

# The Ellul Forum

For the Critique of Technological Civilization

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For the Critique of Technological Civilization

### *Jacques Ellul & Latin America*

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"Technique, in all the lands it has penetrated, has exploded the local, national cultures. Two cultures, of which technique is one, cannot coexist. . . . We shall continue to have the appearance of different civilizations . . . But their essence will be identical."

-Jacques Ellul  
*The Technological Society* (1954; ET1964), p. 130

1988-Present

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**Issue #1 Fall 1988 — Debut Issue**

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The  
Ellul Studies  
Bulletin

A Forum for Scholarship on Theology and Technology  
Department of Religious Studies,  
University of South Florida, Tampa, Fl 33620

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The deadline for submissions for the next issue is October 15,1988. See instructions on the last inside page for details.

## Welcome

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *The Ellul Studies Bulletin*. Thanks to the organizational work of Dan Clendenin, Ellul scholars from around the country (and even beyond its borders) met for the first time at the American Academy of Religion convention in Boston last December. At that meeting I indicated that I would be willing to edit a newsletter which could serve as a communications link among us. This letter fulfills that commitment.

Jacques Ellul's "contribution to contemporary theology is monumental... a comprehensive *tour de force*." This conclusion from my book, *The Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Mellen Press, 1981), has been criticized as perhaps too strong a claim. However I remain unrepentant As *the Epilogue* (177ff) in which this statement appeared made

clear, his work is monumental not because he is right in every respect but because of its unique focus and comprehensiveness. The depth and breadth of his work "culminates in a thorough sociological analysis of the technological society and its religiosity in such a way as to directly lay bare the ethical and theological issues surrounding human freedom and the future in our technological civilization."

Ellul has helped theologians to see that technology is not just one more thing to think about but rather has replaced "nature" as the new all-encompassing context in which theology is done. "Perhaps the most important contribution of Jacques Ellul to the future agenda of theology is not the *answers* he offers to the questions he raises (although his *answers* are not insignificant, he would not think of them as *answers*) but the questions themselves." Through his sociological analysis of the sacralization of technology placed in dialectical confrontation with the Biblical witness to the Holy, Ellul has taught us how to raise the question of technology in such a way as to be appropriated for theological reflection and ethical consideration." He has taught us how to think critically, creatively and constructively about technology in a way no one else has managed to do. Barth may be his equal, indeed his mentor, in theology. Lewis Mumford may approach his status as a sociological and historical critic of technology, but no one has brought these two disciplines (theology and sociology) together in such a way as to define the theological and ethical agenda as Ellul has. "Thus even where Ellul may be thought in error by some, I believe he will be seen as having advanced our understanding of the issues, for his bold formulations provoke further investigation, further dialogue, further insight. He is a man who has done his homework to our benefit." One may not agree with Ellul but there is no way to responsibly do theology in our technological civilization without taking his work into account. There is no way around him, only through him. That is what makes his work monumental.

It is appropriate therefore that this publication bear Ellul's name. It is my hope that *The Ellul Studies Bulletin* will live up to Ellul's dialectical and dialogical standards. Nothing would be more embarrassing and disappointing to Ellul than to have this *Bulletin* be the vehicle for *true disciples*, *Ellul groupies*, or a *cult of Jacques Ellul*. The whole thrust of Ellul's theological ethics has been to force Christians to think for themselves and *invent* their own responses. Although the *Bulletin* will review and discuss Ellul's work, it should not be our purpose to turn Ellul's scholarship into a body of *sacred* literature to be endlessly dissected. The appropriate tribute of the *Bulletin* to Ellul's work will be to carry forward its spirit, its agenda for the critical analysis of our technological civilization. Ellul invites us to think new thoughts and enact new deeds. The *Bulletin* should be a vehicle for carrying out that challenge, hence the tag line of the *Bulletin*, "*A Forum for Scholarship on Theology and Technology*"

I debated about what to call this publication. At first I thought perhaps *The Ellul Studies Newsletter*. But I wanted it to be something more than a newsletter and yet something less than a journal. I hope the *Bulletin* will create such a niche for itself. It should be a vehicle for the exchange of information on conferences, publications, etc. But I also hope that it will be a forum for the exchange of ideas. I would like to

invite you to submit short position papers (up to ten double spaced pages) for open discussion. Responses would be invited and printed in the next issue. Sometimes when we are working on ideas but are not quite ready to put them in final form it would be helpful to be able to send up a *trial balloon* and see how it flies. *The Forum*, I hope, will serve that purpose.

*The Ellul Studies Bulletin* will be published twice a year in late Spring and again in late Fall (about a month before the AAR meeting). This first issue is free and I encourage you to duplicate it and send it to interested friends or send me their addresses and I will put them on the mailing list. If you decide you wish to receive the *Bulletin* you will need to fill out the subscription form on the last page of this issue and mail it in with your check. Within the United States subscriptions are \$4.00 per year. Outside the U.S. subscriptions are \$6.00. These rates will have to be reviewed after our first year of operation but I want to keep the cost as low as possible.

Finally, this is an experimental publication. If it is to work everyone who subscribes needs to participate by sending position papers for the *Forum*, annotated bibliographic information on books or articles you have published, reviews of relevant books you have read, announcements of conferences and calls for papers on relevant topics, etc. *The Bulletin* should function as a communications network. If you don't send me submissions it is an indication that there is no need for the network. So let the experiment begin.

Darrell J. Fasching, Editor

Nota Bene

The deadline for submissions for the next issue is October 15, 1988. See instructions on the last inside page for details.

## Call for Manuscripts

*Peter Lang Publishing* (New York/Berlin) is searching for bold and creative manuscripts for their new monograph series on *Religion, Ethics and Social Policy* edited by Darrell Fasching. Scholars from the Humanities and Social Sciences are invited to submit book-length manuscripts which deal with the shaping of social policy in a religiously and culturally pluralistic world. We are especially interested in creative approaches to the problems of ethical and cultural relativism in a world divided by ideological conflicts. Manuscripts which utilize the work of Jacques Ellul would be most welcome as well as manuscripts taking other approaches. A two page brief on the series is available. For more information, or to submit a manuscript, contact the series editor, Darrell J. Fasching, Cooper Hall 317, University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida 33620. Phone (813) 974-2221 or residence (813) 963-2968.

Fasching is also Associate Editor for *U.S.E Monographs in Religion and Public Policy* which accepts manuscripts on religion and public policy which are too long for journals but too short for a book. If you care to submit a manuscript in that category

you may also send that to the above address. Be sure to indicate the monograph series to which you wish to submit your manuscript.

## Paper Exchange

One service the Bulletin might be able to perform is providing a bulletin board for the exchange of papers delivered at academic conferences. If you have papers you have delivered on Ellul or on the general topic of theology and technology and are willing to make them available, send the title with a brief annotation and your name and address, and indicate whether there is a fee per copy. These will be listed on the bulletin board and anyone interested can write you for a copy.

## Volunteers Needed

If you would be interested in assisting in the production of the *Ellul Studies Bulletin* please contact Darrell Fasching, CPR 317, University of South Florida, Tampa, FL 33620. Undoubtedly we will need a book review editor, a bibliographic editor, etc. It is essential that you have access to a computer to prepare copy.

2nd Ellul Consultation Scheduled for November AAR

by Dan Clendenin

*The American Academy of Religion* will sponsor the second Consultation on Jacques Ellul at its annual meeting in Chicago this November.

**Last year's** meeting attracted over 40 participants. Three papers were presented.

Marva J. Dawn, *The Importance of the Concept of the "Powers" in Jacques Ellul's Work*

Darrell J. Fasching, *The Dialectic of Apocalypse and Utopia in the Theological Ethics of Jacques Ellul*

David Lovekin, *Jacques Ellul and his Dialectical Understanding*

The respondents for the first session were: David W. Gill, Joyce Main Hanks and Charles Mabee.

**This year** we will have three papers and a single respondent for our 2 1/2 hour session:

Clifford G. Christians: *Ellul's Sociology*

Joyce M. Hanks, *The Kingdom in Ellul's Thought*

David W. Gill *The Dialectical Relationship Between Ellul's Theology and Sociology*

Gary Lee, Respondent

For those interested, the pertinent information for the second consultation is as follows:

AAR Annual Meeting

November 19-22, 1988

Chicago Hilton and Towers

Chicago

For further information, you can contact the chairperson of the consultation:

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Farmington Hills, MI 48018

313-553-7200/9516

# Book Reviews

## Theological Method in Jacques Ellul

by Daniel B. Clendenin (Lan-hanm, MD: University Press of America, 1987). pp. xvii + 145

Reviewed by Marva Dawn, Vancouver, Washington

(Marva is a Ph.D candidate in Christian Ethics at the University of Notre Dame and a founder of *Christians Equipped for Ministry* in Vancouver.)

Dan Clendenin's well-researched and balanced study develops the thesis that "Ellul's theological method revolves around one key theme or kernel idea, the dialectical interplay between freedom and necessity,.. a gold thread ... which serves as a sort of hermeneutical key to his thinking" (xi). This revised doctoral dissertation contributes immensely to the possibility that more scholars and lay readers can properly understand Jacques Ellul and let his thinking stimulate, rather than alienate, their own. Since most of us reading this publication believe that Ellul's prophetic voice needs to be heard in our world, we can all be grateful that Dan Clendenin has provided such a useful tool for listening to him appropriately.

Clendenin's own method is illustrated best by three concentric circles, the largest of which describes four methodological interpretations of Ellul: as theological positivist, existentialist, prophet, and dialectician. His second chapter analyzes the more narrow circle of Ellul's dialectical method, which "operates as a description of reality [the phenomenological], an epistemological orientation to understand this reality, and as a Biblical-theological framework by which to read the Bible and craft a peculiarly Christian style of life [existential]" (xvi). Then, chapters three and four explicate Ellul's central dialectic between freedom and necessity, the innermost circle and the "controlling idea in all of Ellul's work" (59).

The final chapter analyzes four weaknesses and three strengths of Ellul's method. Clendenin's "internal" criticisms are the best part of the book, for he aptly demonstrates that Ellul's works contain definite non-dialectical tendencies which are inconsistent with his avowed method (129). First of all, Ellul's unclear or caustic use of language often invites antagonism rather than dialogue. Secondly, his theme that freedom is not just a virtue of the Christian life, but rather its *sine qua non*, is undeniably reductionistic. Ellul is right to emphasize this aspect because of the social circumstances of contemporary Christianity, but his overstatement denies the dialectical interplay of other factors in discipleship. Most helpful of Clendenin's critiques is his analysis of



the inconsistency of Ellul's universalism in its selective reading of Biblical texts, its negation of human free will, and its negation of the individual (pp 135-141).

I disagree, however, with Clendenin's third alleged weakness in Ellul's; method - viz., his conception of "power as the enemy of God." Utilizing the Biblical notion of *exousiai*, Ellul has maintained a dialectical tension in his understanding of power, though his latest work, *The Subversion of Christianity*, contradicts some of his earlier statements about the nature of "the Powers." Furthermore, Clendenin himself must be criticized for his own overstatement that "Ellul never comes close to incorporating the use of power into his dialectic" [134, emphasis mine), and he himself is inconsistent when he asks Ellul to give "clear guidelines" for "nonpower use," since a few pages later he cites as a first strength in Ellul's method his deliberate refusal to provide solutions in order to obligate readers to think beyond him (133 and 142). His claim that Ellul "gives us no help here with his rather unrealistic picture" (133) overlooks the prophetic nature of Ellul's language, designed to raise awareness of the subtlety of the demonic aspects of power.

Clendenin also cites as strengths that Ellul effectively combines theology from above (revelation) and below (practical concern for the world) and that his theology truly offers hope and freedom to the person on the street. That, of course, is a main reason why all of us care so much about his work.

## Freedom and Universal Salvation: Ellul and Origen

In some ways no two theologians in the history of Christianity could be farther apart than Jacques Ellul and Origen, the Neo-Platonic theologian from the 3rd century. If one were to classify them using H. Richard Niebuhr's five types of Christ and culture relationships, Origen would probably fall under the *Christ of Culture* type and Ellul would stand probably be found somewhere between *Christ Against Culture* and *Christ and Culture in Paradox*. In many ways Tertullian rather than Origen would seem to be the theologian who might have the most in common with Ellul. And yet on two themes very much at the heart of Ellul's thought, *freedom* and *universal salvation*, it is in fact Origen who is his kindred spirit. Although it's hard to believe, Origen is even more radical on these two themes. On universal salvation it seems that he held that all creatures would eventually be saved, even the devil, and on freedom he thought that because God gave us the capacity to be free, even after universal salvation is achieved, the fall could happen again, should some creature choose to rebel against God. Ellul would not go quite that far on either count but he certainly goes further than most theologians in the Christian tradition have. In the *Forum* column for this issue a case is made for the ethical importance of universal salvation. But to refresh our minds on Ellul's stand the following excerpt from Dan Clendenin's recent interview with Ellul is quoted from *Media Development* (2/1988, p. 29).

## Interview

**Clendenin:** You have been a strong advocate of universal salvation, which you seem to support by at least five ideas: distinction between judgment-condemnation; between salvation-freedom; priority and triumph of God's love (Jonah's hard lesson); your robust/high Christology; scriptural references to perdition - 'God's pedagogy\*' - only of heuristic value.

**Ellul:** Exactly. This is a part of Karl Barth. Barth liked very much to make a joke. One day he explained the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian in this way: everyone has received a sealed letter from God, but a Christian is the one who has opened it and read it. That's the way it is in reality. Every person is loved by God, but Christians are the only ones who know it

**Clendenin:** And experience the joy, hope and freedom.

**Ellul:** Yes, and that changes completely one's perspective on mission. Because toward pagan people, for example, we do not say to them, 'Be converted or, you will be damned', but rather, 'I'm telling you that you are loved by God.'

**Clendenin:** That was Jonah's hard lesson, that God loved even the Ninevites! No one is excluded.

**Ellul:** Yes.

**Clendenin:** You said with Karl Barth that a person must be crazy to teach universalism, but impious not to believe it.

**Ellul:** Yes, I like very much this phrase of Barth's. For me, obviously, there are biblical texts which seem to go against the idea of universalism, but I really don't understand them very well. That's why I say very often that for me universal salvation is in the realm of faith, but I cannot present it as a dogma.

**Clendenin:** Would it be fair to call your belief in universal salvation a pious hope but not an absolute conviction?

**Ellul:** No, it's an absolute conviction.

**Clendenin:** Universal salvation sounds very un-Kierkegaardian!

**Ellul:** Yes, this is exactly the place where I part company from Kierkegaard.

**Clendenin:** But what about his question: does this do away with Christianity by making everyone a Christian?

**Ellul:** No, it does not make everyone Christian.

**Clendenin:** They are not hidden Christians?

**Ellul:** No, that's right, to teach people that they are loved by God is to start them on the path of being converted to Jesus Christ. But it's not at all what Kierkegaard justly criticized as a 'Christian' society.

**Clendenin:** Yes, this latter theme you pick up in *The Subversion of Christianity*. What about divine coercion in universal salvation, especially given your very strong emphasis on the absolute importance of human decisions/choices.

**Ellul:** This is really a story of love between God and man. I don't believe that the human being is completely independent before God.

**Clendenin:** And here we've begun to ask the metaphysical question which we can never answer.

**Ellul:** When the Word of God addresses a person it liberates him or her, but this free person has heard a word from God. Often I ask my students and the people to whom I'm preaching, 'Do you understand that what you're hearing right now is a word from God?' Thus there is human responsibility, and one can never say that God does not speak. Yes, He does speak now.

## Bibliography

Each issue the *Bulletin* will print bibliographical references to articles and books either on Ellul or using Ellul's work as well as other publications of interest in the area of theology and technology. If you have written such books or articles, please submit the bibliographic information preferably with a sentence or two of annotation. You may also submit articles written by others which you believe your colleagues should know about. A few articles by Dan Clendenin and Darrell Fhsching are listed below to start things off.

**Clendenin, Daniel.**

*Theological Method in Jacques Ellul.* Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987.

"Will the Real Ellul Please Stand Up? A Bibliographic Survey," *The Dinity Journal* 6.2 (Autumn 1985): 176-183.

"The View from Bordeaux: An Interview with Jacques Ellul," *Media Development* 2/1988.

**Fasching, Darrell J.**

*The Thought of Jacques Ellul.* New York and Toronto: Edwin Mellen Press, 1981.

*A comprehensive analysis of Ellul's sociology and theological ethics. (225pp.)*

Technology as Utopian Technique of the Human," *Soundings*, Vol. LXII, #2, Summer 1980.

*Utilizes Ellul's work in a broader thesis about the utopian and anti-utopian elements in modern technology.*

"Jacques Ellul as a Theologian of Culture", *Cross Currents*, xxxv #1, Spring 1985.

*Interprets Ellul's work in the light of Tillich's idea of theology of culture with a focus on Ellul's books The New Demons and Apocalypse.*

"Theology and Public Policy: Reflections on Method in the Work of Juan Luis Segundo, Jacques Ellul and Robert Doran," *Method*, Vol. 5, #1, March, 1987.

*An critical comparative analysis of the role theological/sociological method in the critique of ideology as an element in the shaping of public policy.*

"The Dialectic of Apocalypse and Utopia in the Theological Ethics of Jacques Ellul" in *Research in Philosophy and Technology* Greenwich: JAI Press, 1988.

*An attempt to show that Ellul's dialectic leads to a more positive evaluation of utopianism than he explicitly allows. The complexity of Ellul's dialectic is unraveled using H. Richard Niebuhr's typology of "Christ and Culture."*

"Mass Media, Ethical Paradox and Democratic Freedom: Jacques Ellul's Ethic of the Word," in *Research in Philosophy and Technology*. Greenwich: JAI Press, 1989

*An attempt to suggest an ethic for Journalists based on Ellul's analysis of media and propaganda which relates Ellul's work to the work of Eric Voegelin and the ethics of Martin Luther as well as the Anabaptist tradition.*

"The Liberating Paradox of the Word," in *Media Development* 2/1988.

*Relates Ellul's work on media and propaganda and especially his *The Humiliation of the Word* to the implicit concern the professional fields of communication (especially journalism) have with theology and the explicit concern theology has with communications.*

# Forum

## The Ethical Importance of Universal Salvation

by

Darrell J. Fasching, University of South Florida

The purpose of the *Forum* is to provoke discussion, to further that goal, let me state the thesis of this position paper bluntly. In Dan Clendenin's book, *Theological Method in Jacques Ellul*, (University Press of America, 1987), he offers as one of his most devastating critiques of Ellul the following: "The most glaring inconsistency in Ellul's theological dialectic is his nearly unqualified affirmation of the universal salvation of all peoples beyond history." (Clendenin, 135) According to Clendenin this dissolves the dialectical tension that Ellul otherwise maintains throughout his theology, the tension between *No* and *Yes*, between the Judgment and Promise of God. Moreover he argues that by insisting on universal salvation Ellul in fact commits the sin of collectivization (treating humanity as a mass) which he otherwise condemns in his dialectical critique of the technological society. My thesis is quite simple - Dan Clendenin is wrong. (1) Ellul's affirmation of universal salvation has not broken the consistency of his Biblical and Barthian dialectic nor has it succumbed to collectivization. On the contrary (2) the notion of universal salvation is a necessary pre-condition for the ethic of freedom Ellul develops precisely to protest the collectivization of human behavior in a technological society. Finally (3) Clendenin's failure to understand this linkage between ethical freedom and universal salvation is complemented by his failure to understand the relationship of both to *power*. This leads to another questionable criticism central to his final critique of Ellul, namely that Ellul allows no positive place for the use of power within a Christian ethic.

(1) First, let's be clear, Ellul is not professing some general philosophical dialectic. He explicitly states that he is affirming the Biblical dialectic of judgment and promise. This biblical dialectic is eschatological. That is, the Biblical literature itself, whether the prophets of the Old Testament or the Gospels of the New Testament, limits this dialectic to history. Clendenin wants Ellul to be "consistent" and carry this dialectic "beyond history." But that is precisely what would be inconsistent. Clendenin suggests that one strategy that Ellul could take in response to his criticism would be to "be explicit about what he implicitly affirms, that his concept of dialectic is limited to history, and that there is no reason for this dialectic to continue after this life. I have found only one place where he hints at such (*The Humiliation of the Word*, 269)."

Clendenin acts as if this were a matter for speculation on which he is inviting Ellul to take a stand and is puzzled that he cannot find explicit references by Ellul to the issue. I submit that this is not hard to understand. Since Ellul explicitly subscribes to the Biblical dialectic which is limited to history I doubt that he ever thought that the matter needed further comment. Ellul remains consistently faithful to the Biblical dialectic.

(2) Second, Ellul's insistence on universal salvation (a) is not an instance of the collectivization which he otherwise criticizes in a technological society but rather (b) is a precondition for an ethic of freedom which is able to combat such collectivization.

Let me address point (2a) first. For Ellul collectivization is a sin which has to do with the limits of human consciousness. Human beings, he argues, (in *False Presence of the Kingdom* for instance) are not capable of loving the whole human race. Individuals can only love individuals, the neighbor who crosses one's path and is in need. Mass media seduce us into trying to love everyone. The media evoke compassion in us for those in distress half way around the world who we can only know abstractly and collectively. In the process we become diverted from caring for the neighbor we can personally know and help. Intent on changing the world, we become swept up in mass movements and bureaucratic structures which rob us of our individuality while at the same time we end up neglecting our neighbor. Such collectivization is a function of our being limited finite beings. As such we can neither know nor relate to all individuals personally and individually. Universal salvation on the other hand has nothing to do with this human limitation. Universal salvation is about God's capacity, not our human capacity. Unlike ourselves, God's knowing and caring are not limited. Only God could conceivably know, love and save the whole human race and do so without collectivization. Only God could love the whole human race by loving each individual as an individual. Therefore Clendenin is quite wrong to say that universal salvation is inconsistent with Ellul's dialectical critique of collectivization.

Now let me turn to point (2b). In fact, the case is quite the contrary of the one Clendenin suggests. Universal salvation actually plays a central role in making possible Ellul's ethic of freedom and its protest against collectivization by undermining the theological rational which has historically promoted Christianity as a collectivizing religion, one which produces an ethic of conformity to the world. To make my case I wish to appeal to arguments advanced not by Ellul himself, although I believe they are presupposed in his work, but by two of his theological contemporaries, John Howard Yoder and Juan Luis Segundo. These are an unlikely pair of names to link together. Yoder champions the Anabaptist tradition while Segundo is an advocate of liberation theology. But on one issue both agree, namely that as soon as Christianity came to view its message as something everyone must accept in order to be saved, Christianity began to be "watered down" and abandoned its "ethic of discipleship" for a Constantinian ethic of "Christian civilization." [see chapter 8 in Segundo's *The Liberation of Theology*, (Orbis Books, 1976) and chapter 7 in Yoder's *The Priestly Kingdom*, (University of Notre Dame Press, 1984)].

Both argue that the sociological pressure of preaching a Christianity for everyone leads to the compromising of the Gospel ethic and ends up legitimating a "Christian civilization" whose final outcome is the Inquisition. Both argue that the core of this betrayal of the Gospel lies in assuming everyone has to be Christian in order to be saved. At this point Segundo makes the same move that Ellul does. That is, he appeals to Barth's teaching on universal salvation. Only in this way, he argues, can the drive toward collectivization be broken in Christianity and its function as a minority "Heaven" within society be recovered. Yoder is more suggestive and less explicit but he too insists that we have to get rid of the notion that everyone needs to be Christian, and implies that the separateness of Christians has as its goal the "whole world's salvation" (12). Both of these theologians share Ellul's conviction that Christians are and should be a minority in the world and that the desire to be otherwise leads to the "betrayal of Christianity". All three are intent upon recovering an important element of prophetic faith, namely, the insistence that *election* is a call to *vocation* (i.e., being a light to the nations) and not to a status of special privilege. To put it in New Testament terms, conversion as a response to the call or election to faith is not a privileged guarantee of salvation but rather a call to be a leaven for the transformation of the world into a new creation. When Jesus tells his disciples that they are to be the "salt of the earth" the metaphor is quite deliberate. Who in his right mind would sit down to a meal of salt? On the other hand a little salt brings out the true flavor, the best flavor of any plate of food.

Those who admire Ellul's prophetic ethical critique of our technological civilization but who would choose to deny his position on universal salvation need to ask themselves whether these two can really be separated. As Yoder and Segundo argue, the weight of Christian history suggests otherwise. For Ellul faith is a call to vocation. It is what some are called to do for God's world in history. Salvation on the other hand is what God has done for the whole human race in Christ. The good news of the latter frees Christians to assume the task of the former. Faith is not a work that earns one a ticket to "heaven". But faith does make a difference, precisely where it should - in history as the freedom to struggle against the demonic forces of necessity, of collectivization and dehumanization. Faith inserts the freedom of God into history to the benefit of the rest of the world.

Clendenin's presuppositions become clear when he accuses Ellul of making everyone into a Christian as a consequence of universal salvation (at the very least he seems to think Ellul must believe them to be "hidden Christians"). Clendenin cannot imagine that anyone can be saved unless he or she is a Christian. This never occurs to Ellul. In Clendenin's interview Ellul explicitly denies this interpretation. Ellul is not playing games with Clendenin. It is simply that he can conceive of non-Christians being saved. For Ellul "being saved" and "being Christian" are overlapping categories, for Clendenin they are one and the same category.

(3) Let me turn to my final point, Clendenin's critique of Ellul's treatment of "power." That he should criticize Ellul for holding a view of universal salvation and also for not

advocating a "positive" use of power is rather telling. At least from the point of view of John Howard Yoder's theology. For Yoder thinks that it is significant that as soon as Christianity decided everybody had to be Christian it gave up the way of non-violence for the way of power and coercion. Where Christians of the first centuries refused to serve in the military, Constantinian Christians made serving the state into a Christian duty. Where Christians of the first centuries practiced the Judaic ethic of welcoming the stranger, Constantinian Christianity made being a stranger, one of another faith, illegal. By force of law, and arms if necessary, being a citizen required being a Christian. Yoder and Ellul understand that if you give power an inch it will take a mile - it will take over the whole world. To give power an inch is to compromise the Gospel as embodied in the Sermon on the Mount.

It is interesting that Segundo recognizes this but argues that not even Jesus could live in the world without compromising this message and so suggests that the Gospel must be compromised and the use of force must be baptized by the Gospel. Ellul does not make that mistake. He too recognizes that no one can live in the world without the use of power but he refuses to baptize it. Power may be necessary but necessity belongs to the realm of sin. To use the Gospel to condone power is to do the devil's work. Even the power of a benevolent state rests on power as coercion which will never be used only for just purposes. For Ellul, Christians can hold positions of power but they must never succumb to the illusion that their use of power is blessed by the Gospel - rather they must learn to live with the dialectical tension and paradox of being both saints and sinners at the same time. Clendenin's critique of Ellul on power is wide of the mark. For Ellul power is used positively when the Christian, like the yachtsman, welcomes the conflicting forces of power or necessity that impinge upon him or her and uses them against each other even as the yachtsman tacks against the wind. The only thing to be feared is the calm, for then he or she can do nothing. For Ellul, there is no freedom without power and necessity but as soon as we bless necessity we turn it into a demonic fatality and the positive becomes negative.

The question of the use of power is the most troubling question that Christian ethicists face. I continue to wrestle with this issue myself. There is room for positions on the "positive use of power" in the ethical dialogue and I hope we will hear more from Dan Clendenin on this matter. But such positions need to take seriously the challenge of Ellul and Yoder (and we could add Stanley Hauerwas to this camp) who insist that Christians have got to stop thinking of themselves as having to "be in charge." The motivation to baptize power does not come from within the Gospel but from the outside, namely, from desire of Christians to run the world. This desire is closely tied to the presupposition that the whole world ought to be Christian, indeed must be Christian, in order to be saved. That is a dangerous pattern of reasoning and motivation and one which Ellul undercuts, severing the traditional link of Constantinian Christianity (Catholic and Protestant) between election and salvation. Since all are saved through Christ's death and resurrection that task is already accomplished. What remains unfinished is the struggle with the demonic dehumanization and collectivization which



occurs in history. It is to that struggle that the elect are called. Ellul's insistence on universal salvation serves to rechannel the energy of Christians in the direction which is most needed in our time, the ethical direction. Far from capitulating to collectivization in any way, it is rather a most potent force against it.

Clendenin has two other aspects to his argument with Ellul that I have not focused on. One is the charge that universal salvation violates human freedom. But universal salvation does not violate free will. It is not about human freedom at all but about divine freedom. It insists that no matter what humans may do God remains free to accept them in his reconciling love - that his love, like the rain, falls on the just and the unjust alike. Rather than reject those who reject him, he chooses to take the consequences of that rejection upon himself in an act of suffering reconciliation. As Paul puts it, prior to any act of repentance, "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us... when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him by the death of his Son..." (Romans 5:8&10)

Clendenin puts his objection another way by arguing that the problem with Ellul's position is that human "actions no longer have ultimate soteriological value." He is quite right and that is as it should be. The act that has "ultimate soteriological value" is the sacrifice of Christ, an act of grace. On this too Ellul is surely right Human acts are restricted to the plane of penultimate value, the plane of history where they can make a difference.

Finally Clendenin argues that universal salvation cannot be scripturally maintained. In this position paper I have not tried to show that universal salvation is true or consistent with scripture. I have simply tried to argue that to remove it from Ellul's position effectively undermines the potency of the prophetic ethic he is so much admired for. In fact, however, I am largely persuaded by Ellul's arguments in this area as well.

Clendenin seems to imply that the Biblical dialectic of "judgment and promise" should finally result in a division of the world into the *saved* and the *damned*. Such a conclusion however assimilates the "Good News" to the historical and dialectical categories of the *sacred* and *profane*. It is the power of the demonic (the *diabolos* or divider) over that dialectic which creates dualistic division, strife and chaos. But Ellul correctly perceives that that dialectical dualism is relativized by the Biblical (eschatological/apocalyptic) dialectic between the Sacred and the Holy, in which the Holy unites what the sacred once divided. Hence the love of God transcends the categories of the sacred and profane (the saved and the damned) and falls upon the *just* and the *unjust* alike.

Clendenin also accuses Ellul of a "selective reading of the Biblical texts" but this surely begs the question, since the opposing view selectively reads the Biblical text as well, ignoring precisely those elements Ellul would emphasize. But more to the point every theological position selectively reads the text. After all, (as Krister Stendahl and others have shown) "Justification by faith" is not the dominant theme in Paul's thought and yet Luther made it the criterion by which all other scriptural statements were to be judged and forged it into the pillar of Protestant faith. Until I read Ellul's brilliant

exegesis of the Book of Revelation I remained skeptical that universal salvation could be scripturally maintained. I came away with my mind decisively changed. It seems to me that Ellul does with the Book of Revelation what Luther did with "justification by faith." Clendenin may disagree with Ellul's reading of the Biblical texts but I doubt that he can show that his own alternative reading is any less selective. In the end I am inclined to accept the Pauline advice to Timothy, "We have put our trust in the living God and he is the Saviour of the whole human race but particularly of all believers. This is what you are to enforce in your teaching." (1 Timothy 4:10 )

## A Visit with Jacques Ellul

Pessac, France, June 27, 1987

by Marva Dawn

Jacques Ellul and his wife are very gracious people! They welcomed me kindly and even served raspberries from their garden. Through the excellent translating of Philip Adams, we held a far-ranging conversation for almost two hours. Prof. Ellul asked questions about my work, too - especially about some articles on teaching ethics to children. This stands out in my memory because Ellul serves as an excellent model of a profound scholar who is also able to relate well to other people. Concerning the common split in theologians between the head and the heart he said, "it is contrary to the Gospel."

We talked about many practical issues that day - the situation in South Africa, the ecology movement, U.S. intervention in Nicaragua, caring for the poor and the handicapped, euthanasia. As would be expected, Ellul stressed the importance of avoiding propaganda and political games, of thinking about each problem as a whole (thinking globally), and of seeing what we can modify practically in our own communities. He urged the U.S. to fight communism with economic justice rather than armies and to help the poor not only materially but also with fellowship, spiritual security and support in their anguish.

Regarding his efforts to reform the Church, Ellul criticized a "whole generation of liberal pastors" who "don't believe in anything so they have nothing to say." He said that most of the renewal in France is taking place beside the churches (except for the charismatics), rather than in them. Now he belongs to a small transdenomination-al group trying to listen to laypeople, but this "scares the authorities." Ellul feels his most important insight for the Church has been his emphasis on hope. Secondly, against the particular French problem of 200,000 people (including many intellectuals) becoming Muslim, he stresses, "our God is a Tfinity." This led to a discussion of universalism; had

I already read Dan Clendenin's book (see review) I could have been more able to press him further about the inconsistencies of his views.

The other major doctrinal topic was his concept of "the powers," the subject of my dissertation. When I questioned certain inconsistencies in his writings, he stressed that the powers must be understood dialectically - that they can't be personalized, and yet that there is a Power beyond what can be explained, that every human rupture is a *diabolos*, the Separator.

Most helpful for me were Ellul's comments about practical issues in writing and teaching, such as creating the necessary balance of preparing for one's Bible studies while yet dealing with all the people who want to speak with us when we are leading retreats. He stressed the importance of the Holy Spirit in helping us to find the time to do both. When I thanked him for taking the time to talk with me in spite of all he has to do, he answered, "I'm almost done with what I want to write." Even as *The Presence of the Kingdom* was the introduction to his corpus, his recently complete commentary on Ecclesiastes is its conclusion. He said that he continues to write, but without a tight program. His *Ethics of Holiness* is written, but he doubts whether it will ever be published because it is too long - which led to a discussion of presenting our work in publishable ways. He said that he had created his own market, but that it had taken a long time. When I responded that I'm too impatient, he replied, "you must always be impatient."

I wanted to know Ellul as a person, encountering typical obstacles in the struggle to live out his faith and ministry. He revealed himself as I expected - a wonderful model of a gracious man incarnating the Gospel in practical ways, a brilliant man choosing carefully the values of the kingdom of God.

## ***Media Development Devotes Issue to Ellul***

*Media Development: Journal of the World Association for Christian Communication* has just devoted most of its 2/1988 (vol XXXV) issue to *Perspectives on Jacques Ellul*. Many of you who are receiving this first issue of *Die Ellul Studies Bulletin* have also received a copy since I supplied Michael Haber, the editor, with a copy of our mailing list. However a number of you who have been added to the list since then will not have received it. You may want to write for a copy. The address is *Media Development*, 357 Kennington Lane, London SE11 5QY England (Telephone 01-582 9139).

The collection of articles is impressive. The table of contents is listed below for your information.

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## Forthcoming Ellul Publications

by Gary Lee, Editor, Eerdmans Publishing Co.

It is difficult to keep up with the work of a prolific author like Ellul - he seems to write more quickly than most of us can read! This difficulty is compounded when the work has to be translated. But it is worth the effort (and the wait, for those who do not read French).

I will begin by just mentioning Eerdmans two most recent translations of Ellul titles: In 1985 we published *The Humiliation of the Word* (285 pages, \$14.95), a translation by Joyce Hanks of *La Parole humiliée*. In 1986 we published *The Subversion of Christianity* (224 pages, \$9.95), translated by Geoffrey Bromiley from *La Subversion du christianisme*.

In July of 1988 we will publish *Jesus and Marx: From Gospel to Ideology* (200 pages, \$12.95), translated by Joyce Hanks from *L'idéologie mandée Chrétienne*. From both a biblical-theological and a socio-political perspective Ellul examines the attempts to relate Christianity to Marxism (e.g., liberation theology, Marxist Christianity). He describes the challenges that Marxist Christianity presents to traditional Christianity (the former practices some goals that the latter talks about but too often fails to do), and he discusses the roots and development of Marxist Christianity. He then reviews in detail some key Marxist-Christian books, exposing the weaknesses of so-called Marxist Christianity (which is neither Marxist nor Christian!). He argues that the biblical perspective takes exception to all political power; hence he concludes that Christian anarchism is the realistic revolutionary option. The preface by Joyce Hanks provides an excellent introduction to the book, for she shows how it relates to his previous work.

Early in 1989 we will publish Geoffrey Bromiley's translation of *Ce que je crois* (the French edition, published in 1987, is 290 pages; the English edition will probably be less than 200 pages), tentatively titled *What I Believe*. In this book Ellul outlines his beliefs about life, the world, history, and Christianity. In the first part of the book he discusses,

among other things, the meaningfulness of life, the dialectic, evil, and love. In the second part he surveys history from Paleolithic times to the present. In the third part he discusses his religious beliefs, including his views on providence, universalism, and recapitulation. The book is thus a convenient summary of Ellul's beliefs and will serve as an excellent introduction to his thought, for he states succinctly and provocatively his views on many crucial topics.

Later in 1989 we will publish Joyce Hanks' translation of *La raison d'être: Méditation sur l'Ecclesiaste* (French edition, 1987, 318 pages) (English title uncertain). Here Ellul offers another of his stimulating biblical studies, on a book that has been central to his thinking for fifty years. He begins by discussing his approach to Ecclesiastes and his general view of the book. He then takes up various themes of Ecclesiastes (power, money, work, the good). Next he discusses the role of wisdom in Ecclesiastes and its relation to philosophy. Finally, he examines the references to God in Ecclesiastes, especially in chapter 12. Throughout, Ellul interacts with biblical-theological scholarship, though this is not a verse-by-verse commentary but more a thematic meditation.

We are considering the translation of *Un chrétien pour Israël*, I have written to Ellul requesting a slight update, and he has agreed to write a postscript concerning the recent turmoil in Israel. In this book Ellul gives a biblical-theological analysis of Israel, then a historical, sociopolitical analysis, in which he examines the propaganda about Israel and considers the complexities of this difficult situation.

I have also just received from the French publisher *Hachette* a copy of *Le bluff technologique*, Ellul's latest book, so that we can consider it for translation. This, his third volume on technique (*The Technological Society* and *The Technological System* being the first two), builds on the previous ones and is similarly massive (489 pages in the French edition). Though we are primarily a religious publisher and this, like the other volumes, is a sociological rather than a theological study, we are pursuing the translation rights.

In addition, we are considering a proposal by Marva Dawn for a translation of six key early articles by Ellul, which, along with Marva's comments, would serve as an introduction to Ellul's thought.

Several years ago Ellul told me that he had written a manuscript on *Technique et Théologie*, but that he could not find a French publisher for it, since he already had so many books in the works. I urged him to send it to me, even though it was handwritten, but he declined. I have asked him again, also for any other material he has, in whatever form. In his recent letter he stated that he has written both this work and his *Ethique de la Sainteté* (which is 1000 pages) but that both need to be updated and revised. In addition, he is currently working on or has plans for three other books, including one on the suffering of Christ, which we will surely pursue.

But Ellul's writing career may be nearing its end. Who will pick up his mantle? Who will carry on in the tradition of Kierkegaard, Barth, Ellul, Stringfellow, etc.? Who will be our next prophet to provoke us to think deeply about our faith and our life?

## Addendum

by Dan Clendenin

(*Editors Note:* Some time ago I asked Dan Clendenin to give me an update on Ellul's publication plans based on his interview with Ellul last April. Then just before press time I got in touch with Gary Lee to update me on what Eerdmans was planning to publish. Since there was a good deal of duplication between these reports and Gary's was more recent, I am appending here, only those comments from Dan which add something to Gary's report.)

*Technology and Theology* is done but needs to be "greatly revised and rewritten." When I asked Ellul just how close he was to final completion he remarked, "Right now I don't have any desire to write... I'm not writing anymore right now. Maybe later, but not now. Above all, I feel free."

...As for *The Ethics of Love* and the second half of his prolegomena to ethics, he said he has notes, but they need to be written... Finally, I asked him about his two-volume autobiography which is already written. Would it be published? "No, I gave it to my wife. She will do what she wishes with it. If she wants to publish it, she will, if not, she will keep it."

As for other items (not based on my interview). Publisher Donald Simpson of Helmers and Howard (PO Box 7407, Colorado Spring, CO 80933) has been corresponding with Ellul and by now should have finalized a contract to bring back into print *Presence of the Kingdom*... Also a secondary work on Ellul by David Lovekin is due out soon, published by Lehigh University Press.

## Ellul and Propaganda Review

A new journal, *Propaganda Review* has crossed the editor's desk. Some of you are probably familiar with it. Its editorial page indicates that the goal is to move "away from narrow definitions of propaganda toward a concept of a socially pervasive 'propaganda environment'." It is a view on the subject which is certainly shared with Ellul and appears to owe a certain debt to his thought. It may depart from Ellul somewhat in advocating the use of counter-propaganda to undermine the propaganda environment. Issue number 2 contains an article on Ellul, entitled *Jacques Ellul: Quirky Trailblazer of Propaganda Theory* by Claude Steiner and Charles Rappleye. The short article, which contains some fine photo's of Ellul, praises him for his pioneering efforts in studying propaganda but seems to treat him as an "oddball" (i.e., "quirky") in his appeal to Christian faith as a response to the propaganda environment. The article does not adequately illuminate how this faith response relates to the propaganda environment and thus makes the response seem somewhat arbitrary and quixotic.

The difficulty in fighting propaganda however is well illustrated in an excerpt from an interview with Ellul conducted by Claude Steiner, in which Ellul states:

Sometime ago I was teaching a course on propaganda techniques. I wasn't studying the principles of propaganda as I do in my book; I was trying to teach my students about propaganda techniques in various countries so they could recognize them. At that time, I discovered that a French officer had been arrested in the Algerian and imprisoned because he was in possession of secret documents which belonged to the Fifth Office, the office for propaganda during the Algerian AAhr. I tried to contact this prisoner and to get hold of his secret documents because I hoped I could use them in my study. When I finally managed to obtain them, I found that they were notes from my course. The Fifth Office had taken my classwork to conduct their propaganda in Algeria. I decided never to write anything on propaganda techniques again" (Issue #2, P-33).

If you are interested in subscribing to *Propaganda Review*, the price is \$20.00 for four issues. Make checks payable to *Propaganda Review* and mail to Media Alliance, Building D, Fort Mason, San Francisco, CA 94123.

The Ellul Studies Bulletin  
Department of Religious Studies  
University of South Florida  
Tampa, Florida 33620

**Issue #2 Nov 1988 — Ellul's  
Universalist Eschatology**



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A Forum for Scholarship on Theology in a Technological Civilisation  
 November 1988 Issue #2  
 Department of Religious Studies,  
 University of South Florida, Tampa, FL 33620

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## From the Editor

by Darrell J. Fasching

Welcome to the second issue of the *Ellul Studies Forum*. For those of you who read issue #1, the first thing you may notice is a name change. The first issue was entitled *The Ellul Studies Bulletin*. Even after I chose the name "Bulletin" I was not entirely comfortable with it but it took me a while to figure out why. "Bulletin" reminds me of *the latest breaking headline* and the effects of *propaganda*. "Forum," on the other hand, suggests dialogue and discussion which focuses on the power of the word. The model of a "Forum" therefore is more in keeping with the spirit of Ellul's work and shall henceforth be displayed on the masthead of this publication.

In this issue you will find an excellent review of Willem Vanderburg's *The Growth of Minds and Cultures* by Katherine Temple. Vandenburg is strongly influenced by Ellul and his work deserves our attention. You will probably find the *Forum* position paper by Michael Bauman to be a rather harsh critique of Ellul's *Jesus and Marx*.

But since the purpose of the *Forum* is to stimulate debate and discussion, this should motivate some interesting responses for the next issue. There are also two responses to my essay "The Ethical Importance of Universal Salvation" which appeared in the *Forum* of our first issue. Both Ken Morris and Marva Dawn have some thoughts on my statement.

I am grateful to Dan Clendenin for assuming the responsibilities of *Book Review Editor*. If you are willing to review books or have a specific book you would like to review, contact Dan at William Tyndale College, 35700 West 12 Mile Rd., Farmington Hills, MI 48018. I am also grateful to Carl Mitcham and Jim Grote who have agreed to be *Bibliographic Editors*. If you have materials for the ongoing bibliography, send them to Carl Mitcham, Philosophy & Technology Studies Center, Polytechnic University, 333 Jay Street, Brooklyn, NY 11201.

*The Ellul Studies Forum* is meant to foster a communications network among scholars who are interested in the work of Jacques Ellul and in the general area of theology and technology. I want to encourage all readers to send contributions and make suggestions and I hope I will see many of you at the Ellul consultation in Chicago.

Finally, I should mention that I sent Ellul the first issue without advance warning. He responded that he was "happy and surprised at the creation of the *Ellul Studies Bulletin*"\* and he promises to respond to my request for a short essay to be published in a future issue.

## 2nd Ellul Consultation Scheduled for November AAR

by Dan Clendenin

The second consultation on the significance of Jacques Ellul's thought for the study of religion will be held at the annual meeting of the *American Academy of Religion* in Chicago. The AAR meets from November 18th to the 22nd, 1988 at the Chicago Hilton and Towers. The session on Ellul will be held Monday, Nov. 21st, from 1 p.m. until 3:30 p.m. in conference room 4K on the 4th floor.

**This year** we will have three papers and a single respondent for our 2 1/2 hour session. The papers are as follows:

Clifford G. Christians: *Ellul's Sociology*

Joyce M. Hanks, *The Kingdom in Ellul's Thought*

David W. Gill *The Dialectical Relationship Between Ellul's Theology and Sociology*

Gary Lee, Respondent

There will be a late night opportunity for all Ellul scholars to get acquainted over a beer (or whatever you prefer). If you are interested please join us. We will meet at

the AAR registration desk at 10 p.m. on Sunday evening and promptly adjourn to the nearest "watering hole" for "serious" discussion.

For further information on the Ellul consultation, contact the chairperson:

Daniel B. Clendenin

William Tyndale College

35700 West 12 Mile Rd.

Farmington Hills, MI 48018

313-553-7200/9516

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## **First Inter-American Congress on Philosophy and Technology**

by Carl Mitcham

The first Inter-American Congress on Philosophy and Technology was held in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, Oct. 5-8th, 1988. The Congress was organized by the Center for the Philosophy and History of Science and Technology of the University of Puerto Rico in Mayaguez, with some assistance from the Philosophy and Technology Studies Center of Brooklyn Polytechnic University.

The congress was attended by approximately 25 scholars from throughout Latin America, 20 from north America and 5 from Europe. It was conducted mostly in Spanish, with some papers being presented in English. Proceedings will be published in both languages.

The themes that emerged from the conference included the issue of the relationship between religion and technology. A number of what might be called conservative Catholics from various countries (including the US) defended traditional views of the Christianity-technology relationship, i.e., that a recovery of a sense of the sacred or of God is necessary to place technology in proper balance.

Other themes focused on technology and culture, STS (science-technology-society) education, the science-technology relationship, and ethics and technology.

## **Conference on Democracy and Technology**

The Fifth Biennial International Conference of the Society for Philosophy and Technology will be held at the University of Bordeaux in France from June 29th to July 1st 1989. The theme of the conference is "Technology and Democracy." Health permitting, Jacques Ellul is expected to participate. For more information on the conference

contact Stanley Carpenter, Social Sciences, Georgia Tech, Atlanta GA 30332 or Langdon Winner, Dept, of Science & Tech. Studies, Rensselaer Polytechnic Inst., Troy, NY 12180-3590.

## **Paper Exchange**

(Readers are invited to make available relevant papers they have read (or will, read) at conferences. Please provide title, address and cost)

Darrell Fasching will deliver a paper on "Mass Media, Ethical Paradox and Democratic Freedom: Jacques Ellul's Ethic of the Word" at the international conference on "Democracy and Technology" to be held at the University of Bordeaux next summer. Anyone desiring a copy should write to Fasching at the Department of Religious Studies, University of South Florida, Tampa, FL33620 and enclose one dollar to cover the cost of postage and duplication.

## **Thanks for the Help**

A special note of thanks is due to David Gill and Dan Clendenin who shared with me the expense of producing the 1st issue of *The Ellul Studies Forum* which was distributed free of charge in order to generate interest in this enterprise.-*The Editor*

## **Apologies**

Those of you who have sent in checks subscribing to the *Ellul Studies Bulletin* may have noticed that your checks have not yet cleared. I apologize for the delay but I have encountered some bureaucratic tangles which delayed establishing an account to which these checks could be deposited. It appears that I have finally resolved all the problems and you should be getting your canceled checks soon.

# Book Reviews

## The Growth of Minds and Cultures

by Willem Vanderburg, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985.

Reviewed by Katharine Temple

[The following review is excerpted from the winter issue of *Cross Currents* 1985-1986. We are grateful to Katharine Temple and to *Cross Currents* for permission to reprint. - *The Editor*]

A cursory glance at the table of contents might leave the impression that here we have one more introductory textbook in sociology or anthropology. But this would be a mistake. Early on (p.9), Vanderburg tells us this is the first volume in a projected trilogy -*Technique and Culture*, a title which sharpens the focus. I have to admit it is daunting to pick up a 300-plus page book, only to find out there are two more yet to come. Since, however the task is enormous, I also have to conclude that the effort is worth it. In this case, it is important to pay closer attention than usual to the Preface and Introduction, which serve to clarify the end-point.

I have the profound sense that our present concepts allow us to see the mystery of human life only through a dark glass... But the very process of asking new questions and not absolutizing reality as we know it is vital not only to keep scientific debates in their proper context, but also to guarantee a genuine intellectual life for us and the generations to come— If these reflections can contribute to giving new energy to a dialogue within the multi-versity and among intellectuals around science, technology and technique and their influence on human life, my audacity in attempting a synthesis on such a vast scope will have been worthwhile (pp. 302-303).

At no point is Vanderburg preaching to the converted. He is speaking to people who have to be lured into the discussion in the first place - natural scientists and engineers who, by and large, consider the social sciences beneath them, and those in other disciplines who are thoroughly intimidated by "the hard sciences." As he has to start from square one on both fronts, it is a difficult mix, especially when he wants to promote dialogue, and critical dialogue at that. Then, even apart from his pedagogical pursuits, his own research breaks out of the accepted positivist molds. His conceptual framework is grounded in the dialectical thought of Jacques Ellul ( who has written

an incisive foreword that puts the methodology into perspective). Vanderburg has commented elsewhere about the influence.

In rethinking Marx... Ellul centered on technique, a much broader phenomenon than technology in the engineering sense. Indeed without recognition of this, much of what Ellul says may appear to be overstatement or exaggeration. It was this which struck me most when I first encountered it in *The Technological Society*, and called forth in me a desire to work through this concept from an engineer's point of view (*Cross Currents*, Spring 1985).

Ellul is indeed one of the most brilliant interpreters of our century, but he is an inspiration others have found difficult to swallow, and so he is out of favor in the official groves of academe. Vanderburg has undertaken to introduce a recalcitrant crowd with uneven sophistication to controversial arguments based on highly sophisticated concepts. Perhaps this is as good a definition of formal teaching as any.

Having said that, let me also stress that *The Growth of Minds and Cultures* is not a re-hash of Ellul's insights brought into the classroom. Both are sociologists who view the world very much alike and the Ellul imprint is clear. Nevertheless, they are sociologists who work differently. Just as Ellul is an analyst (in the etymological sense "to loosen," "to unpack," "to dissect") starting from the whole, so Vanderburg remains an engineer, examining the parts to see what makes the system tick and then working toward putting those parts together into a synthesis. One example. This book starts with the irreducible social unit, the individual, and follows how he or she is "enfolded" into the pre-existent web of culture. Ellul, by contrast, tends to start with a definition of *technique* itself. The two approaches are complementary, not interchangeable. The very lack of acceptance Ellul's work has encountered may indicate that the more nuts-and-bolts description is very much in order.

Every once in a while, it also occurred to me that there is not a single topic in the book that won't be old hat to someone and long since rejected by someone else. I cannot say, however, that I wasn't warned.

I have assumed that most of my readers, like myself, will have an expertise in some areas covered in these essays and not in others... In all of this, I am keenly aware of the fact that both the frontier-type of highly specialized knowledge and the intellectual-reflective kind of knowledge have their own lacunae (p. xxv).

The whole point of a synthesis is not to come up with brand-new separate parts; it is to look at what we think is obvious with new lenses, to show new configurations and relationships. Of course, there is sometimes bound to be a *deja-vue* quality, as well as disagreement, partly because of the range of separate parts and partly because

Vanderburg presents his case without being easily side-tracked. We are sadly unused to this way of thinking. The question is whether this sociological synthesis promotes clarity. I would say that it does. With both scientific coolness and passion, he succeeds in a synthesis that lays the foundation for his next work on technique.

Because he has made such a considerable sociological contribution, I feel churlish in asking questions perhaps better put to the discipline itself. My hesitations come at both ends of its spectrum. First, I think certain biological inquiries deserve greater weight; in particular, genetics and the implications of maleness and femaleness. Second, at the other end stands philosophy. Although the book is deliberately non-philosophical, many of the key concepts carry over from that tradition: mind, will, being, freedom, even culture itself. Such reservations probably would not come to mind if it were not for the overwhelming denial of biology and philosophy in technical civilization at large. Such may be the nature of the beast; nevertheless, from a book that carefully delineates terms, one is tempted to ask for more.

What heartens me the most about this book is the way it re-asserts common sense as a criterion, even as the discarded disciplines once did. Now, "common sense" is an elusive term both philosophically and in common parlance. The only consensus about it is that common sense is never very common. Yet, it is the best expression I know to describe the strength of Vanderburg's argument. By it, I mean a practical wisdom and judgment that rely on perceptions and experience as the touchstones to shake us out of our tendencies to fantasize, objectify, trivialize and distort. People do not initially perceive themselves either genetically or statistically or philosophically and, strange or shaky as it may sound as a theoretical principle, Vanderburg is actually on solid ground when he builds on common perceptions. There will still be disagreements, but the stage is set for discourse based on actual experience, even on the widest conceptual plane.

Vanderburg has concerned himself with technological advances and what they might mean for our life. *The Growth of Minds and Cultures* leads us to see how hard it is to dissociate ourselves from a "star wars" mentality, in which our culture is deeply and almost inextricably embedded. Nevertheless, Vanderburg shows that we can think about this civilization in other than logistical terms or science fiction.

# Forum

## Jesus and Marx: \*From Gospel to Ideology: A Critique

by Michael Bauman

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The following was submitted as a book review of *Jesus and Marx: From the Gospel to Ideology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), pp. xvi + 187. However, I thought it provocative enough to merit featuring as the *Forum* statement for this issue. Readers are invited to respond for the next issue. *The Editor*.

The first task of an academic author is to understand his subject. The second is to make himself understood. Though it may be offensive to say so in a forum like this, I do not believe that in *Jesus and Marx* Jacques Ellul has succeeded well on either count. Because it often takes longer to correct an error than to make it, and because this book contains a surprisingly large number of errors of fact and errors of interpretation, I must content myself, within the small scope afforded a book review, to mention but a few of the most flagrant or most easily noted shortcomings.

First, I deny that Christians ought to feel any pangs of guilt "because of what the searching gaze of socialism revealed about them, their church, or even Christianity itself (p.5). Socialism, for one thing, says nothing about anything. Only socialists do. What they say, I am convinced, is philosophically sloppy and historically incorrect. The guilt revealed by "socialism" should be guilt felt by socialists. I can not countenance Ellul's irresponsible assertions that Marxist criticisms are "obviously based on justice" or that "in every respect our society is unjust for both individuals and groups" (p. 6, emphasis added). Nor will I countenance Ellul's unproven (and unprovable) assumption that justice means equality. One must not say, with Ellul and the Communists that our "unjust society results from twenty centuries of Christianity" or that "neither churches nor Christians are doing anything to improve the situation (p.6). All I will admit is that books and ideas like Ellul's will not work and that his last statement is a refutation of his own book, written as it is by a Christian and clearly intended as an aid.

What is one to make of the scandalous assertion that "no matter what kind of poverty the poor suffer, the Communists are on their side, and the Communists alone are with them" (p. 6)? I can only say "God help those with whom the Communists stand." Obvious examples like Mother Teresa aside, one need only look at the years



since WWII to see that Communism is the major perpetrator of poverty and not its solution. The Japanese, for instance, were on the losing side of the war effort and suffered nuclear destruction twice. They occupy a land not great in size or in natural resources. Nevertheless, their economy and their standard of living far outstrip that of the Soviet Union, which was on the winning side of the war, which was given all of Eastern Europe as a gift, and which has more people, more land and more natural resources than Japan. A similar comparison could be made between North and South Korea, East and West German, and mainland China and Hong Kong. Capitalism, not socialism, has unlocked the secrets of wealth and sustained growth. Capitalism, not socialism, has been the better friend of the poor. Socialists, not capitalists, ought to feel the pangs of guilt revealed by Socialism. Poverty circles around socialist ideas and socialist ideologues wherever they come to power. Shocking as it is to some, by the 1980's the average Black's per capita annual income under apartheid in South Africa was higher than that of the average white under Communism in the Soviet Union. In short, while capitalism and the Church are not perfect, neither are they what Ellul describes. Nor is Socialism.

Despite Ellul's groundless claim that communist tactics are consistent with communist goals, it is obvious that communists preach liberation and practice enslavement. As long as the same band of happy thugs continues to occupy the Kremlin and to sustain the Gulag, we must not say, as Ellul does that "they accomplish what Christianity preaches but fails to practice" (p. 6). Such ideas are scandalous and reprehensible. Have we forgotten Solzhenitsyn so soon?

That is why Ellul must not say, as he does say with regard to Fernando Belo's communism, that he respects the choice of others to be Communists and does not question it (p. 86). Nor should one say, with Ellul, that Belo's leftist revolutionism is a "perfectly respectable" choice. It is not. But, Ellul's muddled sense of Christianity and of Communism permits him to make these and other such abhorrent assertions, such as that Belo's view of the "radical opposition between God and Money, God and the State" and "God and Caesar" are not only true, but "truly evangelical" (p. 89). In other words, because of his partial acceptance of Communist claims, one can tax Ellul with the same charge with which he taxes Belo: he "appears not to suspect [that] Marx's thought is a whole - a precise, integrated unit, based on a thorough method. Once one has adopted it, one cannot mix it with other methods and concepts." (p. 94).

Second, Ellul's understanding of history is less than reliable. For example, he tells us that "often an ideology springs up to parry an ideology-free practice" and that "capitalism is a practice with no explicitly formulated ideology; socialist ideology arises to oppose it. Afterward, capitalism will produce a 'defense'" (p. 1). Not only is it a highly debatable (if not downright mistaken) notion that there is any such thing as an "ideology-free practice" or that capitalism, when it emerged, was one, it is patently false to claim that its ideology developed in response to Socialism. Karl Marx and *Das Kapital*, after all, come after Adam Smith and *The Wealth of Nations*, not before.

Such errors seem to arise from Ellul's peculiar view of ideology, a view wherein he tries to separate the inseparable. Contrary to Ellul, one cannot readily distinguish theology from ideology because the former category is a subset of the latter. To distinguish theology from ideology is no 'more useful than to distinguish Irishmen from humanity. One might well distinguish good theology from bad ideology, or good theology from bad, but one need not do what Ellul tries to do. His attempt is based upon a definition of "ideology" so fully idiosyncratic that if one looked only at his definition, one could not guess the word it was intended to define. Flying in the face of every dictionary known to me in any language, Ellul defines ideology as "the popularized sentimental degeneration of a political doctrine or worldview; it involves a mixture of passions and rather incoherent intellectual elements, always related to present realities: (p.1). A large number of Ellul's conclusions are based upon this monstrous and unjustifiable definition. When the foundation is tilted, how can the superstructure stand straight?

*Forum*, M. Bauman continued.

Ellul argues that while Christianity is not an ideology, it can degenerate into one as when, for example, it becomes "a means for distinguishing those who are right from those who are wrong [the saved and the damned" (p.2)]. But, Christianity did not become a means for making such determinations; that is something it was from the very beginning. Ellul, one begins to think, does not understand the nature of the very religion he is attempting to promote and to protect. "Christianity," he says, "is the destruction of all religions" and of "airbeliefs" (p.2). Because Christianity is, on any common sense view, undeniably a religion and entails beliefs, one cannot but wonder after reading such statements (1) if Christianity is not an enemy to itself, or (2) if Ellul uses language with grotesque imprecision and license. For many, the second option recommends itself most convincingly. So also does the conclusion that imprecise language is inescapably tied to muddled thinking.

This book's muddle is extensive. Ellul's skewed vision of history and of economic principles and reality are sometimes shocking, as when he tells us that Caesar is the creator of money (p. 168). For over 200 years, since Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson, economists have known that money *antedates* government and that it arises from human action, not human design. Government recognizes the medium of human exchange and adapts itself to it. Government does not create money. But such ideas are (so far as this book is concerned) unknown to Ellul. He nowhere shows a knowledge or understanding of classical or of Austrian economics. If his index is to be trusted, Hayek, Von Mises, Schumpeter, Ricardo, Hume, Smith, Say, Bastiat, Gilder and Sowell form no part of Ellul's knowledge of economics. I dare say that without knowing them, one could not understand Marx. Perhaps that is why Ellul believes that Marx was "admirably well acquainted" with the problems of his day, that Marx's misdirected and ineffective theories can be labeled "solutions," and that his anti-theism was not an essential part of his ideology (pp. 4,153).

And what is one to make of the grossly exaggerated assertions that "both the Old and New Testaments take exception to all political power" and that "the state's prosperity always implies the death of innocents" (pp. 171,172, emphases added)?

In short, I believe Ellul misunderstands history, economics, Communism and even Christianity itself. In this book, Ellul does not adjudicate the Christian tradition, Christian wisdom, or Christian revelation in a capable or well-informed way.

# Forum Response

## The Importance of Eschatology for Ellul's Ethics and Soteriology: A Response to Darrell Fasching

By Ken Morris

Dan Clendenin has strongly criticized Jacques Ellul for his affirmation of universal salvation. Darrell Fasching's position paper on "The Ethical Importance of Universal Salvation" took Dan Clendenin to task over his failure to recognize universal salvation as an integral part of Ellul's ethic of freedom, yet it must be pointed out that Ellul himself has said that one need not accept his universalism along with the main body of his approach to ethics.<sup>1</sup> Even though Fasching has made a helpful critique of Clendenin's analysis, he has failed to uncover the root of both Ellul's optimistic soteriology and his ethics. In order to understand, and indeed, not be distracted by Ellul's affirmation of universal salvation, we must grasp the centrality of Biblical eschatology to Ellul's thought. We must understand what Ellul means by "the presence of the Kingdom," an apt title for his seminal work.

Fasching sees universal salvation as "a necessary precondition for the ethic of freedom Ellul develops precisely to protest the collectivization of human behavior in a technology society." He uses the theologies of John Howard Yoder and Juan Luis Segundo to argue that universalism, by undermining the theological rationale and ethical motivation which have historically promoted Christianity as a collectivizing religion, serves to free up the church from its worries about converting the world and "rechannel(s) the energy of Christians in the direction which is most needed in our time, the ethical direction." Fasching draws on the assertion shared by Yoder and Segundo that the Gospel was betrayed when the church came to view its message as something everyone had to accept in order to be saved. The immediate result of this assumption was that the boundaries of salvation got drawn (and redrawn) in such a way that the greatest possible number of people could be included. Christianity abandoned its "ethic of discipleship" for an ethic of "Christian civilization." This shift failed to preserve the central biblical perspective of election as a call to vocation, and, instead promoted election as a special privilege. But the greatest significance of this move was that the emphasis in theology was shifted off of discipleship and onto salvation. Central to this

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<sup>1</sup> David W. Gill, cd., unpublished interview with Ellul, Bordeaux, France (July 1982).

shift was the definition of the boundaries of salvation *according to, and for the sake of, human understanding.*

While it is true that the contemporary church, especially the conservative wing, has a preoccupation with personal, future salvation, and while it is also true that an affirmation of universal salvation effectively undermines this emphasis on soteriology, it does not necessarily follow that Ellul's universalism and his ethics of freedom are inseparable. Both Ellul's ethics of freedom and his soteriology are rooted in his eschatology. One must understand this if one is not to be distracted by his universalism.

Ellul claims that Romans 8, which he feels is a fundamentally universalistic proclamation, has indirectly inspired all the research and writing he has done over the last fifty years.<sup>2</sup> A specific reading of Romans 8 was the final stage in what Ellul elusively refers to as "a very brutal and very sudden conversion to faith in Jesus Christ."<sup>3</sup> He identifies three essential and interdependent themes in Romans 8: the salvation of the world, the suffering of the present time, and freedom. These three themes became the basis of all of his life's study and proclamation.

According to Ellul's exegesis of Romans 8, every individual is in solidarity with the whole of creation: "The creation's suffering, (Paul) tells us, arises out of human sin - out of my sin." Therefore, if one person can be saved out of their sin, then the whole creation is concerned. "I can't be liberated or emancipated by myself... All creation - humans, animals, things - all are promised salvation, reconciliation, new birth, new creation."

The second theme in Romans 8 is the suffering of the present time. These sufferings are the inevitable subjection to "the law of sin and death" (8:2) which Ellul understands as bondage, obligation, fatality and biological, cultural, social, economic and political conditioning. The work of God in Jesus Christ ruptures these inescapable necessities by introducing hope. Hope, central to Ellul's theology, is defined as the immediate expression of the eschatological and freedom is the ethical expression of hope.<sup>4</sup>

Freedom from necessity and fate is only possible in "the law of the Spirit of life in Jesus Christ." Not only have we all been set free, all creation will be set free. There is a Now of that liberation as well as a Not Yet. Salvation is "a liberation that puts me on the path of freedom." In Ellul's personal discipleship under Christ both Christian hope, which is expressed in his ethics of freedom, and universal salvation are rooted in the Eschaton. "I go through all the miseries of the world carried by this hope, writes Ellul, "because I know that both those who know of it and those who don't are walking together to meet their Lord and Savior."<sup>5</sup>

Given the historically soteriological focus of Christian theology, it is understandable that Fasching would argue for a direct connection between Ellul's theology and ethics.

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<sup>2</sup> Ellul, "How I Discovered Hope," *The Other Side* (March 1980), p. 31.

<sup>3</sup> Ellul, *Perspectives on Our Age* (New York: Seabury, 1971), p. 14. [4] Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment* (New York: Seabury, 1971), p. 239.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>5</sup> Gill, Unpublished interview with Ellul (July 1982)

Both Clendenin and Fasching grasp the significance of Ellul's eschatological approach to theology and ethics, the same eschatological approach which gave rise to his universalism, but neither has stepped back far enough from the context of their thinking to recognize the effect that this traditional preoccupation with soteriology has had on their own theologies. For that matter, neither has Ellul.

Clendenin betrays his preoccupation with soteriology by choosing this area to mount "one of his most devastating critiques of Ellul." Fasching is correct in questioning the consistency of Clendenin's stance that adopts the ethics of freedom that are generated by Ellul's eschatology yet rejects the soteriology that issues from the same. Even so, Fasching falls short of ridding himself of a soteriological tendency by affirming, after Ellul that in the apocalyptic/eschatological resolution of the historical dialectic between sacred and profane *all* persons are saved. The emphasis is still on salvation, in Fasching's case it is simply all inclusive.

One of Clendenin's critiques of Ellul's universalism is that it fails to extend his dialectic beyond history. Fasching is correct in his assertion that this criticism is groundless since Ellul clearly maintains that the Biblical dialectic is eschatological and thus limited to history. But regardless of whether or not this tension, which centers on the soteriological question, is resolved at the Eschaton, an affirmation of universal salvation in the midst of history allows the dialectical tension to collapse. On the whole, however, Ellul grapples with this soteriological tension in a consistent manner, and even when he allows it to collapse at the times he affirms universal salvation he reveals that he is not entirely comfortable in so doing, adding, "I often teach in sermons and public Bible studies, but I never teach universalism. I do believe it, I attest to what I believe, I witness to it, but I don't teach it."<sup>6</sup> To affirm universalism as true, yet to refuse to teach it, is more than simply a reluctance to be identified as a universalist. This hints at the dialectical tension of a soteriology rooted in eschatology. Geoffrey Bromiley picks up on this soteriological tension when he observes that Ellul's position strives to avoid "either an automatic salvation on the one side or a salvation dependent on giving oneself in faith to Christ on the other."<sup>7</sup> A main theme in *The Meaning of the City* is that God's characteristic love takes into account human free will, all human intentions, even if they are, in fact, revolts against God, and transforms them as material for the New Creation. Ellul recognizes that what he is contending is prone to misuse. The temptation inherent in this theological position of eschatological appropriation of everything and everyone is to give ourselves over to our selfish desires while counting on God's pardon. But he argues that any such misuse is based on the rupture between reality and truth initiated with the Fall. Ellul draws his analysis from the Biblical revelation and therefore he claims it is fundamentally an appeal to those who have already made a decision of faith: "Either we believe that the Bible expresses

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<sup>6</sup> Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays, eds. Christians and Van Hook (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1981), p. 40

<sup>7</sup> Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, p. 179.

the revelation of God centered in Jesus Christ... or else we do not believe it. We must not confuse the two positions: asserting that since God pardons in the end we have nothing to worry about and thus can obey our every whim is taking the attitude of one who does not believe in revelation."<sup>8</sup>

The person who claims to both universal salvation and moral license is one who does not understand that truth does not equal reality under the Fall. He thinks he can assert the truth that all will be adopted by God in his love while at the same time be rejecting the Lordship of Christ. It does not occur to him that he is attempting to restrict this word of revelation to pure objectivity. He is separating the word of universal salvation from its necessary context of obedient discipleship and, in so doing, uses it to oppose that discipleship. He wants to separate his life for what he thinks is an objective truth, but the biblical revelation is that "all human speech is intrinsically connected to a person —. (when) someone has tried to separate it from the person who speaks it, it has lost its relationship with truth and has become a lie."<sup>9</sup> Only for the person who lives in the eschatological kingdom, that is, under Christ's Lordship, can this revelation be a reality. Only at the Eschaton are reality and truth reunited.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the present possibility of a situation arises in which two people can assert the truth of universal eschatological salvation but only the one who is in the eschatological kingdom, as demonstrated by his or her submission to the ethics of that kingdom, is speaking of reality in truth. For the other, salvation is not a reality.

In effect, what Ellul accomplishes with his eschatological dialectic is to remove the possibility of answering the soteriological question once and for all: yet he does just that. Ellul has stated that, "the soteriological dimension is diminished with respect to the dimension of the kingdom."<sup>11</sup> With the advent of the Kingdom (though hidden and not yet fulfilled) in the coming of Jesus, the soteriological dimension is completely removed. Therefore, in affirming universal salvation Ellul is taking an unjustifiable liberty with the eschatological dialectic, a liberty that causes more trouble and confusion than it is worth. Especially since the soteriological tension is, in and of itself, sufficient to move our theological focus off of salvation and back onto discipleship and the kingdom of God. Ellul's perspective on salvation and his ethics of freedom share a common root in his eschatology, but they are only indirectly connected.

Vernard Eller (University of La Verne) is a scholar familiar with Ellul who has effectively grasped the importance of retaining a soteriological tension. Eller wants to walk a narrow path in his soteriology, one that most contemporary theologians, with their central focus on salvation, would find difficult to accept. On the one hand, he feels that it is wrong to assert that there will inevitably be some people who will not

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<sup>8</sup> Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), p. 33.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 237-269.

<sup>10</sup> Ellul, *In Season, Out of Season* (Harper & Row, 1982), p. 76.

<sup>11</sup> As quoted in Gregor G. BoUch, *Karl Barth and Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1980), p. 75.

be saved. On the other hand, contra Ellul, he believes that it is just as wrong to assert that all human beings will ultimately be saved.

Since one cannot be sure of either particularism or universalism, the most one can propose is a "universalistic possibility." This effectively moves our focus off of salvation and onto the ethic of discipleship grounded in our response to what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. Ellul's universalistic possibility (see his *Revelation: The Most Revealing Book of the Bible*) is a third soteriological position, and one which moves beyond the particularism/universalism impasse by preserving the tension of the eschatological dialectic. It only becomes an option, however, after we have been able to identify our misleading emphasis on personal, future salvation as unbiblical and heeded Ellul's call for "re-eschatologization" of Christian theology.

Presently we find ourselves trapped in a circle of incriminations. Contemporary scholars and theologians who begin to rediscover the eschatological root of biblical discipleship and begin to tentatively work out their understanding of the soteriological tension, usually, by attempting to balance particularism with a broader sense of God's graceful action, are invariably branded with the scarlet "U" of universalism. A good example is Ellul's predecessor, Karl Barth. In an "evangelical" response to Barth's theology entitled *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth* (1956), G.C. Berkouwer identified the key element of Barth's theology as the tension between universal election and human decision. Instead of seeing this as a dialectic, however Berkouwer pointed to it as a crossroads and wondered which way Barth would turn: "Probably no one will wish to venture a prophecy as to the direction in which Barth will further develop his thought. It is possible, however, to state in a nutshell his central thesis. This is that the triumph of election means, centrally and determinatively, the *a priori* divine decision of the election of all in the election of Christ."<sup>12</sup>

Barth responded to Berkouwer by attempting to move the emphasis away from the question of salvation and toward a freedom and pursuit of a knowledge of Christ: "I'm a bit startled at the title, *The Triumph...* Of course I used the word and still do. But it makes the whole thing seem so finished, which it isn't for me. *The Freedom...* would have been better. And then instead of— *Grace* I would have preferred ...*Jesus Christ*."

^ AU this is particularly significant for the contemporary church as it grapples with the issues of evangelism and social action. As long as our focus remains on personal, future salvation, we can never be entirely comfortable with a renewed emphasis on an ethic of discipleship. But if soteriology can be grasped in terms of a tension rooted in Biblical eschatology, then we can move beyond the either/or approach (either particularism or universalism) in which the majority of contemporary, orthodox, Christian theology has sunk its roots.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 76.



## A Second Forum Response to Fasching

In response Darrell Fasching's article on "The Ethical Importance of Universal Salvation" in the premier issue of *The Ellul Studies Bulletin*: It seems to me that throughout his critique of Clendenin's objections to Ellul's notion of universal salvation Fasching confuses two very important and necessarily distinct issues. Underlying all three points of Fasching's argument is a confusion of evangelistic coercion/Constantinian power and the particularity of the gospel.

John Yoder is right to criticize the Constantinian coercion that demanded conversion (a better choice than losing one's life!) and thereby watered down the ethics of Christian discipleship. But that coercion is not identical to the belief that salvation was made possible for the human race particularly through the gift of Jesus Christ, in whom all human beings are invited to have faith.

Rather than the notion of universal salvation, the idea that Jesus alone is "the way, the truth, and the life" is the necessary pre-condition for an ethic of freedom. Without him a person struggles under the un-freedom of trying to make one's own way, of following all the right steps to find the truth, and of expending great effort to create and justify one's life.

The gift of salvation in Christ is offered freely. God does not coerce us to accept it. Moreover, God's grace sets us free to respond to that salvation with lives that carry on what Fasching calls "the struggle with the demonic dehumanization and collectivization which occurs in history." Consequently, the Christian ought not to use power to coerce others into accepting the good news of God's gift in Jesus. Fasching rightly criticizes Constantinian link with power, but throws the baby out with the bath water when he also rejects the uniqueness of Christ's victory over the powers.

Ellul, Yoder and Hauerwas all are right to condemn the unbiblical notions that Christians are in charge, but this ought not to be confused with the idea the Christians have a great gift to offer the rest of the world - the grace of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Fasching falsely links "the desire to run the world" with the belief that Christ alone is the means to salvation. Unfortunately, throughout history, since Constantine, Christians have used power instead of appeal in their evangelism, but that was not the case in the early church. All its members were both pacifists and also advocates of Peter's confession that "there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among [humankind] by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12).

## Fasching's Reply

I very much appreciate the thoughtful responses to my essay by Ken Morris and Marva Dawn. I must say that in many ways I find Ken Morris' essay persuasive. I agree with him that it would be desirable (given the typical narcissistic emphasis

on personal future salvation) to remove the issue of "salvation" from the theological vocabulary altogether, replacing it with a focus on eschatology. I find it distracting, and almost embarrassing, to have to spend so much time discussing it when our focus is on the response of theology to a technological civilization. And yet, just because there is such a prevalent misuse of this theme which does distract from the ethical-eschatological dimension, such a discussion is unavoidable. Given this past history I wonder if it is really possible to attempt to sidestep the issue as Mr. Morris seeks to do. I am afraid that Vemard Eller's position, at least as interpreted by Mr. Morris, may not really undercut the motivation to turn the whole world into a collectivist Christian civilization. Agnosticism about salvation, Max Weber argued, actually led Calvinists to be more compulsive in spreading Protestant Christian civilization. If it is true of Ellul's position, as Mr Morris says, that "an affirmation of universal salvation effectively undermines this emphasis on soteriology" it may be (given our past history) the only way to undercut a collectivist ethic and recover an ethic of discipleship. I recognize that Mr. Morris is right to warn that affirming universal salvation in the midst of history may collapse the dialectical tension necessary for an ethic of discipleship. Paul faced the same problem in preaching that in Christ all things are permitted. Some took this as an invitation to license. That is why it is probably good that the scriptures are ambiguous on this matter. No one can reasonably claim certain knowledge on this issue and take things for granted. It is better to have some doubts even as we live by hope.

I am less persuaded by Marva Dawn's position. I do not see how the statement - "the gift of salvation in Christ is offered freely. God does not coerce us to accept it" - can be true if the consequence of refusal is hell and damnation. It is only offered freely if one accepts Ellul's premises concerning universal salvation. Dawn opposes "universal salvation" to the notion that "Jesus alone is the way" but for Ellul this is a false opposition since he affirms both. Dawn concludes her argument with Acts 4:12 (i.e., there is salvation in no other name), apparently to oppose it to my conclusion with 1 Timothy 4:10 (i.e., God is savior of the whole human race, especially all believers). It is interesting, however, that on her premises one is forced to choose between these two scriptures but on Ellul's premises one can consistently affirm the truth of both.

## **Bibliographic Notes on Theology and Technology**

by Cari Mitcham and Jim Grote.

Danner, Peter L. *An Ethics for the Affluent*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1980. Pp. viii, 416. "[I]ntended for undergraduates who accept in a general way Judaeo-Christian ethical values. Its subject is ethics as applied in economic relations, and its orientation is personalist" (p. 1). Technology mentioned explicitly only in passing, but nevertheless of some relevance.

De Franch, Ramon Sugranyes, Chanoine A. Doneyne, Joseph Kaelin, and O. Costa de Beauregard. *Foi et technique*. Paris: Librairie Pion, 1960. Pp. 181. Proceedings from the XUIe Assemblee Pldnifere de Pax Romana, Mouvement International des Intellectuels Catholiques, in Louvain, July 1959. The authors contribute an "Introduction" and articles on "Technique et religion," "La biologie dans le champ de tension de la pense contemporaine," and "Problemes de foi d'un scientifique," respectively. These are followed by a lengthy "Accueil de la foi dans un monde scientifique et technique" by an international commission. [Both of these first two citations are to important items inadvertently missing from the "Select Bibliography of Theology and Technology" in *Theology and Technology* (1984), to which these notes are a supplement]

Granberg-Michaelson, Wesley. *A Worldly Spirituality: The Call to Take Care of the Earth*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984, Pp. xiv, 210. The author "identifies himself as an evangelical and distinguishes himself as such from Catholics and liberal Protestants, but he writes in no sectarian spirit. His concern is to arouse believers of all persuasions - evangelicals, fundamentalists, and all the rest - from construing their faith in exclusively personal terms... and to make them aware of its application to the world as God's creation. He seeks to articulate a biblically-based theology and does not hesitate to call in the assistance of modern biblical scholarship from all quarters." - from the favorable review by George S. Hendry, *Theology Today* 42, no. 2 (July 1985), pp. 264-266. Granberg-Michaelson was for eight years chief legislative assistant to Senator Mark Hatfield, has been a member of the Sojourners community, and now directs the New Creation Institute and teaches journalism at the University of Montana.

Jaki, Stanley L. "The Three Faces of Technology: Idol, Nemesis, Marvel," *Intercollegiate Review* 23, no. 2 (Spring 1988), pp. 37-46. The Enlightenment looked upon technology as idol; its critic Edmund Burke viewed technology as nemesis. "Burke's ultimate perspective on the shift from chivalry to calculators, human or electronic, was a religious perspective" (p. 39). Trying to eschew these extremes are those such as Dennis Gabor who turn to technology as a marvel for manipulating even society. What is really called for is responsibility. A breezy piece with many apt historical references.

Locher, Gottfried W. "Can Technology Exist without Belief?" *Theology Digest* 21, no. 3 (Autumn 1973), pp. 221-223. Abstract from "Galuben und Wissen," *Reformatio* 22 (1973), pp. 82-92. Christians must assert themselves to influence science and technology for the better. [Another miss in the 1984 bibliography.]

Lecso, Phillip A. "Euthanasia: A Buddhist Perspective," *Journal of Religion and Health* 25, no. 1 (Spring 1986), pp. 51-57. Buddhism prohibits active euthanasia and advocates hospice care. By an M.D.

Marty, Martin E. "The Impact of Technology on American Religion," chapter 11 in Joel Colton and Stuart Bruchey, eds., *Technology, the Economy, and Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), pp. 278-287. Although in Europe technological change has been at odds with religion, such has not been the case in the United States. In the US prior to industrialization only about 10-20% of the population was religiously affiliated. But "the coming of technological industrialization was accompanied by an

almost consistent rise in church membership (to over 60 percent) from the 1870s into the 1960s. Somehow, Americans blended technological mastery with religious search and identification" (p. 279). There are, however, problems and ironies in the technology of worship, the symbolization of spiritual experience, the application of ethics, and the instrumental use of technology.

Moran, Gabriel. "Dominion over the Earth: Does Ethics Include All Creatures?" *Commonweal* 114, no. 21 (December 4, 1987), pp. 697-701. A Christian brief for animal rights in the face of advancing technology. This is part of a special issue on the theme "Keeping Afloat: Stewardship in Machines, Money and Farms."

Novak, Philip. "The Buddha and the Computer Meditation in an Age of Information," *Journal of Religion and Health* 25, no. 3 (Fall 1986), pp. 188-192. Meditation can help deal with the cognitive as well as the emotional stress of information overload.

"Perspectives on Jacques Ellul" Theme issue of *Media Development* (Journal of the World Association for Christian Communication) 35, no. 2 (1988), pp. 1-31. Contents: Jacques Ellul's "Some Thoughts on the Responsibility of New Communication Media," Clifford G. Christians' "Is Ellul Prophetic?" Darrell J. Fasching's "The Liberating Paradox of the Word," Roelf Haan's "Understanding Progress: Cultural Poverty in a Technological Society," John M. Phelan's "Jacques Ellul: A Formidable Witness for Honesty," Joyce Main Hanks' "Feminism in the Writings of Jacques Ellul," Katharine Temple's "Jacques Ellul: A Consistent Distinction," Willem H. Vanderburg's "Idolatry in a Technical Society: Gaining the World but Losing the Soul," Daniel B. Clendenin's "An Interview with Jacques Ellul," and James McDonnell's "Annotated Bibliography."

Sherrard, Philip. *The Eclipse of Man and Nature: An Enquiry into the Origins and Consequences of Modern Science*. West Stockbridge, MA: Lindisfarne Press, 1987. Pp. 124. Useful restatement of the problems created by the desanctification of nature in modern science. As much about technology as much as science, though it fails to say so.

Thomas, Mark J. *Ethics and Technoculture*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987. Pp. vii, 305. Technology is neither inherently good nor inherently evil, but ambiguous. From Paul Tillich's theology of culture, which recognizes and tries to deal with such ambiguity, and Tillich's occasional reflections on the ambiguity within technology, Thomas attempts to develop a more comprehensive theology of technological culture. Chapters I and II are introductory, providing first an overview and then some basic perspectives. Tillich's view (summarized in chapter III) is then systematically contrasted with the more affirmative views of technology found in Talcott Parsons and Herbert Marcuse and the negative view of technology found in Martin Heidegger in relation to technological time and space (chapter IV) and technological causality and substance (chapter V). The affirmation of technology is coordinate with an autonomous view of the human, the negation of technology with a heteronomous view. The concluding chapter VI sketches a theonomous view of technology. "Human technology is ambiguous (creative and destructive), because human being is estranged from its own ground and source. Autonomous social ethics (Parsons, Marcuse) cannot

create an unambiguously good technological society because it cannot overcome the existential situation. Heteronomous social ethics (Heidegger) cannot create the common good because it cannot reimpose the primal relation to origins. And insofar as all of these ethical interpretations are expressed in terms of a self-sufficient finitude, none can grasp either the depth of human estrangement, nor the ultimate source of transcendence required for its fulfillment. Only when human artifice and innovation are seen as derivative and existentially distorted can the ambiguity of the technological era be grasped:

We cannot close our eyes any longer to the fact that every gain produced - for example, by scientific and technical progress - implies a loss; and that every good achieved in history is accompanied by a shadow, an evil which uses the good and distorts it.

Any social ethic which fails to grasp this central reality is doomed to swing with the movements of history between an unwarranted optimism and an equally unwarranted despair over the human condition" (pp. 225-226). A truly theonomous view of technology will affirm its creativity and value production as such but also contain "an element of 'technical self-limitation'" (p. 232). This limitation will be guided by organization under a democratic socialism. Originally a doctoral dissertation directed by Langdon Gilkey.

"To Be Christian is to be Ecologist." Theme issue of *Epiphany* 6, no. 1 (Fall 1985), pp. 1-83. Guest editor, Peter Reinhart. Contents: Vincent Rossi's "The Earth is the Lord's: Excerpts from The Eleventh Commandment: Toward an Ethic of Ecology\*," Stephen Muratore's "Where Are the Christians?: A Call to the Church," Rossi's "Theocentrism: The Cornerstone of Christian Ecology," "Earth Stewardship '84: A Special Seminar Section" - with contributions by Fred Krueger on "The Eleventh Commandment and the Environmental Crisis, Muratore on "Stewardship is Enough: Ecology as Inner Priesthood," Reinhart on "The Ten Talents of Stewardship and the Angelic Dimension" and "Eternal Festival: Folk Culture, Celebrations and Earth Stewardship," and Michael Crowley on "The Virtues: Commitment, Spiritual Practice and Transformation" - Michael Eichner's story "The Master Craftsman, an interview with Krueger of the Eleventh Commandment Fellowship, Muratore's "Holy Weakness, Strength of God: From Despair to Christian Ecology," and a good annotated survey of books on the environmental movement.

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Readers are invited to contribute to this ongoing bibliography. Please send books or articles to be noted, or notes themselves, to

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Peter Lang Publishing (New York/Bem) is searching for bold and creative manuscripts for their new monograph series on *Religion, Ethics and Social Policy* edited by Darrell Fasching. Scholars from the Humanities and Social Sciences are invited to submit book-length manuscripts which deal with the shaping of social policy in a religiously and culturally pluralistic world. We are especially interested in creative approaches to the problems of ethical and cultural relativism in a world divided by ideological conflicts. Manuscripts which utilize the work of Jacques Ellul would be most welcome, as well as manuscripts taking other approaches. A two page brief on the series is available. For more information, or to submit a manuscript, contact the series editor, Darrell J. Fasching, Cooper Hall 317, University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida 33620. Phone (813) 974-2221 or residence (813) 963-2968.

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**Issue #3 Jun 1989 — Eller and  
Ellul on Christian Anarchy**

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## From the Editor

by Darrell J. Fasching

Welcome to issue number three of the *Ellul Studies Forum*. This issue completes our first subscription year and I hope that you think this effort worthy enough to renew your subscriptions for issues four and five. Please note that there is a subscription renewal form enclosed. Also note a slight increase in subscription price, from four dollars per year to six (eight on foreign subscriptions). I started out with the lowest possible subscription price I thought (hoped) we could manage on. However, after a year of experience its clear that this modest increase will be needed to keep us in the black.

You should find this issue especially interesting. Our Forum essay "*Be Reconciled*" is by Jacques Ellul himself. He graciously sent us this article as he promised when we began the *Ellul Studies Forum*. You will also find Ellul's rather stinging reply to Michael Bauman's review of his book *Jesus and Marx* (Issue #2, Nov. 88) in this



issue's Forum Response column. Ellul outlines in detail why Michael Bauman's review is seriously misrepresentative. Nevertheless, I feel compelled to say a few words about this review myself. First, I must offer a word of apology to our readers and especially to Jacques Ellul for publishing this rather irresponsible review. I must confess that at the time, my pressing schedule had not yet permitted me the time to read *Jesus and Marx*. Mr. Bauman was asked to write a review of this book by our book review editor and I received it shortly before publication time. I recognized it to be a rather harsh and uncharitable review. Still, I decided to run it because I felt it was important to establish that critical reviews are welcome and an important part of scholarship, no matter how well established the author under review.

What I was not in a position to judge at the time was that the review was seriously misleading. Having since read *Jesus and Marx* it is now clear to me that Mr. Bauman seriously misrepresented the subject matter of the book. He professes to be a "theologian of culture." He might have learned something from the master of that discipline, Paul Tillich. Tillich said that what struck him most about scholarship in this country when he came here from Germany was that one's opponents always attempted to refute the strongest possible interpretation of your work whereas his European colleagues were in the habit of choosing the weakest possible interpretation and often ended up destroying a "straw man." I am afraid that is what Mr. Bauman did in the last issue - if not worse. While claiming that the first obligation of an author is "to understand his subject" he proceeds to interpret the positions Ellul is criticizing as positions Ellul himself holds. This is an inexcusable error, if it is an error. One has to wonder if it is not deliberate misrepresentation. From Mr. Bauman's review one gets the impression that Ellul is championing communism and socialism and condemning capitalism. One could scarcely conclude from Mr. Bauman's article that Ellul's book is a stinging critique of socialism and communism which argues that Christian faith can never be compatible with either. And yet that is exactly Ellul's thesis. One would never guess, from Mr. Bauman's review, that such sentences as the following could be found in *Jesus and Marx*: If you care for the poor, Ellul argues, "You will have to break quickly with Communism, since its practice has produced many more radically poor people than capitalism ever did. Communism has never defended the truly poor: only those who were useful to the revolution" (p. 131). It makes one wonder if he bothered to read anything beyond the first chapter.

What is equally disturbing about Mr. Bauman's review is the arrogant tone with which he puts forth his own views as unquestionably true, leaving the impression that anyone who disagrees with him is simply out of touch with reality. Mr. Bauman seems painfully unaware of his own vulnerability. If he did not bear the title Associate Professor, I would have assumed him to be a "green" Ph.D., fresh out of graduate school. In the future, I promise to exercise tighter editorial control, not to exclude disagreement and/or criticism of the work of Jacques Ellul (I myself engage in these tasks) but to exclude irresponsible scholarship, not worthy of the name.

In the book review section you will find a new review of *Jesus and Marx* by Dan Clendenin, our book review editor, which I think will give you a better understanding of the book's contents. You will also find an essay review by Katharine Temple of Ellul's *Le christianisme et l'anarchie* and Vemard Eller's *Christian Anarchy*.

Indeed, a major section of this issue is devoted to the theme of Christianity and Anarchy. We are pleased to have three essays on this topic. One is derived from the last chapter of *Jesus and Man*. The other two were graciously sent to me by Vemard Eller. One is by Eller on his interpretation of "Christian Anarchy" and the second is by a mysterious Hu Elz on "Eller's Crowning Achievement" - namely his influence on Ellul's development of the theme of anarchy. Who is Hu Elz? I am afraid I don't know. No identification was given with the essay. But a skillful literary-critical analysis might suggest that he must be a "close disciple" who has absorbed much of Eller's casual style.

Finally, we have a Bibliographic essay from Carl Mitcham on movements and newsletters in England relating Christianity and technology, which should be of considerable interest. And we have a review of upcoming Ellul publications by Gary Lee of Eerdmans Publishing Company.

The next issue (November) will be devoted to the theme of Judaism and Christianity in a Technological Civilization. I am off to Bordeaux and the Society for the Philosophy of Technology's conference on "Democracy and Technology" at the end of this month. While I am there I plan to interview Ellul about his book *Un chrétien pour Israël*. Ellul's view of the cooperative vocation of Jews and Christians in a technological civilization is a fascinating aspect of his work which has received little attention. If anyone has a contribution they would like to make on this or any other topic please feel free to send me your manuscripts.

# Forum

## Be Reconciled

by Jacques Ellul

Translated by Joyce Hanks

God's reconciliation with humanity is secured through Jesus Christ. But this should lead to reconciliation on our part with God, and to reconciliation among us. In what follows, I would like to suggest just an outline of the second point. It seems to me to entail two aspects: religious and theological quarrels and divisions, on the one hand, and position-taking in the World, on the other.

As I have thought about it over the last several years, the tragedy of the separation of our various Churches springs from the fact that the reasons for their separation no longer matter very much. Two hundred or a thousand years ago, these reasons often justified separation. In the case of the theological battle over *filioque*, for instance, do theologians and clergy today really attach great importance to this formulation of the faith?

Or consider certain facets of that great schism, the Reformation: transubstantiation, for instance. A French Catholic theologian said to me a few months ago that "no one" on the Catholic side believes any more that the wine is materially transformed into blood, and the bread into flesh (I think he meant theologians, since the situation certainly differs among simple believers!). He said "we believe in Jesus' real presence (but in the sense of his words: 'I am in your midst'). The bread and wine are Symbols of that presence." This inevitably reminded me of Calvin's phrase: "we believe in Jesus' real (meaning 'true'!) presence in the Lord's Supper, but not in his material presence. The dispute sprang from a certain philosophy of substances, no longer accepted in our day. On the contrary, we can come together rather easily on the basis of an existentialist philosophy.

The huge debate concerning salvation by faith or by works was similar. The terrible thing in this case was that both sides agreed salvation came by grace, in any case. But one group believed a person's initial act was believing in that grace, whereas the other group believed one first put grace into practice through works. Astonishingly, advocates of salvation by faith accomplished the most works in the nineteenth century (works of the Church and of charity). To think the Church was torn asunder, and thousands of Christians died, killing each other, because of such terrible misunderstandings (to which we could of course add others, such as the Virgin and the Saints).

At times breaches have occurred quite differently: a small group of Christians would realize the official Church was forgetting an important aspect of Revelation. For example, it is quite true that in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Protestantism, the Holy Spirit and eschatology were neglected. So these groups of Christians would decide to try to "return the Holy Spirit to his proper place," or "rediscover the importance of eschatology in theology and the spiritual life of the Christian." Their error consisted of making this truth the only important truth: a truth that constituted, by itself, a subject *Stands aut cadentis Ecclesiae*. They considered everything else secondary.

The official Churches committed a much more serious error: they failed to recognize what was right in such movements. Since the groups comprised only a minority, they were obliged to separate from the Church, becoming the Pentecostal Movement, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, etc. The "much more serious" error involved failing to apply a rule I find extraordinary: *Major aut Saniorpars*. It existed in the Church from the tenth to the thirteenth century, only to disappear in the fourteenth. When a decision was to be made in a Church Council, for example, a vote took place, but the majority was not always right! The ideal was to arrive at unanimity. Failing that, the group had to consider whether the minority represented a *saniorpars*: a wiser point of view. This process provoked delays, but resulted in a more just solution. People doubted that truth could be decided by a majority of votes! In reality, the Church should have examined whether these minorities were calling it back to essential truths. Instead, after their exclusion, such groups hardened their position, and ended up in the absurdities and extremism we know so well.

But can all this still be valid today? The Presbyterian Church, for example (the Calvinist church, or the Reformed Church of France), has now recognized again the importance of eschatology and the centrality of the Holy Spirit. Each time someone proposes a reconciliation of these churches, however, or wants to examine what divides us, stern refusals follow. Whose? The authorities'-all of them. What I have to say will meet with very poor acceptance, but the thing separating Churches is no longer theological, religious, or doctrinal questions. It is institutions, organizations, and authorities. The heads of these Churches do not want to lose their power. They see no way to unite their separate and different institutions. People prefer having the body of Christ tom to pieces rather than challenging our authorities, powers, and institutions.<sup>1</sup> Considering that the Churches yield to such feeble motivations, it is not surprising they lose their influence in this world!

The second aspect of reconciliation among us involves taking political positions, often within a single Church.<sup>2</sup> After 1940 we rediscovered in Protestantism (at least

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<sup>1</sup> At this point I return to the theme of a series of articles I wrote in 1952: "On the Cultural and Social Factors Influencing Church Division," *Ecumenical Review*, vol. 4 (April 1952), pp. 269-275, reprinted as "The Cultural and Social Factors Influencing Church Division," in C. H. Dodd, G. R. Cragg, and Jacques Ellul, *Social and Cultural Factors in Church Divisions* (New York: World Council of Churches, 1952), pp. 19-25.

<sup>2</sup> The point I take up here particularly concerns French Protestantism, but I am convinced a similar

in France) that the Church could not isolate itself from problems in society. For instance, we found ourselves confronted with communism in 1944. What attitude should we adopt? Many French pastors and theologians who had been completely indifferent, before the war, suddenly found themselves with communist friends in the Resistance. As a result of such friendships, they assented to communist doctrine. Moreover, this process highlights an important characteristic of French Protestantism: relationships based on friendship or charity often lead our Protestant intellectuals to join an organization, in order to show they sympathize with the doctrine or philosophy of people to whom they want to be closely related. We find this again in the case of Islam.

Naturally, the "great" French theologians of that era (such as Pierre Maury, Marc Boegner, and Jean Bose) did not allow themselves to be influenced at all by this trend, but a great number followed the (moderate) example of Karl Barth, who said, rather simplistically: "Since the Soviet Union saved us from Hitlerism, we must reconsider our negative attitude." Thus Barth drew close to communism (he was, of course, ignorant of both Marxist doctrine and the reality of the Soviet regime).<sup>3</sup>

Beginning at that point, we have a split in the Reformed Church of France. On the one hand we find those who considered the only calling to be evangelism: making the Gospel known and enabling people to share in salvation in Jesus Christ. On the other, those who considered a Christian could now witness to his faith only through political action, which ought to establish a just society. In such a society, the poor would be given first place. This faction denied the Gospel could be received without social action, resulting in "the good news announced to the poor." The poor with no money, the proletariat, and only they were worthy of bearing the good news. Remarkably, this group managed to prevail, through utterly insidious means. Today, we can no longer declare that we want to make the Gospel known by means of the Word.

Next we saw political positions taken at the time of the war in Algeria. The same intellectuals and theologians who had sided with the poor now acted on behalf of the Algerian Freedom Fighters, against France. The motive was the same: since the Arabs were poor and oppressed, one had to be on their side, against the rich French oppressors. This tendency continued as the group sided with the Palestinians (because they were the Poor, whereas the Israelis represented the United States, and thus the rich!). The trend continues today with respect to the immigrant workers (all Arabs), and the Palestinians. This Christian political movement has, of course, adopted Liberation Theology. But, more than that, it quickly subscribed to Marxist thought, and now favors Islam, emphasizing the "monotheism" of the two religions!

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problem exists in many countries. Furthermore, in this article I especially attack Christians who have taken a Leftist position. I have made (and could make here) the same criticism of Christians of the "Right." See my *False Presence of the Kingdom*, tr. C. Edward Hopkin (New York: Seabury, 1972) and *Jesus and Marx: From Gospel to Ideology* tr. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988).

<sup>3</sup> Barth had been heavily influenced by his friend Fritz Lieb, who wrote a book in 1945 in which he "proved" that the Soviet Union had completely changed, that it had become completely free, and that there was no oppression there!

Of course, this trend that dominates the Protestant intelligentsia judges very harshly the Christians who confine themselves to the Gospel. These are considered reactionary, and unfaithful to God's will, since they do not put themselves on the side of the Poor. The adopting of political positions has gone beyond earlier theological differences.

My greatest reproach of all these Christians who adopt a political stance is essentially that they are ignorant. That is what grieves me most: between 1940 and 1956, they knew nothing about Marxism. They did not try to find out what was really happening in the Soviet Union. I maintain that when a Christian takes a political stance he should reflect on everything: the means used and the future risks, as well as the doctrine that inspires the movement. If you are for the Palestinians, you must study the PLO's charter and evaluate the Israelis' chances for survival if the Palestinians should win. If you favor Islam, you must begin by studying the Koran thoroughly.

I believe that these Christians are acting in good faith, and that they are sensitive to poverty, but they are utterly lacking in perception, dear thinking, and competence. An honest Christian with these deficiencies says nothing. Above all, he does not take himself (like those I am attacking here!) for the equivalent of the Old Testament prophets! The prophets not only listened faithfully to the Word of God, but also were well acquainted with political conditions in their time!

The experience of the last forty years should have given our false prophets a warning about their errors. But, since they take themselves for prophets, they see none of the damage done by the regimes they have supported. They continue to drag well-meaning Christians into other errors, and widen the splits they have produced in the Reformed Church of France!

## Update on Ellul Publications

by Gary Lee

**Eerdmans Publishing Co.**

About a year ago, in the first issue of *The Ellul Studies Forum*, I reported on our forthcoming translations of several Ellul titles. Here is a brief progress report.

We have just published *What I Believe* (223 pages, doth, \$19.95), Geoffrey Bromiley's translation of *Ce que je crois*. Here Ellul treats several key general concepts (chapters include "Life Has Meaning," "The Word," "Lifelong Love") as well as some crucial theological ideas ("The Seventh Day," "Universal Salvation," "Recapitulation") and an overview of history. Thus this work serves as a good introduction to Ellul's thought.

Joyce Hanks has recently submitted her translation of *La raison d'être: Meditation sur VEcclesiaste* (English title uncertain). This is another of Ellul's provocative and insightful biblical expositions; here he finally treats the biblical book that one might associate most closely with him. Publication is scheduled for 1990.

We will indeed publish the translation of *Le bluff technologique*, Ellul's third massive volume on the role of technique in our world. As the title indicates, Ellul examines the technological bluff, that is, the illusions by which technique has fascinated and seduced us. Geoffrey Bromiley expects to finish the translation before the end of this year, and we should publish it either late in 1990 or early in 1991.

We are still in the process of finalizing the contract for *Un chretien pour Israel*, which is another demonstration of Ellul's ability to blend theological, sociological, and historical analysis. Ellul has recently submitted a postscript to take into account the events in Israel that have transpired since he wrote the book (1986). We hope to publish it in 1991.

Ellul's *Anarchie et Christianisme* is our most recent acquisition. Here Ellul looks at the relation between anarchy and Christianity from sociological and historical perspectives, and then examines a number of Biblical texts that provide the basis for the anarchic option. This book is similar to, though briefer than, Vemard Eller's *Christian Anarchy* [Eerdmans, 1987], to which Ellul refers. Look for publication in 1991 or 1992.

Finally, one other book, though not written by Ellul, reflects his influence at a number of points: Marva Dawn *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*. Marva combines solid Biblical exposition, insight from Jewish traditions, and practical reflections to guide the reader into a fuller appreciation of the meaning of the Sabbath. Available in July (232 pages, \$10.95).

## **The Presence of the Kingdom - Back in Print**

Helmets and Howard Publishers, (P.O. Box 7407, Colorado Springs, CO 80933) has just brought Jacques Ellul's *The Presence of the Kingdom* back into print. This edition has a new Preface by Ellul explaining what prompted him to write this book and an introduction by Dan Clendenin. Written early in his career, *The Presence of the Kingdom* is a remarkable *blueprint*, foreshadowing the massive scholarship that was to follow in over forty books. Virtually all the important themes of Ellul's work are contained here in a "nutshell". If you do not have this classic on your book shelf, now is the time to order it. The price is \$10.95, with professional discounts (20%) and examination copy discounts (50%) available. Call 719-520-1559 for more information.

# Forum Response

## A Reponse to Michael Bauman's Review of *Jesus and Marx*

by Jacques Eilul

Translated by Michel Machado

My work has been so often criticized without being understood that I believed nothing could shock me. However, I must confess that Mr. Bauman's article [Issue #2, Nov. 88] first provoked irritation, then stupefaction, and finally I thought it to be a joke! Indeed, I found it (and I use Mr. Bauman's terms), "monstruous", "grotesque." I never read such accumulated stupidity and lack of comprehension. It is evident that Mr. Bauman knows nothing of my work. He does not know that I was for forty years professor of history of institutions and economics and that I am aware of the works of Hayek, Schumpeter and others. Mr. Bauman knows nothing of Marx's theory and of the prominent Marxist theoreticians. Setting aside his ignorance, I am equally disturbed that an obtuse theology professor can so violently judge a book that he has clearly misunderstood and I doubt even seriously, read.

Mr. Bauman's atrocious misconceptions include the following:

1. He accused me of saying that Christians ought to have a feeling of culpability because of what socialism revealed. But, I never said that! I said, in fact, "Many have had a bad conscience"... I report a fact, nowhere have I said that Christians must have a bad conscience.
2. I never wrote that justice was equality. I have often written to the contrary. Mr. Bauman should begin to apply to himself the rule that he set in the first line of the article - "The first task of an academic author is to understand his subject."
3. He accuses me of saying that Communists are on the side of the poor. Here again, he missed it. I don't justify the Communists, I do not say that they help the poor. I say that wherever the poor revolt, Communists are there. If Mr. Bauman had known the Leninist *prods*, if he had read Lenin's work, he would have known that that is their tactic. Clearly, I do not entertain the simplistic idea that Communists help the poor; they use them in order to come to power. Only for appearance and public opinion sake do Communists care for the poor.



4. His inability to understand is further revealed when he believes that I could have said that our unjust society is the result of twenty centuries of Christianity. I wrote clearly that this is the accusation hurled at Christianity by Communists and that if many ceased to be Christians it is because this argument was accepted.
5. Concerning my statement that the Communist tactics exactly correspond to Communism's objective, Mr. Bauman, again understood nothing since he doesn't know the clever tactics and grand strategy of Lenin. In a stupid fashion, he transforms it: "the Communist discourse is contrary to what Communists practice." But discourse is not the same thing as tactics!
6. Mr. Bauman attacks me because I said that Belo's choice is respectable. For myself, *a priori*, I respect the choices of all, but I didn't say that I accepted them. *If* Mr. Bauman knew something about the matter, he would have known that I wrote one of my books in order to prove that Belo's position is wrong, not in conformity to the Gospel. Moreover Belo clearly is ignorant of Marxist doctrine.
7. Mr. Bauman makes numerous misinterpretations like this one: He attacks me violently because I wrote that "Caesar is the creator of money". From his learned ignorance, he said that money existed before the State (I wrote twenty pages on the origins of money in my six volumes! *History of the Institutions*). But I never wrote what Mr. Bauman thinks to have read! I wrote that Caesar makes [i.e. coins] money (*fait les prices de monnaie*). Mr. Bauman ignores the difference between create [i.e., originate) and make [Le., coin]. Besides, very early, as soon as metal ingots were used as money they were indeed marked and usually it was the political power who did it.
8. I could go on enumerating the stupidities and confusions of this article, but I will insist only upon two very important questions. First, it is "evident" for Mr. Bauman that Christianity is a religion. I was thinking that since Kierkegaard and Karl Barth, the distinction and even the opposition between religion (which is a fabrication of man in order to satisfy his religious need) and the Revelation of the God of Abraham and Jesus (which doesn't not correspond to the religious desire of man), was clear and well accepted (at least by 90% of European theologians). Evidently, our theology professor knows nothing of Kierkegaard or Barth! From a sociological standpoint, he assimilates Revelation to religion!

My second point concerns my definition of ideology. The "excellent" Mr. Bauman finds it scandalous and unjustifiable. This entails three remarks. First, he seems to ignore that there exist at least fifty definitions of the ideology. Every author has his own and the one of Adorno is not Belo's or Aron's, or Lukak's, etc.. I proposed a definition after having said that there were many others. My definition corresponds to the one accepted by most French political scholars. I

counsel Mr. Bauman to read, for example, the different articles of the *Encyclopaedia Universalis* concerning ideologies, where he will learn that the matter is not so simplistic as he thinks. What is apparent from his article is his inability to distinguish among Theory, Doctrine and Ideology! For example, he argues that I am mistaken in saying that often an ideology arose to defend a previous *praxis* devoid of ideology. (He doesn't know, for instance, that Capitalism was constituted since the XVI century, without the help of any ideology). I am supposed to be mistaken in saying that the liberal ideology appeared to defend Capitalism against the Socialist ideology. What an error he is uttering! Of course, Smith's *The Wealth of the Nations* was published long before Marx's *Das Kapital* - Bauman's response is absurd because, here, we speak about doctrine. Liberal doctrine appeared before Socialist theory. Socialist ideology, however, appeared since 1815 in order to attack Capitalist structure. This was before any Liberal ideology existed.

9. He accused me of not having cited, in this debate Hayek, Schumpeter, Herme, Say, Bastiat, etc... But I don't understand why I should mention these in a debate about Marxism and Christianity in which they are not relevant. I have not quoted the prominent Marxist classics, either. I wanted to focus on current debate and I quoted only current authors, (with the exception of Proudhon and Bakunin).
10. Finally I maintain:
  - a) that although it raised the level of life of populations and produced much more from an economic standpoint, liberal capitalism created a much poorer proletariat than before;
  - b) that our affluent nations create an increasing poverty in the third world;
  - c) that nineteenth century Christianity played the role of an ideology of justification for the wrongs of Capitalism;
  - d) But that Marxism will not resolve any of these problems and that Christians must not ally themselves with the Communists.

This was evident in my book. In short, Mr. Bauman understood nothing I had to say. I pity his theology students if he misunderstands the Biblical text in the same fashion. His misunderstanding reflects a theology of the last century, the preconceived ideas of the Constantinian heresy, and a desiccated social conservatism.

# Anarchism and Christianity

## The Paradox of Anarchism and Christianity

by Jacques Ellul

We express our thanks to Gary Lee and Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. for permission to reprint a brief selection from Jacques Ellul's, *Jesus and Man*, (Eerdmans, 1988), The following are excerpts from the concluding chapter.

Perhaps it seems odd to attempt a reconciliation of anarchism and Christianity, since the idea that they are utterly irreconcilable enemies is so well established. Doesn't anarchism repeatedly cry "no God and no Master"? ... Looking at the question from the opposite angle, we see that Christianity clearly not only respects authority, but presupposes that authorities exist. Everyone believes Christianity to be a doctrine of order... From both sides, then, the reconciliation of anarchism and Christianity seems excluded... Without a doubt the official Church, transformed into a power, taught the opposite of biblical teaching... Essentially... both the Old and New Testaments take exception to all political power. No power can claim to be legitimate in itself. Political power and organization are necessities in society but only necessities. They attempt repeatedly to take God's place, since magistrates and kings invariably consider themselves the incarnation of authority. We must continually challenge, deny and object to this power. It becomes acceptable only when it remains on a humble level, when it is weak, serves the good and genuinely transforms itself into a servant...

Usually, however, this principle is stated the other way: the state is legitimate except when it becomes tyrannical, unjust, violent, etc. In reality, since the state is illegitimate, it should be destroyed, except when it acts as servant of all..., effectively protecting the good...

The only Christian political position consistent with revelation is the negation of power: the radical, total refusal of its existence, a fundamental questioning of it, no matter what form it may take. I repeat this statement not so Christians will turn toward some sort of spiritualism, political ignorance, or apolitical position - certainly not! On the contrary, as Christians we must participate in the political world and the world of action, but in order to deny them, to oppose them by our conscious, well-founded refusal. Only this refusal can challenge and occasionally impede the unlimited growth of power. Thus Christians can take their place only beside anarchists; they can never join the Marxists, for whom the state is unacceptable only to the extent that it is bourgeois.

Do Christians contribute anything specific or special to anarchism? ... Anarchists live in an illusion, believing that it is possible actually to abolish power and all its sources... Today we can no longer believe in one of the absolute tenets of anarchist faith: the inevitability of progress... We must not become discouraged, then, if our anarchist declaration fails to lead to an anarchist society... [However] when we shake the edifice, we produce a crack, a gap in the structure, in which a human being can briefly find his freedom, which is always threatened... I can hear the disillusioned anarchist: "Is that all we are doing?" Yes: *all* that; through our refusal, we keep the trap from closing all the way, for today. We can still breathe out in the open. The Christian must enable the anarchist to make the transition from a contemptuous "Is that all?" to an "All that," filled with hope...

I believe this two-edge Christian contribution of realism and hope to be essential for anarchism. Anarchism's need for Christianity shows the possibility of a practical harmony, which could accompany the dear agreement of the two on the theoretical level. This possibility contrasts with the fundamental contradiction of Christianity and Marxism, and the extraordinary uselessness of cooperation between them. I must clarify, however, that in this essay I am not trying to find a new concordism. I do not mean to imply that anarchist thought expresses the Christian political orientation, nor that Christians should adopt an anarchist orientation. In other words, we must not fall into the same error with anarchism that has been made with respect to Marxism!

I have tried to show, contrary to what is usually believed, (1) that no radical contradiction exists between anarchism and the concrete consequences of Christian faith in the sociopolitical area, whereas there is a contradiction between Marxism and the implications of the faith; (2) that anarchism does not imply as Marxism does, the elimination of Christian specificity; (3) finally, that within the context of modern society and our concrete historical situation, the determining and decisive problem is that of the universal power of the state<sup>TM</sup>. Communism has shown itself incapable of responding to this challenge. On the contrary, each time it comes to power, it merely reinforces the state. Refusing a synthesis of Christianity and Marxism does not amount to "preaching submission"... On the contrary it means entering a *different* revolutionary way, another way of questioning that is infinitely more radical and profound.

## Eller's Crowning Achievement

by Hu Elz

Within the past year or so... the Federation of French Anarchists commissioned Ellul to write for them a book, *Anarchie et Christianisme ...*, The book was purposed particularly for partisans of political anarchy, who would not have much knowledge as to how Christianity relates - although it could be just as useful for Christians who have almost no knowledge as to how anarchy might relate to their faith. Ellul is probably

the only person ever, who has been equipped to do as full justice to one side of the equation as the other. He is a top authority either way.

In the book Ellul opens by recounting his personal history regarding the two traditions. His faith as a Christian believer has always been his primal commitment; yet, in his political interests, anarchy has long had a fascination for him... The difficulty is that he has never found a way of getting the two together - natural enemies as the two seem to be.

Traditionally, Christianity and anarchism have shown deep animosity toward each other, with what surely is good reason. Anarchy starts from the premise that all of society's effort to structure itself and regiment the citizenry to an established order - all this works to the detriment rather than the enhancement of true humanity. The anarchical goal, then, is to break up these "orders," that, in the ensuing "disorder," individuals might find the freedom to live as truly human humans.

In response, Christianity has not been particularly keen on the idea, seeing anarchy's "disorder" as nothing but a threat to "the ordering of God" and "the godly ordering of the world" to which it is committed. The antagonism has been as much as absolute. Most anarchists have been atheists. After all, the idea of a 'Lord\*' (The Great Orderer in the Sky) is quite antithetical to what they have in mind. Further, they have seen (correctly enough) that the institutional church has always been on the side of tighter and tighter ordering rather than looser and looser. Ellul set himself some problem in trying to make those two speak with a common voice.

Ellul's book testifies as to how long he has been worrying the matter. As the years went by, he found more and more evidence of an anarchical strain within Scripture, but he still didn't see how this could contribute to getting the two traditions together. The breakthrough came then, he says [p. 7], in reading Vemard Eller's book, *Christian Anarchy* (Eerdmans, 1987).

Vemard, of course, is happy to have been of help - though the situation is very much a weird one. The truth is that anything and everything Vemard may know of Christian Anarchy he learned in the first place from none other than Jacques Ellul. The first chapter of Vemard's book (in which he defines the concept and establishes its categories) is based directly upon the thought of Ellul - and particularly upon one of his earlier essays regarding Christianity and anarchism. All Vemard was doing was quoting Ellul back to himself.

Actually, this is a phenomenon that probably happens time and again. When I hear my own thoughts read back to me by another person (in this situation in which I am *hearing* rather than *speaking*,') I can often hear things I was not fully aware of having spoken. But if Ver-nard never did anything except echo Ellul's crucial words back to himself, that is more than enough to constitute a crowning achievement.

Probably there was a bit more involved. Vemard came at the problem from a new angle. Rather than trying simply to combine apparent incompatibles, he came up with a new category - a third category that combined at least something of the earlier two and yet was not identical with anything of either of them. In the new two-word term

"Christian Anarchy" neither of the words means quite what it meant when standing alone. Each word modifies the other in the process of being paired.

"Anarchy"... assumed that, once set free, people would freely discover for themselves the minimal, instinctive ordering that would truly serve their humanity. But... "Human regimentation" never manages to limit itself - always gets out of hand and goes demonic.

So "Christian Anarchy"... [uses] that disorder's freeing us to give ourselves wholly over to the Ordering of God... This new regime would not be heavy-handedly impositionai (as all human regimes have to be). God's regime of love and light, is one that never uses force but uses patience and mercy in winning people into that one Order that is right for them.

So Christians need have no fear of anarchy - if it's Christian Anarchy. And anarchists need have no fear of Christianity - if it's Anarchical Christianity. Ellul can combine his two interests - if it is done by going to a new, third category rather than by trying to meld two old incompatibles.

Vemard's crowning achievement proceeds from that point. Ellul, in his book (pp. 12-13), confesses that, in tracing the strain of Christian Anarchy through church history, he had thought simply of renegade individuals such as Tertullian, Francis of Assisi, and a few others. But here again, Vemard's book taught him something he undoubtedly knew for himself - if he had been thinking.

It's hard to say how accurate an understanding of the 16th century Anabaptists... Ellul has had up to this point; these people still do not get a very good press on the Continent But Ellul is explicit in saying that Vemard is right, that the Anabpatists were not \*a-political Christian secessionists"... they were true Christian anarchists.

It's hard to know, too, how much Ellul has heard of the Blum-hardts, the 19th-century German father-and-son pastoral team that was so influential with the young Karl Barth. But here again Ellul is explicit in seconding Vemard's motion that the Blumhardts "formulated a strictly anarchistic Christianity."

There is no difficulty at all in determining that Ellul has been up on Kierkegaard since goodness knows when... But apparently Ellul had never thought of SK in connection with anarchy. However, a nudge from Vemard's book was enough to get Kierkegaard in.

Finally, it is no secret that Ellul, for a long time, has been strongly influenced by the work of Karl Barth. However, there were aspects of Barth's thought that had Ellul convinced that Barth could not be a Christian Anarchist. Yet, regarding Vemard's long chapter on Barth, Ellul now testifies that that demonstration has convinced him: Barth will be of that number when the anarchistic saints come marching in.

## **Christian Anarchy**

by Vernard Eller

**University of La Verne, La Verne, California**

Recently, while I was teaching a graduate seminar on the subject, a student came up with the terminology that enables me to express the gist of Christian Anarchy in fairly short order. She made a distinction between God's "Plan A" and God's "Plan B." Crucial, then, to any understanding of Christian Anarchy is, first, the seeing of the distinction and then the maintaining of it through every step of ethical reflection.

The ... point is made with ... relevancy in the story of Israel's demand for a monarchical government (1 Samuel 8:1-22)... The overarching question is: "Are the governing authorities... *of God?*" The answer which, from the biblical standpoint, simply will not do - this is the answer we most often get: namely, "The good moral regimes which we find attractive are *of God* but bad, immoral regimes are *of the devil*."

Rather, to our question, the first and decisive answer must be: "Well, the evidence is clear that none of them is recognized, or plays any part, in God's "Plan A." When Israel chose to go for a human ruler, God made it clear that this was nothing other than a rejection of his "Plan A" and indeed of his very self. His "Plan A" prescribes that he retain all (all) the reins of human government (and, indeed, cosmic government) in his own hands - that he perform the necessary governing of creation on his own, with surrogate orderers being entirely superfluous. "Plan A" intends that the government of all things rest with the one true and competent governor. That God be everything to everyone, as 1 Cor. 15:28 so aptly puts it.

Thus, rightly, the last thing any human government can claim for itself is that it is *of God*" ~ when, obviously, what it actually represents is the rejection of God. This is an absolute judgment that recognizes absolutely no distinction between one claimant and another - whether it be good, bad, or indifferent. No, to the extent it claims the authority to govern, to that extent it represents a rejection of God's own governance and a defiance of his "Plan A" (which does not call for any power-sharing on his part).

It is... only under "Plan B" that governing authorities come into the picture as being willed *of God*. In effect, God says that, if we have rejected his perfect governing authority of "Plan A," it is downright essential that we have governing authorities of some sort. We will just plain have to make do and put up with the imperfect and sinful authorities of human devising. However, no one ought to think that these belong to God's "Plan A"; they are only the poor, poor substitute demanded by "Plan B."

Accordingly, in our biblical account, God helps Israel choose Saul as the most promising "Plan B" king for them... Yet, under "Plan B," while trying to use human governing authorities for as much good as he can get out of them, God also is the one who takes the initiative in unseating Saul and trying David in his place. The entire history of Israel's monarchy is that of governing authorities who aren't good for much but who, I guess, do fulfill God's Plan-B intention of keeping things from going completely to smash.

Now Christians, along with their ethics, are going to have the most ethically difficult time imaginable - living, as they do, suspended between "Plan A" and "Plan B." For themselves... Christians are totally committed to "Plan A." They try to make God so completely Lord of their lives that, for them, no other lords or authorities even exist.

It takes all of their time to praise, love, and obey their Jesus. And when human-sinful governing authorities try to intrude themselves into the Christian's value-structure, they can be seen and treated as nothing other than competitors with and thus enemies of God.

Yet Christian ethics can't be left at this single focus on "Plan A." God himself demands that we go dialectical by reminding us that he, also, is the author of "Plan B"; it too is part of his will for humanity. It is true that those governing authorities are enemies of God; yet, just as truly, they represent the government God's wayward children simply must have if they are to survive long enough for him to get them back into salvation. These do, in a strange sense, represent the government of God.

So, if Christians love this wayward world as God loves it, they will have to be willing to involve themselves even in the makeshift ungodlinesses of "Plan B."

In Christ, Christians have been given the freedom to participate helpfully in "Plan B." However, we have blown that opportunity completely when we join "Plan B," treat the governing authorities as though they were now agents of God's saving work, play it as though "Plan A" has been superseded by "Plan B."

What we call "Christian Anarchy," then, is simply this very tricky business of retaining our Plan-A opinion of the governing authorities as rebellious enemies of God - retaining this opinion (as God himself does) even while using these same authorities (as God himself does) for the Plan-B survival of the race.

## **Translators Needed**

Occasionally the *Forum* will be publishing articles submitted in foreign languages. We need volunteers who are capable and willing to provide translations. Usually the articles will be four or five double spaced typed pages. The maximum size is ten double spaced pages. If you are willing to contribute your services in this way it will help to keep the cost of subscriptions down and will be greatly appreciated by your colleagues. We are especially grateful to Joyce Hanks, of Scranton University, and Michel Machado, of the University of South Florida, for their translations of Ellul's essays for this issue. If you can help us out please contact the Editor.

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As the *Ellul Studies Forum* enters its second year of publication, we are pleased to announce the formation of an Editorial Advisory Board. The editor shall depend on them for advice as to themes and topics for the *Forum* and for occasional editorial comment. The members of the advisory board are as follows:

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# Book Reviews

## Jacques Ellul, *Anarchic et Christianisme*

Atelier de Creation Libertaire, Lyon, France, 1988, 123 pp. Vernard Eller, *Christian Anarchy*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Mi. USA, 1987, 267 pp.

Reviewed by Katharine Temple

Anarchism, that underrated and submerged critique of modern society, has been a longstanding, if not always overt theme in the writings of Jacques Ellul. It goes back at least as far as his time with Emmanuel Mounier and *Esprit* in the 1930s, and his most explicit formulation came in *Autopsy of Revolution*, a classic of anarchist thought. Put succinctly, that school (which is a critique of both Capitalism and Marxism from within Socialism) points to the increasing power of the state as the focal point for social analysis.

Theologically, M. Ellul's anarchism points to the same power of the state as a false god or a locus for the incarnation of the principalities and powers - a motif in *Apocalypse*. How he brings together his two types of writing has long been a question, and he has always insisted that they stand in a dialectical rather than a systematic relationship. On the subject of anarchism, he has shown what he means, biographically, in *In Season, Out of Season* and, analytically, in the last chapter of *Jesus and Man* and now in *Anarchie et Christianisme*.

Although nothing substantially new appears in this slim volume (apart from reflections on 1 Peter), various strands from previous works are pulled together and that alone makes it worthwhile. Here and there some irritants surface, such as some comments about liberation theology or Islam without the more complete arguments he has given elsewhere, or certain statements about the prevalence of socialism that is not self-evident in English-speaking countries. These, however, are relatively few and far between (albeit on-going) points. Overall, it is a treat to encounter his grasp of the anarchist tradition, his fluency with the Bible and Church history, and his emphasis on Christian realism.

In *Anarchie et Christianisme*, M. Ellul commends Vernard Eller's book, and also I had read some articles on his own [Eller's] and M. Ellul's theological roots, which are as little known and as much shunted aside as anarchism is in social thought. As a result, I was looking forward to *Christian Anarchy*, especially as Mr. Eller writes from this country where, to put it mildly, anarchism has never really "taken." In any case, maybe I looked forward too much and expected too much.

Let me say, first of all, that I was not disappointed in the story of his theological sources - -the radical Reformation, Kierkegaard, the Blumhardts, Karl Barth, Jacques Ellul - -although his explanations seem marred by the tone that hints broadly that really nobody else has had such thoughts as his. How could he not mention William Stringfellow whodid so much to make Karl Barth and Jacques Ellul known here, or Dorothy Day who introduced anarchism through the pages of *The Catholic Worker!* Nor do I disagree about the need for hard questions to be put to the Christian left or peace movements, although, again, other voices have also spoken. Why, for instance, no account of Stanley Hauerwas or John Howard Yoder? And, finally, the matter of whether he is a-political or not (a charge he seems to relish) seems, by and large, beside the point

My disappointments lie elsewhere. Unfortunately, throughout the book, Mr. Eller falls into generalizations and simplifications that start to sound like a parody of some of the complaints made about M. Ellul.

This imprecision is most marked in the title theme of anarchism, which does have a coherent meaning, content and history, no matter how unsystematic these may be. Mr. Eller makes a point of saying (p. 4) that he knows nothing about anarchist writers, nor does he know much about Marxist analysis apart from impressions (p. 60) either. And so the stage is set to waver between "re-inventing the wheel" or a Humpty-Dumpty sense that "a word means exactly what I say it does, neither more nor less." In either mode, the result is not conducive to realism about what is going on, to which we are called to respond. Furthermore, his historical references are, at best, uneven.\* The history of biblical exegesis and theological understanding is long and complex; it does no service to dismiss whole traditions, century after century, with a patronizing wave of the hand. Indeed, we need iconoclasts to expose errors and shibboleths, but such a vocation requires more, not less insight and detailed knowledge than has prevailed.

Beyond these points, my major disappointment lies in his picture of responses being made by Christians today. My criticism may sound harsh, particularly as "the movement" can often drive me to distraction almost as much as it seems to annoy Mr. Eller. Still, I think we must avoid the temptation to judge anything anybody is doing with broad, unnuanced strokes and at its worst The critique is necessary, but how is it to be made? We must remember that caricature is not constructive, fraternal criticism, while sarcasm means "a tearing away at the flesh." In the interests of clarity and charity, we are not allowed to indulge in such approaches.

Take but one example, tax resistance is one of his main targets. In these sections, I found myself wondering "Whom is he talking about?" There are not all that many tax resisters around, but some do exist and they have seriousness and an awareness about the bonds among taxes, war and materialism — a recognition and thoughtfulness that come close to M. Ellul's discussion but that could not be guessed at from Mr. Eller. He does not bother to address the diverse philosophical biases and approaches among those who do so choose. Some are anarchist, most are not; some are believers, many are not; almost all focus on war taxes. None of these distinctions enters the book,

and he completely ignores the form of tax resistance most consistent with anarchism, voluntary poverty (in keeping with Peter Maurin's - the co-founder of The Catholic Worker - dictum: "The less you have of Caesar's, the less you have to tender unto him"). Such failures from an author who wishes to shed light on the topic only further the division and shallowness, only give scandal rather than edify.

In the end, it comes down to the requirement of realism. The lacks in social analysis and dialectics (the very thinking that lies at the heart of M. Ellul's account of anarchism) combine to undo the contributions Vemard Eller could have made in *Christian Anarchy*.

☒ *Examples of this unevenness come in his search for Biblical interpretations. On the one hand, his discussion of Philemon, for example, is enlightening, while his treatment of the Temple and synagogue in Jewish tradition, as another example, should have been edited out as an affront*

## **Jesus and Marx: From Gospel to Ideology, by Jacques Ellul**

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988, 187 pp., 12.95.

by Daniel B. Clendenin

**William Tyndale College, Farmington Hills, MI**

At age eighteen Ellul borrowed a copy of Marx's *Das Kapital* from the library and, upon reading it, experienced a conversion to a global interpretation of the world. About the same time he also underwent what he describes as a "brutal conversion" to Jesus Christ Unable to eliminate either totalitarian truth, and unable to merge them into a synthesis, for the past sixty years Ellul has sought to hold them in "radical contradiction" (p. 63), by which he means a critical and mutual dialectical tension such as characterizes all of his thought In *Jesus and Marx* he offers a withering critique of the fashionable tendency which merges the two and declares that the only authentic Christian *praxis* is that which commits itself to Marxism. Understanding Ellul, though, demands an effort to enter into his dialectical mode of thinking which holds the two in critical tension. Readers must beware of making two errors.

First, despite this scathing critique, Ellul does not throw out the baby with the bath water. Marxist thought has challenged Christianity in a number of positive ways (pp.5-10). It focuses attention on the need for social justice (which is not to say it brings justice!). It recognizes the role of the poor in the historical process and enters their world (even if not for good). Marxists attain a "coherence between thought and action, theory and *praxis*," which shames the church's disparity between word and deed. By focusing on the material factors of history, Marxists challenge the evangelical tendency toward a disembodied spiritualization of Christianity which is little more than a privatized experience. Finally, the zeal and militant spirit of Marxists challenge

the church to become what we should be. Indeed, they take seriously the last of Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*, the goal is not to interpret the world but to change it.

But readers must avoid the opposite mistake of reading Ellul as soft on Marxist Christians. His critique is at two levels. First, there is Marx himself. Marx could never answer existential questions of life, love and death; his view of people as merely economic beings (*homo economicus*) is reductionistic; and his belief in the inevitable progress of history is naive. Thus, Marx is not scientific but passionate (and that is why Ellul likes him). Most of *Jesus and Marx*, though, occurs at a second level and is directed to those Christians who claim to follow Marx. According to Ellul, their words and deeds show they are neither Marxist nor Christian. In chapters 2-6 Ellul levels an excoriating attack on such people, with special attention paid to Fernando Belo's *A Materialist Reading of the Gospel of Mark* (Orbis, 1981) and G. Casalis's *Correct Ideas Don't Fall from the Skies: Elements for an Inductive Theology* (Orbis, 1984). We can summarize five salient points made by Ellul.

First, Marxist Christians display an alarming degree of conformity to sociological trends. Thinking to be "progressive" in their positions, they are really just the opposite: eager-beaver Johnny-come-latelies who "conform culturally and intellectually to the rest of society" (p. 21). This guts Christianity of all content. Thus we witness an incredible sociological phenomenon: Christians who have every reason to oppose Communists and almost no reason to join them continue, like moths to a flame, to find it an irresistible attraction (p. 34).

Second, liberation theologians must ask the question: liberation for whose benefit? The so-called wars of liberation from capitalism and imperialism have resulted in worse dictators, more outrageous oppression and shameless brutality, more prisons, greater economic disparity, than any ever perpetuated by the West (p. 58). Given the fact that Communism "has never incarnated itself in anything but dictatorships," a Christian "would have to be crazy" to join them (p. 137). Third, where is the *praxis* of most of these theologians? Except for a small minority, most of these liberationists are bourgeois professors whose only *praxis* "consists of giving lectures, writing articles, traveling to congresses or colloquia, attending demonstrations, signing petitions and manifestos, and organizing seminars" (p. 128).

Fourth, when Marxist Christians accuse others of a blind reading of the Biblical text and claim to offer the first truly objective and "scientific" exegesis, they reveal their own pre-understandings. They fail to apply the myth of hermeneutical objectivity to themselves. In fact, this theology which claims to be inductive and based on the priority of *praxis* is in reality just another deductive theology with its own uncritically accepted assumptions. Finally, Ellul takes to task "service theology" which contends that meeting human need alone on the horizontal level is all that counts. Considering Matthew 9:2-13 as a case study, he shows how just the opposite is true: the vertical relationship of confession and worship must come first

*Jesus and Marx* is ultimately rooted in a broader Ellul theme: that the Gospel revelation is fundamentally iconoclastic and inimicable to all power, and especially

political power (which is the worst kind). Thus, the book ends with a chapter on anarchy, "the only acceptable stance in the modern world" (p. 156n). By anarchy Ellul does not mean social chaos. "All my position means is that the present center of conflict is the state, so that we must adopt a radical position with respect to this unfeeling monster" (ibid.).

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# Bibliographic Notes on Theology and Technology

## Bibliographic Report on Some Recent British Discussions Regarding Christianity and Technology

by Carl Mitcham

In early November 1988 I had occasion to visit in Chalfont-St-Giles, England, with Peter Davies and his family and to be introduced to a number of discussions among Christian engineers regarding the problems of technology. Davies, after working for seven years as an engineer with Jaguar Ltd., took a leave to earn an M.Sc. in Industrial Robotics and Manufacturing Automation, with the intention of returning to industry. But in the process he became concerned about the use of technology in society and now, as a Ph.D. candidate in management at Brunel University is writing a dissertation on the philosophy of technology.

### Science and Faith Newsletter

When asked whether there was any group of persons like himself, technical professionals concerned about the relation between engineering and ethics, Davies first introduced me to the *Research Scientists Christian Fellowship*, the aim of which is "to influence the whole climate of thought about science and Christian faith so that it becomes generally known that there is no conflict but that rather the two can work in harmony" (from a descriptive pamphlet). Interestingly enough, however, a significant number of the contributions to the RSCF newsletter, *Science and Faith* (published once or twice a year), in effect point up the existence of real conflicts.

For instance, in Newsletter No. 5 (1985), reporting on the 1985 American Scientific Affiliation/RSCF conference at Oxford, Donald MacKay notes how different speakers identified challenges to Christians in the new sciences of the person (biomedicine, psychopathology, etc.), artificial intelligence, tensions between serving and manipulating, and the need for numerous conceptual clarifications (pp. 10 ff).

In Newsletter No. 6 (June 1986) D. Gareth Jones conducts "An Odyssey through the New Reproductive Technologies" (*in vitro* fertilization, artificial insemination, and surrogate motherhood) and again finds numerous conflicts with Christian ethical principles (pp. 24-49).

Newsletter No. 7 (December 1986) contains a critique of the animal rights movement by David Williams (pp. 11-31) arguing that although animals do not have rights human beings (particularly Christians) have duties and responsibilities toward animals. There is also a report on an RSCF conference on "The Ethics of Animal Use" (pp. 3-10).

By contrast, Newsletter No. 8 (August 1987) is devoted primarily to Donald MacKay's enthusiastic outline of "Christian Priorities in Science" (pp. 10-26). For MacKay, science grows out of Christian belief in an ordered creation and love for humanity, and when true to itself in both theory and practice is essentially Christian. MacKay even criticizes "such a champion of biblical Christianity as C.S. Lewis, who justified his anti-technological bias by identifying human dominion over nature with hubris," for being too much influenced by Greco-medieval and Stoic ideals of "conforming the soul to reality" (p. 16), and defends as Christian the technological goal of "fashioning the future" (pp. 18 ff).

Newsletter No. 9 (May 1988) announces that RSCF is changing its name to *Christians in Science* and that the *Science and Faith* Newsletter will be joined with *Faith and Thought* (of The Victoria Institute) to form a new and more ambitious journal called *Science and Christian Belief*.

## Engineers Group Newsletter

A second newsletter, more immediately devoted to technology, is that of what is called the *Engineers Group*. Here the consideration of tensions with Christian thought and practice are much more pronounced.

For example, the Winter 1984 contents includes: John Davis' "Engineering for God or Mammon?" (pp. 2-6), Kathy Carter's "God and the Computer" (pp. 7-8), John Phillips' "Computers in Practice" (pp. 9-14), and a letter from Tom Hutt on "Engineering and the Task of Developing the Christian Mind" (pp. 17-19). As the editor notes in a forward, "each comes to a similar conclusion" that "we must... avoid setting up Hi-Tech as our idol" (p. 1). But each article also in effect points out that this is exactly what technology tends to do.

The Summer 1985 *Engineers Group* Newsletter contains an article by TMan Jiggins (until recently principal lecturer in Applied Nuclear Physics at the Polytechnic of the South Bank, London) pointing out the ways in which technology destroys community. "Power corrupts," he writes, "and computer power has a peculiar corruptibility" (p. 7). "We live in a progressively artificial world and to an increasing degree our expectations are being moulded by technological values" (p. 9). By contrast, Martin Wood defends the connection of "Computers and Christianity." In the same issue Nigel Rooms comments on Davis' article from Winter 1984 and Richard Franceys writes on problems of "Engineering for Development" while Michael Duckenfield calls for the formation of a Christian working party to apply a Christian ethics to technology.

The Winter 1985-1986 Newsletter contains Paul Marshall's "Is Technology Out of Control?" (pp. 6-12, arguing that although it can be perverted by sin, technology



is necessary for the exercise of Christian stewardship), Gary Colwell's "Technology and False Hope: A Christian Look at the False Assumptions Behind Technology's Optimism" (pp. 13-22), an address to the Conference of Mennonites in Canada in 1984. Indicative of the close association of the Engineers Group and the RSCF, this issue includes Gordon Clarke's "The Machine Starts," a counterpoint to E.M. Forster's "The Machine Stops," which also appears in *Science and Faith* (December 1986).

The major piece in the Autumn 1986 issue is David W. Aycock's "Christian Objections to High Technology: Analyzing the Resistances" (pp. 30-54). According to Aycock of the University Counseling Center at Taylor University in Indiana, USA Christians must work to overcome psychological factors that are sources of negativity and keep them from contributing more effectively to the rational assessment of technology in the light of scriptural principles.

The *Engineers Group* Newsletter for Autumn 1987 contains a statement of the "Aims and Objects of the Engineers Group" as part of the *Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship* (UCCF). These are:

"To develop a creative Christian perspective upon engineering and technology

"To help one another maintain a consistently Christian stance throughout our work as engineers

"To foster a constructive Christian influence in engineering

..., [and]

"To provide support and encouragement for missionary engineers and students..(p. 4).

This issue also reprints MacKay's "Christian Priorities in Science" from *Science and Faith* (1987) and includes Mark Williams' "Education for Balanced Attitudes towards Computer Technology" (pp. 35-41).

In the Summer 1988 Newsletter Michael J. Duckenfield asks "Is Maximum Efficiency Always Best?" (pp. 7-10) while John T. Houghton, FRS, Director General of the Meteorological Office, reviews Christian attitudes toward technological progress. According to Houghton, the Christian should lobby government to direct technical change toward worthwhile ends, make sure all facts are considered when making decisions, send "technical missionaries" to developing countries, make better use of new communications technologies to spread the Gospel, make better use of leisure, and "in emphasizing the importance of spiritual as opposed to material values,... demonstrate a positive approach to technological progress and material advances, rather than a withdrawal from their possibilities" (p. 19).

## Tensions

On balance both these publications - both of which regularly contain letters and short reviews - exhibit a persistent tension between seeing science and technology as realms of Christian fulfillment and sources of Christian struggle. All but a few of the most positive articles identify problems; and most of those that stress problems also

admit to some truly Christian achievements and promises. Jacques Ellul, for instance, is probably equally praised (as insightful and prophetic) and blamed (as pessimistic and lacking in faith or real understanding of science and technology) for his criticisms of technology.

What is most evident in these publications is a consistent attempt by practicing Christians who are also scientists and engineers to relate their faith and their work. Standing back a bit from the particular difficulties discussed, one cannot help but sense that the persistence of difficulties in itself may be a sign of the times.

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Readers are invited to contribute to this ongoing bibliographic column. Please send books or articles to be noted, or notes themselves, to:

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The Deadline for the Next Issue is October 1, 1989. A major theme for the next issue will be Judaism & Christianity in a Technological Civilization.

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**Issue #4 Nov 1989 — Judaism and  
Christianity after Auschwitz and  
Hiroshima**

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## **A Forum For Scholarship on Theology in a Technological Civilisation**

November 1989 Issue #4 ©1989 Department of Religious Studies,

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Judaism and Christianity After Auschwitz And Hiroshima, p.4

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## **From the Editor**

by Darrell J. Fasching

Welcome to issue # 4 of the *Forum*. Let me open by reminding everyone that *The Ellul Studies Forum* subscribers and other interested scholars will be meeting at the AAR Conference in California on November 18th. See the announcement on page nine for details.

Although putting the *Forum* together is always a labor of love for me, I confess that this particular issue has been something of a distraction since I am currently on sabbatical, writing a book. The working title of the manuscript is *Apocalypse or Utopia? Ethics After Auschwitz and Hiroshima*. I have been able to put this issue together without breaking my train of thought, so to speak, by focusing the *Forum* on the same theme. In effect, I am using the *Forum* as a sounding board for this topic, which is not inappropriate to its intended purpose.

Therefore, in this issue you will find two *Forum* essays focusing on the need for Christian theology to rethink the relation between Christianity and Judaism in a technological civilization. The first is my essay, *After Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Judaism and Christianity in a Technological Civilization*, which explores the impact of Auschwitz and Hiroshima on Jewish and Christian theology and ethics. In the second

essay, Katharine Tomple attempts to undo some of the stereotypes about Judaism and the law in Christian theology. This essay is reprinted from *The Catholic Worker* where it appeared in a less polemical form as part of a larger essay written for the feast of Epiphany.

We also have reviews of three of Ellul's books, two of which have not yet appeared in English translation. These are *Un Chretien pour Israel* reviewed by myself and *Le bluff technologique* reviewed by Gabriel Vahanian. The third book is *What I Believe* reviewed by Daniel Lewis.

In the *Forum Response* section we have an essay by Vemard Eller responding to Katharine Tomple's critical review of his work. Also in this section you will find a response from Michael Bauman to Jacques Ellul's response to Bauman's critique of Ellul's book *Jesus and Marx*. Among other things, Bauman takes exception to Ellul's definition of "ideology." Bauman clears this issue up more by example than by counter-definition, for Mr. Bauman tells us that he is a "politically conservative, free-market Christian" who holds that "Christian values are capitalist values." That, I venture to say, is a mistake Ellul does not make with regard to either Capitalism or Marxism. Whatever definition of ideology one chooses, it should be axiomatic that Christian faith ought to be in the world but not of it. Mr. Bauman appears to be quite comfortable citing George Gilder to answer the question - "What does it profit a man to gain the world and lose his soul?" The answer, I gather, is quite a bit, and most of it is probably in tax shelters. No doubt Mr. Bauman's preoccupation with showing that justice does not entail equality, follows from this - for if it does Capitalism is definitely in trouble when it comes to the distribution of wealth.

Moving on, thanks to Carl Mitcham and Jim Grote we again have a bibliography of new materials relevant to our interest in theology in a technological civilization.

Finally, I visited Jacques Ellul in Bordeaux in July. I had thought that I might publish my interview with him in this issue but it didn't turn out that way for two reasons. First, we only had an hour for the formal interview and I found myself using much of it to explore issues that were of more personal rather than public interest. Second, even though some of the interview would be of general interest, I have been working against the clock to finish my book and simply have not had the time to transcribe and edit the interview.

There was however, for me, one especially surprising development in my encounter with Ellul. Practically the first thing Ellul said to me when we were first introduced was that he thought Gabriel Albanian was the most important theologian writing in France today. Since I did my dissertation on Ellul under Vahanian, I was naturally most pleased to hear this. Nevertheless, I thought perhaps he was just being polite. But then at the conclusion of the major address which Ellul gave to the Society for the Philosophy of Technology conference on Democracy and Technology, after a somewhat pessimistic (as usual) assessment of prospects for the future he concluded by saying that the only hope for the future lay in the direction of "Utopianism" in the sense that [n]my good friend Gabriel Vihanian uses that term." Given that Ellul has consistently

spoken disparagingly of "utopianism," this came as a considerable surprise. Since my own book on Ellul was an attempt to reconcile Ellul's apocalypticism with Xbhanian's utopianism as reflected in his book *God and Utopia: The Church in a Technological Civilization*, I found this especially gratifying. When I asked him about this "change" after the speech, he said that for a long time he resisted Vhhanian's utopian approach, but gradually he became convinced by it.

All of this is by way of introducing the focus for the next issue. A new book by Wianian has just been published in France, *Dieu anonyme, oulapeur des mots [GodAnonymous, or words not meant to be feared]* (Descl6e de Brouwer, Paris, 1989). Vfehanian has agreed to furnish an essay based on this book for the June issue of the *Forum*. He has sent me the following paragraph summarizing the book's theme:

In the biblical tradition, faith consists in changing the world rather than changing worlds. From the Garden of Eden to the New Jerusalem its outlook is thoroughly utopian and therefore in order for the world to become the theater of God's glory it must be hallowed. But "hallowing"... must not be confused with any tendency to "sacralize" past achievements through which God is located here or there. Being neither this or that, God is word. God is language, even that language of which the human is an instrument. True, this verbal character of the human reality is best underlined by technology, but only because the human is the instrument of technology and not the other way around. The human is accordingly the condition of God, so human that God needs no other name than any name through which the human in Christ, the human itself, comes into its own. Not that the human is now the measure of all things. In the biblical tradition, not even God is the measure of all things. For there is no other measure of all things but the Christ in whom God, being a God who speaks ... being a God who is all in all, is God anonymous.

# Book Reviews

## *Un Chretien pour Israel*, by Jacques Ellul

Monaco: Editions du Rocher, 1986, 243 pp.

**Reviewed by Darrell J. Fasching**

This book reveals a side of Jacques Ellul that may come as a surprise to some. Most of us are familiar with Ellul the sociologist of technical civilization, Ellul the exegete of scripture, Ellul the theologian and ethicist of freedom. But in *Un Chretien pour Israel* we now discover Ellul the champion of Judaism and defender of the state of Israel against all anti-Judaism, anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism.

Although Ellul typically argues that only Christians can introduce freedom into a technical civilization, he clearly makes one exception to this rule. The one other community of hope and freedom is Judaism. Thus one might have guessed that Judaism has a special place in his theological thinking. For those who have read his earlier books *Hope in Time of Abandonment* and *Prayer and Modern Man* this will not come as a complete surprise (see the forum essay for this month). And careful attention to his Biblical commentary, *Apocalypse: The Book, of Revelation* might also have prepared one for this book. But even so I was still quite surprised and most delighted with the depth of his commitment.

The book begins with a personal preface and then proceeds to a discussion of the place of the Jewish people in Christian faith, scriptures, and theology - dealing forthrightly with the history of Christian anti-Judaism. This prepares the way for addressing anti-Jewish trends in our time and the link between anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism. An analysis of anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist propaganda in contemporary news media coverage follows. The book then concludes with a historical and political analysis of the Middle East situation with special attention to the PLO - Israeli conflict, the emergence of an anti-Semitic bias in UN declarations, and finally a vigorous defense of Israeli political policies in relation to the Palestinians.

In the Preface, Ellul reveals some of the biographical details of how he has come to the position he holds in this book. He goes to lengths to show that his position is based not in any personal factors, such as personal friendships or family influences. Rather, his commitment to Judaism grows out of his scriptural and theological understanding that being a Christian requires a relation to the Jewish people. Thus we find that he was largely indifferent toward Israel until 1948 when he read an essay by M. Visscher exegeting chapters 9-11 of Paul's letter to the Romans. "In my own spiritual life,"



he says "chapters 8 and 12 had played an important role, but I had never seen the importance of the teachings of Paul on the Jewish people (13)." This essay was decisive in his development of a commitment to the Jewish people. Thus he insists that he does not defend Israel out of a bad conscience for Christian persecutions of Jews, nor because of the Holocaust (even though he insists Christians must, of course, come to grips with these) nor out of any admiration for Israel's prowess in rebuilding the land of Israel. His defense of Israel comes rather as "a direct expression of the faith which I have in Jesus Christ and as a result of a series of political reflections (16)."

Ellul acknowledges that the New Testament has been the cause of anti-Judaism in Christian history, especially in placing blame for the death of Jesus on the Jews and for promoting a teaching of supersession - that gentile Christians replace the Jews as God's chosen people. But he argues that such a use of the New Testament scriptures is contrary to the theological meaning of the Gospel, which insists that the cause of Christ's death was "our sins." Moreover the negative teachings of contempt in Christianity are based on pulling passages out of context and applying them to the whole of Judaism, and as a result creating a false theology of the rejection of the Jews. But there is only one place in the whole of the New Testament in which the relationship of Jews to Christians is explicitly addressed as a theological issue, and that is in Paul's letter to the Romans. Everything else in the New Testament thus must be brought into reconciliation with it. Paul provides the norm and standard of theological truth in this area. And Paul's teaching is emphatic: the Jews are not rejected by God. Christians do not replace the Jews as God's elect, but rather are a wild olive branch grafted on to the holy root of Israel. In Ellul's view, Jews and Christians are the two covenant peoples who stand in a dialectical historical relationship to each other as God's faithful witnesses in history. The "Mystery" revealed in Paul is that "through Israel the election and salvation of the whole of humanity will finally be attained" (29) and thus "Israel must always be at the center of Christian theology"(33). Israel testifies to the faithfulness of God and the Church to the universality of the love of God. The problem, as Ellul sees it, was that this theology of Paul's was buried under a tradition of anti-Judaism in the Church fathers, beginning with Origen, so that Paul was selectively read and re-interpreted to conform to the myth of supersession.

As Ellul moves on to the contemporary implications of anti-Judaism, he develops the theme that contemporary anti-Zionism is fundamentally disguised anti-Judaism. Nor does he accept the specious argument that the Arabs can't be anti-Semitic since they are themselves Semites, arguing that Hitler's anti-Semitism (a racial prejudice) was in reality only disguised anti-Judaism (a religious prejudice), noting that Hitler had cordial relations with Palestinian Arabs, which seemed to cause him no problems at all.

One of Ellul's most provocative arguments is that the Palestinian people, as a political and "ethnic" reality, is the creation of propaganda. They had no special "Palestinian" ethnic identity prior to the formation of the state of Israel (157). They were simply Arabs living in the territory. "The Palestinians have never constituted a nation nor an

organized people. They have never been a state" (108). It is only in the last twenty years that "the Palestinian people" have been created through political conflict and propaganda.

In the contemporary situation the media tend to portray the Palestinians as a persecuted minority who have a right to use violence while Israel is portrayed as the oppressive majority whose every act which uses force is condemned, ignoring the fact that the Palestinians are part of an Arab majority which both surrounds Israel from without and threatens her from within at the same time. Israel is accused of exploiting the bad conscience of the West, but nothing is said about the pro-Palestinian exploitation of the bad conscience of the West for its "colonialist crimes."

The most vicious propaganda tactic is to turn the Holocaust back upon the Jews by accusing them being the new Nazis and the Palestinians the new "Jews" or "persecuted people." The analogy is so inexact as to be blasphemous. There are no smoke stacks in Israel, there is no mass genocide. The identity cards and internment camps are no more than many other nations enact to protect their own security. The treatment of Palestinians is no different than the treatment Jews are accorded in many other countries (e.g., USSR, Kuwait, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, etc.) and yet the media find only the Palestinian situation an outrage. Moreover, few countries are as vulnerable to sudden attack as Israel and fewer still could be annihilated by such an attack. (Ellul calculates that the country could be divided by a decisive military attack in less than half an hour.) If other nations lose a war they have the luxury of regrouping their resources and going on. If Israel succumbs to attack there will be no second chance.

The outcome of this propaganda and the political situation it creates, Ellul argues, is to create a new pre-pogrom climate which will be used to "justify" a new attempt at a "final solution."

Ellul goes on to discuss the Palestinian charter, which like Hitler's Afein Khmgf promises the annihilation of the Jewish people and of the growing influence of anti Judaism in UN declarations and policy. On the Palestinian charter, he observes that it has never been revoked. He totally distrusts contemporary Palestinian claims to have revoked this commitment to the destruction of Israel, noting that until they change the charter by the same formal process in which it was first created such claims are nothing but lies and propaganda.

Ellul finally concludes the book with a discussion of Israel as a nation which is not "an exemplary" State, acknowledging that real abuses of power occur. But he nevertheless insists that Israel is a "unique state" showing greater conscience, morality and respect for its promises than have the nations which stand as its accusers. Ellul finishes on a discouraging note, saying that he can see no solution to the situation in the Middle East even as he warns that world peace for the future hangs in the balance there. Yet what is impossible for human beings may yet be possible for God. The task of Christians is to hope and pray and act as Christians "for Israel."

This book is rich in detail far beyond anything I can communicate in this review. Theologically I can find no fault with it at all. Historically, I do not have sufficient

command of the depth and breadth of the facts of 20th century Middle Eastern history and politics so as to be able to disagree with it. At the very least it ought to be on the mandatory reading list of every Christian as a healthy antidote to the anti-Judaic and anti-Zionist propaganda we are deluged with and taken in by, all too often. (For this reason, I was very disappointed to learn that *Eerdmans* has decided not to publish an English translation. However, they have passed it on to *Helmets and Howard*, where Donald Simpson confirms that they are considering it for publication, so there is still hope.) Theologically, Ellul is surely right to insist that it is the special responsibility of Christians to be making the case "for Israel."

Daniel J. Lewis's Review of '*What I Believe*'

## '*What I Believe*' by Jacques Ellul

Translated by G. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989; London: Marshal Morgan and Scott, 1989), 223 pp., \$19.95, cloth.

Reviewed by Daniel J. Lewis, *William Tyndale College*

Most books with the title "What I Believe" might be discounted out of hand. In this case, however, the fact that the book was written by Jacques Ellul makes the title intriguing rather than banal. The highest interest, of course, will be those who have already been exposed to Ellul's writings.

There is a careful distinction which the reader must observe between faith and belief, a distinction which Ellul makes in the "introduction" and which must not be passed over. Belief, at least in the way Ellul uses it, is the affirmation of what he thinks about things, not so much on a doctrinal level but in terms of a world view. The book is not creedal, and it is not a theology, though as is usual in Ellul's works, theology influences his treatment of the subject matter. Neither is it a philosophical prolegomena, though despite Ellul's aversion to it, philosophy also impinges on the subject matter. Rather, the work is more on the order of an assessment and a conclusion about the way in which human life and society exists, how people make decisions, how the human race explores its potential - and most important - what are the far reaching implications of all this.

Ellul addresses his world view in three major sections. The first is a collage of various beliefs about reality, including the meaning of life, the relationship between chance, necessity, and accident, the nature of communicable truth, the importance of dialectic, the human desire for harmony as a lost ideal in need of restoration, the problem of evil, and the human need for life-long love which arises out of freedom. As is characteristic of his other works, there is a strong ethical bent throughout. He himself says, "I have devoted my whole life to making people more aware, more free, more capable of judging themselves, of getting out of the crowd, of choosing, and at the same time of avoiding wickedness and imbecility. My books have never had any other goal" (p. 64).

Special comment is in order with regard to his discussion of the dialectical method. In fact, for anyone not familiar with Ellul's works (and possibly even for those who are), it would be appropriate to read the chapter on dialectic immediately following the introduction. Ellul frequently resorts to explaining his beliefs by the negation of what he does not believe. His method is not unlike that of the sage in the Upanishads who, when pressed for a definition of God, says, "neti, neti," i.e., "not this, not that."

The second major section explores a philosophy of history. Since Ellul's speciality is sociology and history, this portion is particularly insightful. Ellul explains human history under the rubric of three stages or environments, the environment of nature, which he calls the original or prehistoric environment, the environment of the social group, labeled the historical period, and the environment of technology, the post-historic era into which human society is now plunging. Each new environment appears, not by eliminating the previous one, but by superimposition, thus modifying and reducing it to a substratum.

The final major section addresses theism and what Ellul perceives to be metaphysical reality. While it is not so easy to pigeonhole Ellul into a definite theological category, it can at least be said that he certainly is neither a deist, gnostic, process theologian, apologist, nor fatalist. He is more similar, at least in dialectical method, to Karl Barth, Emil Brunner and the Niebuhr brothers. In this final section, he addresses the spiritual potential inherent in a freedom of history, and he does so through the theological lens of God's rest on the seventh day. This rest, which has already been inaugurated, still awaits its consummation in which all the tensions of history and human life will be resolved by a foil reconciliation with God. Reconciliation with God is unilateral, and the divine rest, which will be consummated in a total way at the conclusion of history, becomes the foundation of Ellul's universalism. In his closing comments, he suggests that human freedom to cooperate with God will result in the divine recognition and acceptance of human work, and as he says in his closing line, "... to the utmost of my power it has been the meaning and motivation of all that I do."

It is difficult to be critical of a world view, except to express agreement or disagreement. A world view is not some matter of fact or research, but a perspective and a value judgment on life and reality. At the same time, it may be said from the viewpoint of this reviewer that the most stimulating and perceptive area of the book is Ellul's forceful and convincing analysis of the technological environment, not as an entity to which a minor adjustment can be made, but as a total framework which assimilates all else in human society.

# Forum

## After Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Judaism and Christianity in a Technological Civilization

by Darrell J. Fasching

Judaism, Christianity and technological civilization - what possible link ties these three together, other than sheer contemporaneity? The answer, at least my answer, begins by tracing the path to Auschwitz and beyond.

### From Anti-Judaism to Anti-Semitism and Auschwitz

That the Holocaust or Shoah (i.e., time of desolation) could occur in our "modern" world is a judgment on all the institutions and resources of Western civilization, but it is an especially devastating judgment on the one ethical community, above all, which should have come to the defense of the Jews, namely, the Christian church. The cause of that failure has deep roots in Christian history and theology.

In the year 380 C.E., under Theodosius, the first Christian emperor of the Roman empire (Constantine was not baptized until his death bed), Christianity was declared the only legal religion of the empire. From this time forward no aliens or strangers were allowed within Christendom. Human dignity was granted to those who were *same* and denied to those who were *different*. At this time all pagan traditions were suppressed and forbidden and Judaism came under severe legal restrictions. Within that same decade an ominous event occurred which was to set the pattern for the next two millennia of Jewish-Christian relations. In 388 C.E. the Bishop of Callinicum in Mesopotamia led a mob in the burning of a Jewish synagogue. Theodosius, in an attempt to administer justice, ordered the bishop to rebuild the synagogue. Ambrose, the bishop of Milan, the great church father and teacher of Augustine, forbid Theodosius to enforce his decree and withheld the sacraments until he acquiesced to his demands. This event set the pattern for the treatment of Jews in Western civilization from the 4th century onward. The state became an instrument of the Church for the suppression of Judaism in particular and "heretics" in general. Behind this event already lay *more* than three hundred years of theological anti-Judaism in the writings of the church fathers, in which the Jews were accused of "killing Jesus," the Messiah and Son of God, and thus committing a "crime" against the human race. For this "crime,"

it was said, they were condemned by God to wander the earth, homeless, until the end of time as a "negative witness" to the truth of Christianity.

It is hardly coincidental that as these teachings took hold, the legal status of Judaism crumbled and the vulnerability of Jews to prejudice and violence increased. Synagogue burnings, Jewish children forcibly taken away from their parents and baptized, expulsions of Jews from country after country, and especially from the time of the Crusades, repeated mob violence or *pogroms* with extensive loss of life. When Hitler told two German bishops that he was only finishing what the church had started, he knew whereof he spoke. No wonder Hitler could say in *Mein Kampf*, "I believe that I am acting in accordance with the will of the Almighty Creator by defending myself against the Jew, I am fighting for the work of the Lord."

Historically, Christians have engaged in a process of spiritual genocide. We have said to the Jew: "You have no right to exist as God's chosen because God has rejected you and chosen us instead. We are the true Israel." The step from such spiritual genocide to physical genocide - from "you have no right to exist as Jews" to "you have no right to exist" - is a step prepared by Christian religious anti-Judaism and carried out under Nazi "secular" anti-Semitism. Both the sacred and the secular in Western civilization, both Christendom and the Enlightenment, prepared the path to Auschwitz. As long as being a Jew was perceived by the Gentile as a religious claim, the "final solution" to the "Jewish problem" (i.e., the simple fact of their existence) could officially be envisioned as conversion, although the popular response was all too often pogrom and expulsion. But once the secularization process unleashed by the Enlightenment redefined being a Jew in terms of race, conversion was no longer a possible solution. Religious anti-Judaism became secular anti-Semitism. Now "the final solution" to the presence of an alien and undesired race came to mean genocide: a solution the Nazis attempted to enact.

## Two Models of Faith and Ethics

Different models of faith have different moral consequences. That is the hypothesis I wish to explore in the aftermath of the Shoah. How is it possible that, in spite of more than 2000 years of oppression and persecution, Jews remained faithful to their tradition? And why is it that Christians, who in the beginning were also persecuted, became a persecuting religion and abandoned the central Gospel injunction of loving one's neighbor, even one's enemy, as oneself? Starkly put, I think the answer is to be found in a fundamentally different understanding of faith and ethics in each tradition. Judaism is grounded in an understanding of faith as a dialectic of *trust and questioning*, even to the point of calling God into question, whereas in Christianity the element of *questioning* was largely lost and the dialectic of faith collapsed into an ethic of trust as total and *unquestioning obedience*.

Both traditions allow that trust and obedience play a central role in the life of faith and both appeal to Abraham as a model of this trusting faith. But in Judaism Abraham

is remembered not only as the one who exemplifies the obedience of the Akeda (the binding of Isaac to be sacrificed, Genesis 22) but also as the one who, in the argument over Sodom and Gomorrah, questions and challenges God, asking: "Shall not the judge of all, himself, be just?" (18:25)." For Biblical, Talmudic and Hasidic Judaism, faith is wrestling with God - an ongoing dialogue and debate with God which serves as a training ground for moral autonomy, rooted in a strong sense of human dignity as a reflection of being created in the image of a God who is without image. The reduction of faith, in the Christian case, to unquestioning trust and obedience, by contrast, has taught quite another moral lesson: namely, the subjugation of moral autonomy to finite moral authorities, religious and/or secular-political, who pretend to speak for (or as) God, even when the obedience demanded runs counter to the Gospel message of love of neighbor and one's enemy. The result has been the persistent and repeated tendency of Christians, Protestant and Catholic alike, to accommodate their faith and moral vision to dehumanizing ideologies of the *status quo*, and so become a *negative witness* to the very transcendence they proclaim.

There is in Judaism an understanding of *covenant* as a personal and communal relationship which is essentially a two way street. It is a dialogue between God and his people grounded in a set of mutual expectations. The formula "I will be your God and you will be my people" is understood as a moral contract of love and commitment obligating both parties. Jews are obligated to live by the commandments but God also has obligations: to be with his people, to guide them and protect them. Although the term *chutzpa* has rather lighthearted connotations in American Jewish culture, the Israeli scholar, Mordechai Rotenberg, argues that it has a weightier meaning in the Talmudic tradition and is the most appropriate term for this contractual relationship "according to which God as a dynamic 'personality' allows man to influence him— [Indeed, *chutzpa* is] a symbol for man's capacity to affect God and change his decrees and consequently man's future by his actions and justified complaints (Rotenberg,14)."

If the faith of Jews was a faith grounded in answers, the Holocaust or Shoah (i.e., the time of desolation) might well have meant the end of Judaism. But the faith of Jews, it seems, is not grounded in answers to metaphysical questions but in a personal covenant relationship of *chutzpa*- of ongoing dialogue and debate which is a continuous *wrestling with God*. More than any other factor, it seems to me, it is this which is providing the foundation for post-Shoah Jewish theology. Let me briefly suggest evidence for this from three leading Jewish authors who are struggling to find a path for Jews after Auschwitz: Emil Fackenheim, Elie Wiesel and Irving Greenberg.

Emil Fackenheim has raised the fundamental question: Where was God at Auschwitz? Like virtually all other Jewish authors on this subject, he rejects the pious traditions of the past which accounted for misfortune by suggesting that it is punishment for sins, for the Jews who died in the death camps were overwhelmingly Jews from the most pious and observant communities in Europe. God cannot be let off that easily. But then where was God? And how can one continue to be Jewish in

the face of God's seeming abandonment of his people in the death camps? In response to these questions, Fackenheim says:

There is a kind of faith which will accept all things and renounce every protest. There is also a kind of protest which has despaired of faith. In Judaism there has always been protest which stays within the sphere of faith. Abraham remonstrates with God. So do Jeremiah and Job. So does, in modern times, the Hasidic Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev. He once interrupted the sacred Yom Kippur service in order to protest that, whereas kings of flesh and blood protected their peoples, Israel was unprotected by her King in heaven. Yet having made his protest he recited the Kaddish, which begins with these words: "Extolled and hallowed be the name of God throughout the world..." Can Jewish protest today remain within the sphere of faith (Fackenheim, 76)?

Elie Wiesel, a most eloquent survivor of Auschwitz, knows the meaning of this conflict. More than any other author, Wiesel deserves to be seen as the bearer of the tradition of *chutzpa* in our post-Shoah world. Wiesel tells us: "I remember my Master... telling me, 'Only the Jew knows that he may oppose God as long as he does so in defense of His creation.' To be a Jew "means to serve God by espousing man's cause, to plead for man while recognizing his need of God." Or again, "Judaism teaches man to overcome despair. What is Jewish history if not an endless quarrel with God? (Wiesel, 6)." Standing like Job in the dialectical and dialogical tradition of *chutzpa*, Wiesel chooses to put God on trial and call him to account. This is a persistent theme throughout his writings culminating in his play, *The Trial of God*. The play, ostensibly about an incident in the 17th century, is actually based on an experience he had in the death camps, where he witnessed three rabbis who "decided one winter evening to indict God for allowing his children to be massacred." And when the trial was over and God was found guilty, the rabbis realized it was time for prayers and so they bowed their heads to pray (Brown, 154). The dialectical and dialogical faith of trust and *chutzpa* is not the Active invention of post-Shoah theologians. It is a lived faith, a tradition of faith reaffirmed in the very bowels of the death camps.

Irving Greenberg, our third theologian, explores the ethical as well as theological implications of this tradition. Greenberg takes issue with Richard Rubenstein's belief that God died at Auschwitz. He quotes Rubenstein's declaration that "Jewish history has written the final chapter in the terrible story of the God of History... the world will forever remain a place of pain... and ultimate defeat (Greenberg, 26)." Greenberg's response to this is direct: "After the Shoah, there should be no final solutions, not even theological ones (13)." What Greenberg finds unsatisfactory in Rubenstein's response to Shoah is his "definitiveness." Rubenstein has broken with the paradoxical dialectic of Jewish existence - the dialectic of trust and *chutzpa*. Rubenstein has abandoned the Talmudic-Hasidic path of *questioning* and settled for a definitive answer. He does not



wrestle with the unnamed God of Jacob. For Greenberg it is not belief in God which has to be abandoned but rather unquestioning trust and obedience. The ethical implication of the Holocaust is that one should be skeptical of all movements, religious or secular, whether of the left or the right. "Nothing dare evoke our absolute, unquestioning loyalty not even our God, for this leads to possibilities of SS loyalties (38)."

After Auschwitz, Greenberg argues, authentic faith defies the traditional categories of sacred and secular. It is action not words which tells us who has experienced the reality of God. Thus Greenberg argues that during the 1967 war against Israel, it was Sartre who spoke out against a potential genocide and Pope Paul VI who was silent. Thus we must say that it is Sartre, not the Pope, who has shown himself to be a man of faith, one who has experienced the reality of God and God's image in every human being. Or again, he argues that in Israel today, it is the secular Israelis who represent authentic faith and not the Orthodox Jews. For it is the secular Israelis who insist on the admission of all Jews to Israel and not orthodox Jews, who even after the Shoah, would turn their backs on some Jews who do not meet their "religious" standards. Here the final paradox of the tradition of *chutzpa* reveals itself. The tradition that calls God into question is the tradition that calls human beings into question as well - in the name of the image of God in all creatures. It is the paradox of appealing to God against God on behalf of God's creation.

## **The Sacred, the Secular and the Demonic: Genocide as Deicide**

What went wrong with Christianity during the Shoah? Why did the majority of Christians, and especially clergy, either actively or passively support Hitler and his "final solution to the Jewish problem"? Indeed, not even the famous Barmen declaration of the Confessing Church raised the issue of the treatment of the Jews. The leading figure in its formulation, Karl Barth, later wrote: "I have long felt guilty that I did not make this problem central... There is no excuse that I did not fight properly for this cause...(Lit-teil, 46)."

"The most ironic statistic of the Third Reich... was that more Catholic priests and Protestant ministers died in the German army than were put into concentration camps: from an actuarial point of view it was safer to oppose Hitler than to support him (Allen, 122)." The greatest shame of the Church was "the tendency for all church-going Catholics and Protestants to be more anti-Semitic than were those who no longer attended services regularly (Gordon, 260)."

What went wrong? Undoubtedly a full answer to that question would be very complex, but I would suggest that a fundamental flaw in the dominant model of faith and ethics found within Christianity plays an essential role. It might be thought that the Church failed because it substituted the State for Christ as her Lord. But it is more complicated than that. Virtually from its beginning, Christian faith came to be defined

as requiring (in varying degrees) obedience to the state as an aspect of obedience to Christ. Therein, I believe, lies the heart of the problem.

Now, feith as a fierce and unquestioning loyalty to the will of God revealed in Christ could be an ethically powerful force for good in the world, were the "will of God" understood solely in terms of "love of neighbor," and even "one's enemies, as oneself." But when the message of the Gospel is taken to include the theme of supersession, the myth that gentile Christians replace Jews as God's chosen, and vrfien it is thought to include the requirement of obedience to the state, the implications become ominous.

The key scripture which seems to have promoted this ethic of obedience occurs in Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 13: "Let everyone obey the authorities that are over him, for there is no authority except from God..." It is this statement that Luther appeals to in formulating his extreme position in urging the German princes to suppress the peasant revolts of his time. Only God can establish rulers and only God can remove rulers. It is not permissible for human beings to revolt, even against a vicious and unjust ruler. It is this pattern of faith as unquestioning obedience which prepared Christians for obedience even to Hitler.

Throughout history Jews refused to assimilate and be conformed to the world around them. The refusal of the Jew to assimilate led pagan and Christian alike to a violent rage against the Jew, because the "otherness" of the Jew was a witness to that which transcends all religions and cultures, remaining Wholly Other. God cannot be made the exclusive possession of any culture or religion - not even in the name of Christ. The existence of the Jew has reminded others that God's ways are not the same as their ways. In the world of the Shoah, the existence of the Jew was a burdening reminder of "faithfulness" which the-Christian conscience, of those who preached the value of "not being conformed to the world" while practicing conformity to the world of Nazi values, was only too happy to have out of sight and out of mind.

In the Nazi period this rage against the Jewish witness to transcendence escalated to a point of no return. The religious rage masked itself in the myth of race which made assimilation as a "final solution" an impossible option. Hence the Nazis turned to genocide. But make no mistake about it, the rage against the Jew (whether pagan, Christian or Nazi) is a scarcely disguised rage against the transcendence of God, the God who cannot be used to legitimate pagan, Christian or Nazi hegemony, the God who cannot be owned or used for political and ideological purposes, the God who is the limit of all conformity to this world. The attempted genocide of the Jews is a thinly disguised attempt at the deidde of God, in which the perpetrators have all too typically projected their own motives onto the victims as a justification for their own genocidal actions.

## **Ellul's Contribution to Post-Shoah Christian Ethics**

Jacques Ellul's theology speaks with unusual relevance to our situation after Auschwitz. Ellul's theology stands in sharp contrast to traditional Christian theology

with its myth of supersession and ethic of obedience - a theology which shaped the path leading to Auschwitz. Rather than seeing the church as replacing the synagogue, he sees both as standing in a dialectical relation of mutually enabling witness through which they share the vocation to be communities of freedom in a world of determinisms. Ellul is often accused of focusing on the individual to the exclusion of the church. But in a rare discussion of ecclesiology in *Hope in Tune of Abandonment* he holds up the synagogue as the model of apocalyptic hope and urges the church to take the synagogue as the model for a diaspora presence, a "hidden presence" (the incognito), in a technological civilization. "Israel," he says, "is a people centered entirely on hope, living by that alone... As the one hoping people of the world, it is Israel which provides us with the model for this age... an example of the incognito. In this age of abandonment... I think that Christians should take that as a model (Ellul, 290-291)." Indeed, "if history is looked at closely and without the usual Christian prejudice, it turns out to have been forged at least as much by the Jewish incognito as by Christian activism...(Ellul, 297)." "There is only one political endeavor on which world history now depends; that is the union of the Church and Israel... These two communities \_ . must join forces so that, in effect, this Word of God might finally be written ... in counterpoint to the technological history of these times...(Ellul, 305)." Ellul is speaking, he says, not of an institutional merger but of a conversion of the Church to hope so as to support Israel "in its long march through the same night and toward the same kingdom (Ellul, 304)."

And in *Prayer and Modern Man*, written about the same time, Ellul furthers spells out the meaning of Jewish hope as a model for Christians. In an age of God's silence and abandonment, he argues, apocalyptic hope gives one the audacity (i.e., *chutzpa*) to assault God, and wrestle with him. Prayer is just this combat with God "which is a demand that God not keep silence..., a striving with God, of whom one makes demands, whom one importunes, whom one attacks constantly, whose silence and absence one would penetrate at all costs. It is a combat to oblige God to respond, to reveal himself anew (156)." Such prayer is a "commitment on behalf of man" which "is decisively bound to the commitment with God (164)." Such prayer is "the ultimate act of hope" from which "all further radicalism, of behavior, of style of life and of action" comes (167,176).

Ellul's importance for post-Shoah Christian theology is linked to the fact that he is one of those rare Christian theologians who has allowed the Jewish experience of faith to speak to him and teach him. Ellul's theology echoes the wisdom of Judaism summarized so eloquently by Elie Wiesel: "Only the Jew knows that he may oppose God as long as he does so in defense of His creation." to be a Jew "means to serve God by espousing man's cause, to plead for man while recognizing his need of God (Wiesel, 6)."

Ellul's God is not a "Christian" God but the God of Israel, which is to say, the God of the whole human race. His God is the anarchist God of which Irving Greenberg speaks as the God who invites the contestation of all authority, sacred and secular,

including his own, in defense of his creation. The difference between God (The Holy) and the idol (whether sacred or secular), is that idols will tolerate no dissent. There is a link between Ellul's ethic of audacity (apocalyptic hope) and anarchism, and his universal compassion manifest in his belief in universal salvation. His God is the God of the whole human race, of all those who are different and not just of those who are the same, the God who reveals his transcendence through the *otherness* of the stranger and the alien.

## **From Auschwitz to Hiroshima: The Demonic Autonomy of Technique**

The path to Auschwitz and its consequences represent a severe challenge to the religious traditions of the West. To Christians, because of the complicity of Christianity in that anti-Judaic path renders its theological and ethical categories morally suspect, to Jews, because their victim status presses faith in the God of history and faith in human beings to the breaking point. But the path to Auschwitz, and from Auschwitz to Hiroshima, represents a challenge, equally severe, to the scientific and technical secular culture of the Enlightenment. We do not seem to have fared any better under a secular ethic than we did under a religious one. Indeed we have fared worse; genocide it seems is a unique product of the modern "secular" world and its "technically competent barbarians." As Franklin Littell has put it:

The same kind of "educated" technicians built Auschwitz and the antipersonnel weapons used in Vietnam... The technically competent barbarian is available to the highest bidder, be he communist or fascist or feudal despot or republican. The common mistake is to suppose this is solely a result of his avarice or unbridled ambition; it is aided and abetted by a system of education that has trained him to think in ways that eliminate questions of ultimate responsibility. Having eliminated God as an hypothesis, he exercises godlike powers with pride rather than with fear and trembling. Unaware of himself as a person, finite and imperfect, he becomes, year by year, less a mechanic and more a machine - a machine which is still able to perform some complex services that are yet beyond the capacity of even the most advanced computers... The world of *techne* largely ignores the past in its devotion to present tasks... And the problems themselves are defined by an intellectual discourse that rules out the mysterious and transcendent... The definitions often lack aesthetic and spiritual quality and... the solutions are often morally outrageous - all of this was programmed in from the start... as a child of the Enlightenment (Littell, 13-15).

Auschwitz is the symbol of a demonic period in modern Western civilization in which the religious, political and technological developments converged to create a

society whose primary purpose was the most efficient organization of an entire society for the purpose of exterminating all persons who were regarded as aliens and strangers to that society - especially the Jews.

Although they stand side by side as apocalyptic events unique to the modern period, Auschwitz and Hiroshima cannot be equated as historical events. Hiroshima parallels Auschwitz only in its consequences, not in its human intentionality. Auschwitz expresses the linkage of the technological mythos to the intentionally demonic ethnocentric tribalism of the Nazis. Hiroshima represents the halting of a similar linkage of technology and demonic tribalism among the Japanese by a country, the United States, which for all its weaknesses was built on a tradition of welcoming all the tribes of the earth. Hiroshima stands as a warning, reminding us that if the Nazis or Japanese had had the bomb, demonic tribalism and genocide would have won the day and that victory would have meant the total destruction of the earth and all its tribes.

There is more to the link between Auschwitz and Hiroshima than sheer contemporaneity. This has become dear to me as I have studied the Post-Holocaust Jewish theologians. Again and again, in the same breath with "Auschwitz" the name "Hiroshima" keeps coming up. The link between Auschwitz and Hiroshima turns out to be an inner link demanded by the analysis of those who were, directly or indirectly, the victims of the Shoah. It is as if those who know something of the "desolation" of Auschwitz recognize that in some sense they have a kinship with those who know the "desolation" of Hiroshima. But also, more than once I have encountered an awareness of a logical as well as psychological link between the two - a link identified as the progressive unfolding of a technological civilization which no longer holds anything sacred, not even human life - nothing that is except the technical imperative: If it can be done it must be done. The death camps were technically feasible and they came to pass. The atom bomb was technically feasible and it came to pass. A final, total apocalyptic nuclear annihilation of the earth is technically feasible...

By comparison with the bomb, technical power at Auschwitz was still relatively inefficient and limited in scope and so capable of being demonically directed at targeted populations, such as Jews and Gypsies. But with the coming of the bomb, technical power burst the bounds of all limitations and has become completely autonomous, it has outstripped human intentionality. If there is a next time after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it will not matter who the good guys and who the bad guys are. The threat of apocalypse which erupted at Auschwitz is no longer limited to the West. Hiroshima symbolizes the globalization of the demonic.

The movement from Auschwitz to Hiroshima is psychological, logical and finally mythological. For Auschwitz and Hiroshima have assumed the mythological status of sacred events which orient human consciousness. They have become trans-historical and trans-cultural events which are shaping a public consciousness of our common humanity. The horrifying irony of this is that they are not manifestations of the divine but of the demonic and the common awareness they are creating is one structured by dread.

On July 16th 1945 at 5:30 a.m. the first atomic bomb exploded at a New Mexican desert site named Trinity. It lit up the sky "infinitely brighter than the sun" and one reporter thought of the Biblical phrase -"Let there be light." It was a "religious" response to the awesomeness of a new kind of power. But this experience of the "sacred" was no life giving experience. It was J. Robert Oppenheimer, the scientist who orchestrated the "Manhattan Project," who captured its meaning most accurately. He remembered the line from the Bhagavad Gita, spoken by Krishna/Vishnu: "Now I Am Become Death, the Destroyer of Worlds." The technological utopianism of the secular city, aptly symbolized by "The Manhattan Project" revealed itself at Trinity to be headed toward an apocalyptic and suicidal destiny. The sacred power of the technological reality was unleashed in a "cloud of smoke and a pillar of fire" and the division of history into a new *before and after*, which began at Auschwitz, found its completion in the movement from Trinity to Hiroshima. On August 6th 1945 at 8:16 a.m., the bomb exploded over Hiroshima and the *millennium of utopia*, the millennium which gave rise to science, technology and the "myth of progress," came to a premature apocalyptic end.

It is as if in a moment of inverse enlightenment or revelation, the religious symbols of East and West clashed and exploded within the psyche of J. Robert Oppenheimer and he grasped the demonic inversion of the sacred. The symbolism of the Buddha's Enlightenment, the Biblical Exodus and the Resurrection have undergone a demonic inversion. "Trinity" no longer names the God of life but the place where planetary death was bom. Now when a commanding voice is heard from a burning fire it speaks not the language of being - I Am Who Am - but the language of not-being - I Am Become Death. Likewise, when the hibakusha (literally "explosion affected person") or survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki speak of themselves as *mugamuchu*, meaning "without self, without center," they speak not of the humanizing experience of liberation (*no-self*) which comes with Buddhist enlightenment but the experience of total "desolation" which comes with total immersion in the kingdom of death of which the survivors of Auschwitz, during the Shoah (i.e., time of desolation), were the first to speak.

The task of theology in our time, as Arthur Cohen suggested in his book *The Tremendum*, is to excavate the abyss of the demonic and build a bridge of transcendence over it. That bridge, I am convinced, must be built on an ethic of audacity on behalf of the alien and the stranger. We need a common ethic to unite us as a global human community, one which can carry us beyond our common dread. Perhaps excavating the abyss will motivate us to build a bridge, one built by *passing* over-the abyss and into other religions and cultures in order to *come back* with new insight into ourselves and our own culture.

## **Beyond Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Welcoming the Stranger**

In such a context the dialogue between Christians and Jews in response to Auschwitz leads to the inclusion of Buddhists, as inevitably as Auschwitz leads to Hiroshima. For

Buddhism is not only native to Hiroshima but also the other great tradition bound by an ethic of welcoming the stranger - i.e. the "outcaste." I am convinced that the movement from Auschwitz to Hiroshima provides a prophetic warning of what the future holds if we fail to create a cross-cultural public order which can find unity-in-diversity. The apocalyptic threat of our time is that we shall be swallowed up in the abyss of the demonic. Our utopian hope lies in *passing over* and *coming back*—in creating that new world where strangers are welcome and where bonds of cross-cultural understanding could alter our relation to the technical order and at the same time make total destruction of "the other" unthinkable. I believe such a world is possible, based on a new social ethic which can be structured cooperatively by Jews, Christians, Buddhists and other ("secular") a-theists - one which can have a transformative impact on the rest of the world.

After Auschwitz and Hiroshima, I am convinced, we need a new style of theology and ethics. We need a "decentered" or "alienated theology." Alienated theology, is theology done "as if one were a stranger to one's own tradition. It is my conviction that alienated theology is the appropriate mode for theology in an emerging world civilization - a civilization tottering in the balance between apocalypse and utopia. There are two ways to enter world history, according to the contemporary author, John Dunne, - you can be dragged in by way of world war or you can walk in by way of mutual understanding. By the first path global civilization emerges as a totalitarian project of dominance which risks a total atomic apocalypse. By the second path we prevent the first, creating global civilization through an expansion of our understanding of what it means to be human which occurs, as Dunne suggests, when we *pass over* to another's religion and culture and *come back* with new insight into our own (Dunne, ix-xiii).

Gandhi is an example - passing over to the *Sermon on the Mount* and coming back to the Hindu *Gita* to gain new insight into it as a scripture of non-violence. Gandhi never considered becoming a Christian but his Hinduism was radically altered by his encounter with Christianity. One could say the same (inverting the directions) for Martin Luther King Jr., who was deeply influenced by Gandhi's understanding of non-violent resistance in the *Gita*. When we pass over (whether through travel, friendship or disciplined imagination) we become "strangers in a strange land" as well as strangers to ourselves - seeing ourselves through the eyes of another. Assuming the perspective of a stranger is an occasion for insight and the sharing of insight. Such cross-cultural interactions build bridges of understanding and action between persons and cultures which make cooperation possible and conquest unnecessary. "Passing over" short circuits apocalyptic confrontation and inaugurates utopian new beginnings - new beginnings for the "post-modern" world of the coming 3rd millennium. Gandhi and King are symbols of a possible style for a post-modern alienated theology.

To be an *alien* is to be a stranger. To be *alienated* is to be a stranger to oneself. We live in a world of ideological conflict in which far too many individuals (whether theists or a-theists) practice a "centered theology" in which they are too sure who they are and what they must do. Such a world has far too many answers and not

nearly enough questions and self-questioning. A world divided by its answers is headed for an inevitable apocalyptic destiny. But when we are willing to become strangers to ourselves (or when we unwillingly become so), new possibilities open up where before everything was closed and hopeless. My own conviction is that the *kairos* of our time is one which calls forth the badly neglected ethic of "welcoming the stranger" which underlies the biblical tradition and analogously "welcoming the outcaste" which underlies the Buddhist tradition. It is this care for the stranger and the outcaste which provides the critical norm or test of authentic transcendence as self-transcendence.

Centered theologies, whether sacred or secular, theist or a-theist, are ethnocentric theologies which can only tolerate the alien or *other*, if at all, as a potential candidate for conversion to *sameness*. Centered theologies are exercises in narcissism which inevitably lead down apocalyptic paths like those that led to Auschwitz and Hiroshima. Why? Because such theologies, whether civil or religious, sacred or secular, cannot permit there to be *others* in the world whose way of being might, by sheer contrast, cause self-doubt and self-questioning.

Alienated theology, however, understands doubt and selfquestioning as the essence of transcendence and therefore understands that only a faith which requires one to welcome the alien or stranger is truly a utopian faith open to transcendence. According to the Genesis story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1 -9), human beings sought to grasp transcendence through the ideology of a single language and a common technological project - building a tower to heaven. But God upset their efforts by confusing their tongues, so that they could not understand each other. They became strangers to one another and so could not complete their task. The popular interpretation of this story is that the confusion of tongues was a curse and a punishment for the human sin of pride. But I am convinced that is a serious misunderstanding of its meaning. I would suggest, rather, that human beings misunderstood where transcendence lay and God simply redirected them to the true experience of transcendence which can only occur when there are strangers to be welcomed into our lives.

To put it in terms closest to home for myself, as a Christian who seeks to come to grips with Auschwitz in the light the history of Christian anti-Judaism, I cannot be a Christian except as I am prepared to welcome Jews into my life, understanding that the very attempt to convert them would be to destroy the authenticity of my own faith by robbing me of the chance to welcome the stranger (the one who is different from me and a permanent witness to the Wholly Other in my life) who is given to me as an invitation to transcendence. For the literal meaning of "transcendence" is "to go beyond" - to go beyond my ego-centered, ethno-centered, religio-centered world to embrace that utopian world glimpsed at Pentecost, where each spoke in his or her own language and yet each is understood by all (Acts 2:1-13). The tragedy of human existence revealed by Auschwitz and Hiroshima, is that we continue to misread our situation. Given the opportunity for transcendence, the opportunity to be carried beyond ourselves into a new global human community, we continue to insist on a "technological solution," a MAD (Mutual Assured Destruction) solution which at best leads to a global stalemate



between cultures and at worst to an attempt at global conquest. In either case we place ourselves under the dark and threatening cloud of an atomic apocalypse which such a path must inevitably bring.

To speak personally as one living in an *age of alienation*, I used to think that the experience of alienation was a problem in need of resolution. I have come to see it rather as a promising opportunity, for when we have become strangers to ourselves we experience a new vulnerability and a new openness to the other - other persons, other ideas, other cultures and ways of life. To the degree that the secularization which accompanies technological civilization alienates us from our "sacred" traditions, it presents us with utopian possibilities. It also presents us with apocalyptic dangers. The greatest danger created by alienation seems to be that we shall get lost in a sea of relativism, of assuming one way is as good as another. That is just as destructive as those centered theologies which assume there is only one way. It is my conviction, however, that there is a path in between these extremes of relativism and absolutism and that is the way of *passing over and coming back*. This path reveals that some ways are better than others. Those ways are marked by an openness to doubt and self-questioning and a genuine compassion for *the other* which leads to an ethic of audacity (*chutzpa*) on behalf of the alien and the stranger. These are authentic signs of encounter with the Holy.

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**Annual AAR Meeting**  
The Ellul Studies Forum  
Ellul, Christianity and Anarchism  
presented by  
**Vernard Eller**  
Meeting, 9 a.m. -12 p.m.  
Saturday, November 18th, 1989  
Conference Room # 7  
Anaheim Hilton

## **On Christians, Jews, and the Law**

**By Katharine Temple**

This article has been extracted from a longer essay written for the feast of Epiphany in the January-February 1988 issue of *The Catholic Worker*.

More and more, I am distressed to encounter Christian teachers who, wittingly or unwittingly, seek to distance us from Judaism. For example I read articles in journals meant for people attracted to "peace and justice" concerns, claiming that Jesus did away with Mosaic Law in favor of something superior, namely, love; that He founded a new religion on a moral rather than an institutional basis; that, in cleansing the Temple, He wanted to abolish completely the purity laws; that He rescued us from patriarchal (and other) oppression in Jewish law; or that civil disobedience is rooted in Jesus' contempt for the same divine revelation, the Law of Moses. Apart from conjuring up the long, dark shadows of Christian anti-Semitism, this quick dismissal of the Law acts to deny the truth of Christianity as being grafted on to the rich root of the olive tree of Israel (Romans 11). As a people so grafted, Hebrew Scriptures are truly for Christians a thoroughgoing revelation *of* grace. (Saying so is not new, for the Church has always promulgated this as doctrine, although not always with clarity and conviction.) And at the heart of the Hebrew Bible - for Moses and all the other prophets and sages, and for the whole Jewish tradition, including Jesus of Nazareth - lies the Law.

Part of the difficulty, leaving aside anti-Semitism, seems to lie in the very word "law" as the translation for the Hebrew word *Torah*. For Christians, "law" brings with it images of dry legalism, devoid of mercy and compassion or freedom. In the matter of Biblical Law, however, these are misguided prejudices. Jews know the Torah given to Moses at Sinai to be God's gift to draw the people's lives into the fullness of His. Pinchas Lapide, an orthodox Jewish theologian who devotes much time to teaching Christians about the Bible, has written: "For Jews, the Torah is a gift of grace which flows from the love of God. Accordingly, to believe or not to believe is the free choice of every individual. Certainly faithfulness to the Torah rests solely and completely on

*emunah* - absolute, unquestioning trust in God which summons us to work as coworkers with God in the task of improving the world” (from *Paul, Rabbi and Apostle*). A single citation may well not convince Christians who are used to thinking of the Law as harsh and picayune and not needed for us. Nevertheless, the more one learns about Torah (or *halacha*, the way to walk, another Hebrew word for the Law) from those who embrace it, the less desire there is to scorn it.

Christian scholars could gain so much from the whole history of Jewish learning about Torah, but unfortunately, in many circles, its importance continues to be diminished. We are taught to read the Exodus story without following it through to Sinai, or to revere the prophets without heeding their call to return to the Law, or to study the New Testament in isolation from the Old Testament. It is little wonder that we find it hard to associate Jesus with His People, either historically or theologically.

When we do come to the New Testament, many people suggest that Jesus kept the Law when convenient, but broke it to “do his own thing” whenever it did not suit His higher purposes. I remember a paper given at a Jewish-Christian colloquium, discussing examples of the times Jesus supposedly broke the Law, and why. The intriguing part, for me, came when those examples were challenged - by the Jewish participants - not because of differences between Judaism and Christianity, but because of the lack of comprehension shown about the content of the Law. They claimed that none of the episodes under scrutiny undermined a view of Jesus as an observant Jew. Why should Christians find this conclusion surprising or unsettling? After all, St. Luke tells us that as a young man Jesus sat listening to the teachers and asking them questions, and amazed everyone with His understanding and answers (2:46-47). That is, He knew and lived by Torah. From his detailed studies, Clemens Thoma, a noted Christian scholar, concludes: “Jesus, the so-called sovereign transgressor of the Law, does not exist!... He certainly did not practice a narrow-minded interpretation of it, but He also opposed all excesses. He wanted the Law to be understood in its most profound meaning and in its original context” (from *Christian Theology of Judaism*). Or, if we prefer to speak of the Christ of faith, why would the Word of God at Creation and at Sinai break His own commandments?

St. Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, is the one who tells us how we are to be joined with the root of Israel, and yet he is notoriously perplexing ... and has been presented as the great rejecter of the Law. In fact, many Christians, who otherwise have little use for him, rejoice in the thought that St. Paul announced the abolition of the Law. How could it be, though, that this Pharisee and student of the famous Gamaliel slighted the Law the way we do? Do we know what Jewish sources understood about the Messianic Times and what would happen to Mosaic Law then? Or how he read his Hebrew Bible and the rabbinic commentators? Once more, Pinchas Lapide can help shed some light.

“When Paul says that neither Jew nor Gentile can achieve salvation by fulfilling the commandments or performing the deeds of Torah, he is kicking doors that are already open to all Biblically knowledgeable Jews. It was self-evident to all masters of the *Thl-mud* [the authoritative Jewish interpretation] that salvation or participation

in the coming world, as it is called in Hebrew, could be attained only through God's gracious love."

"If, in addition, we note that this same Paul includes *nomothesia*, 'the giving of the Law,' among the gracious gifts of God that belong to Israel even after Easter, that the word *telos* can mean 'goal,' 'conclusion,' 'completion,' 'fulfillment,' or even the 'final part' of a thing, not just 'end'; that the apostle twice indicates that Jesus lived in accordance with the Law throughout his earthly life (Rom. 15:8 and Gal. 4:4); that Paul prescribes a new *halacha* for his young congregations, containing dozens of statutes, regulations, prohibitions and requirements, some of which seem to be even stricter than the unascetic ordinances of orthodox rabbis - then it is no longer possible to continue talking about the so-called Pauline termination of the Law or its validity."

If such a reading of St Paul is possible for a Jew who has every reason to suspect the Church, and for whom Christianity is a heresy unnecessary for the vitality of Judaism, can we not explore with him the possibilities for ending the ignorance and distrust that keeps us from our roots?

As may be gathered from these quotes from Pinchas Lapide and Clemens Thoma, there exist good historical studies to help us begin again and which can serve to counter our stereotypes. As they also show us, however, the question of our roots, our source in the Bible, our salvation coming from the Jews, is not merely an historical study. Beyond looking to the past, we also must recognize why certain books have been preserved as Scripture to reveal to us now the living Word of God.

All these questions arise when we read passages about Jesus and the Pharisees. First of all, it is impossible for us to understand these texts without knowing something about the historical group of people known as "the Pharisees." One of the best essays is "The Pharisees" by Leo Baeck (the chief rabbi in Germany during World War II). According to him, they were the reformers, the "progressives" who brought the Law to the people, who made possible their survival after the destruction of the Temple, and who founded Judaism as it is practiced today. From this perspective, many historians think the rabbi Jesus was Himself a Pharisee and the confrontations were inter-Pharisee debates. This portrayal is a far cry from the "Pharisaical" self-righteous hypocrite that has been handed down to us. The Jewish tradition of the Pharisees seems quite unknown to the many preachers who erroneously contrast "their" religion of hang-ups, petty parochialism, bigotry and legalism, with "ours" of trust, universalism, love and authentic faith. Unbiased historical studies can help influence the way we reckon with what Jesus was saying.

It would still be too easy, though, to keep the Pharisees as historical figures, unrelated to us, to make the Pharisees into our scapegoat, just as we have treated the whole Jewish people who have followed in the Pharisees' footsteps. This is not to dull the fact that these are judgment passages, but to suggest that revelation, unlike history, is spoken to us and not about other people in faraway places. In other words, "the hard sayings of Jesus" fall on us. The verses themselves ask for this kind of reading for most of the Pharisee conversations begin with "You." Our tendency to shift away

from ourselves to "them" is really the attempt to reject Jesus as our Lord by removing ourselves from His presence, and putting the blame elsewhere...

## Jacques Ellul, *Le bluff technologique* [*The Technological Bluff*].

Paris: Hachette, 1988

Reviewed by Gabriel Vahanian, University of Strasbourg

Translated by Charles L. Creegan

This review is reprinted with permission from *la Revue d'histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses* 68 (1988) 4, p. 510-511.

Nothing irritates Jacques Ellul so much as being taken for someone "opposed" to technique, by detractors and admirers alike. He repeatedly shows that one cannot be opposed to technique any more than to avalanches, but nobody — or almost nobody — pays any attention. Though many arguments could be given in his defense, I will mention two, which are the most important for an understanding of this last work and the numerous other writings he has given over to this subject.

The first argument begins from the simple fact that Ellul, who certainly does not esteem technique too highly, is careful not to underestimate it. On the contrary, I would say that he overestimates it and moreover that he is well aware of this. Clearly he sees in technique a sort of bogey man, though he is wont to complain that it only succeeds as a scarecrow. But we are rather more fallen than the birds, particularly as we play sorcerer's apprentice. In our hands technique inevitably slips its chains — or is it that we simply conspire to charge our own slips to its account? And when we foot a bill far too large for our human purses, we are not only the victims of an enormous bluff, but worse, its willing victims. Of course, we cover ourselves by a technicality: we abdicate. It is this abdication which Ellul exposes in *Le bluff technologique*, a volume which will no doubt be seen to form a trilogy with *The Technological Society* (*La technique*, 1954) and *The Technological System* (*Le système technicien*, 1975). These titles illustrate a semantic glissade, which did not happen by chance. We are bluffed, not by technique, but by the system which we erect upon it — using technique to enthrall ourselves rather than to help us toward self-evaluation. But Ellul tells us that all technical progress has its cost, and furthermore that technique does not bluff. So it is we who must bear this cost, at the price of being-along with technique? — the objects of one of the most enormous bluffs, the technological bluff: "that is, the gigantic bluff of a discourse on techniques [my emphasis-G. V.] in which we are caught up, which continually causes us to take hawks for handsaws and, what is worse, to modify our stance toward our own techniques." For after all what is a man, if not that by which we escape from technique? Even a technological society has in it a bit of social vision which escapes the embrace of its techniques — unless it is taken in, and resigns itself, under the fallacious pretext

that because one is not opposed to technique, one must believe the slogan "it can do anything," and thus one must blindly let it do whatever it can.

We again owe thanks to Jacques Ellul for crossing the "t's" and dotting the "i's." It is not against technique that we must work, but against the discourse into which we force it beyond measure and beyond reason. Ellul takes up this task with a will. One after another, he masterfully dismantles all those technological challenges with which we have been ceaselessly plied and with which we are still being tempted, though in fact even the technological fairy has lost her way-if she is not making us lose our heads! He addresses four issues, which all participate in the growing uncertainty about the effects of an invasive, unassimilated technique: the ambivalence of technical progress; the unpredictable nature of development; the vicious circle constituted by technique and its insidious influence on politics and science or the economy; and finally the contradictions inherent in the system itself. The upshot, aside from spiritual impoverishment, is a marginalization approaching abrogation of culture. Without flinching, Ellul writes: "a technological culture is impossible." He believes that "culture is necessarily humanistic or it does not exist," and declares categorically that "no bridge between the two is possible."

Then are we irremediably condemned-irrecoverable? One would never guess Ellul's reply. It is a firm no! He is categorical, though his hope rests only on the fact that in the last analysis, "the gigantic bluff is self-contradictory" and "has nothing to do with the fact that technique yields very satisfying and useful fruits, as I have never denied." And I call attention to the fact that the emphasis is Ellul's: he brings me to the second of the reasons which I invoked above against those who unfairly accuse him of being opposed to technique. He will pardon me for expressing it in the well-known formula:

A man more Utopian than Ellul has never been bom!\*

\* The last line is an idiomatic translation. A literal translation of the French would read: "*More Utopian than Ellul, you die.*"

\*\* *The Technological Bluff* is scheduled to be published in English by Eerdmans s before the end of 1990.

## Contributions Welcome

Original essays for the *Forum*, responses to previous *Forum* essays, book reviews, etc. are welcome. Essays should be submitted on 35 or 5.25 inch IBM compatible format disks along with hard copy if at all possible. Word processing files from Word Perfect, Microsoft Word, Multimate, Xywrite, Nota Bene, and Wordstar can be used directly. Also Ascii and DCA formats. If this is not possible, just send typed copy to Darrell Fasching, 15811 Cottontail Place, Thmpa Florida 33624.

# Forum Response

## Vernard Eller's Response to Katharine Temple

I was not particularly disconcerted by Katharine Temple's disappointment over my book - especially since Ellul himself and many other top reviewers have given it much more favorable notice. However, Temple's review may provide me opportunity to clarify some matters.

I propose that temple has misread the significance of the fact that Ellul's book bears the name Ellul, while mine bears the name Eller. The similarity of name is not meant to suggest a similar quality of mind and work. Quite the contrary, my name is different from his to keep it clear that my work represents an order of intellect and scholarship entirely other than his.

I never ever, for one moment, have seen myself as an intellectual peer, colleague, or competitor with Jacques Ellul. I don't even see myself as an Ellul scholar, someone equipped to meet him on his own level in the way of analysis, critique, and the citing of other authorities pro and con. No, my way is simply to read Ellul's books (usually only once), let whatever ideas adhere, and then also let them resurface and be put to use as they will. I have not researched and claim no "command" of his literature that enables me to cite chapter and verse on one point or another. I have no technical expertise in any of Ellul's fields — have made no effort to keep up with, let alone make scholarly contributions to, Ellulian studies at large.

My one advantage, a gift most precious to me, is perhaps that, from the word Go (which was apparently Ellul's Christian Century article of June 1968) I have heard Ellul speaking on the same wavelength to which I was already attuned by virtue of my biblical commitment and "sect-type" church background. So, whenever I have difficulty understanding Ellul's "words," I simply read his mind - and usually come off understanding him better than his scholarly proficient do. I am of the firm conviction that Ellul's "simple faith" is much more of the essence than is his "scholarly expertise." And I intend to stay plugged into Ellul on the end at which I started and where I have found so much satisfaction for more than twenty years now.

I really believe that the burden of temple's complaint against me is that I wrote my type of book (biblical theology for the lay reader) rather than hers (technical stratospherics for the academician). Mine nowhere purports to be that of an Ellul scholar addressing other Ellul scholars like herself. No, the greatest satisfaction I feel about my book is that it introduces the thought of such thinkers as Ellul, Barth,

Bonhoeffer, the Blumhardts, Kierkegaard (plus Hengle, Bomkamm, Kee, and others) to a lay audience that would never consider itself competent to tackle such scholars through their own scholarly writings. If I have a contribution to make to the cause of Jacques Ellul, it will not be through the medium of technical papers; it will be in opening his thought to Christian laypeople, those in best position for profiting from it [As a convenience, I shall hereafter identify the above named thinkers as "my people."]

What I most wish "temple (and other reviewers like her) would have been willing to recognize is that basically my book, from start to finish, is biblical exposition. I don't think there is a spot in the book where the reader can be more than a few pages away from biblical exposition. The essential use to which I put each and every one of "my people" is as biblical exegetes, nothing more - not ethical theorists, not political scientists, not speculative theologians, none of that. Most pointedly put, the thesis of my book is that the concept of Christian Anarchy can be derived (and must be derived) solely from the biblical faith. And this has the effect of making it accessible to any Bible-believing Christian, quite apart from intellectual attainment or technical expertise.

Consequently, the history and analysis of anarchical theory (which "temple demands of me) is quite beside the point. The survey of current ethical theory (implied in the demand to include Yoder and Hauerwas) would actually confuse and lose me my audience. The suggestion that I must show myself a scholarly expert in these professional fields before being allowed to speak about Christian Anarchy - strikes me as the worst sort of intellectual elitism.

Consequently, too, a study of the "Christianity," of Christendom - which is far from the same thing as biblical Christianity [see Ellul's *The Subversion of Christianity*] - that "Christianity" is quite beside the point and would, again, completely sidetrack my book.

It was this finding of Christian Anarchy in practice all over the place that I understand "temple to have been after by faulting me for not naming William Stringfellow (Episcopalian) or Dorothy Day (Roman Catholic) among the blessed - and for dismissing "whole traditions" out of hand. In the first place, I never did set out to list "the blessed"; I set out to find noted Christian thinkers who have left us major deposits of authoritative biblical exposition that point toward a concept of Christian Anarchy. I respect all four of temple's people (Stringfellow, Day, Yoder and Hauerwas) and know a couple of them personally. I doubt that there is one of them who would agree that their work in biblical theology puts them in the league of Ellul, Bonhoeffer, Barth, and Kierkegaard. And as to dismissing whole traditions, why does temple pick on me for that one? Ellul (let alone Barth and Kierkegaard) has done that much more thoroughly than I ever could.

There is much more to which I perhaps ought to give answer; but I will be content to address the one charge of my making tax resisters my main target - while she knows a number of tax resisters who are truly nice people.



Again, that is completely beside the point. Temple refuses to recognize that every single time I talk about tax resistance I am doing biblical exegesis (either doing an exegesis of my own or sharing one from the expert exegetes of "my people"). And the reason the tax question comes up time and again is because (as best I can discover) the tax passages are the sole representation of the New testament speaking specifically to the basic issues of revolutionary protest and civil disobedience.

Yet I never express anything less than good opinions of the moral character of tax resisters I have known. My one charge is that the biblical counsel is against their position rather than supportive of it. If I am wrong, my error could be rebutted without any anger or ill will from either side. All that is wanted or needed is a reputable biblical exposition that supports tax resistance. Yet the fact is that I have caught plenty of flak like temple's - while, no more than she does, has anyone else shown a willingness to dispute the matter biblically.

As I say, I can take temple's review without too much consternation, knowing that Jacques Ellul, some Ellul scholars, and other expert reviewers read mine as a book quite different from the one she apparently read. I do think it important for readers of *Ellul Studies* to know that temple's is very far from being the unanimous opinion of my book.

## Michael Bauman's Response to Jacques Ellul

Regarding Professor Ellul's objections to my review (My numbers correspond to his.):

1. Ellul is wrong. I did not accuse him of saying that Christians ought to feel guilty about what Marxist critics allege concerning Christianity or Christians. As a politically conservative, free-market Christian, I denied that we Christians ought to feel Socialist-inspired guilt because the Socialist criticisms directed at us are radically flawed. I said so as a preface both to my complaints about what Ellul does say and to some of the criticism Socialists have made with which he agrees.

2. While rehearsing the Communist critique, of Christian practice, Ellul occasionally (and, I think, rightly) registers his dissent, as, for example, he does when he notes the manipulative way Communists side with the poor. He does not do so, however, when addressing the issue of justice. The communist critique writes Ellul, "was obviously based on justice. In every respect our society is unjust for both individuals and groups. It produces inequality on all levels: inequality of opportunity, income, power, culture" (p. 6). Quite clearly, these words indicate that inequality is an injustice and (conversely) that justice entails equality, things Ellul says he never wrote.

3. I did not "accuse" Ellul of saying that Communists are on the side of the poor. I quoted him. Further, contrary to Ellul's assertion that he does not say that Commu-

nists help the poor, he himself writes that "they accomplish what Christianity preaches but fails to practice" (emphasis added, p. 6).

4. Ellul objects that the accusation that our "unjust society is the result of twenty centuries of Christianity" is one concerning which he "wrote clearly that this is the accusation hurled at Christianity by Communists and that if many ceased to be Christians it is because this argument was accepted." He most certainly did not. In the passage in question (pp. 5-6), Ellul is speaking about why many have become Marxist Christians. He nowhere mentions either the possibility or the actuality of their ceasing to be Christians, for this reason or for any other. (Nor does he pause here to distance himself from this Marxist challenge.)

5. Despite Ellul's opposite assertion, I am well aware of "the clever tactics and grand strategy of Lenin." Unlike Ellul, however, I do not believe that Lenin's means are compatible with Lenin's goals or could ever lead to them. I hold the same view of all Communist regimes. Five-year plans, Gulags, iron curtains, military expansionism, cultural revolutions, perestroika, glasnost, and state-sponsored terrorism cannot and will not yield a worker's paradise, a proletariat without chains, or a world without the state. I contended and do contend, that a radical incompatibility exists between Communist ends and means. Barbarism will not yield humanitarian or therapeutic results.

Further, contrary to Ellul, discourse and its uses most certainly are a part of Communist tactics. That is Lenin.

6. Not all, perhaps not even most, of the choices humans make are respectable or are worthy of a Christian's respect. Some choices are ignorant and inadequately informed; some are counter productive; some are wicked. Despite his intention, Belo's choice to be a Communist is all these things. I do not respect it anymore than I respect someone's choice to be a slave trader which I consider to be very much the same thing. I challenge such choices and I excoriate them. Contrary to Ellul, while I respect and value choosing, I do not value all human choices, especially this one. I cannot side with someone who writes that Belo's choice to be a Communist "clearly merits our respect," that it is "a political choice," one "which we do not question!" (p. 86).

7. If the distinction between "make" and "create" is so fundamental to Ellul's view of the nature and origin of money (a distinction that in economics I contend is truly insignificant), and if I am mistaken to use the word "create" concerning Caesar's role in this activity, then perhaps Ellul should enlighten his translator to that fact, for Ellul's text does say - despite his insistence that he "never wrote what Mr. Bauman thinks to have read!" - that "Jesus means that Caesar, as creator of this money, is its master" (emphasis his, p. 167).

8. You may still number me among those who consider Christianity a religion and who deny that "biblical revelation necessarily entails iconoclasm, that is, the destruction of all religions [and] beliefs" (emphasis added, p. 2). From my position on this issue, however, one should not deduce, as does Ellul, that I "know nothing of Kierkegaard or

Barth"! One could more accurately deduce that I reject them and that I have reasons for doing so.

In addition, I contend that not all the working definitions that scholars advance (much less all definitions) are acceptable. Some, for example, are unjustifiable question-begging and need to be discarded. Some debates are won (and lost) by definition. As a trained literary critic, one who opposes the unnecessary proliferation of definitions and the degeneration of language that results, I did, and do, reject Ellul's idiosyncratic use of the term "ideology." to do so is not, as Ellul charges, "simplistic."

As a trained historian, I equally as firmly reject his reconstruction of the rise or capitalism and its subsequent development, besiegement, and defense. Some of my reasons for doing so are outlined in EA. Hayek's *Capitalism and the Historians* (1954).

9. By mentioning the economists I did, I was intentionally endorsing their relevance to what Ellul calls "the current debate" between Marxism and Christianity, especially Gilder, Smith, and Bastiat. That Smith and Bastiat are not our contemporaries is quite insignificant. Current debates can often be resolved (or at least set in their proper light) by invoking the wisdom of the past. Insight was not born with our generation. I only regret now that I did not mention Whittaker Chambers in this context, a man who is not an economist, but whose views are wonderfully pertinent.

10. a: That liberal capitalism did not further impoverish the poor, I refer you to such books as Michael Novak's *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (1982), pp. 16-22.

b: That the wealthy do not prosper at the expense of the poor, I refer you to such books as George Gilder's *Wealth and Poverty* (1981) and his *The Spirit of Enterprise* (1984), especially the former. Both books also demonstrate that Christian values are capitalist values.

c: Nineteenth-century Christianity was not a monolithic entity about which we can make generalizations like Ellul's, which alleges that it served merely to justify the failures of capitalist societies and systems. The evangelical united front in America, for example, served to ameliorate - not defend - such shortcomings.

d: We agree!

Finally, Ellul need not worry about my students or my biblical exegesis. The failings of his own anarchist reading of Scripture, however, I will expose elsewhere. I shall do the same regarding what I consider his unjustifiably incomplete break from Marxist taxonomy and methodology, and from the ideology that necessarily attaches to them.

# Bibliography

## Bibliographic Notes on Theology and Technology

by Carl Mitcham and Jim Grote

*Seventh in a series. Contributions welcome.*

*Please send books, articles, or notes themselves to:*

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Berry, Thomas. *The Dream of the Earth*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988. Pp. 247. The natural, evolving world is our most important community and teacher. Its chief lesson is a respect for the diversity of all forms of life. Religions, for example, behave like natural species, offering unique insights into the evolutionary process. Technology, however, in its materialist bias tends to eclipse the spiritual dimensions of our "self-transcending" universe. Reviewed by Kenneth Woodward in *Newsweek* (June 5, 1989). See also an interview with Berry by Bernard Connaughton and Jo Roberts, "Thomas Berry: Dreaming of a New Earth," *Catholic Worker* 56, no. 2 (March-April 1989), pp. 1 and 6.

Berry, Thomas. "Wonderworld as Wasteworld: The Earth in Deficit," *Cross Currents* 35, no. 4 (Winter 1985-1986), pp. 408-422. Alternative technologies need to be harnessed within the context of a "planetary socialism" to insure the survival of the planet. Religion is an integral part of this project. "If this sense of the sacred character of the natural world as our primary revelation of the divine is our first need, the second is to diminish our emphasis on redemption experience in favor of a greater emphasis on creation processes... A third need is to provide a way of thinking about 'progress' that would include the entire earth community" (p.417).

Berry, Thomas. "Thomas Berry: A Special Section," *Cross Currents* 37, nos. 2-3 (Summer-Fall 1987), pp. 179-239. Vintage Berry. Creation mythologies which emphasize an ecological motif are needed to counterbalance the Christian preoccupation with redemptive mythologies which have provided the primary energy behind the Western industrial/technological motif. This symposium includes three articles by Berry - "Creative Energy," "The New Story: Comments on the Origin, Identification and Transmission of Values," and "The Dream of the Earth: Our Way Into the Future." Also included

are two laudatory critiques of Berry's *opus* - Brian Swimme's "Berry's Cosmology" and John Grim's *Time, History, Historians in Thomas Berry's Vision*."

Cobb, John B., Jr., and David Ray Griffin. *Process Theology; An Introductory Exposition*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976. Pp. 192. Chapter four, "A Theology of Nature," argues that process theology provides an ecological attitude that substance-oriented theologies fail to provide. "Accordingly, if all actualities, not simply human ones, are constituted by the enjoyment of experience, and hence are to some degree ends in themselves, then we should, to the appropriate degree, treat them as ends and not merely as means to our ends" (p. 77).

Easching, Darrell J. *The Thought of Jacques Ellul: A Systematic Exposition*. New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1981. Pp. xxxviii, 225. Doctoral dissertation under Gabriel Albanian. Ellul's "sociology of the sacred" (cf. *The New Demons*) mediates his dialectic of sociological analysis and theological proclamation. Ellul is not critical of technology *per se*, but of the "transfer of the sacred into technology." That which desacralizes a given reality becomes the new sacred reality. For example, the Church desacralized nature, the Bible (*sola scriptura*) desacralized the Church, and technology has desacralized the Bible. The task of Ellul's theology is to desacralize technique. Reviewed by Jim Grote in *Horizons* 14, no. 2 (Fall 1987), pp. 405-406.

Gill, David W. *The Word of God in the Ethics of Jacques Ellul*. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1984. Pp. xvi, 213. Doctoral dissertation attempting to reconcile Ellul's positive biblical ethics with his constant affirmation that "there are no normative ethics of the good, but there are ethics of grace, which are quite the opposite" (p. 170). This dichotomy in Ellul's thought partially explains why Ellul has been "so deficient in suggestions of ways to counter technique" (p. 98). Reviewed by Jim Grote in *Horizons* 14, no. 2 (Fall 1987), pp. 405-406.

Granberg-Michaelson, Wesley. *Ecology and Life; Accepting Our Environmental Responsibility*. Vefaco, TX: Word Books, 1988. Pp. 200. Popular plea for environmental responsibility. Includes an appendix of articles: Lynn White, Jr.'s "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," Francis Schaefer's "Substantial Healing," Bruce Birch's "Nature, Humanity, and Biblical Theology: Observations Toward a Relational Theology of Nature," Vincent Rossi's "Theocentrism: The Cornerstone of Christian Ecology," James Rimbach's "All Creation Groans: Theology/Ecology in St Paul," and H. Paul Santmire's "God's Joyous Valuing of Nature."

Hall, Douglas John. *Imaging God; Dominion as Stewardship*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans; and New York: Friendship Press, 1986. Pp. viii, 248. Biblical, historical, and theological examination of the term *imago del*. Rejects a substantialistic conception of the image of God (*imago* as noun) in favor of a relational conception (*imago* as verb). We best image God by serving creation, not mastering it. Quotes Dostoevsky's lather Zosima: "Man love the animals... Do not pride yourself on your superiority to the animals, they are without sin" (p. 201).

Hall, Douglas John. *The Stewardship of Life in the Kingdom of Death*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1988. Pp. xvi, 144. Revised edition of Hall's *Christian Mis-*

sion: *The Stewardship of Life in the Kingdom of Death* (New York: Friendship Press, 1985) and sequel to Hall's earlier *The Steward: A Biblical Symbol Come of Age* (New York: Friendship Press, 1982). Contains five theological meditations on passages in Scripture relating to the Church's mission to foster life on earth, not just to anticipate heaven. "Very soon in its history, Christianity moved away from the Hebraic spirituality of earthly well-being expressed in this scripture [Is. 65:17-25] and toward a kind of etherealization of the goal of belief... The question that confronts us today is how we can recover the earthward orientation of the faith of the exodus, incarnation, and cross" (p. 128).

Harder, Allen. "Ecology, Magic and the Death of Man," *Christian Scholar's Review* 1, no. 2 (Winter 1971), pp. 117-131. Naturalism and humanism offer little possibility of healing the environmental crisis that is often blamed on Christianity (cf. Ian

McHarg and Lynn White, Jr.). If man is merely a "pile of chemicals" engaged in the struggle of natural selection, then it is unlikely such a self-understanding will produce an enlightened ecological consciousness. Traditional theism, properly understood, provides the only genuine attack on "pollution." The command to *subdue* the earth in Gen. 1:28 should be reinterpreted as a command to *tame* the earth. See the dialogue of the prince and the fox in Saint-Exupery's *The Little Prince*. "One only understands the things that one tames" (p. 129).

Kass, Leon R. "Evolution and the Bible; Genesis 1 Revisited," *Commentary* 68, no. 5 (November 1988), pp. 29-39. The order of appearance of the creatures in Genesis 1 is intentionally incongruous in order to force the reader's attention away from the temporality of the six days to the intelligibility of the six days. The primary purpose of the structure of the six days is an ethical one, namely to teach the non-divinity of the cosmos (contra Aristotle, i.e. autonomous reason), the moral ambiguity of God's highest creature (who has the "least fixed" path of motion), the morally neutral nature of nature (revelation replaces natural law), and the non-eternity of the cosmos (and hence the non-eternity of the species). Far from contradicting evolution, Genesis 1 supports many of the findings of modern science as well as provides an *origin* of species which evolution fails to provide. Provocative theological support for modern science from an unlikely source - Kass is a student of Leo Strauss with doctorates in medicine and philosophy.

Lampe, G. W. H. "The New Testament Doctrine of *Ktisis*," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 17, no. 4 (December 1964), pp. 449-462. Emphasizes the anthropocentric doctrine of creation in the Old and New Testaments. Redemption is "logically and theologically" prior to creation. Lampe goes so far as to label creation as the "raw material" for human spiritual development. However, passages such as Rom. 8:18ff. and Col. 1:15ff. show the strong interconnection between the drama of redemption and its effects on creation - both in terms of the fall and the resurrection. In terms of the fall Lampe comments: "Hence creation is subjected to meaninglessness; and the more man's technical capacity to subdue nature improves, the greater the frustration

which he imposes on it (p. 457). Later published in German in *Kerygma und Dogma* 11, no. 1 (January 1965), pp. 21-32.

Lerner, Michael. *Surplus Powerlessness*. Oakland, CA: Institute for Labor and Mental Health, 1986. Pp. xii, 350. Critique of modern industrial society within the tradition of the Frankfurt school by the editor of the Jewish political magazine, *TMam*. Progressive ideologies of the recent past (science, Marxism, psychoanalysis) have been assimilated into cultures of technological domination. Biblical religion offers the only real alternative to the oppressive individualism fostered by modern society. "The very way that empiricism and scientism have come to dominate contemporary thought make it likely that religious communities will remain the major challenge to one-dimensional thinking" (p. 276). Emphasizes the crucial role religious tradition and ritual play in building community. Favorable review by Jim Grote in *Catholic Worker* 56, no. 4 (June-July 1989), p. 6.

Mascall, E.L. *Christian Theology and Natural Science*. London: Longmans, Green, 1956. Pp. xvii, 328. The notion of a fundamental conflict between science and theology is baseless. Approaches this thesis by examining several topics, including "The Nature of Scientific Theories," "Creation in Theology and Science," "Modern Physics and Indeterminacy," "The Body and the Soul," and "Man's Origin and Ancestry." Scholarly and technical study. Useful bibliography.

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Panikkar, Raimundo. "Some Theses on Technology," *Logos*, vol. 7 (1886), pp. 115-124. Discusses technology from the standpoint of its non-neutrality, autonomy, homocentrism, nominalism, quantification of reality, etc. Heideggerian analysis. "The realm

of science is the measurable. Science proceeds by measuring. We can only measure something if we succeed in reducing the phenomenon in question to discrete units... What cannot be measured does not 'count.' The pun is revealing" (pp. 122-123).

"Repurposing Education; The American College in the Ecological Age." *Religion and Intellectual Life* 6, no. 2 (Winter 1989), pp. 7-69. Symposium devoted to Thomas Berry's article, "The American College in the Ecological Age," which originally appeared in Berry's *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988). According to Berry, "the American college may be considered a continuation, at the human level, of the self-education processes of the earth itself (p. 7). Colleges must create an integrated curriculum modelled on the earth's evolutionary process. What is needed is a "functional cosmology" that includes the spiritual realm within geological processes. Respondents include Everett Gendler's "A Terrestrial Dogmatism?" Dell Hymes' "From an Anthropologist," William Nichols' "The Limits of Ecological Vision," Mary Evelyn Tucker's "New Perspectives for Spirituality," Betty Reardon's "Getting from Here to There," and Theodor Benfey's "A Scientist Comments."

Santmire, H. Paul. *The Travail of Nature; The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985. Pp.xiii,274. Extended critique of Gordon Kaufman's "A Problem for Theology: The Concept of Nature," *Harvard Theological Review* 65, no. 3 (July 1972), pp. 337-366. Kaufman emphasizes the Kantian distinction between nature and history and argues that Christian theology finds little value in nature *per se*, other than as a field for moral activity. In contrast, Santmire provides historical documentation for an ecological motif in Christian theology (Irenaeus, Augustine, St. Francis) interacting with an anti-ecological spiritual motif (Origen, Aquinas, Luther, Barth, Chardin). "The narratives of biblical experience can be read primarily in terms of the metaphor of migration to a good land and the metaphor of fecundity (the ecological motif) wherever that seems feasible, rather than primarily in terms of the metaphor of ascent (spiritual motif)" (p. 189). Santmire critiques the "asymmetrical" status of the spiritual motif wherein nature and spirit are created, yet only spirit is redeemed. Favorable review by Jerry K. Robbins, *Theology Today* 42, no. 4 (January 1986), pp. 537-540.

Smolarski, Dennis C. "The Spirituality of Computers," *Spirituality Today* 40, no. 4 (Winter 1988), pp. 292-307. Rehashes the old instrumental view of technology as a value-free tool. "Guns Don't Kill People, People Kill People" (p. 295).

Staudenmaier, John M., SJ. "United States Technology and Adult Commitment'," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 19, no. 1 (January 1987), pp. 1-34. Fascinating study of the relationship between modern technology and the current crisis in adult commitment (i.e. rising divorce rates and declining religious vocations). For example, standardized mass production leads to an atrophy of negotiating skills which results in an inability to resolve interpersonal conflicts. Or, technical complexity creates feelings of inadequacy which translate into a lack of confidence in choosing lifetime vocations. Or, the extraordinary precision required by electronic systems fosters a pattern of "little tolerance" in personal relationships. Or finally, electricity's creation of twenty-



four hour "days" produces an inability to live through "dark times" and an obsession with the quality of relationships. "Relentless clarity kills adult commitment" (p. 24). Practical advice to restore a sense of personal vocation includes the suggestion of fasting from electricity once a week and telling stories by candlelight instead.

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Thevoz, Jean-Marie. "Apport de la theologie protestante a la bioethique" [The contribution of protestant theology to bioethics], *Reseaux*, nos. 53-54 (1987-1988), pp. 131-146. Four features of protestant theology - emphasis on the otherness of God, interpretation of Scripture, concern for anthropology, and openness to dialogue with the real world - have contributed to interdisciplinary, ecumenical discussions in bioethics. Part of a special issue, edited by Gilbert Hottois, on "La Bioethique, Une nouvelle generation de problemes ethiques?"

Wright, Richard. "Responsibility for the Ecological Crisis," *Christian Scholar's Review* 1, no. 1 (Fall 1970), pp. 35-40. Rebuttal to Ian McHarg and Lynn White, Jr.'s thesis that Christianity is responsible for the ecological crisis. An earlier version of this paper appeared in *Bioscience* 20, no. 15 (August 1970).

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**Issue #5 Jun 1990 — The Utopian  
Theology of Gabriel Vahanian**

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## From The Editor

Welcome to issue number five of *The Ellul Studies Forum*. Next to Jacques

Ellul, probably no theologian has written as consistently and persistently on the theme of theology and technology as Gabriel Vahanian. It is no accident that Ellul sees him as the most important theologian writing in France today and describes his utopian theology as our only hope for the future. From his 1961 book *The Death of God* through *God and Utopia: The Church in a Technological Civilization* (1977) to his newest *Dieu anonyme, ou la peur des mots (God Anonymous, or Fear of Words, 1989)* the singular underlying and unifying theme has been the impact of technological civilization on Christian faith, theology and ethics.

The power of Vahanian's work lies in the fact that he does not simply take technology as one more topic on the agenda of Christian theology but rather explores the way in which technology alters the inner texture of theological thought itself. In so doing he

reveals the inner affinity between the utopianism of technology and the eschatological utopianism of Biblical faith - an affinity whose common term is the human capacity for speech, for the word. Exploring the implications of his work is the main theme of this issue and the focus of *Forum I*. This section is introduced with my own brief essay on the significance of Wianian's work. Then Lonnie Kleiver, of Southern Methodist University, gives us a masterful essay review of Vahanian's book *God and Utopia* and Phillipe Aubert, a pastor of the Reformed Church of Alsace, does likewise for Vhhanian's new book (not yet released in English) *Dieu anonyme, ou l'apeur des mots*. This is followed with a short essay by Vhhanian on Paul Tillich's ambivalent treatment of the utopian theme. The result, I hope, will be a clearer picture of the significance of Vahanian's utopian theology.

In *Forum II* we have two further essays. The first, by Sylvain Dujancourt (a student of Vahanian's at the University of Strasbourg), outlines the significance of "Law and Ethics in Ellul's Theology." The second, by Sergio Silva, a professor of theology at the Catholic University of Chile, compares the theological understanding of technology in recent Papal pronouncements with the documents of the Second Vatican Council of the Catholic Church. Finally, as usual, thanks to the diligent work of Jim Grote and Carl Mitcham, we have the latest installment in their continuing bibliographical annotation of current work in the area of theology and technology.

I hope all *Forum* readers will find this issue of interest. I wish to express my appreciation to Charles Cfeegah for his fine translations of two articles for this issue. Finally, please note that there will be a meeting of Ellul scholars on Friday morning preceding the annual AAR Conference to be held in New Orleans this year. See page 6 for details.

*Darrell J. Fasching*, Editor

N.B. All essays in this issue have been modified as needed to conform to current standards of inclusive language.

# Book Reviews

## *The Struggle for America's Soul: Evangelicals, Liberals, and Secularism.* By Robert Wuthnow.

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989, 189pp., \$16.95 paper.

by David L. Russell

William Tyndale College, Farmington Hills, MI.

The ever growing interest in American Evangelicalism has resulted in a smorgasbord of thought-provoking publications. While many new historiographies continue to be published on evangelicalism and fundamentalism, an impressive number of works are now being produced from within sociological circles. In a review article in the *Evangelical Studies Bulletin* (Fall 1989) historian Mark Noll quips, "It is becoming increasingly difficult for historians of religion to maintain their prejudices against sociologists." The gist of this statement has to do with the positive impression sociologists of religion have been making, not only upon the field of religious history, but upon the varied fields of theology as well. - -

At the top of the list of impressive publications from a sociological perspective is this most recent work by Robert Wuthnow, professor of sociology at Princeton University. Interestingly, this book follows one year behind his preceding publication, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith since World War II*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), considered to be the most concise history of American religion since World War II.

Wuthnow's analysis is centered around the dynamics of two competing groups in American society, conservative evangelicals and religious liberals, both of which are influenced by a seemingly progressive secularism, to begin with, the author identifies three main sectors at work in American society: 1) The public sector, 2) The private sector, and 3) The voluntary sector. While many social theorists identify only two sectors, public and private, it is Wuthnow who opts, for the voluntary sector. It is his contention that the voluntary sector possesses aspects of both the public and the private sectors. The Church functions in the voluntary sector, however, the changing dynamics in society are changing the role and relationship of such voluntary organizations to society overall. In light of the relationship of the Church as a voluntary organism in American society there are added dynamics at work within the Church which increasingly make ambiguous and complicate that relationship. Wuthnow identifies it in the historic break between religious conservatives and religious liberals as

far back as the years immediately following the Civil War, but perhaps as far back as the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. The contested terrain (chapter 3) of conservatives and liberals has continually drawn them "...into the public sphere in recent years" (p.41) yet with little progress in terms of arriving at a common ground.

Ongoing debates continue over the abortion issue, prayer in the public schools, gay and lesbian rights, and the nuclear arms race to mention just a few. Instead of arriving at constructive conclusions conservatives and liberals resort to a tit for tat game of "Argumentum Ad Hominem." What, then, is the end result? According to Wuthnow, it "...has been a travesty of the profession of love, forgiveness, and mutual forbearance" (p.64). Wuthnow uses the Presbyterian Church as an institutional model for the past and present struggles between conservatives and liberals not for the reason that there have been no struggles in any of the other denominations, but mainly because of the magnitude of the struggle for Presbyterians. Division has haunted the Presbyterian Church from the days of the "New Light" versus the "Old Light" controversy during the First Great Awakening to the present day divisions between Presbyterian conservatives and Presbyterian liberals. The possibility of reconciliation, while hoped for by some, is in Wuthnow's opinion, slim to none. He in fact argues that the cleavage between these two warring parties is unfortunate for the reason that the conflict is skewing efforts to reconcile and more clearly see the biblical mandates for love and understanding.

In part II Wuthnow turns his attention to the "Dynamics of the Secular." The focus of this section deals with the ways in which the state, the media, and education all effect the function and role of religion in American society. In particular is the concern for the tendency of the state to drive individuals into various forms of civil privatism.

Conversely, there has been a privatization of America's faith attributable to many factors, including the increasingly pluralistic nature of American religion, and the greater identification of personal faith with the private sector. Interestingly enough Wuthnow accuses the widening appeal of the religious mass media of contributing to the privatization of faith. The televised religious format becomes a surrogate for the real thing. In other words, who needs the First Baptist Church down the road when you can tune into the "Glass Cathedral" on the tube? In this sense the religious couch-potato can receive dynamic Bible teaching and words of encouragement while maintaining a detached commitment obliging themselves only to mailing in an occasional check.

The battle between "Science and the Sacred" (chapter 7) has also been a contributing factor in the divisions between conservatives and liberals. For this study, the presumption that science is a contributing factor in the advancement of secularism seems to be refuted by the evidence that Wuthnow presents. The available evidence appears to indicate that there is a greater likelihood of secularization within the disciplines of the social sciences and the humanities.

In summary, Wuthnow poses a challenge to the evangelical academic community to continue working at developing credible scholarship and the utilization of the resources at their disposal. According to Wuthnow, "the intellectual community and the public at large have a tremendous interest in knowing more about evangelical Christianity"

(p.175). So what seems to be the problem in achieving greater goals in the evangelical community? Wuthnow seems to indicate that more reconciliation needs to take place between evangelical Christians and liberal Christians.

Overall, I found this work well reasoned and adequate in its analysis of evangelicals and liberals. However, at times I got the sense that Wuthnow failed to clearly discriminate between fundamentalists and evangelicals and as a result he seemed to define conservative evangelicals as fundamentalists. I do believe that Wuthnow made periodic attempts to distinguish between the two (e.g., pp. 43 and 171). It should also be understood that the terms evangelical and fundamentalist are ambiguous and not so easily defined. It will be interesting to see what Wuthnow may produce in the future, but this work is bound to be one of his best.



# Forum I

## The Utopian Theology of Gabriel Vahanian

Gabriel Vahanian's "Utopian Connection"  
Speaking of God, the Human and Technology  
by **Darrell J. Fasching**

All too typically contemporary theological reflection on technology seems awkward and inept, as if we are stumbling around looking for a handle on this phenomenon - which, of course, is precisely our situation. For the most part, theology is treated as one world of discourse and technology another. In Gabriel Albanian's view, a theology which does not speak the discourse of its culture cannot speak to that culture. As a theological ethicist or theologian of culture he understands his task to be that of appropriating and transforming the linguistic universe of our technical civilization. The power of his work lies in his ability to locate the linguistic connection between the biblical tradition and our technological civilization.

"No epithet better qualifies this post-Christian age," Vahanian argued in his 1961 book, *The Death of God*, "than, 'technological'" (N.Y.: Braziller, 1961, 176-177). Long before *Time* magazine turned "the Death of God" into a media event, Albanian had used that phrase to suggest that technological civilization was radically altering the experiential-linguistic texture of human existence, creating a "post-Christian civilization" typified by "a cultural incapacity for God." In a technological age the Medieval language of "supematuralism" no longer speaks the reality of God. The problem, he argued, is not so much secularization as it is a religiosity disengaged from the world. Christian faith has been reduced to a religiosity living in a separate world, focused on changing worlds rather than changing the world. That technological world which Albanian first analyzed almost three decades ago was (and still is) a world desperately in need of "the spirit of utopian and radical Christian adventurousness,... a radical rupture with the past and a bold new beginning (1961,188)."

That is not a bad description of the theological enterprise which Albanian has been engaged in since then - "a radical rupture with the past and a bold new beginning." A world which has no other language of faith than that of another world (in this case the language of Medieval supematuralism) is a world which has no capacity to speak of the living God and so ends up endlessly *Waiting for Godot*. A world which has no contemporaneous language to speak of God has no God to speak of. For the living God is not only the God of creation, the God who *speaks us*, but equally the God of

incarnation, the God whom *we speak* (*Dieu anonyme*, Paris: Descite de Brouwer, 1989). If the God of creation is not first of all the God of incarnation, if the word does not become flesh through the linguistic structures and sensibilities of our contemporary existence, then "God is dead."

The "Death of God" as a cultural event suggested that with the emergence of a technological civilization human existence had undergone a fundamental mutation. The sacred had migrated, as Albanian put it in *God and Utopia* (N.Y.: Seabury, 1977), from nature to technology. The theological task is to be as faithful to the linguisticity of our world as the Medievals were to theirs. Understanding themselves to part of the sacred order of nature, transcendence was expressed in terms of the supernatural. Today we understand ourselves in terms of technology and transcendence will have to be expressed in terms of its utopianism. We no longer think of ourselves as living within a fixed order of nature and subject to an unchangeable human nature. We now seek not only to remake our world but also our selves. "Existentialism," Vahanian argued already in *The Death of God*, "is related to Christianity in the same way as technology is. Neither is thinkable without the Christian culture which originated them (1961,211)." The technological self is no robot, says Albanian, but the self which makes itself (*God and Utopia*, 1977, 136). And this same existential self-understanding pervades our managerial attitude toward our social structures. A technological civilization has an inherent utopian propensity, an inherent openness to transformation which can only be explained by understanding it as a child of biblical eschatology.

If ours is a Post-Christian age it is so because unlike the Middle Ages which were still shaped by pre-Christian Classical world views, the technological structures of our world are a direct product of the impact of biblical faith upon Western culture. The irony is that, because of this, the Gospel is more directly attuned to a technological civilization than it ever was to the Medieval mythological and metaphysical world view of "Christendom" - so much so that to speak of God in terms of "nature" and "super-nature" in our world seems foreign and unintelligible.

Every myth of ages past, Albanian argues, was a "technique of the human" which, while promoting human identity as "human nature," ended up settling humans, not in nature but in culture (1977, 86). Culture is the uniquely human realm, the artificial realm or "second nature" we create through our capacity for speech. As such, culture is inherently technological. Entranced by myth, we once thought of ourselves as part of the order of nature. But when technological consciousness demythologized these myths we became aware that we dwell not in nature but in language - the realm of culture. We have come to realize that our understandings of nature are themselves cultural products. To be a linguistic creature rather than a creature of "nature" is to be an eschatological-utopian creature. For language provides no permanent place to dwell but rather demands that we become what we are not. Both personal identity and the structure of society is rendered radically open. Modern technological civilization is uniquely and selfconsciously a child of the word.

For Albanian, "God," our "humanness" and "technology" are related, not extrinsically but intrinsically. They converge in our utopian capacity for culture, that is, our capacity for speech. Theology in a technological civilization cannot be "natural theology" but only a "theology of culture" - a theology of the word. Natural law and natural theology were always an ill-fitting graft onto a biblical faith which insisted that we are created in the image of a God without image, a God Wholly Other than nature and known only through speech. Human identity, understood "in the image" of such a God, revealed not some ill fated human nature doomed to death but a utopian destiny of new creation. If there is a lesson to be learned from the eschatological utopianism of biblical faith, it is that *a rose by any other name* is not really a rose. The difference between "nature" and "creation," or "history" and "incarnation," is the difference between fate and utopian destiny - between being trapped in "this body of death" or being "alive in Christ." Everything depends on the word - the Christie event where the otherness of God and our humanity converge as utopian event of the human. For it is "neither God nor man but Christ who is the measure of all things" (1989,61). This convergence can only occur in the body, (physical and social/ecclesial) where the word is made flesh through the techniques of the human. Wherever the word is so embodied, the world is transformed to disclose the pleromatic fullness of its utopian destiny as the reign of God draws near and all things are made new.

Christ, says Vahanian is not "some leftover Jesus" to be retrieved from the past and faith is no nostalgia for Jesus but rather "hope in Christ" (1977, 73 -75). Faith has to do with the coming of the human and Jesus confirms that there is no way to God except through the humanity of every person who comes to us as a stranger, as "God anonymous" (1989,174-177), even as the church has less to do with the creation of some exclusionary community than with "communion" with the stranger through whom God's otherness invites us to share in the pleromatic fullness of a new creation. "I have no other God," says S<sup>h</sup>anian, "than the God of others" (1989,96).

God, says Vahanian, is not "the condition of (i.e., does not explain) our humanity any more than our humanity is "the condition of" technology. On the contrary, our humanity "is the condition of God." Apart from the human there is no God to speak of and apart from technology there is no human to speak of. Apart from technology, the human as utopianism of the body cannot come into being. We are not first human and then express our humanity through technology any more than we are first human and then express our humanity through speech. On the contrary, "In the beginning was the Word." First we are given the gift of speech and through speech the possibility of our humanity is given to us (1989,143). As the embodiment of our capacity for speech technology makes it possible for us to become what we are not The human is not a fact to be accounted for but a possibility ever and again to be realized (i.e., "made flesh"). As children of the word created in the image of the God without image *we are not what we are and are what we are not* (1977,137).

The utopian connection, then, between God, our humanity and technology is the word, our capacity for speech. But we must not think that Vahanian is collapsing the

divine into the human and its technological realization. Nor should one think that he is proposing the collapse of the kingdom of God into Utopia. On the contrary, he insists: "Utopia is not the kingdom. Utopia is to the kingdom as nature is to creation, or as history is to redemption, or simply as the flesh is to the spirit. If there is a relationship between them it is one of radical otherness" (1977,137). It is the task of the church, as an *other world* within (not "another" world beyond) this world, to bring about a cultural revolution through a prior ecclesial revolution.

Without the reign of God embodied in the social structures of our technological civilization, its utopianism will give way to the technical imperative (i.e., "if it's possible it's necessary" or "what can be done must be done") as our fate, putting an end to the utopianism of the human. Apart from the reign of God, the possible becomes reduced to the actual even as creation is reduced to nature and eschatology to history. The reign of God makes the impossible possible. "Created in the image of God, [the human] begins where all techniques of the human leave off, where they can only go "too far,"... where for want of the kingdom utopia ends" (1977, 141). Only a church which has re-formed itself as utopian embodiment of the word for a technological civilization, embracing "the words and concepts proper to *homo technicus*"(1989,167), can serve as the leaven of a cultural revolution which would enable the world to realize its utopian possibilities - making all things new and all things possible.

## God and Utopia: The Church in a Technological Civilization

by Gabriel Vahanian (N.Y.: Seabury, 1982)

An Essay Review by Lonnie D. Kliever

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Perhaps no contemporary theologian is more frequently misunderstood than Gabriel Vahanian. Often wrongly associated with other movements (Left-wing Barthianism, Death-of-God theology), he has gone his own way in fashioning a theological vision at once distinctively biblical and uncompromisingly modern. The constructive lineaments of that theology have been partially obscured by the iconoclastic tone and message of Vahanian's writings in the 1960s - *The Death of God* (New York: Braziller, 1961), *Wait Without Idols* (New York: Braziller, 1964), and *No Other God* (New York: Braziller, 1966). With the publication of *God and Utopia: The Church in a Technological Civilization* (New York: Seagjry Press, 1977), the full shape and significance of Vahanian's theology has emerged. In this genuinely original and radical statement, he

establishes the essential identity between a 'utopianism' and an 'eschatological faith' and sketches out the linguistic and ecclesiological form that faith must take in the 'technological civilization' that is dawning in our time.

Vahanian sees all human existence as essentially utopian. This 'utopianism of the human reality' functions both as a limit and as a horizon. As horizon, "the human" confronts human beings as a dare without prototype. As limit, "the human" contests every expression of life as less than a final achievement. Both dimensions of the utopian are caught etymologically in the Greek word for utopia -*ouk topos*. Human life happens where strictly speaking "it has no place." This utopian "otherness" or "beyondness" is, of course, what religions speak of symbolically as "God." As we shall see, there are very different ways of conceiving the relation, between "God" and humans. But whatever the conceptuality, God is God and humans are human only so long as they remain other to one another?

There can be no doubt that for Vahanian biblical faith is paradigmatic for this joining of the utopian and of the religious. Indeed, the utopian character of authentic humanism and the "eschatic" nature of biblical faith are structurally identical. But this formal identity must not be misunderstood. Vahanian does not generalize utopian humanism and eschatic faith to some universal experience enjoyed equally by all. Both the human and the divine come to appearance only in language and that language is always culturally and religiously particular. The utopian reality of the human and of God is always expressed in a culture's own religiosity and every religiosity is articulated in a specific cultural framework. This means that a given religious and cultural symbol system may either express or repress true humanity and true divinity. Any given symbol system can spell death or life to humans and to God!

Vahanian calls each such symbol system a "technique of the human," and notes that each technique is borne by a distinctive "vector of culture." The heart of this theological program centres in sorting out the ways these techniques differ and why their vectors change with the passage of time. He begins by marking a crucial distinction between "soteriological" and "eschatological" techniques of the human. Soteriological techniques (religions of salvation) envision God as the condition of the human. In soteric religiosity, God's transcendence is *exterior* to humans and the world. Human existence is defined by "scarcity" and "heteronomy" and the utopian destiny of the human is projected into *another world* which can only be anticipated through "spiritual" evasion of this world. By contrast, eschatological techniques (religions of the reign of God) see humans as the condition of God. Eschatic religiosity sees God's transcendence as *anterior* to human beings and the world. Human existence is marked by "abundance" and "autonomy" and the utopian destiny of the human is realized in this world becoming *other* through "bodily" engagement with it.

Vahanian further divides soteriological techniques according to whether humanization is seen as a liberation from nature or from history. A soteric religiosity vectored on *nature* centres in a "supernatural" conception of transcendence. Only a return to a supernatural world above can make up for the mysteries and miseries of life in the

natural world. By contrast, asoteric religiosity vectored on *history* turns on an "apocalyptic" conception of transcendence. Only the arrival of the apocalyptic world ahead can resolve the vicissitudes and injustices of historical existence. In other words, these soteriological techniques of the human rest on "mythic" conceptions of transcendence. They distinguish humans and God, world and kingdom, by *separating* them spatially and temporally. Consequently, these mythic carriers are never adequate for expressing true humanism or biblical faith. Soteriological religiosity always consigns the utopian reality of humans and God to some paradisaic past or apocalyptic future. Their utopianism has consisted largely "in changing worlds rather than in changing the world."

Given these distinctions, Vahanian argues that Christianity has been a "salvation religion" throughout most of its history. To be sure, there was no way historically that Christianity could have avoided taking the cultural form of a soteric faith because the only cultural vectors available in the Greco-Roman world were mythic. Moreover, these supernatural and historical theisms at least mediated the utopian reality of God and humans in an ambiguous way. Belief in another-world above or ahead at least stood guard iconoclastically against all temptations to deify nature or society. The existence of the church at least prevented total disengagement from every concern for the world. But even these "misshapen utopianisms" have lost their power to bring the human and God to appearance in the modern world. An axial shift in modern sensibilities has "dishabilitated" the entire Christian tradition by undermining its mythic framework. The God of salvation religion who fulfills life from above nature or beyond history is no more! All mythic "cultural vehicles" of transcendence have been dissolved by the triumph of technological civilization. Modern technology has delivered humans from the mythic world of scarcity and heteronomy into the technological world of abundance and autonomy. Modern technology has made humans *producers* of nature and history rather than their *products*.

Seen in this light, technology is not the threat to humanism and faith so widely feared today. Technology liberates humans from an impersonal nature and history and empowers them to humanize both. What then is technology if not the continuation of utopian humanism and eschatological faith? If the proper place of the human is neither "residue of nature" nor "afterglow of history," then technology furthers the realization of "the coming of [the hu]man" by extricating humans from nature's necessities and history's terrors. In other words, technology both negates and fulfills the Christian tradition. In negating Christianity's mythological conception of religion (whether in its supernatural or apocalyptic version), technology at last offers a cultural vector that can embody a genuinely eschatological faith.

Vahanian is under no illusions that technology's promise will be realized automatically. Technology will foster the utopianism proper to the human only if it gets "the religion it deserves." That new religiosity requires a new language and a new ecclesiology. Here Vahanian is still feeling his way and his thought at this point reaches an unparalleled density and difficulty. But the essential shape of this requisite linguistic and ecclesial revolution is clear enough to be grasped.

Linguistically, an eschatological faith can speak of God and the kingdom of God only by speaking of humans and their world. The human is the "event of God," though God is the ever-present other by which humans become what they are not. The world is the "event of God's kingdom," though the kingdom is the never-present *eschaton* that calls forth the world as *novum*. But language about humans and the world in a technological civilization must be *bodily* and *fictile*. The shift from mythology to technology is a shift from a "civilization of the soul" to a "civilization of the body." Technological civilization gives humans an earthly dimension heretofore neglected in favor of the soul and its heavenly aspirations. Body language brings the utopian reality of the human and God into the realizable present and thereby makes the human body and the social structure the instrument of the kingdom and the incarnation of God! But body language that does not sink into factualism or soar into fantasy must be fictile –it must shape the present by joining the real and the imaginary. Indeed, every human body and social structure is a "bridge" between the imaginary and the real precisely because language is the "artificer" of the human. "Language nudges the body into the word as well as anchoring the word in the body, even as the imaginary is anchored in the real. Indeed there is no utopia except in terms of the realizable, and the imaginary is nothing other than a utopianism of the real. Eschatological artifice does not overwhelm the imaginary with the real, nor does it sublimate the real in the imaginary. It emancipates humans from both, "thereby bringing hope within reach."

Ecclesiologically, an eschatological faith is neither identical with nor separate from the customs and structures of society. The church is rather "the eschatological principle of political and social organization of the human order." The utopian church in a technological civilization must meet the challenge of the "technocratic" systematization and privatization of life. The often-voiced fear that technology inevitably brings dehumanization and faithlessness grows out of technology's breakup of traditional customs, roles, and communities. Bureaucratic rationalization and multinational corporations are making traditional geographic and sociological boundaries obsolescent. Seen in its best light, this technological leveling could signal the latter-day beginnings of a "city of earth" where there is neither East nor West, black nor white, male nor female. But what of the individual who seems lost in this "gigantism" and "interchangeability"? Will the individual and the interpersonal simply disappear in the extraordinary *artificiality* of the technological environment and persona? While admitting the dangers of such a loss, Vahanian contends that artificiality need not oppose the human. After all, linguistic artifice creates the utopian "nowhere" where human life happens. "Far from being a robot, artificial man is the man who makes himself." "Artificial man" can be authentic if he or she makes himself or herself in the image of an imageless God."

The church cannot contribute to this artistic process of humanization by establishing havens of seclusion or ghettos of particularity. The church must go beyond all confessional or geographical boundaries. Neither liturgy nor polity should separate the church from the human community. Yet the church will lose its iconoclastic function and its eschatological anchorage if it is nothing but that community. The utopian church is

an *other* world in the present world precisely because it is "pleromatic" - bringing all things everywhere into fullness by naming the One God who is everywhere because nowhere, and who is for every one because for no one. The utopian church is anywhere and everywhere anyone makes a new world.

Here then in bold strokes is the sum of two thousand years of Christian thought and life. Vfebanian presents a remarkable sketch of humans and their world in transition from a mythic to a technological civilization. That unanswered questions and critical problems abound in a work this encompassing and radical goes without saying. More traditional thinkers will ask: Is the reality of God so language-dependent? Does an eschatological faith offer real consolations? Is the utopian church anything more than an ideal construct? More radical thinkers will ask: Why does biblical faith deserve normative status? Does utopian humanism require symbols of radical transcendence? Does technological rationality allow anything other than private religiosity? But questions such as these do not blunt the sharpness of Albanian's challenge to both sides of the contemporary debate over human nature and destiny - to a reductionistic atheism that simply re-assigns the attributes of God to humans or to a repristinated theism that simply remodels human dependence on God. Neither atheism nor theism meets the challenge of making and keeping human life human in a technological civilization.

## **Dieu anonyme, ou la peur des mots [God Anonymous, or Fear of Words]**

by Gabriel Vahanian (Paris, Descl e de Brouwer, 1989)

**An Essay Review by Philippe Aubert Pastor, Reformed Church of Alsace**

*Translated by Charles L. Creegan*

### **God Speaks Our Language**

Many theologies have endless prolegomena. One may enquire into the relation between faith and reason, between ontology and theology; lay the foundations of an existentialist, materialist or other reading of the Biblical tradition; reflect on the being of God and the being of humans. It is very true that all God-talk is grist for the Biblical mill. God may be defined as Alpha and Omega, the all-powerful, the judge or the gracious one. These conceptions of God are all present in the Biblical tradition, but the originality of the Biblical message over against other religions is not to be found in any of them.<sup>1</sup>

God is a God who speaks, the inverse of silent idols: "And like all speech, which binds even while liberating, God, bound to humanity, is only so bound by the word."

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<sup>1</sup> Gabriel Vahanian, *DieuAnonyme ou la pew des mots* (Paris, Desclde de Brouwer, 1989), p. 17.



Even before Gabriel Albanian, Christianity has certainly not lacked theologians who have placed this Biblical affirmation at the center of their theological thought for rarer are those who have accepted all the consequences. Barth himself fell by the wayside — a victim, like many others, of a hermeneutics of history. To say that God is speech, that God is connected to humanity only by language and not by virtue of an analogy of being, or some sort of historical conscience, is to radicalize to the point at which God escapes from the idol which we make as soon as we assign to God a name, a place, a history, be it ever so holy.

Here we can see a filiation with the thought of Bultmann, who, in his enterprise of demythologizing, had no other intention than to bring God back to the zero point, a point of no return at which only the new and the impossible are possible. That is what the Bible does when it forges the idea of redemption over against that of history, of creation over against that of nature.

Radicalized, God is no more tied to nature than to history. Holding to a hermeneutics of speech from Genesis to Revelation, from creation to resurrection, Albanian elaborates in his book a veritable Systematic Theology. Diving back into the sources of Biblical tradition, his thought does not switch Gods at the whim of the diversity of Biblical texts, of our existential angst, or of passing trends.

Offered as prolegomena are the central affirmations of the Bible: God is speech, and its fulfillment: the Word made flesh. In this verbal condition, God and humanity are linked by language. If the break with ontotheology is not surprising, the anthropology found in Albanian's thought is worthy of greater attention. In a world where often God has resolved the human question, but also-inevitably-humans have resolved the Divine question, Albanian reminds us that far from exposing or confusing these questions, the Bible radicalizes them to the point of defining them in terms of alterity: an alterity which only language can establish.

Speech does not separate. It does not separate what God has joined together. It does not separate what is one-as a hand is one with another in clapping, or I with thou, God with humanity in metaphor. It is not metaphor which is a manner of speaking a language. It is language which is a metaphor. It is the power of metaphor which bodies out the space of a speech as it makes of speech God's space: a space where humanity is the condition of God, where the reality of God is given with the reality of the world, but nevertheless without their becoming confused.<sup>2</sup>

Humans are grounded in God; like Adam, called Son of God, they have no other antecedents than speech. Thus they could not be defined as changelings of nature or as beings gifted with a historical conscience. Without precedents, each one is altogether as human as anyone, in the formula which Albanian borrows from Jean-Paul Sartre. "Where even God is no more than a word. A word thanks to which humanity is no

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

longer grounded and never will be solely grounded in nature-though we must first be human, and, like Adam, hitman first rather than the first human.”<sup>3</sup>

Now it is dear that language cannot be reduced to a simple code of signs and symbols.

We are far from the conception of Paul Tillich, for whom religious language can only be symbolic: “[The symbol opens] up levels of reality which otherwise are hidden and cannot be grasped in any other way.”<sup>4</sup> Tillich translates, he does not radicalize, so that for him the word “God” cannot be replaced since it partidpates in the Holy which it expresses. Translation only displaces or circumvents the Holy, it makes language an instrument or even a mask. For Albanian, in speaking, God unmasks, un-names, de-sacralizes, putting himself [berselfpn question thanks to language which by nature is iconoclastic and utopian.

God can only be spoken!

## Speech and Utopia: God

Refusing to enclose God in a name, the Bible also constrains itself from enclosing God in a place: Biblical iconoclasm moves from the anonymity to the utopianism of God. For the myth of the Eternal Return or of the Earth-mother is substituted the hope in the Promised Land; to natural order which engenders an ethic of necessity is now propounded the Law, gracious order for which the only possible ethic is that of the impossible.

Master of the Universe, God creates. Thus is wiped out any idea of a generative Nature which takes care only of those it favors. So in the Old Testament, the appeal to nature as a norm and criterion of life yields to the Law. The Earth-mother yields to the Promised Land. And the Eternal Return yields to the Sabbath, while humans, whatever they may be in the natural order; are all equidistant from God.

Albanian restores this utopianism, which succumbs to a sacral conception of God and of the world, by a formula which acts as leitmotif from beginning to end of the book: “ftith consists not in changing worlds, but in changing the world.”<sup>5</sup>

## Salvation and Utopia: The Christ

Whether in a sacral or utopian conception of the world, every religion must address the question of salvation. For from Israel to the Church, salvation is the central problem of the Bible.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, ed. Robert C. Kimball (New York, Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 56 [cited in French translation–Tr.] .

<sup>5</sup> Vahanian, p. 79.

The answer to this question must lie in the Christie conception of God, but also-as Albanian is at pains to show-in the Christie conception of humans. Classical Christology generally develops in three parts. First is an ontological reflection on the person of Christ, which most often aims to emphasize the ontological specificity of Christ as against humans, or again to deny any differences; in this second case, the difference between Christ and us would come out existentially. The second part attempts to discover the historical foundations of the life of Jesus, while the third is given over to the soteriology which follows from the confession of Jesus Christ as savior.

For Vahanian, Jesus is no more the answer to the God question than He is to the human question. He absorbs neither, but rather sets them face to face in their alterity and their communion, thus becoming the covenant between God and humanity. The measure of God and of the person who is the Christ does not begin with the birth of Jesus, but with the faith of the believer. That is to say, faith guarantees its own foundation and the result of historical studies is of minor importance. Does not St. Paul himself settle the question by reminding us that we only know the Christ of the writings? The life of Christ begins with faith and the sense of God shown when, in Christ, God is not stuck in divinity nor the human in humanity, but God is of one body with humans, and in Christ 'humanity is the condition of God.'"

Son of God, Christ does not represent the quintessence of God, but God's providence, in other words God's currency. Son of Man and thus native of the human, he does not symbolize the culmination of nature through the human phenomenon which would also be its conscience, but the novelty of humanity.<sup>6</sup>

More than ever it is a question of salvation. The word is made flesh to be embodied, to become Church as body of Christ-but on condition of becoming a social body in all of its dimensions, ethical, political, economic and cultural. Far from any mysticism, the thought of Vahanian ever returns to ethics: an ethics which permits us to change the world, as opposed to a mysticism which only changes worlds.

## **Utopianism of the Body and Social Order The Spirit**

Far from setting in opposition heaven and earth, God and humanity, or the flesh and the spirit, the Bible invites us to engage nature and its determinism, history and its absolutisms, and the social order.

The pneumatology of Vahanian does not rest on a subtle analysis of the different names which refer to the Spirit. The best way of understanding the third person of the Trinity is still the amazing story of Pentecost.

While Western theology has, for a variety of reasons, dangerously reduced the place of the Spirit, our author gives it a new spin which is not unsurprising. Rather than any

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

mystical manifestation like glossolalia, the outpouring of the Spirit is nothing other than a new social order, an ecclesial vision of the world.

And how is this order to be recognized? From the fact that it falls into place once our behavior—on the social as well as the religious, cultural and ethical levels—demonstrates the conviction that is ours when our living is living the Christ.<sup>7</sup>

To live the Christ and not simply in Christ. The nuance in the Pauline expression must not be pushed too far; Vahanian wishes to insist on the fact that the Spirit does not interiorize the Christ, but exteriorizes him, communicates him in every person's language. Every person, be they Parthian, Elamite, Mesopotamian, Jew or Greek, male or female, rich or poor.

Not satisfied to revise the social order which classifies people according to their merits, or privileges of land or blood, the Spirit moves between the individual and the communal - [shaping] a community in which communion must not eclipse communication. St. Paul was already worried at the attitude of those Christians for whom the edification of the neighbor was secondary to the mystical communion of speaking in tongues. It falls to Vahanian to take up the cause and to take on the interpretation of the famous passages which Paul devotes to this problem in the first letter to the Corinthians.

And would not God then be reduced to a mere effect of language—like that other Divine abyss, Being, or what fills it, the Holy? Speech postulates language. But when through misdirection it is called to postulate both more and less than language, it leaves the sphere of language. Then it serves to strengthen a vision of the world more mystical than ethical: dualistic, and providing a springboard for the initiates, the candidates for otherness. But if God is a God who speaks to us, God is willingly placed in question, less through nature and its catastrophism or history and its tragedy, than through language. It is in language that one recognizes the traces of God, as those of the wind in the grass, breath in the word, and the Spirit in the newness of the world and of life.<sup>8</sup>

In this book, Gabriel X&hanian shows that it is possible to escape the eternal problem of theism and atheism by returning to the roots of Biblical tradition.

Taking up the theses already expressed in *God and Utopia*, the author proceeds to a true theological reconstruction which, far from refuting tradition, restores it by reorienting it in a direction it should never have left. A theology in gear with modernity which returns to the Christian an awareness of faith, a capacity to grasp the reality

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

of the world, not fleeing it, but rather changing it. On one condition: that the Church must show its mettle, it must not be afraid of words; for more than our past or our future it is speech which remains a challenge to humans and a hope of humanity.

☒ Editor's note: Mr. Aubert makes a puzzling allusion here. I suspect he means to say, as Vahanian does say, that Paul reminds us that even if we once knew Christ in the flesh that is not how we now know him, for we now know him only in the Spirit. (2 Cor. 5:16).

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*Ellul Forum Meeting at the AAR Convention*

***A Critical Appraisal of Ellul's Sexual Ethics* by Tom Hanks author of *God So Loved the Third World***

Friday, November 17th, 1990

at the New Orleans Marriott

The Lafayette Room

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## **Theology of Culture: Tillich's Quest for a New Religious Paradigm**

by **Gabriel Vahanian**

**University des Sciences Humaines, Strasbourg**

***for Jean-Pierre Richter***

Whatever reasons are adduced by Paul Tillich when he claims that, under the circumstances of today's human cultural predicament, traditional theological ethics should give way to a theology of culture, one thing clearly stands out: the task at hand can be neither defined nor discharged properly unless it rests, firmly, on a religious analysis of culture. Immediately, however, another thing makes itself felt and grows and looms even larger than the former it refers to what I shall call Tillich's quest for a new religious paradigm.

In *Theology of Culture* Tillich writes that if "religion is being ultimately concerned about that which is and should be our ultimate concern, [then] faith is the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern, and God is the name for the content of this concern."<sup>9</sup> But no sooner has he made this statement than he draws our attention to the fact that with it he points to "an existential, not a theoretical, understanding of

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<sup>9</sup> *Theology of Culture*, Oxford University Press, New York 1959, p. 40.

religion.”<sup>10</sup> But is that all there is to it? Nor would the question arise if, in the same paragraph, he did not invite it by admitting that “such a conception of religion has little in common with the description of religion as the belief in the existence of a highest being called God. and the theoretical and practical consequences of such a belief.”<sup>11</sup> Having thus raised at least a question about the assumption that religion must be intrinsically tied up with a substantialist ontology, he adds, similarly, that another and for us equally significant consequence of “the existential conception of religion is the disappearance of the gap between the sacred and secular realm.”<sup>12</sup> And yet, just as he retracts himself with respect to God as Being-itself, so also he will not really go so far as to drive a wedge between religion and the sacred much less discard that other, equally rampant, assumption according to which religion must intrinsically be tied up with the sacred.

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Casual as they may be, these statements bring nonetheless into focus what, to my mind, is really at stake in Tillich’s shift from theological ethics to theology of culture.

To begin with, take the last words of the last quotation. Considering that normally what goes together with the sacred is the profane while religious is what goes together with secular, one is bound to wonder whether the disappearance of the gap is, for Tillich, the result of a process of desacralization or the result of a process of secularization. For reasons that will become clear as we go on, Tillich does not mean the former. But he really does not mean the latter either, since secularization - of which he is critical, anyway - at worst would amount to a displacement of the sacred, not its loss. And if so, there could be no disappearance of any kind of gap, either. Or else, it must result from a process of desacralization - a process which, precisely, consists, not in obliterating religion, but in providing it with another ground than the sacred. Indeed, unless the gap to which Tillich consistently refers has disappeared, what would be the point of shifting from theological ethics to theology of culture? Given the ambiguities of Tillich’s thought or his *existential* ambivalence about the secular (or, for that matter, the sacred), the shift, once it is properly analyzed, should bring into evidence another yet equally exciting aspect of his thought, with consequences affecting not only ethics and society but also the language of faith and theology properly speaking. Meanwhile, the real nature of the shift and its shortcomings in Tillich’s own handling of it are brought to light by raising a simple question. It can be phrased as follows: Obviously honing in on or beckoned by a new religious paradigm, what is it that prevents Tillich from ultimately giving up ontotheology, and the idea of God as Being-itself, for the sake of a theology rooted in the Word - instead of merely using words? That is, to a theology attuned to the verbal condition of the human. What is it that keeps his thought firmly oriented to the sacred instead of prodding it into a theology of utopia?

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

To be sure, what Tillich was concerned with, on his own admission, was a *religious* analysis of culture. But, given the previous remarks, it could well be that this first step was also the wrong one. Considering the vast upheavals generated by the successive scientific and technological revolution and their urgent implications for human self-understanding; considering in other (or, should I say, in his own) words, the cultural shaking of our religious foundations, should he not have instead been concerned with a cultural analysis of religion? Indeed, if language is "the basic cultural creation" and, Tillich goes on, of moreover, "every religious act, not only in organized religion, but also in the most intimate movement of the soul [i.e., not only in theoretical but also in existential religion] is culturally formed," in these times of spiritual crisis and shifting religious styles - driving, for example, Protestants and Catholics into having nowadays more in common than they do with their respective sixteenth century ancestors - would a cultural analysis of religion not have provided him with a better and more pertinent theological stance? Much as Tillich protests against ascribing religion to a "special realm" alongside a secular one, does he not himself consolidate such a cleavage even when he defines religion as "the substance of culture" and culture as "the form of religion"?<sup>13</sup> Inevitably, a definition of this type is bound to foster one kind of dualism or another, if it does not simply perpetuate a rather traditional, dichotomous understanding of reality.

Tillich's protestations to the contrary notwithstanding, this impression is not quite alleviated by statements to the effect that "the religious and the secular are not separated realms:" they are "within each other."<sup>14</sup> Such statements, however, are immediately counterbalanced if not neutralized by the rather telling admission that "this is not the way things actually are."<sup>15</sup> Actually, each realm tries or tends to dominate the other, even as, Tillich claims, on another, existential level, each of us drifts into estrangement or is responsive to both acceptance by God and self-acceptance.

Am I then still suggesting that for all practical purposes Tillich's understanding of the relation between religion and culture is grounded in the sacred? I am, in spite of the fact that he defines the sacred as a passion for the secular. Am I equally suggesting that his understanding of the religious phenomenon and of Christianity in particular is one that is not so much grounded in "salvation" as one that reduces the Christian faith to a religion of salvation? I am once again, and again in spite of the fact that even for Tillich "salvation," "saving," and "savior" are words that need to "be saved themselves."<sup>16</sup> They are words whose efficacy has consistently lost to the "saving power of the technical control of nature," while at the same time the cure of souls is itself

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, p. 42.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p. 41.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>16</sup> "Salvation," *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* LVII(1963) 1, p. 4 & 7.

being practiced with a far "greater consciousness of the real meaning of grace" by depth psychology.

In a word, Tillich's reluctance to get rid of *being* in talking about God is in turn explained by his reluctance to get rid of the sacred. Interestingly, this twofold reluctance is accompanied by an even more significant acknowledgement, namely: both religion and culture are funded by language. True enough, what Tillich means by language is nothing more than a symbolic order and its tradition. And, although as an order this order is less and less conspicuous today for its adhering to the so-called vertical dimension rather than to the horizontal one, still it is thoroughly tangled with the sacred of which it remains captive instead of being pegged on utopia. Mistaking optimistic progressivism for "hope against hope," the utopian hope of which at times American civilization was only able to reflect distorted image, Tillich points out that religion "had nearly forgotten the religious reservation, the vertical line, and had dedicated itself to the religious obligation, the horizontal line alone. It had consecrated progressivistic utopianism instead of judging and transcending it."<sup>17</sup> What he does not realize, however, is that religion has been undergoing a basic shift: in fact, if not yet theoretically it is no longer tied up with the sacred. And Tillich has no conception of such a radical mutation of the religious experience. Inadvertently or not, he then writes: "The original terminology of scriptures and of the liturgies of the Ancient Church cannot be replaced. Mankind has archetypal words."<sup>18</sup>

As is well known, Paul Tillich was by and large rather critical of utopia. He sees it as the ultimate sanction of secularism if not its final degeneration. No wonder he did not approve of Gogarten's overall vision *afjS£kularisiering*. Yet he should not be rebuked for that. And he would not be altogether wrong if his own alternate concept of apologetics had been free of all suspicion. Indeed, utopia and the sacred do not quite mix. As Gilles Lapouge puts it, utopia is not precisely to the sacred.<sup>19</sup>

And no one can elude the question, either. Something prevents Tillich from identifying the religious dimension with the spirit of utopia. Why? In spite of the entire thrust of his thought, what is it that, for example, drives him to contend that "no church is possible without a sacramental representation of the Sacred"?<sup>20</sup> Or does Tillich manage to overlook the fact that this kind of claim is scarcely possible without the prior confusion of the sacred and the holy, of sacralization and hallowing? Surely, there must be another explanation.

At this point, it seems obvious to me that Tillich was groping for a new religious paradigm. The general trend of his thought is studied with irrefragable indications of such a quest. To wit, the incessant struggle against secularism as well as clericalism or ecclesiasticism he wages in the name of that most apt and most beautiful of all, the Protestant Principle –of which, apparently, even his own definition of religion

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<sup>17</sup> *The Protestant Era*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1948, p. 190.

<sup>18</sup> *Auf der Grenze* Evangelisches Verlagswerk, Stuttgart 1962, p. 47.

<sup>19</sup> Gilles Lapouge, *Utopie et civilisations*, Flammarion, Paris 1978.

<sup>20</sup> *Auf der Grenze*, p. 52.



and culture, if not his theology of culture, is to be deemed but a distorting echo. Quite correct when, by ecclesiasticism, he means otherworldliness, something seems to go wrong when, by secularism, he means not only socialism but also the latter's utopianism or, more precisely, its immanentist utopianism. Not to mention the fact that it remains to be seen whether, of necessity, utopianism must be immanentist,

Tillich, easily presuming that secularization must lead to secularism and construing the secular in antinomy with the sacred, opts for and finds refuge in the bosom of the sacred even while claiming to be concerned with the unconditioned, the ultimate, albeit forgotten, the religious dimension.

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Still, it is no wonder that in spite of it all he has, in "Critique and Justification of Utopia," written pages hardly surpassable on the subject. From the start, he states, that "utopia is truth," and asking "Why is it truth?" answers: "because it expresses man's essence, the inner aim of his existence." "Utopia," Tillich insists, "shows what man is essentially and what he should have as telos of his existence."<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, Tillich points out, "a socially defined utopia loses its truth if it does not at the same time fulfill the person, just as the individually defined utopia loses its truth if it does not at the same time bring fulfillment to society."<sup>22</sup>

However, the significant thing lies elsewhere. It lies in the fact that this truth of utopia seems itself inevitably bound to be checkmated by no less a utopian untruth: "Utopian is a judgment of the extreme sinfulness of the present or of a social group or people or religion and an attempt to lead out of this situation, but it does not say how this is possible if there is radical estrangement."<sup>23</sup>

We need not be surprised at Tillich's negative assessment of utopia being as strong as his positive assessment. He uses the same stratagem with respect to the church or religion in general, or with respect to culture. He remains consistent with the sacral presuppositions of his theological stance, globally considered, if not outright with the Protestant principle. Of the problem thus raised by utopia he sees no resolution except in terms of the *idea of the two orders*,<sup>24</sup> of the vertical and the horizontal or, do I dare add, of the sacred and the profane. Clearly, for Tillich only the Lutheran idea of the two orders - which I prefer to see as somewhat alien to my own unabashedly Calvinistic understanding of the Protestant principle - can prevent utopia from "freezing" into some *final solution* (with all this phrase connotes to our post-Auschwitz ears). Tillich does not, I am afraid, seem to allow for the possibility much less for the fact that utopia, if it aims at anything, aims precisely at no final solution of any kind. For him, what would and does ultimately confer finality, even "utopian finality to any place or time in

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<sup>21</sup> Frank E. Manuel ed., *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, Beacon Press, Boston 1967, p. 296.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 297

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 300.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 308.

history," is and has always been the sacred. No sooner has he acknowledged the spirit of utopia than he rejects its relevance unless it can be retrieved in the name of the sacred. Unexamined or inadvertent, such a position is all the more unexpected since Tillich himself concludes his own essay with these words which he himself underlined: "It is the spirit of utopia that conquers utopia." And who else but Tillich could say anything like that?

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If the religious task consists in changing the world rather than changing worlds, is there any conquest or, for that matter, any quest that is not fundamentally utopian? Only in this manner can the religious dimension be spared from becoming one dimension among others. Only in this manner can it perform as the leaven does in the dough, changing it into bread. By contrast with the sacred, the spirit of utopia implies in no way that the real world is somehow a place off limits; it is what is at stake in and through cultural revolutions that exhibit a religious vision and religious revolutions that likewise exhibit a cultural relevance. True enough, in Tillich's time, the need for either kind of revolution had, at bottom, been ideologically oriented, exclusive of any other consideration. Progressivistic or apocalyptic, demonic or catastrophic, it did nevertheless reflect something - though not always the best — of the deeper revolution that had been and still is affecting us all both religiously and culturally, the technological revolution.

Of this technological revolution, surely, Paul Tillich grasps the hitherto unexpected, unfathomed meaning. The desert can be "tamed" into a garden, and the wilderness, both inward, psychological, and outward, physical, can be turned into paradise. Which, of course, does not mean that the converse cannot equally happen, and technology unleash demonic forces yet unsuspected by our natural, all too natural, inclination to evil. Not that this would mean the ultimate surrender of nature to technology and its alleged inherent madness, its congenital incapacity for coherence. It could, on the contrary, mean the surrender of technology to nature, albeit through human nature.

To conceive of technology as the ultimate negation of nature amounts to overlooking its real meaning, to begin with, technology has made us more conscious of nature than we have ever been so far. Technology is the spirit of nature conquering nature. And to it, and its implications, Tillich is, no doubt, most sensitive.

So sensitive, indeed, that he feels the need for a new religious paradigm - a utopian paradigm of religion in lieu of the sacral paradigm bequeathed by the Western tradition. A tradition, however, of whose language, precisely, Tillich does not simultaneously feel the need to be freed. And it is this language which holds Tillich's thought firmly grounded in the sacral discourse of on-totheology and withholds it from the spirit of utopia. But it is a language that defeats itself: pervading everything from birth to death, geared to life after death, it shies away from life in spite of death, the life over which death itself can win no victory - no final victory.

Not without some irony, Paul Tillich's ashes were scattered in the sky over and above the memorial garden designed in his honor at New Harmony, a town founded by Robert Owen and his utopian community, a landmark in the conquest of utopia by the spirit of utopia.

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Book Reviewers Needed

If you are willing to be called upon as a reviewer for *The Forum* please contact Dan Clendenin, William Tyndale College, 35700 West Twelve Mile Road, Farmington Hills, MI 48331. Phone 313-553-7200.

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# Forum II

## Law and Ethics in Ellul's Theology

[Abstract of *Introduction to Jacques Ellul's Judicial Ethics*, Master's Thesis, Faculty of Protestant Theology University of Strasbourg]

By **Sylvain Dujancourt**

*Translated by Charles L. Creegan*

Jacques Ellul's judicial thought is an aspect of his work which has received little attention. And yet it is perfectly characteristic of Ellul's sociological and theological procedures. In this area as in others, Ellul initiates a dialectic of constant cross-questioning involving study of the problem in its social, political, and cultural aspects, and investigation of what the Bible says-or does not say-about the subject. For Ellul, law is a human phenomenon which is only fully significant in light of Biblical revelation.

A: to affirm that law is a human phenomenon is an implicit response to two questions: What is law? What is its origin?

1) In defining law, Ellul begins by rejecting the traditional alternative between idealist and positivist conceptions-which he accuses in the first case of an abstract vision of the nature of law and humanity, and in the second case of reducing law to a mere rule. Law is "a concrete system destined to be applied." Ellul next distinguishes law from several notions for which it is sometimes or often mistaken: morality, history, the State, custom, laws, language, and science. These distinctions allow Ellul to uncover five characteristics of law. Law is universal, a rule of social life indispensable to the functioning of all civilization. Law is an artificial creation of humanity, helping to ensure control of time, space, and human relations. Law is normative, both in that it expresses a desire to modify the total social fact and in that it is a set of procedures facilitating the realization of the values embodied in law. Law depends on applicability, it is made to be applied. Finally, Ellul claims that law has an aim, justice, which is also its critical benchmark.

Ellul the historian sets out a three-stage typology of the evolution of law. In religious law, law and religion are confused. In secular law there is an equilibrium between the basis, popular conscience, and the form, judicial technique. This is the moment of legal evolution which Ellul prefers. The last stage is that of the technologizing of law, in which judicial technique dominates. Here law is transformed into an organization at the service of the State. The law of our societies is in a crisis due at once to its

nationalization, its proliferation, its incoherence, and its devaluation. It has also mutated: technique has transformed law into a mechanism for social control. A teleology of order has substituted itself for one of justice. In counterpoint, Ellul imagines an ideal law which would encompass three qualities: a close mesh with social reality, a subordinated judicial technique, and a capacity for evolution. This conception comes nearest to the second stage of the evolution of law.

2) Having thus analyzed law, Ellul tries to answer the question of its origin—that is, of its creation and foundation. For Ellul, the creation of law is the fruit of a combination of human effort and social facts. Law is firstly a spontaneous and collective work of humans for the organization of social life. Law is created by decisions made in light of certain values. Without accepting the Marxist analysis of law, Ellul allows that social, economic and political givens play an important role in the creation of law. Ellul considers events to be a particularly important source of transformations of law. The satisfaction of three criteria allows us to affirm that a rule has become one of law: the existence of common and accepted values; regularized procedures; and sanctions. Ellul raises judicial and theological objections to natural-law doctrines which purport to explain the foundation of law. "Natural law" is a human invention, founded on a variable idea of nature; it is a negation of the eschatology of the Kingdom and allows humans to escape radical revelation.

B: Continuing his research, Ellul relates his analysis of law as a human phenomenon to the Bible, and shows that revelation adds to the value and significance of law. He examines the place of law in the project of salvation as it is revealed to us by God, and proceeds to extract a Christian judicial ethics. Ellul's theological analysis of law rests on two choices, theology of grace and Christocentrism, which underline his solidarity with S. Kierkegaard, K. Barth and J. Bosc.

1) In revelation, law is an element of the dialectic between truth and reality. In the Old Testament, Ellul distinguishes between the Torah, expression of Divine grace, and Hebraic legislation. Hebrew law is in many ways similar to those of other oriental civilizations of the same era. Ellul notes that, as an instrument of God, it is nevertheless unique. In the New Testament, law takes on an essentially ethical dimension; it is an instrument directed to reducing conflicts and allowing the weak to compensate for their weakness.

In the Bible, there are three characteristic manifestations of law: institutions, such as marriage, State, or property, which are created by God with a soteriological dimension; human rights, those given by God in the interest of covenant, of which the first is to be able to speak to God in the name of Jesus Christ; justice, which is an act of God, judgement, and grace. The notion of justice establishes a link between law and revelation. This link allows Ellul to affirm that the foundation of law is in God. This is not a theocratic conception of law. Instead it signifies that law finds its true value in God, and that in Jesus Christ it gains its full significance. Law is a part of the lordship of Jesus Christ over the world, between the covenant and the parousia. It is also placed

in the eschatological perspective of the final Kingdom, although it cannot contribute anything at all to its coming.

2) On the basis of this judicial and theological analysis, Ellul constructs a Christian judicial ethics, that is to say, a coherence between being and doing relative to law and faith. The ethics proposed by Ellul is founded on the notion of judgement, first of all with respect to existing law, and secondly with respect to the working out of law. On the one hand, the Christian is invited to take notice of the worth of law before God, while at the same time measuring the exact social value of law. Further, the law of love does not allow the Christian to ignore the law in force; it must come into play with respect to the existing law. The Church must also take care that the law of society does not hinder the free speaking of the Word of God, salvation of humankind.

On the other hand, as to the working out of law, the Christian must work for the re-establishment of order, that is, to recall the existence of a transcendent dimension of law. The point of reference is the Christological order. The Christian must constantly reorient law, and stress the creative sense and the social function of law. Ellul invites the Church to exercise its role of mediation and conciliation so that all social groups may rally around certain values, and accept the authority of a law which would bring them into being. Ellul also rejects all notions of a Christian law since he opposes the idea of obliging non-Christians to believe in a faith and values which they do not share.

## Notes on the Catholic Church and Technology

by Sergio Silva G., ss.cc.

*Sergio Silva is a priest of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart and Professor of Theology at the Catholic University of Chile. Recently he spent a week in residence as a visiting scholar at the Science, Technology, Society Program of Pennsylvania State University. In the future he will be collaborating with Carl Mitcham and Jim Grote in the development of more bibliographic documentation concerning theological reflection on technology, especially in Latin America.*

These notes are based on my book (written with the collaboration of Pedro Bocardó) *La idea de la técnica moderna en el Magisterio de la Iglesia, desde Pio XII hasta Juan Pablo II* (1985) (*The Idea of Modern Technology in the Magisterium of the Church from Pius XII to John Paul II*<sup>1</sup>), published in *Anales de la Facultad de Teología* 38, 1987, Cuadern 2, Santiago de Chile, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, 1989, 166 pages. — S.S.

What contemporary Popes and the Second Vatican Council have said about technology reflects the thinking of the Church. Not that in the Catholic Church and in her

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<sup>1</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974).

theology there are no differences of opinion, but on this subject Popes and Council do not go beyond the Church.

To write the book I read and analyzed all that the Popes and the Council have said on technology. It should be immediately noted that Popes and Council seldom reflect explicitly about technology; their statements are usually indirect, apropos other subjects, and in most cases are not in the Encyclicals (letters in which the Pope engages his teaching authority at the utmost, without being infallible), but in occasional speeches to various groups, especially at the Wednesday open audiences. I have collected all such statements (or so I hope) and have tried to organize them systematically.

I have found 409 relevant documents. From Pius XII (1939-1958), 98; from John XXIII (1958-1963), 28; from the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), 8; from Paul VI, 98; and from John Paul II (1978 till 1985), 177.

## I.

My main conclusion is that the Popes and the Second Vatican Council have (with some subtle but significant shifts between them) fundamentally the same attitude toward modern technology, an attitude that can be summarized as follows:

1. The documents stress the importance of modern technology as one factor that contributes to the shaping of modern society and its culture.

2. When they come to evaluate modern technology, their statements are of the form "Yes, but." Yes: they affirm technology in itself, that is, they believe that the human ability to know and to dominate nature has been created by God, so that in this abstract and general sense, technology is God's gift. But: this means that contemporary technology is not always and equally acceptable.

Repeatedly, papal documents refer, on three levels, to the ambiguity of modern technology. First, the forces controlled by technology can be used for good or bad, to support life or to sow death. There is, therefore, fundamentally an ambiguity of humanity, wounded by sin.

Second, modern technology' involves a serious threat to the human spirit. This threat is twofold. On the one hand, there is the issue of method: the method of modern science is legitimate when it is a question of knowing the natural world, but it becomes illegitimate when applied - as the only valid method - to human beings and their works. On the other hand, the problem is cultural: contemporary Western culture is more and more a scientific-technological culture; that is, the ultimate values are the objectivity of modern science and the efficiency of modern technology. But these values tend to destroy the humanness of humanity.

Last, but not least, the indefinitely growing power that modern technology puts in the hands of this wounded humankind - its limitlessness - gives to the problem of ambiguity a new dimension and makes it qualitatively different. On the one hand, to say it simply, ambiguity is of a different order when it is concerned with the ability to kill a few people or to destroy all life on our planet. On the other hand (and this

is more decisive), there is the difficulty of controlling and dominating this technical development and all its effects in the life of society and of individuals.

The papal documents stress four areas in which this difficulty of controlling technology is most obvious: environmental pollution, the destruction of cultures among underdeveloped peoples, damage to the inner life (self-consciousness, awareness, contemplative life), and the triumph of the scientific-technical positivist ideology.

## **II.**

After this brief summary, it is helpful to ask: What is specifically theological in these statements about technology? What do they contribute (if anything) to a philosophy of technology? There are at least two specifically theological points in the documents analyzed.

1. The first is that technology is God's gift to humankind. This point can be regarded as a purely formal one, only necessary in the ecclesiastical language game. But it is accompanied by a more global affirmation that the earth (the object of technological manipulation and transformation) belongs to God, and that he has given it in stewardship to human beings.

These statements can make a twofold contribution to the philosophy of technology. On the one hand, a radical denial of technology is excluded, because as an ability of human nature it is God's gift. Yet, on the other hand, every concrete historical technology, including our modern scientifically based technology, must be criticized because it is not obvious that it respects the earth as the creation of God.

2. The second theological affirmation is that the problems with technology are rooted in ambiguities that derive ultimately from sin. Given that sin can be defeated only by Christ, and that his victory shall encompass the whole world only at his second coming, technology, in the light of Christian faith, will always remain, now and in every imaginable historical future, ambiguous.

From here we can conclude that Christians must undertake the effort and the struggle to transform modern technology, so as to deliver it of its bad aspects, because Christians must struggle against sin in all its forms. This must not be done with a utopian attitude, however, as if a perfect technology were possible. A moderate attitude is the only one that can help us to improve modern technology.

## **III.**

One can, however, go beyond the teaching explicitly contained in the papal documents. If the Popes and the Council were to view technology as a reified anthropology, as made in the image of humanity that prevails in modern culture, then it could be argued that Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of Christian faith, as the criterion of humanness, provides a standard for criticizing technology. If technology is to reify a "good"



anthropology, it must be pursued in the light of the human personality of Jesus, of his kind of relations with nature and with human beings.

Finally, there are implications of the fundamental option for the poor made by the Catholic Church in Latin America, since the Conventions of Bishops in Medellin, Colombia (1968), and Puebla de los Angeles, Mexico (1979). This option is not made by the Church autonomously. It is the option of the God of Jesus himself, who is revealed in the Scriptures (and in the lives of his saints throughout the ages) as he who loves with special care and tenderness those of his creatures who have their lives unjustly threatened. This is what happens today with the poor in the Third and Fourth Worlds, and with nature. The teaching of the Church is therefore that technology ought to be used not to promote but to protect against such unjust threats.

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# Bibliography

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George Parkin Grant. *Technology and Justice*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986. Pp. 133. A selection of essays on the relation between Christianity and modern technology, including critiques of abortion and euthanasia. Grant is especially sensitive to the fascist implications of "quality of life" theologians like Joseph Fletcher who define "personhood" on the basis of neo-cortical function. Regarding Fletcher's indicators of personhood, Grant writes: "The list includes self-awareness, a sense of time, self-control, capability of relating to others, the ability to communicate, a concern for others, control over existence, and a balance of rationality and feeling. A bit unnerving when one looks at oneself. How many of us would qualify?" (pp. 126-127).

Grant, George Parkin. *English-Speaking Justice*. Notre Dame, TN: "University of Notre Dame Press," 1985. Pp. xi, 104. First published, Sackville, New Brunswick: Mount Allison University, 1974. Pp. 112. Critique of John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*. (1971). Within this critique Grant sketches the complex historical relationship between liberal social contract theory, Protestantism, and modern technology. According to Grant, the philosophical weaknesses of social contract theory have been hidden for generations by the material success of technology and the voluntarist faith of Protestant theology. The problematic character of this historical symbiosis of political liberalism, Protestantism, and technology is now coming to light. Social equality is no longer a liberating but a restraining ideal for the progress of technology. While technology depended on the notion of equality in its inception, that dependency has now been outgrown. Liberalism-fails by the wayside as humankind turns from the conquest of non-human nature to the conquest of human nature. Favorable review: Jim Grote, "Technology and the End of Liberalism," *Research in Philosophy and Technology*, vol. 9 (1989), pp. 227-231.

Hawkin, David J. "The Johannine Concept of Truth and Its Implications for a Technological Society," *Evangelical Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (January 1987), pp. 3-13. An exegesis of truth as revelation in the fourth gospel, followed by reflections on the implications for social activism, since the Gospel of John has often been used to justify a kind of spiritual withdraw! from the world. "The Fourth Gospel is not 'quietist.' It does not advocate mere passivity and receptivity before God. *But neither is it 'activist.'* ' The Fourth Gospel maintains that there should be no sustained and intelligent Christian action unless it is informed by the whole life of faith... Thus the Christian's activity in the world has a fundamentally different starting point from that of secularized, technological man. The Liberal philosophy which undergirds the technological society asserts that man's ends are willed from within the horizon of the finite. The Fourth Gospel summons men to live beyond the limits of the finite, in communion with the Father" (p. 13).

Jegen, Mary Evelyn, and Bruno U. Manno, eds. *The Earth Is the Lord's: Essays on Stewardship*. New York: Paulist Press, 1978. Pp. ix, 215. Popular essays from a seminar sponsored by Bread for the World Educational Fund. Includes (among many articles) Ronald J. Sider's "A Biblical Perspective on Stewardship" and William J. Byron's "The Ethics of Stewardship."

John Paul II, Pope. "A Dynamic Relationship of Theology and Science," *Origins* 18, no. 23 (November 17, 1988), pp. 375-378. Letter occasioned by the publication of papers from a workshop at the Vatican Academy of Science honoring the 300th anniversary of Newton's *Principia*. "Only a dynamic relationship between theology and science can reveal those limits which support the integrity of either discipline, so that theology does not profess a pseudoscience and science does not become an unconscious theology." Also included in Robert John Russell, William R. Stoeger, SJ, and George V. Coyne, SJ, eds, *Physics, Philosophy, and Theology: A Common Quest for Understanding (Vatican: Vatican Observatory; Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988)*, pp. M1-M14; and under the title "A New Fusionism: Are Science and Religion Compatible?" *iji Crisis* 7, no. 3 (March 1989), pp. 39-41.

John Paul II, Pope. "Toward a True Ecology," *Pope Speaks* 33, no. 4. (Winter 1988), pp. 323-327. Thlk to representatives of science, art, and journalism at the "Festpielhaus" Theater in Salzburg, June 26, 1988. Quoting his words from a speech five years previously in Vienna, the Pope repeats that "The human person and his world - our earth, which we saw during the first orbits around it as a star in green and blue - must be protected and developed. In the horizon of faith the earth is not a limitless, exploitable reservoir, but a part of the mystery of creation, which one may not treat greedily, but rather owes it wonder and reverence." Continuing, he maintains that "In order to arrive at this attitude, we need a culture of asceticism which will enable people and the diverse human communities to achieve freedom also as a readiness to renounce one's own power and greatness, and thus from within themselves make room for others, particularly the weak" (p. 327).

John Paul II, Pope. "Science and the Church in the Nuclear Age," *Origins* 12, no. 8 (July 15, 1982), pp. 126-128. Talk delivered to researchers at the European Center for Nuclear Research (CERN), June 15, 1982. Science and religion are in a new period of dialogue in which religion "rejoices at the progress of science" (no. 8). But there is also a need for "harmonizing the values of technology issuing from science with the values of conscience" (no. 9)-

Kaiser, Edwin, G., CPPS. *Theology of Work*. Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1966. Pp. xxi, 521. Part One briefly Overviews work in the Bible and Catholic encyclicals in comparison with work in slavery and the pagan concept of work. Parts Two, Three and Four provide more detailed analyses of work in the Old and New Testaments, early Christian attitudes, and in the Middle Ages, respectively. Part Five focuses on "Work in the Modern Age," with chapters on capitalism, Marxism, and "The World of Work Today." Part Six contains a theological appraisal of "The Value of Dignity and Discipline," "Value of Duty and Right," "Virtue in Work," and "The Value of Association." Part Seven examines "Work in Its Current Problems," including Chapter 22 on "The Problem of Automation," the first section of which is entitled "Automation: The Final Challenge of Technology." Part Eight deals with "Special Areas of Papal Teaching," while Part Nine is on "Work and Worship. From Chapter 22: "The problem of technology has long been recognized as the basic adjustment of man to a mechanized social order" (p. 361). Distinguishes between First and Second Industrial Revolutions. Effects of automation include unemployment and the taking over of some human decision making by machines. A "theological critique" argues against allowing the economy to take on an autonomous character and for subordinating technology to the promotion of "the personal human values of the social virtues" (p. 370). "If men are to be trained to direct and guide an automated economy, they must be trained in the moral-personal values of the social order with a clear perception of the moral-personal goals and the absolute demand for moral means to attain them..." "Raising an engineer merely as an engineer for a technological social order in which he is to make final decisions can never be morally justified" (p. 370). Includes a review of Papal teachings and an extended criticism of featherbedding. Some good references to German discussions, a chronology of the American labor movement, and a brief bibliography.

Kass, Leon. "What's Wrong With Babel?" *American Scholar* 58, no. 1 (Winter 1989), pp. 41-60. Classic Straussian biblical commentary. Kass takes Genesis 11:1-9 and compares the story of Babel with Plato's myth of the cave. In both stories the "fire" of technology is central to the rise of civilization and the simultaneous "fall of man." The desire for self-sufficiency embedded in the dream of the universal city (Babel) and in the dream of the autonomous knowledge of good and evil (Adam and Eve) ultimately leads to humankind's complete estrangement from God. God's punishment by the "confusion of speech" fits the crime of prideful self-sufficiency. "The emergence of multiple nations... challenges the view of human self-sufficiency. Each nation, by its very existence, testifies against the godlike status of every other... The prospect of war ... prevents forgetfulness of mortality, vulnerability, and insufficiency. Such times

of crisis are often times that open men most to think about the eternal and the divine" (pp. 55-56). Kass compares the universal language before Babel (Gen 11:1) with the new universal language of "symbolic mathematics" so necessary to "the dream of Babel today." Contains many arguments similar to those in Ellul's *The Meaning of the City* (1970).

Klotz, John W. *Ecology Crisis: God's Creation and Man's Pollution*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971. Pp. 176. Spends more time cataloguing numerous environmental problems than articulating a Christian ethic of ecology. Reviewed by Wilbur L. Bullock in *Christian Scholar's Review* 2, no. 1 (Fall 1971), pp. 87-88.

Mangum, John M., ed. *The New Faith-Science Debate: Probing Cosmology, Technology, and Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989. Pp. x, 165. Proceedings from a conference of 45 young theologians and scientists-technologists on the theme "The New Scientific/Technological World: What Difference Does It Make for the Churches?" (Larnaca, Cyprus, 1987). Paul Abrecht, from the "Foreword": "The discussion of science and faith is at least several centuries old, but the confrontation that began in the middle of this century - roughly after the discovery of nuclear energy and its use in the making of atomic bombs - has raised quite new issues. In the earlier confrontation the fundamental issue was the clash between Christian belief and scientific knowledge, especially between the scientific understanding of the world and Christian views on creation. In that debate the churches were generally on the defensive... The contemporary encounter between faith and science is quite different from the earlier one. The rapid advances of modern science, its tremendous successes, and the technological revolution to which it has led in the last half century have given rise to new concern and questions about the future of humanity in a world increasingly dominated by scientific understanding. Today, as a result, science and science-based technology are on the defensive, and religious faith, speaking in the name of troubled and anxious humanity, has begun to ask questions about the consequences of the scientific world view" (p. viii). Contents: Bengt Gustafsson's "The Current Scientific World View," Arthur Peacocke's "The Challenge of Science to Theology and the Church," Victor Westhelle's "The Challenge of Theology to Science and the Church," Gerhard Liedke's "The Challenge of the Church to Science and Theology," Harold P. Nebelsick's "The Uisk of the Church in the New Scientific Age," Judith K. Larsen's "How High-Tech Is Changing American Society," Ronald Cole-Turner's "Genetic Engineering: Our Role in Creation," Naozumi Eto's "Asian World Religions and Post-modern Science," Vincent P.K. Titanji's "Scientific Research Is My Christian Vocation," Ted Peters' "Reflections on Science as a Vocation," Robert John Russell's "Agenda for the Twenty-first Century," and Paulos Mar Gregorios' "Six Biblical Studies." Appendices contain group reports from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, North America, and international roundtables.

"Manufactured Motherhood: The Ethics of the New Reproductive "techniques." *Logos* (Philosophic Issues in Christian Perspective; Santa Clara University), vol. 9 (1988). Pp. xi, 213. Part I, "General Issues in Reproductive Ethics," contains Albert R. Jonsen's "Ethics of Reproductive Technology: The Deconstruction of a Paradigm," Lisa

Sowell Cahill's "Women, Marriage, Parenthood: What Are Their \*Natures'?", Joseph Ellin's "Reproductive . Technology, Catholicism, Feminism and the Thesis of Bootstrap Pessimism," and Nancy (Aim) Davis's "Reproductive Technologies and Our Attitudes Towards Children." Part H, "Surrogate Motherhood," contains Lori B. Andres' "Feminism Revisited: Fallacies and Policies in the Surrogacy Debate," Herbert T Krimmel's "Surrogate Mother Arrangements from the Perspective of the Child," Usa H. Newton's "Surrogate Motherhood and the Limits of Rational Ethics," Leonard M. Heck's "Surrogate Motherhood: Is It Morally Equivalent to Selling Babies?", June Carbone's "The Uimits of Contract in family Law. An Analysis of Surrogate Motherhood," and Laurence D. Houlgate's "Whose Child? In Rt *Baby Af* and the Biological Preference Principle." Part HI, "Other Issues," contains David N. James' "Why Donor Artificial Insemination Is Immoral" and Kevin M. Stanley's "Moral Issues and Public Policy Concerns Surrounding Sex Preselection." Despite the commitments of *Logos*, only two articles deal at any length with uniquely Christian perspectives on the issue of "manufactured motherhood." Cahill considers the *Instruction* on reproductive technology of the the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (1987) and its distinction between homologous methods (involving only the married parents, as in artificial insemination with husband) and heterologous methods (e.g., artificial insemination with donor or AID). Cahill criticizes the Vatican *Instruction* argument for rejection of homologous methods but agrees with arguments against heterologous methods. James, however, later rejects the natural law critique of AID. For James, none of the "possible senses of 'natural' warrant the conclusion that while ordinary procreation is natural and therefore right, AID is unnatural and therefore wrong" (p. 183).

McDonagh, Sean. *To Care for the Earth: A Call to a New Theology*. Santa Fe, NM: Bear & Co., 1986. Pp. 224. Examines the current ecological crisis and proposes a new theology of the earth based on the writings of Tfeilhard de Chardin and Thomas Berry. By an Irish Columban missionary who has spent many years in the Philippines.

Ovitt, George, Jr. *The Restoration of Perfection: Labor and Technology in Medieval Culture*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987. Pp. xii, 272. Chapter one contrasts the modern view of progress as technology with the traditional Christian theology of progress as growth in self-mastery. Chapter two argues against the Lynn White thesis of Christian responsibility for the doctrine of the virtuousness of technology. Chapter three qualifies Max Weber's observations regarding the positive interpretation of work in medieval monasticism by noting that in monastic theology work was always subordinate to spiritual growth and the development of community. Chapters four and five examine medieval attempts to locate the "mechanical arts" in a hierarchy of values and concludes that while always ranking them low, the 1200s witness an increasing respect for technology because of revolution-aiy changes in agriculture, energy use, and commerce that gave rise to a gradual "secularization" of labor. Theological acknowledgement of work as an independent domain in society is more an accomodation than a creation. Chapter six offers a somewhat speculative sociology of workers in the middle ages.

Pope, Hugh. "St Augustine and the World of Nature," in *St. Augustine of Hippo* (Garden City, NY: Image, 1961), pp. 207-231. On the empirical observations of Augustine the naturalist. Mentions Augustine's argument that the book of nature, like the books of Scripture, leads to an understanding of God.

Silva G., Sergio, SSCC. *La Idea de la tecnica moderna en el magisterio de la iglesia desde Pio XII hasta Juan Pablo II* (1985) [The idea of modern technology in church teaching from Pius XII to John Paul II (1985)]. *Anales de la Facultad de Teologia*, vol. 38 (1987), no. 2. Santiago de Chile: Pontificia Universidad Catolica de Chile, 1989. Pp. 166. An excellent and well documented study of statements on technology by recent popes and Vatican Council II. The official Vatican attitude - with subtle but significant shifts between popes (e.g., John XXIII on nuclear weapons, Paul VI on development, increasing prominence of the problem of ecology, etc.) - emphasizes both the greatness and the risks of modern technology. As Silva concludes: There is "a positive evaluation of technology in itself, that is, of the capacity that God has placed with humanity to know and to dominate nature. But this does not mean that contemporary technological progress is equally acceptable" (p. 133). Repeatedly, papal documents refer to "the ambiguity of modern technology." "This ambiguity consists, in the first place, in that the forces controlled by technology can be used for good or bad. It is, therefore, fundamentally an ambiguity of humanity, wounded by sin. Nevertheless, the indefinite growth of the power that contemporary technology puts in the hands of this wounded humanity gives the problem a new dimension and makes it qualitatively distinct. Ambiguity is different when it is concerned with the ability to kill a few people or to destroy all life on the planet." "But the ambiguity of contemporary technology is not rooted solely in the use that is able to be made of it to support life or to sow death. There is also a serious danger to the human spirit. The problem has two aspects. On the one side there is the issue of method... On the other side... the problem is cultural..." "The popes point out still a third aspect that contributes to making modern technology an ambiguous phenomenon. This concerns the difficulty of controlling and dominating technical development and all its effects in the life of society" (p. 134). This book is based on "La tecnica y su influencia en la cultura: El pensamiento del magisterio desde Pio XII hasta Pablo VI," *Theologia y Vida* 21, nos. 3-4 (1980), pp. 287-329; and "Alcances y riesgos de la tecnica moderna: El pensamiento del Magisterio universal de la Iglesia desde Pio XII hasta Pablo VI," *Revista Universitaria de la Universidad Catolica de Chile*, whole no. 6 (October 1981), pp. 79-91. See also the author's "La tecnica moderna en la crisis cultural de nuestro tiempo," *Revista Universitaria de la Universidad Catolica de Chile*, whole no. 14 (1985), pp. 18-25.

Stackhouse, Max L. *Public Theology and Political Economy: Christian Stewardship in Modern Society*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987. Pp. xiv, 177. Chapter 8 is on "Sacrament and Technology." "In religion, sacrament is the primal form of technique - it is the skill and the art by which we symbolize the most profound connections between the most abstract logics of meaning and the realities of the material world" (p. 153). "Were the rich significance of sacramental actions spelled out and made living realities

in modern technological societies, our stewardship of the Word might not only become enfolded in ritual behaviors and liturgical forms. It might become publicly embodied in a more just, participatory, and sustainable technological civilization able to resist the temptation to use the bomb and less inclined to idolize artificial intelligence than to seek, trust, and honor the one Intelligence that stands behind it all" (p. 155).

Tillich, Paul. *The Spiritual Situation in Our Technical Society*. J. Mark Thomas, ed. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988. Pp. xxi, 213. Previously unpublished lectures, untranslated papers, and uncollected articles. Contents: "The World Situation" (1945), "The Lost Dimension in Religion" (1958), "The Logos and Mythos of Technology" (1927, trans.), "The Freedom of Science" (1932, trans.), "Participation and Knowledge: Problems of an Ontology of Cognition" (1955), "How Has Science in the Last Century Changed Man's View of Himself?" (1965), "The Decline and the Validity of the Idea of Progress" (1966), "Expressions of Man's Self-Understanding in the Philosophy and the Sciences" (1963, lecture), "Thing and Self" (1959, lecture), "The Person in a Technical Society" (1953), "Environment and the Individual" (1957), "Conformity" (1957), "The Relationship Today between Science and Religion" (1960), "Religion, Science, and Philosophy" (1963, lecture), "Science and the Contemporary World in the View of a Theologian" (1961), "The Technical City as Symbol" (1928, trans.), "Has Man's Conquest of Space Increased or Diminished His Stature?" (1963), "Seven Theses concerning the Nuclear Dilemma" (1961), and "The Hydrogen Cobalt Bomb" (1954).

Williams, George Huntston. "Christian Attitudes Toward Nature," *Christian Scholar's Review* 2, no. 1 (Fall 1971), pp. 3-35 and *Ibid.* 2, no. 2 (Spring 1972), pp. 112-126. Extensive review of scriptural, patristic, and later theological literature on nature with a view toward countering Lynn White's thesis regarding the responsibility of Christianity for the ecological crisis (by a church historian). Williams investigates seven sets of scriptural antinomies and their theological traditions: (1) the involvement (Gen 3:17, Rom 3:22) or involvement (Gen 1:31, Ps 19:1) of nature in the fall of man, (2) nature as decaying (IV Ezra 5:55, Ps 102:26) or as constant (Eccl 7:10), (3) nature as intrinsically good (Prov 8:30, Is 55:12) or as only instrumental to human dominion (Gen 1:28 & 9:1, Ps 8:6), (4) the desert wilderness as benign (Is 35:1, Jer 2:2, Rev 12:6) or as malign (Joel 2:3, Matt 4:1), (5) the books of nature and scripture as complimentary (Rom 1:20) or mutually exclusive (Rom 8), (6) the kingdom of God as pastoral (Gen 2:15) or political (Rev 21:1-2), and (7) salvation as pertaining to humankind alone (all of Scripture) or to the whole of creation (Is 11:16, 1 Cor 15:28, Col 1:20). Arguments similar to H. Paul Santmire's *The Travail of Nature* (1985). Oddly, on page 113, Williams quotes Rom 1:20 and references the quote as Rom 8:19. This essay appears in much abbreviated form under the same title in *Colloquy* 3, no. 4 (April 1970), pp. 12-15. The fourth antinomy is the subject of an entire book by Williams, *Wilderness and Paradise in Christian Thought: The Biblical Experience of the Desert* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962).

Young, David P. *The Speed of Love: An Exploration of Christian Faithfulness in a Technological World*. New York: Friendship Press, 1986. Pp. viii, 149. An introduc-



tion, prologue, and first two chapters argue for a religious judgment of technology as destroying human scale and not being used to help the poor. Quoting Kosuke Koyama: "Love has its speed. It is an inner speed.

It is a spiritual speed. It is a different kind of speed from the technological speed to which we are accustomed" (pp. 2-3). "What is critical is not how to regulate technology by laws or restrictions, but rather how to change *our relationship* to technology through our values and discipleship choices. The important issue should be which technologies we choose to use and which we choose not to use because of what they do in terms of justice to person and planet" (pp. 6-7). Followed by chapters dealing with the destruction of mystery, computers, biotechnology, and nuclear power. Two concluding chapters stress that technology is not natural and that Christians must invent the future. There is a "leader's Guide" with suggestions on how to use each chapter in a discussion class. A bit breezy, but useful as Sunday school literature, and as reflecting dedicated reformist liberal Christian thinking engaged with technology. A companion volume: David P. Young, ed., *21st Century Pioneering: A Scrapbook of the Future* (New York: Friendship Press, 1986), a collection of essays, cartoons, poetry, etc.

**Issue #6 Nov 1990 — Faith and  
Wealth in a Technological  
Civilization**

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## A Forum For Scholarship on Theology in a Technological Civilization

In his recent book *Circus of Ambition* (Warner, 1989) John Taylor documents "the culture of wealth and power in the eighties." If accurate, his findings are discouraging indeed. Coupled with unabashed greed and power-mongering we might also think of the latest trends in the human misery index: five-hundred million people starving, one billion persons living in absolute poverty, and two billion people with no regular, dependable water supply. By the end of this calendar year the United States will spend \$6 billion to keep its peace-keeping troops in Saudi Arabia and neighboring countries. How should a Christian think, and take action, in light of such realities?

The present issue of the *Ellul Studies Forum* is devoted to Christian perspectives on wealth. It is my pleasure to thank our contributors and to introduce them to you. Our *Forum* authors are Thomas Schmidt and Justo Gonzalez. Thomas Schmidt completed Ph.D. studies at Cambridge University on the theme of hostility toward wealth in the Synoptic Gospels. He currently teaches New Testament studies at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, CA. Justo Gonzalez of Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, GA, is perhaps best known for his two widely read works *Ute Story of Christianity* (2 vols., Harper, 1984) and *A History of Christian Thought* (3 vols., Abingdon, 1988, 13th printing). His most recent work, *Faith and Wealth* (Harper & Row, 1990), explores Christian attitudes toward wealth in the first four centuries of the church.

Concerning our reviewers, Don Thorsen is Professor of Theology at Azusa Pacific University, Graduate School of Theology, in Los Angeles. Michael Novak holds the George Fredrick Jewett Chair in Religion and Public Policy at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, D.C., and is the author of over twenty books. Our final contributor also hails from within the Beltway. After completing a Ph.D. in Religion and Society at Drew University, Dan Heimbach served as a Legislative Assistant for Indiana Senator Richard Lugar. He now serves on the White House staff at the Domestic Policy Council.

*Daniel B. Clendenin*

Guest Editor

## Ellul Forum Conference at AAR, Nov. 17th

If you were confused by the announcement of the annual AAR conference in the last issue it was for good reason. The announcement indicated that the meeting would be held on Friday, November 17th. THAT WAS AN ERROR. The Ellul Forum will meet on Saturday (not Friday) November 17th, from 10 a.m. to 12 noon in the Lafayette room of the New Orleans Marriott. Thomas Hanks, author of *God So Loved the Third World* will present a "Critical Appraisal of Ellul's Sexual Ethics." Hanks is pastor of the Metropolitan Community Church of Buenos Aires, Argentina. He will be responded

to by Nancy A. Hardesty, Visiting Assistant Professor of Religion, Clemson University, Clemson, South Carolina, and by Catherine Kroeger, who holds a Ph.D. in Classics from the University of Minnesota and specializes in women in the ancient world. This forum is open to anyone who is interested.

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# Book Reviews

## *Money and Power* by Jacques Ellul

**Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1984.**

Reviewed by Daniel Clendenin, William Tyndale College.

(Reprinted with permission from the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 27:2, June 1984.)

Readers interested in the steady stream of books from the pen of Jacques Ellul will be happy to learn of the recent translation of one of his older works. *Money and Power*, first published in 1954, with a second edition in 1979, is a theological study that examines the most practical of subjects - money-in light of the ^Biblical revelation. This translation of *L'Homme et Pargent* by LaVonne Neff comes with a foreword by David Gill and an "afterword" by Ellul from the 1979 edition. Readers need not fear that the work is thirty years behind the times for, in Ellul's works, since 1950 "much has changed in appearance, little in reality." Besides, those familiar with the prophet from Bordeaux know that his creative insights and provocative analyses always make for valuable reading.

Our problem with money, writes Ellul, is that it has become abstract and impersonal. As a result we tend to subordinate the individual to the collective and look for answers in a better economic system. This search for a systemic solution is not only wrongheaded, for it overlooks the subjective element of fallen human nature; it is also hypocritical and cowardly, for it constitutes a cop-out We blame the system and deny the importance of our personal responsibility and individual actions. Collective action is not unimportant Ear from it But it must always be rooted in a deep sense of individual responsibility.

In the OX wealth represents God's blessing and reward. The stories of Abraham, Job and Solomon remind us of this. Wealth was even a "sacrament," Ellul suggests, a material sign of a greater spiritual reality. Wealth was bestowed freely, it represented God's superabundant grace, and it had both prophetic and eschatological characteristics. The sacramental sign, however, was always subordinated to the spiritual reality it signified, and our mistake today is to directly identify wealth with blessing.

Jesus Christ abolished the sacramental nature of wealth, for he himself is the ultimate blessing: "What would the gift of wealth mean now that God has given His Son?" He is now our only wealth." Jesus also shows us the true nature of money. It is not only a material reality that raises moral issues but also a spiritual power that is both

active and personal. It is a god that we are tempted to worship. The problems it raises are not only external (oppression, for example) but internal (temptation), and Jesus forces us to choose between it and the true God.

Of special interest in *Money and Power* is Ellul's fourth chapter ("Children and Money"), a discussion that is as unusual as it is needed and helpful. How can we teach our children about money? First, we must adopt a "strict realism" that rejects all idealism and abstraction. Then by attitudes and actions, examples and opportunities, parents must assume a "dialectical" position. We must show our children, for example, that money is useful and necessary, but not for that reason "good," that it is not contemptible, but not respectable either, or something that we worship. Finally, we must avoid moralism and negativism and must realize that a spiritual power can only be fought with the spiritual weapon of prayer.

Ellul addresses these and a host of other practical questions. Who are the poor, and how can the Christian respond to them with meaning and integrity? What are we to make of the many Biblical passages that seem to automatically condemn the rich and bless the poor? What about savings accounts, insurance, asceticism and giving? After reading Ellul's theological study, one is impressed with the sheer number and extent of passages in the Bible that bear on the topic of money. Readers will certainly not agree with all of his conclusions or with his exegesis, but that is no matter. As Gill writes in the foreword, Ellul never writes merely to enlighten a theoretical problem or to elicit intellectual assent. His purpose is to incite action, provoke our thinking and affect our lives. Those open to such a spiritual challenge will by no means be disappointed by Ellul's creative analysis of this sensitive and vital issue.

## ***Public Theology and Political Economy: Christian Stewardship in Modern Society***

by Max L. Stackhouse. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987, xiv + 177 pp.

Reviewed by Daniel Heimbach, the White House, Washington D.C.

In this book Max Stackhouse seeks no less than to reconstruct the public relevance of Christian theology for the modern world. What he has written is partly an apology for the social legitimacy and public relevance of Christian witness, partly identification of resources for the practice of Christian sociology, and partly demonstration that theological perspectives are still needed to understand the deeper dynamics of life in community. Without question, Stackhouse issues a timely reminder that Christians not only can but must "responsibly link our theology to the structures and dynamics of the emerging political economy in a way that guides, refines, and selectively transforms that which is destructive and selectively sustains that which is creative and redemptive" (p. 174).

The work revolves around the conviction that theological ideas play a decisive role in social life and cannot be dismissed as idiosyncratic rationalizations of private faith. "Any transcendent reality worth attending to has implications for what we think and do on earth" having a "direct bearing on how we conduct worldly affairs? (p. x). It is motivated by the author's view that the resources of Christian insight have seldom and adequately come to grips with key features of modern institutional life such as corporations, modern technology, and the multiplication of professions.

Stackhouse begins by laying out four touchstones of authority that enable us to speak in the public domain about ultimate moral reality and to discuss norms regarding why and how human life in community should be directed, sustained and corrected. These touchstones are: Scripture, Tradition, Reason and Experience. He goes on to outline several "motifs" or "themes" that together constitute a matrix of foci for the liberation, vocation, covenant, moral law, sin, human freedom, ecclesiology, Trinity, and Christology. Stackhouse equates these with "ultimate principles of meaning" (p. 17) able to provide normative moral guidance. Each is described and discussed, but only as it pertains to the author's immediate purpose. "Trinity" is thus the idea that unity can be achieved without destroying diversity, that diversity need not be a threat to ultimate truth. "Christology" is the theme of cultural transformation in the name of Christ, which Stackhouse identifies with the formation of a Christian sociology (p. 36).

After "re-" constructing the framework of a public theology in the early chapters, Stackhouse spends the remainder of the book articulating a renewed metaphysical-moral (viz. theological) vision of political (viz. public) economy. In other words, he gets down to the business of demonstrating the practical relevance of Christian theology for politics and economics. Here he addresses four topics: (1) the exercise of political power, (2) the rise of the corporation as the decisive center of production, (3) modern technology, and (4) pluralism as marked by the proliferation of professions.

In my view, Stackhouse makes his most worthy contributions in the practical sections of his work. For example, he warns against the politicization of religion. Politicization results from a confusion of piety with political power and a failure to adequately respect the importance of separating the institutional arrangements of church and state. He goes on, however, to stress that the value of institutional separation does not exhaust the meaning of piety and power. In fact, political power needs the sanction of religious authority to establish its moral legitimacy. Piety shapes political possibility, and "the shape of the dominant piety will shape the future of power" (p. 102).

Students of Jacques Ellul will be interested in how Stackhouse treats modern technology and the dramatic way it has increased our ability to intervene in nature. He observes that theological assessments of technology have gone to opposite extremes. Ellul is treated as a paragon of the pessimistic extreme which views technology as evil - a danger that offers the illusion of mastery of the universe alienating us from God. Ellul's approach is contrasted to others, like Arend van Leeuwen, who have praised technology as so much a product of the Judeo-Christian belief system that it qualifies

as a form of evangelism. Stackhouse settles on a middle-of-the-road approach that appreciates the moral ambiguities of technology but does not exclude recognition of its promise.

Because the book goes to the heart of a heated controversy over the legitimate place of theological witness in a pluralistic society, it will attract criticism and I have some of my own. First, is the rather unusual use of terms beginning with "public" as a modifier for theology. If the word has any meaning, it suggests something to be distinguished from a "private" theology that is idiosyncratic and without relevance to others. By accepting the distinction, Stackhouse sanctions an idea which although it is not novel among the detractors of theology is rarely associated with theologians themselves. "Democratization" is another term employed in a problematic manner. For Stackhouse it means the application of theological resources to the public domain. This usage is wholly unique and unsuspecting readers are warned not to be led astray by the seemingly familiar.

Second, is the almost comic way that Stackhouse undermines his own efforts to buck the intellectual forces of privatization that would exclude theological insight with its call to transcendent moral accountability from the arenas of public life. Although all the motives upon which he relies for normative comment are taken from Scripture (covenant, vocation, Trinity, etc.), Stackhouse so diminishes the authority of Scripture that one is left wondering how he can analyze the dimensions of public life with such confidence. For example, Stackhouse does not believe one can really go to Scripture to read the thoughts of God. Scriptural truth is relative and can change over time. No scripture passage can stand alone to settle what is true. Essentially, Stackhouse denies the normative standing of Scripture text. Thus he actually reinforces the idea that, perhaps more than any other, is responsible for moving people to conclude that theological insight is irrelevant to the public domain.

Stackhouse has written a book to define and defend the public relevance of Christian theology, and has made a fairly stimulating contribution worth consideration by the discriminating specialist, but while the book contains flashes of insight that will reinvigorate believers who may have begun to doubt the legitimacy of applying theological resources to the public domain, Stackhouse has not made a case to convince those who do not already accept the presuppositions of Christian faith, those upon whom it is hoped a public witness by Christians may have an effect.

## ***Faith and Wealth* by Justo L. Gonzalez**

**San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1990.**

Reviewed by Michael Novak. American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research.

The author of the three-volume *History of Christian Thought* and professor at Columbia Theological Seminary, Justo L. Gonzalez, has been so moved by liberation



theology, he confesses, that he began "asking different questions of the same texts and paying more attention to texts dealing specifically with the economic and social order." Such texts, he found, were central to the life of the early church, even though they have usually been treated as tangential to it. One central question preoccupies him: "What Christians thought and taught regarding the rights and responsibilities of both rich and poor," a study of the history of *ideas*, not of economic history. The ancients, he notes, "had no word for our modern concept of economics: and for good reason - "they also lacked the concept." They understood

The connections between the availability of commodities and price fluctuations. They speculated on why money is valuable and the connections between monetary value and societal conventions. What they did not do is link all this together into a coherent view of economic phenomena and their behavior. Much less did they see any connections but the most obvious between government policy and economic order. Not until the time of Diocletian did the Roman Empire have anything that even remotely resembled a budget. Even then, they apparently had little understanding between inflation and the money supply. Thus, while rulers were often concerned about the plight of the poor - for the threat they posed, if for no other reason - their only remedies were stopgap measures such as doles, (p. xiv)

For this reason Gonzalez prefers to speak of "faith and wealth" rather than of "faith and economics," since "strictly speaking, the ancient Christians, like all ancient Romans, had no economics."

The book is divided into three parts: the background of the ancient world; the pre-Constantinian writers on faith and wealth (from the New Testament to Origen, Tertullian and Lactantius); and the period after Constantine, from Athanasius and the Cappadocians to Augustine. A brief concluding summary rounds off the book

There are wonderful nuggets throughout, from the aristocratic Ambrose, who thought that working the land was the only noble occupation, whereas commerce is robbery, to the Cappadocian who taught that international commerce is one of the most dazzling metaphors for the interdependence of the Mystical Body of Christ. The variety in this testimony, the singularity and brilliance of individual views, and the differences in level of insight (both into wealth creating and to Christian truth) are a most interesting feature of this compendium.

Nonetheless, Professor Gonzalez is able to show convincingly that there was considerable consensus on certain limited matters. First, what a person does with his wealth (or with his poverty) is never considered irrelevant to Christian faith. Second, given the role of money and economic knowledge at the time, usury (practically any loan on interest) was universally condemned, even though a moderate amount of interest was legal according to civil law. Again, the early writers stress, as some pagan writers also did, that the seeker after wealth exhibits an unappeased appetite and a disposition to worry, i.e., a sad kind of poverty. (A seeker after wealth is different from a creator of wealth, but the latter concept had not yet appeared in history.)

Other common beliefs: In giving to the poor, one lends to God, and so almsgiving is a very important religious activity. The rich are at a disadvantage when it comes to entering the Kingdom, partly because their wealth gives them both greater responsibilities and partly because it occasions distraction and seduction. Again, "in spite of the unanimously negative attitude toward accumulating wealth, writers share an equally unanimous positive attitude toward the things themselves that constitute wealth" (p. 226). So one must carefully distinguish between meanings of the word "wealth" - it can mean both things and their accumulation. Against gnostic notions about the evil of material creation, the church fathers were careful to insist that all things, including those that are usually counted as wealth, are good. But they also warn against the passion for accumulation and an inordinate love for things.

Great emphasis was also placed upon the voluntary nature of the sharing of goods in common, as was practiced in the first generations. This was later softened to almsgiving, but even here the early Church fathers commanded that one should keep for oneself only what is necessary and give the superfluous to the need}, because "What is superfluous to some is necessary to the poor" (St. Augustine). On these matters, "the teachers and pastors we have been studying are flexible enough not to set stringent rules but to let believers determine what in their own case is necessary and what is superfluous, although some advise that believers should not make this decision strictly on their own, but rather guided by a spiritual mentor. Augustine also suggests the tithe as a minimum measure" (p. 227).

All the early writers take private property for granted, and Clement of Alexandria argues that without private property, no one could obey the commandment of Jesus to give to the poor. Some authors argue that private property exists only because of our fallen condition. In contrast with Roman law, which considered property rights absolute, Christian authors stressed that property ultimately belongs to God; that human beings can claim no more than a temporary ownership of it, a kind of stewardship; and, third, that Christians will be judged on their use of their own property, and specifically how they have shared it with those in need.

As Gonzalez points out, Ambrose stands practically alone in condemning trade, as when he declared that God made the sea for fishing and not for sailing; whereas Chrysostom praises God for creating the sea so that people can travel long distances and meet each other's material needs through trade. And Lactantius declares that just as God gave antlers to the deer to defend itself, humankind has been given each other, so that through social life, mutual support, and trade, we may defend ourselves.

Gonzalez also notes certain development in Christian thought, as time went on. More and more stress comes to be placed upon enjoying the things of this world as a way of pleasing God, and learning to raise one's heart in gratitude and in detachment. The proof of such detachment is the serenity one maintains when everything is taken away - as quite often happened under conquest, plague, and famine in the ancient world, "Things are to be used, not enjoyed," in the sense that preoccupation with things must be avoided. Ironically, this later teaching suggests that the affluent who

do not have to worry about material things may be less spiritually threatened than the very poor whose preoccupation with them is necessary.

Gonzalez closes on this note; "The doctrine of creation remains one of the pillars on which most of the authors we have studied build their arguments on the proper use of wealth" (p. 232). This is exactly the conclusion reached by Pope John Paul II, the reason for his stress on creation theology. By contrast, liberation theology has very little to say about the creation of new wealth, which is badly needed in order to feed and to clothe growing populations, whereas creation theology shares in two important modern insights into the nature of wealth. First, wealth does not consist primarily in land, gold, or precious objects, but in creative ideas. Second, as the main cause of wealth is human capital, or mind, so the main condition for its creation is a social structure favorable to invention, the free exchange of ideas, and *free* intellectual interaction: in short, "the system of natural liberty."

Not until Adam Smith, alas, was there clarity about the nature and cause of wealth of nations sufficient to constitute the new science of economics. Nonetheless, both Gonzalez and contemporary liberation theologians neglect this new knowledge; they think of wealth in a pre-modern, pre-economic way. In the modern view, the main cause of wealth is not conquest or plunder, as the ancients thought, living in their walled cities against just such eventualities; rather, the cause of wealth is invention, discovery, innovation. Under these new circumstances, new wealth can be created without taking anything from anybody else. The early Christian writers lacked such sophistication; basic concepts of economics (including wealth and its creation) had not yet been formulated, and many modern theologians still entertain premodern conceptions of wealth. Gonzalez does not help us to overcome this deficiency.

Just the same, in commending intense concern for the poor, and both detachment from material things and respect for them as gifts of God, the early Christian writers taught some moral lessons of enduring value. Yet on the urgent questions that concern us today — how to design systems of political economy that will raise the poor out of poverty, and how to nourish Christian prayer and virtue in a prosperous society (whose economic system works) the early Church writers have very little to say. How could they? Systematic reasoning about economic matters would require many more centuries of trial and error - some thirteen more centuries after Augustine - before it would come to fruition. Indeed, there is still more to do on this front today; the development of economics and of Christian reflection upon it is not at an end. This book is a useful text in such reflection, but it is marred by its lack of sophistication about modern economics. One wishes that the same texts would be read in a more sophisticated light; one suspects that they might have much to say about creation theology, human capital, and the inventive power of mind.

## *The Stewardship of Life in the Kingdom of Death.*

Douglas John Hall. Rev. Ed., Eerdmans for the Commission on Stewardship, National Council of Churches, 1988, 144 pages.

Reviewed by Don Thorsen, Azusa Pacific University

In *The Stewardship of Life in the Kingdom of Death*, Douglas

John Hall refers to the ancient concept of stewardship as an all-encompassing symbol for the meaning of the Christian life. Hall contends that Christians should live as stewards of life in a world that can legitimately be called a "kingdom of death" - a world in which people experience suffering, injustice, oppression, war, and the threat of nuclear holocaust. Hall conceives of "life" in terms of the present world, and the Christian mission is to act, confront, resist, and protest in ways that improve the quality of our world. He rejects the "spiritualization" of the gospel characteristic of most contemporary churches (100). Hall wants to reverse the process of presenting eternal life as something that comes in the future. Instead, the abundant and eternal life of God's kingdom should be conceived "concretely as a quality that belongs to the here-and-now" (115).

The structure of Hall's book consists of five meditations upon passages in scripture, drawing upon the central motif they present. In these meditations, Hall discusses the current confusion in Christian mission, the deathlike orientation of the world, God's covenant with life here-and-now, the Christian mandate to become involved in God's plan for the world, and the hope of effecting qualitative changes in all dimensions of life. Hall provides dialogues for discussion at the end of each chapter and a brief synopsis of the five meditations at the end of the book.

Hall exudes passion for Christians to recognize their responsibility to live as Christians in the world. He realizes the depth of problems facing people today, and strives to persuade Christians to "participate in God's mission to preserve and enhance the world's life in the midst of civilizational decay and death" (124). Hall considers the stewardship of life a mandate to act in accordance with the covenant of life God has made with the whole creation (and not just people). This mission implies a strong polemic against war and a quest for justice that is hard for peoples of affluent nations to grasp.

The use of meditations is a provocative approach to the subject of the book, but Hall's exegesis is not. Hall is as guilty of ignoring the context of scriptural passages and of offering a truncated gospel as those he criticizes of spiritualizing the Christian message. For example, Hall romanticizes the older Testament tradition of Judaism as if it represents a pristine source of divine truth without influence from other cultures, and repudiates much of the newer Testament due to Hellenistic influences. As a result, Hall considers Christians to be stewards of a "political gospel" (54), which sacrifices the holistic nature of the Christian message - found in the older as well as newer Testament - for the sake of rectifying centuries of social irresponsibility. A more compelling

scriptural argument could be made on behalf of his concern for stewardship of life in a kingdom of death.

*The Stewardship of Life in the Kingdom of Death* represents the revised edition of an earlier book by the same name. Hall did not make extensive changes in his revised edition, but tried to clarify points which readers found ambiguous in the original. In particular, Hall responds to confusion over his criticism of Christian "evangelicalism" as too diffuse. So in several places he distinguishes between traditional forms of Christian conservatism and popular contemporary expressions of Christian triumphalism. However, Hall continues to generalize and sometimes caricature what he refers to as sectarian (fundamental, evangelical, and spiritualistic) Christianity.

# Forum

## Some Reflections on Faith and Wealth

**Justo L. Gonzalez Columbia Theological Seminary**

I have been asked to write a reflection on the ethical ramifications of my recent book, *Faith and Wealth*. In some ways, I am more inclined to reflect on its theological ramifications. The reason for this is that, partly as a result of my research, I have begun to see the value of a different approach to issues of theology and ethics. As a theologian, what I find most significant in my research is the central role that issues of faith and wealth play in the theology of most early Christian writers. Many of us have been formed in an academic tradition in which there is a separate field of "social ethics," whose principles of action are largely drawn as corollaries from theology and doctrine. From this perspective, issues of wealth are an appendix to issues of faith. Theology has to do with the doctrine of the Trinity, of creation, etc. Money, on the other hand, is an ethical issue. First we must clarify the faith, and then we may discuss matters of wealth.

That is not what I find in most Christian writers of the first four centuries. On the contrary, to them issues of wealth are integral to issues of faith, to the point that a test of orthodoxy is how one deals with the widow, the orphan and the poor. If one were to take as an example Ambrose's doctrine of creation, one would soon see that this doctrine is also an understanding of property rights and their limits. Thus, one does not do theology first, and then reflect on its ethical implications. Rather, one lives out a faith, one practices an ethic, and in the very process of that living out, one begins to reflect on the theological dimensions of the faith.

Thus, what has most intrigued me as my research has progressed is not the number of passages dealing with faith and wealth (literally, hundreds of them), nor the surprisingly radical statements contained in many of them, but the scant attention that such passages have received in later centuries - and certainly among North-Atlantic Protestant scholars. Why is it that we have been so interested in discovering what Ambrose had to say about creation, or about baptism, but not in what he had to say about money and about property?

One may take as an example the emphasis in the early church on the commonality of property. It is clear that when we speak of such commonality our statements need to be nuanced, for what was meant by such commonality is different from much that is meant today by the same phrase. But even so, the notion of the commonality of property

persisted as an ideal, and often as a practice, for much longer than we usually imagine. Even words that we today use in a different sense, such as *koinonla* -and especially the verb, *koinondin*- have meanings and overtones relating to such commonality. Much could be said about this. In the limited space available here it should suffice to indicate that, when two people are *koinondi*, this does not mean that they have "fellowship" with each other, but rather that they are partners in a business venture, or that they own something in common. And *koinon<sup>in</sup>* does not mean to have nice feelings towards each other, but to share with each other - which is also true of the Latin counterpart, *communicare*. In any case, what I find surprising is not all of this, but rather that, in spite of so much talk about *koinonla* -and perhaps because of it - we have somehow managed to take the teeth out of what was a very radical understanding of the Christian community and of stewardship within it. Thus, the primary question is not whether we should practice the *koinoma* of the early church. That certainly is open to debate, since there are many differences between the social and economic order of late antiquity and ours. The primary question is why we have done so much to obscure what the early church said and did about its own *koinonla*.

As I reflect on these matters, it is clear to me that the reason for such historical neglect and misrepresentation is not primarily historical, but ethical. It is not that we have not had the texts available to us. It is rather that we have had reason to fear what the texts say. Indeed, when late in the nineteenth century and early in the twentieth there were a few scholars -mostly Roman Catholic monastics living under vows of poverty-who began unearthing some of the more radical economic views of the "Fathers," there soon was a strong reaction seeking to suppress and to ridicule their findings. As one now reads the texts from those debates, it is evident that what was at stake was not so much the historical question of what the ancients said, but the fear that this could be used to bolster modern socialist ideas. Those who attacked the so-called socialist interpretation of the "lathers" did so under the guise of historians and theologians; but in truth they were defenders of the status quo. In the final analysis, the question was not historical, but ethical.

The same is true today. Ultimately, the question for us is not what the ancients said, but what we are to say and to do. The ancients may serve us as an example; but we have no right to shift unto their shoulders the responsibility for whatever decisions we make. Indeed, what we can see and read in their texts will greatly depend on the degree to which we are actively seeking God's will for us today, and certainly upon the particular calling which we have received from God.

Then, as I reflect on these matters, *I* can only do'so as the person I am, one who has been called and ordained as a teacher and pastor to God's flock. Economists may be led by my book and by the writings of the ancients to a different series of reflections. But I am not an economist, and do not pretend to be. I am a pastor and a preacher, and it is as such that I read the ancients and seek to draw implications for my present task.

As a pastor in a North-American denomination most of whose members are far wealthier than the vast majority of humankind, I do have much to learn from the ancients and their preaching. When reading their writings, and especially their sermons, I am immediately led to ask, why were these early Christian preachers ready and able to preach in such a way? Clearly, the first requisite for such preaching is conviction. We must not think that such preaching was easy or did not involve a cost. It was precisely because of his preaching on matters such as this that Chrysostom died in exile. And for the same reasons Basil, Ambrose and others clashed with bureaucrats, landowners, and emperors.

This conviction included a genuine pastoral concern for the rich in their congregations. Chrysostom's words to that effect were no mere rhetorical device. He was indeed convinced that, were he not to speak the truth to those among his flock who were rich, and show them the radical demands of the Gospel, he would be leading them towards damnation. Furthermore, some who had the harshest words against the greed of the rich had themselves come from the richer classes: Ambrose, Basil, Gregory of Nazianzen, Gregory of Nyssa. They were not thundering against "the rich" in general.

Many of "the rich" were their relatives and friends with whom they had grown up. It was out of concern for them that Basil said that those who withhold food from the hungry, or clothing from the naked, are nothing but "thieves." And for the same reason his brother Gregory of Nyssa bewails the fate of households whose wealth could relieve the misery of many, without themselves suffering from it.

Then, such preaching was possible because the preachers themselves had embraced a different way of life. Belonging themselves to a class where success in life was counted on the basis of the accumulation of wealth, they had refused to follow that path. All of them had given all or most of their own possessions to the poor, and lived very modestly. Indeed, this is a common theme in ancient Christian biography, to the point that it becomes the *sine qua non* of holiness. Preachers such as Ambrose and Basil could show the folly of a societal system in which people were valued according to their possessions, precisely because they themselves had given up their possessions. They could speak of giving money to the poor rather than to the church and its treasury, because they saw themselves as pastors of an entire city, rich and poor, and not as managers and builders of the assets of an institution.

What does all of this mean for us? I do not really know. Or rather, I think I know... but I am afraid to find out! Perhaps one of the reasons why we do not hear much of this sort of preaching today is that we preachers have ourselves embraced a way of life in which our value and success are measured by our own income, which in turn is largely determined by the size of our churches and the class to which our membership belongs. Perhaps one of the reasons is that we are more concerned for the wellbeing of the church as an institution than we are for the wellbeing of the poor. Perhaps, over the years, we have grown accustomed to an interpretation of the gospel that is more amiable and less demanding. Perhaps we no longer consider the poor part of the flock



whom we must defend. Perhaps we no longer really consider ourselves shepherds of the rich, for whose souls we must answer. Perhaps.

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## Luke 14:33 and the Normativity of Dispossession

Thomas E. Schmidt Westmont College

### Ellul and Voluntary Poverty

Hui's *Money and Power* offers many insights which fly in the face of current politicized discussions of the subject and which are, in my opinion, supported by close scrutiny of the Gospels. Key among these are the link between personal wealth and independence from God, the expansion of the definition of the poor (and Jesus as the Poor One) beyond economic and political categories, and the suggestion that the appropriate response is personal and non-programmatic. My purpose in this essay is to extend the last area of discussion from a biblical theological perspective.

Ellul concludes the book by making the Rich Young Ruler story a paradigm of the Christian response (161):

We see in this story everything we have described up to this point: material emptying ("see what you possess"), spiritual emptying ("follow me"), joining the ranks of the poor without there being any social solution, without any amelioration of their fate ("give to the poor").

Rightly pointing out that all are rich who "know the impassable distance that still remains between them and the Poor One" (156), Ellul appears to confirm the normativity of the passage. But while he is not specific, he seems to understand this *essentially and not literally*. Commenting earlier on the same passage (113-114), he remarks:

But could we not ask if, as a result of our personal consecration, we should not give all of our goods? We think of the case of the rich young man to whom Jesus said, "Sell off that you have and distribute to the poor..and come, follow me" (Lk 18:22). We absolutely must not try to sidestep this order; for example by separating the scriptural commandments given to perfected Christians from the others. We must, on the contrary accept the order with all its vigor and its absolute character. Yet even so, this order is rather unusual; we do not find it frequently in either Old or New Testament. We must take it then as a possibility that is always present, a demand that we cannot avoid but that is given only in exceptional cases to people especially called to follow it.

Many interpreters make similar comments in order to dismiss the passage, but Ellul attempts to retain its force. While I do not think that he goes as far as the Gospels warrant, Ellul is consistent with his conclusion when he goes on to suggest that, while "total giving...is not a *sine qua non* of the Christian life," and while it will be "always the exception," nevertheless, "each Christian is called to consider this vocation as a possibility"; it is in fact "a sign and a prophetic act" (114-115). It is refreshing to see a self-described evangelical dare to take the Gospel demands so seriously. My purpose is to affirm this daring by considering carefully a single text which appears to call for complete dispossession of material goods as a condition of discipleship.

## The Importance of Luke 14:33

Why a single text? Certainly the avoidance of the "vocation" of voluntary poverty has been served historically by those who can counter any one text by providing an example of a rich saint, or by noting that Jesus did not always demand total renunciation, or by claiming that such texts are aimed at a bad attitude which not everyone shares. Thus individual passages are rendered powerless by qualifications. Although I have argued elsewhere that such responses are exegetically unsound (not to mention self-serving),<sup>1</sup> it is not merely the limitation of space which leads here to a narrow focus. Rather, I wish to extend Ellul's advocacy of each Christian's consideration of the "call" by *amplifying the voice*. What I mean is that a recognition of the centrality of Jesus should mean that we focus on him for our ethics. If he has a lot to say on a given subject—and on this one he does—we should pay close attention. If he says approximately the same thing in several different ways at several different times—which in this area he does—any one of those sayings is worthy of our attention. Thus *unless Jesus is ethically peripheral or inconsistent, any one command of his will merit the designation*

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<sup>1</sup> My treatment of the relevant passages is contained in *Hostility to Wealth in the Synoptic Gospels* (Sheffield, 1987) 101-162. The substance of the treatment of Luke 14:33 which follows is contained more recently in "Burden, Barrier, Blasphemy: Wealth in Matt 6:33, Luke 14:33, and Luke 16:15," *Trinity Journal* 9 (1989) 178-184.

"normative." Ullis implies, first, that no command of Jesus should be neglected or cursorily interpreted. It also implies that Scriptural exceptions and alternative biblical models must be understood in light of Jesus as the central focus of the Scriptures, not the other way around. The record of the Church in recognizing these implications is a sorry one. Let us set that record aside for several pages and proceed as if one text, Luke 14:33, were the sole and sufficient statement of Jesus on the subject of economic ethics.

The verse is important for several reasons. Its placement is significant as the culminating passage in a chapter devoted to the subject of wealth and its relation to power (Ch. 16 and 18-19 are also important in this regard). The material in the passage gives evidence of extensive reworking by Luke to make its point as forcefully as possible. But perhaps most important for our purposes, there can be no mistaking the intended audience of the demand. Several of the sayings in Luke's Gospel that require dispossession of material goods may be sidestepped as directed only to the Twelve (5:11,28; 6:20-21; 16:9; 12:33; 18:29-30) or to particular individuals (12:21; 16:14-31; 18:22; 19:8). 14:33 is not so subtle: whoever does not meet the condition "cannot be my disciple." "Disciple" (*mathetes*) is employed consistently in Acts to designate believers and so cannot be confined to followers of Jesus during his earthly ministry.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, were we to do so, we would lose the force not only of this but of virtually every command directed to disciples in the Gospel, and we would be forced to consider the ten chapters on discipleship to be intended as an interesting historical specimen. This is hardly admissible; we are left with a verse that is clearly intended to have some practical significance to believers of Luke's generation-and by extension, to believers of our own generation. Precisely what does the demand entail?

## The Context: The Cost Has Been Counted

For which of you, desiring to build a tower; does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, "This man began to build, and was not able to finish." Or what king, going to encounter another king in war; will not sit down first and take counsel whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off he sends an embassy and asks terms of peace. So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:28-33).

"Counting the Cost" is the traditional title for these parables in commentaries. They follow the Parable of the Great Banquet and thus raise questions about the continuity

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<sup>2</sup> The statements of Jesus here are directed to the "multitude" (*ochloi*), which Luke always uses to

of the chapter. If the "excuse makers" and the "disenfranchised" of the parable represent, respectively, the rejecters and receivers of the Kingdom, the ethical instruction of w. 7-14 seems out of place. Banquet-attend-ers are instructed in w. 7-11 to take humble places, and banquetproviders are instructed in w. 12-14 to invite humble guests.

Critical commentators who regard the following parables:: literary vehicle to convey rejection or acceptance of Jesus often regard this ethical instruction as secondary moralizing. But a better explanation involves an appreciation of the convergence of ethical and soteriological matters in the first century Jewish mind. One's behavior at a banquet was in fact indicative of one's eternal destination, and the decision to accept or reject Jesus's invitation to the Kingdom generally coincided with social position. Thus when we conclude that the unifying theme of w. 7-24 is that a person ought to renounce power or "humble" himself, this must be understood in terms of both inward orientation and outward manifestation (behavior and/or position). Therefore, while at a narrative level the transition from banquet parable to outdoor address is awkward, the continuity of theme justifies the construction of the chapter. The common theme is that personal sacrifice is an essential expression of one's standing before God. More specifically, economic sacrifice, or identification with the poor (perhaps in the sense of becoming poor), will mark an individual as a subject of the Kingdom.

At first glance, v. 33 appears to be an overly specific inference from the parables of w. 28-32, and commentators have struggled to make sense of the connection. The explanation is found in the connection to w. 26-27, which precede the parables:

If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

The saying about family loyalty occurs in Matthew in another context (10:37), and the cross-bearing saying occurs in different contexts in three places (Mark 8:34; Matt 10:38; Luke 9:23-25). The formal connection between w. 26-27 and v. 33 is obvious in the beginning, "Whoever does not...". The specific objects of sacrifice are repeated elsewhere in the Gospels and are in fact combined in the important summary of the Rich Young Ruler passage (Luke 18:29). The pattern in this passage, while unusual by modern standards, involves putting the central statement in the middle of the list. This B-A-B pattern means that v. 27 is the general statement, and w. 26 and 33 are the specifications of it. This is confirmed grammatically by the *gar* which connect the parables as the ground of v. 27 and the *oun* which connects v. 33 as the inference from the parables.

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refer to the non-committed audiences of his teaching. In four places (6:17; 7:11; 9:18; 12:1), a distinction is made between "multitude" and "disciple." Although "disciple" is in some instances synonymous with the Twelve (9:18; 12:1), this is the case only when there is not indication of the presence of other believers. Luke distinguishes between "disciples" and "apostles" in 6:13, and elsewhere he employs "disciples" to

This review of the context and structure of the passage helps to establish the general import of 14:33, but some crucial questions remain with regard to the parables and the meaning of the verse itself. The parables, as they are usually interpreted, present the unique notion that an individual calculates in advance whether or not he or she has "what it takes" (presumably spiritual strength) to become a follower of Jesus. It is also very odd to *infer* from this that discipleship is conditional upon renunciation, and I will suggest that another understanding of the parables clears away the confusion. The terms in v. 33 introduce another series of questions. Does "renounce" require physical abandonment or only mental detachment or "readiness" to part with things? Does "aU that he has" mean material possessions or earthly attachments in general? Does "disciple" denote anyone who will enter the Kingdom or only those with a particular vocation? After setting out a new interpretation of the parables and their connection to the demands, I will argue for the first option in each case and then offer some thoughts about the practicability of the passage.

### **Inadequacy of Resources in the Parables of w. 28-32**

J. Jeremias summarizes the traditional explanation of the parables in w. 28-32: "Do not act without mature consideration, for a thing half done is worse than a thing never begun."<sup>3</sup> There are two objections to this explanation. First, it presents an exception to the normal call to discipleship-and indeed, the surrounding demands-by describing it as deliberative and focused on the resources of the individual rather than the resources of God. Second, it makes the parables virtually irrelevant to v. 33. We should expect a consonant summary, such as, "Therefore, you must choose from the beginning to endure to the end." Instead, we find a resumption of the "humble yourself" theme.

A. JUlischer approached an acceptable understanding of the parables by arguing that both parables stress complete sacrifice as necessary to accomplish an important task.<sup>4</sup> The weakness of this understanding was noted by Wellhausen, who pointed out that v. 33 requires the opposite: instead of committing all of one's resources to the task, one must abandon one's resources.<sup>5</sup> Jullicher's explanation meets this objection of the parables' conclusion and is meant to be ironic, but this is probably overly subtle.

It is possible to understand the parables in a new way by stressing their linguistic connection to the conclusion rather than to the phrase, "count the cost." The key is the idea of *ability*. In w. 26,27, and 33, one is not able (*dunatai*) to be a disciple. In v. 31, the king must be able (*ei dunatos* cf. *ei eksei* in v. 28) to meet the opposing army. The implication in both parables is that the subjects do not have sufficient resources and

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designate large groups of believers (6:17; 19:37, and over 20 times in Acts).

<sup>3</sup> J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (2nd ed.; New York, 1972) 196; see also I.H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, 1978) 591; J. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV* (AB; Garden City, 1985) 1062.

<sup>4</sup> A. Julicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu* (2 vols; Tubingen, 1910)2:208.

<sup>5</sup> J. Wellhausen, *Das Evangelium Lucae* (Berlin, 1904) 80.

that they will be mocked if they begin the task. Here a formal similarity to 14:8 (cf. v. 12) becomes important. In 14:8, the one who acts on the assumption of the adequacy of his resources (taking the place of honor) will be mocked (told to sit in a lower place). If, however, he begins by renouncing his resources (taking the lower place), he will be a disciple (moved to a place of honor). The connection between the parables of vv. 28-32 and their conclusion is more clear if we state the conclusions in converse form: "Reliance on one's own inadequate resources precludes discipleship." The theme is hardly strange to Luke's Gospel: in 17:28-33, ties to family and possessions preclude readiness for the judgment day, and in 12:16-34 and 16:9-12, disciples are urged to get rid of possessions which pose an encumbrance in the present crisis. The *outos* with which v. 33 begins, then, refers not to the beginnings of the parables, which depict cost-counting, but to their endings, which depict humiliation and failure. As tower-building or warmaking with inadequate resources are doomed, so discipleship with the encumbrances of family and possessions is doomed. Humble yourself and you will be exalted: renounce tower and war making and you will escape ridicule; renounce family and possessions and you will be rewarded. This is the argument of Ch. 14.

### The Terms of Luke 14:33

Luke finds a graphic word for renunciation in *apotassomai*. The verb is used only here in NT material concerning wealth. The usual, almost formulaic, expression is "sell and give."<sup>6</sup> In narrative passages, disciples simply "leave" (*aphiemi*) possessions."<sup>7</sup> *Apotassomai* is employed in several NT passages to denote physical separation from persons or things.<sup>8</sup> Its use in earlier and contemporary literature sheds light on its meaning here. The most interesting incidents are in Philo, where the word is used in a similar context, including the following:

...(N)ot only does (Moses) *renounce* the whole belly, but with it scours away the feet, that is, the supports of pleasure...We must not fail to notice that Moses, when he refuses the entire belly, that is the filling of the stomach, he practically *renounces* the other passions too (*Leg. AIL* 3:142-145).

Have you won the Olympic crown of victory over all wealth, and so risen superior to all that wealth involves, that you accept nothing of what it brings for your use and enjoyment?...Will you see all the treasuries of wealth, one after the other; full to the brim, yet turn aside from them and avert your eyes?...For (a celestial and heavenly soul) taking its fill of the vision of incorruptible and genuine goods, *bids farewell* to the transient and spurious (*Deus* 145-151).

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<sup>6</sup> Mark 10:21 and parallels; Luke 12:33; 19:8; cf. Matt 5:42; 13:44-46; Luke 6:30.

<sup>7</sup> Mark 1:16-20; 2:14; 10:28 and parallels.

<sup>8</sup> Mark 6:46; Luke 9:61; Acts 18:18,21; 2 Cor 2:13.

The consistent use of *apotassomai* in the literature of the period to denote physical separation requires the translation "give up" (NTV, NASB, JB) or "part with" (NEB, Modern Language). "Leave behind" is preferable to these translations because it conveys the sense accurately here and in narrative passages. "Renounce" (RSV, Living Bible) and "forsake" (KJV), while fair enough translations according to their dictionary definitions, have been so weakened by abstractions of the verse that they are no longer useful in discussions of the subject

The aorist tense of this verb indicates decisive action and not mere willingness to act, as some have interpreted the intent of the verse.<sup>9</sup> Not only is the notion of "willingness" excluded grammatically, but it also makes a mockery of NT ethics in general: "Not that I have reached the goal or even that I press on toward it, but I remain perpetually willing to move in the right direction if it ever becomes necessary."

"All that he has" (*pasin tois heautou huparchousin*) has been generalized to include not only the disciple's material goods but also "his dear ones and everything his heart clings to. *vea*, even his own life, his own desires, plans, ideals and interests."<sup>10</sup> This kind of explanation may follow from discomfort with v. 33 as an inference from the preceding parables. Unfortunately, the practical result is to render the command so general that no one feels obligated to obey it. The word used here for possessions (*huparchonta*) does not allow such vagueness. It is used consistently in the NT over a dozen times for personal property, including passages in Luke's Gospel on the same theme (8:3; 12:15; 12:33; 19:8; cf. Acts 4:32). The radical nature of the command is highlighted by the word "all" (*pas*), which Luke inserts elsewhere to intensify the tradition (5:11; 5:28; 6:30; 18:22). The terminology here is clear and specific: "all that he has" means things that can be sold, given away, or abandoned.

## Can the Text Be Spiritualized?

We are left with a command which, if allowed to speak on its own merits, appears to call every believer to abandon all possessions as an expression of discipleship. Is there anything in the context which might mitigate the severity of this demand, which might justify the long history of rationalization by believers who read it? The only possibility that I can see in the immediate context is to extrapolate from v. 26b, which calls each believer to give up ("hate"<sup>11</sup>) family and "...yes, even his own life." If Jesus could not possibly mean that disciples must literally die as a prerequisite of discipleship, neither could he mean that they must literally leave behind possessions. Does he mean, then, that renunciation is primarily spiritual until death; *Le.*, that one's devotion culminates in death, which entails loss of family and possessions, and that this truth must be embraced at the beginning? Such a spiritualization of the passage

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<sup>9</sup> E.g. Marshall 594.

<sup>10</sup> N. Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, 1951) 399.

<sup>11</sup> See Schmidt, *Hostility* 126-127 for the argument that "hate" means "leave behind."

would be inconsistent both with Jesus's interest in actual behaviors and the examples of obedience to these commands in the Gospels and Acts. Such "retroactive obedience" is the ethical companion of "cheap grace."

A more sensible common denominator of the commands to leave family, life, and possessions is to understand Jesus as demanding *that from the beginning point of discipleship, one must conduct oneself as if these old resources no longer exist*. The gospel deprives them of their power, or rather, replaces them with a new Power. When decisions are made now, they are not made with these old powers in view. The inevitable result, which is borne out in Gospel narratives and the epistolary literature, is that a new family comes into being, personal safety is disregarded, and possessions are employed exclusively for the work of the Kingdom. The new priorities are, respectively, disloyal, dangerous, and economically foolhardy. A new world has penetrated the old, refusing to compromise.

When we attempt ethical constructs in response to these kinds of statements of Jesus, then, perhaps it is best for us to resist not only spiritualizations of his demands but also justifications of our compromises. We should instead preserve the terminology of striving that Paul used, and we should remind ourselves that the first believers referred to themselves not as Christians but as those of The "Way. to the extent that we follow the new way of Jesus, in our living and not only in our thinking, we are disciples. Renunciation of the power of money will cost us more than a troubled conscience.

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**Respondents:**

**Nancy A. Hardesty and Catherine Kroeger**

Saturday, November 17th, 1990 at the New Orleans Marriott The Lafayette Room  
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**Issue #7 Jul 1991 — Jacques Ellul  
as a Theologian for Catholics**

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It was Martin Marty who once described Jacques Ellul as "the quintessential Protestant" of our time. This issue is devoted to exploring the thesis that this "quintessential Protestant" is also a theologian for Catholics. Back in my "Catholic days" when I first read Ellul, the affinity of his thought with that of both Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton immediately struck me. It is that affinity which is explored in this issue. The work of putting this issue together was made easy by the willingness of Jeff Dietrich and Katharine Temple to allow me to reprint their articles and conversation concerning the suitability of Jacques Ellul's theology for the Catholic Worker movement and its impact upon that movement. These essays first appeared in the *Catholic Agitator* and the *Catholic Worker* which they respectively edit. Following their essays, Gene Davenport explores the parallels between Thomas Merton and Jacques Ellul on *Technique*. The impact of these various essays, I hope, is to show that although Ellul is not a

Catholic theologian he has influenced Catholic thought. This influence is not so much upon the Catholic theological mainstream as it is on the radical anarchistic strand of Catholic thought represented by both the Catholic Worker movement and by Thomas Merton.

In this issue you will also discover reviews of two of Ellul's books recently published by Eerdmans: *The Technological Bluff* and *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes*. Although we previously published a review by Gabriel Vahanian of the French edition of *The Technological Bluff* we thought it appropriate to review it again now that an English translation is available. The book on Ecclesiastes, however, has not been reviewed here before. You will also find reviews of books by Jeffrey Stout and Gene Davenport. I think you will find them all worth your attention.

The next issue (January 1991) will be devoted to Ellul and the Mass Media under the guest editorship of Clifford Christians. Also, it is important to note the death of Lewis Mumford this past year. He and Jacques Ellul are the two great pioneers of the social and historical study of technology. A future issue will be devoted to Mumford's work. Finally, I announce with sadness the news of the passing of the Mme Yvette Ellul, the wife of Jacques Ellul. Our thoughts and prayers are with Jacques Ellul in his time of loss.

*Darrell J. Fasching*, Editor

## In Memory of Mme Yvette Ellul

by Joyce Hanks

Jacques Ellul's wife of 54 years, Yvette Ellul (née Lensvelt), died on April 16, 1991, of cancer of the pancreas, after a three month illness. She will be remembered not only as Ellul's constant companion, driver, helpmeet, and critic, but as someone who contributed on her own to scholarly reflection. She wrote, for example, a wide-ranging series of articles for the Journal *Foi et Vie* which was edited by her husband for many years. The series, entitled "Chronique des livres oubliés," (Chronicle of forgotten books), analyzed works by Simone Schwarz-Bart, Henry James, and Cheikh Hamidou Kane, among others.

Married in 1937, the Elluls had four children, three of whom survive their mother: Jean, Yves, and Dominique (a daughter). Their second son, Simon, died in 1947 at the age of six.

Mme Ellul's hospitality was legendary: she welcomed many Ellul scholars with great quantities of tea time goodies and impressive meals, in addition to lively, thoughtful conversation. Few outsiders probably suspected the extent of Mme Ellul's generous hospitality which included dinner every night for the foreign-born wife of a student of Ellul's, during the years the student served in the French forces of World War II.

Jacques Ellul's frequent spontaneous tributes to his wife can perhaps best be summed up in his response to from Daniel Clendenin (in his 1987 interview with him). He was asked what he considered most important to him as he looked back over the years. Ellul responded that his leadership and creation of the French Reformed parish in Pessac (where the Elluls have lived for decades outside Bordeaux) "gave me the most joy because I did it with my wife."

# Book Reviews

## *The Technological Bluff*, by Jacques Ellul

Translated by G. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990, 418 pp.

Reviewed by Nicola Hoggard Creegan

*The Technological Bluff* is a big dense book, a metadiscourse on the discourse of bluff, by a man who thought he had written his last words in *The Reason for Being*. No one will be surprised that Ellul argues that technique is autonomous, fragile, unpredictable, costly, wasteful, often useless, ugly, ambivalent and ambiguous. But developments in the last ten years have convinced him of the need to write another book about technology. The level of technique now reached—computers, lasers, genetic engineering and space research—together with the discourse on technique, which lauds its positive aspects and ignores the negative, has driven us into an all pervasive technical lifeworld. But this world is a bluff; we do not see the seriousness of our situation, and in fact we are persuaded to think it quite otherwise than it is. This bluff is a "terrorism," in the sense of "molding the unconscious with no possibility of resistance."

Ellul sets out to expose the fragility of technique and of the bluff surrounding it. He is not against technique; he is not for it. But in this book he postulates that with the increasing sophistication of technique there are escalating problems, these problems are inseparable from the positive gains, and the hazards are inherently unpredictable. The stakes are infinite and the potential losses absolute. Technique, then, reveals itself as more inherently problematic than ever, even without the lack of critical reflection and bluff which render it deadly; if technique were subservient to moral reasoning and higher values, Ellul hints, we might have decided that some techniques were not worth the risks. In this regard, and lest we get lost in this meta-level discourse, Ellul reminds us more than once that the common car kills a thousand people a month in France. It is, he says, "the great symbol of diversion and the associated emptying out of reality and truth."

What is this bluff? Ellul describes it as "the rearranging of everything in terms of technical progress." It is "a demonstration of the prodigious power, diversity, success, universal application, and impeccability of techniques." Technique, he explains, is seen *a priori* as the way to progress, and the answer to all collective and individual problems—including those it causes. Positive aspects are magnified, and negative ones concealed. By bluff we come to live in a world of "diversion and illusion."

This bluff is based upon a changed ideology of science—a soteriology of science, on a changed rationality—as justification for power, and on the suppression of moral judgments. Politicians and technicians are among those who consciously lead the adaptation to technique and are hence the main instigators of bluff. Unwitting, spontaneous bluffers include intellectuals, driven by their fascination with technique, and their unwillingness to appear out of date. This bluff creates and is created by a world in which knowledge is power, a world of experts and technocrats, of cooperation between universities and big isolated centers of technical research—the technopolis.

Why is the bluff able to work? It is all encompassing, Ellul suggests. Moreover, the positive aspects are easy to articulate and see while the negative aspects are always “vague phenomena, which are significant only by their bulk and their general nature...but [which] eventually give a certain negative style to human life.” Time and space are distorted, and access to nature is limited. “People are being plunged into an artificial world which will cause them to lose their sense of reality and to abandon their search for truth.” But the bluff obscures that which is lost. Furthermore, the discourse on technique claims most in exactly those areas in which it is failing; there is talk of technical culture, human mastery of technique, technique is said to be rational and human. This is a bluff, argues Ellul. Technical culture is not possible, people live in networks rather than communities, the basis for rationality has changed, and with the advent of the computer, technique has “definitively escaped from control by human will.” Moreover, it marginalizes huge numbers of people, causing unemployment, and social instability.

This leads us, Ellul claims, into a world of absurdity. Technique and its attendant discourse have brought us close to the scenario of the philosophers of the absurd. There is economic absurdity, for example, in Western economies which rely upon the manufacture and consumption of useless gadgets while Third World economies are unable to meet basic needs. There is absurdity in the ability of scientists to manipulate genetic material while being unable to know what kind of genetic model they would desire. There is absurdity in the lack of existential freedom and psychological impotence effected by the escalating diversity of choices technique appears to offer.

Here, as with other Ellulian denunciations of modernity, one reads and wishes to say it is hyperbolic. After all, here I am writing this review, reading the book, in the time saved by technique. I am using a word processor, for a computer-dependent *Forum*. But yes, I hear Ellul reminding me that I am not counting or even seeing the global and personal costs. And although one might feel some resistance, one is relieved, also, that so much of the burden of modern reality is explained by his analysis. On the one hand, like his mentor, Kierkegaard, he draws us into dialogue with ourselves and our culture, to recognition and affirmation. On the other hand one feels the caution one must feel faced with a deluge of facts about things that go wrong, and brought to synthesis by a powerful mind. My intuitions affirm his stance, but my caution reminds me that though his arguments are compelling, the facts upon which they are based were selected and others rejected. Is this a valid and prophetic picture of our life in

modernity? If a prophet's validity is to be found in predictive power Ellul has already shown his credentials; and in light of the recent war, we should note well that one of the warnings in this volume is that "the conflicts which divide multinational concerns, supranational movements,...and nations are now extremely violent, a violence both expressed and enhanced by the multiplicity of techniques, and yet..on the other hand the violence of the confrontations masks the nullity of the stakes."

This is not a theological work, but it is in a dialectical relationship with his theological work. The burden of Ellul's analysis should be understood in the light of his underlying belief that all systems and worldly powers are deceptively bent on destruction. The exposing of the weakness of technique and the false reality in which we live must be juxtaposed to his affirmation of Word as truth, the answer only barely hinted at here, when he affirms that the spiritual and the scientific must listen to each other and that science must remember that "ultimate reality cannot be grasped."

But when he has pushed us to despair at the lifeworld in which we live and with which we inevitably cooperate what are we to do?

Television is a god in this society, he claims. Ellul watches television for the purposes of understanding the world he critiques.

We are left to ponder how we might raise children who as yet have no critical skills in an audio visual world. Ellul always resists answers, always resists systems, and this of course is both frustrating and gratifying. In this book he responds only with the hope that in spite of our being "radically determined" the internal contradictions of the bluff will cause its disintegration. He dares to hope that this will cost as little as possible, and that as individuals we must recognize the "little cracks of freedom" and "install in them a trembling freedom."

I have always been intrigued by Ellul's Kierkegaardian emphasis upon the individual as the answer to collective necessity and evil. After all, only the individual has the freedom capable of opposing the necessity of systems and institutions bound by technique and bluff. But are there not also corporate dimensions to Word, grace and freedom? Ellul offers solutions only as brief sketchy afterword; he wants us to think them out for ourselves. But we might wish that these last paragraphs were longer, if not another boot

## ***Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes* by Jacques Ellul**

Translated by Joyce Main Hanks. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990, 306pp.

Reviewed by Daniel Clendenin

A commentary on a biblical text that warns against the writing of books?! Ellul, of course, delights in this paradox, and those familiar with him and the content of Ecclesiastes will find it no surprise that Ellul declares Ecclesiastes his favorite portion



of Scripture. He begins with his regular dose of modesty, that he is utterly unqualified as a scholar to write the book except for having read and prayed over the text for fifty years, and by explaining his scholarly method that proceeds in the opposite direction of virtually all other scholarly work. Ellul carefully refrained from reading anything at all about his subject as he completed his manuscript. After completing it, he read everything he could find. Predictably, "in the end, my reading of dozens of commentaries gave me no reason to change a single line of what I had said" (3). More seriously, Ellul sees the present work as the "final word" to his life work (even though he has written four books since this one), much as he sees *Presence of the Kingdom* as his prolegomena.

Ellul begins introductory critical matters by rejecting what he senses are three erroneous presuppositions in the study of Ecclesiastes: the necessity of formal linear logic that insists on the law of non-contradiction (paradox and dialectic are key for Ellul), a naive and superficial reading of the text that fails to get to its deeper meaning (for Ellul, the text says more than is written; cf. 284), and the opinion that the text is not Hebraic but rather a reflection of another culture or cultures. Just who is Qohelet? Ellul surveys the options, opts for pseudonymity, and throughout the book simply retains the Hebrew transliteration. After a few other text-critical discussions, Ellul looks at the entire text according to three primary themes, each of which forms a single long chapter, themes of vanity (49-127), wisdom (128-212), and God (213-303).

In Qohelet Ellul discovers the "dissenter par excellence" (30), and he revels in finding in the Biblical text themes of vanity that correspond to what he has elsewhere called commonplaces of society, illusory myths by which we live. For example, Qohelet declares that "progress does not exist" (60), exploding the ideological optimism of Marx, de Chardin, our technicians, scientists, et al. But this is hardly cause for fatalism, pessimism, withdrawal, or inactivity (68); quite the contrary, for among his declarations of vanity Qohelet denounces vanity itself (1:2). What about political power (75f)? It is "vanity, oppression, and foolishness" (84). Money, work, happiness, morality, and human answers all receive like treatment, with the dialectical yes-no spoken to each.

Wisdom is the next prism through which Ellul views the text, and it too, being both praised and damned by Qohelet, results in dialectical vision. It encompasses both knowledge (134-138) and usefulness (138-141). It is at once fragile and impossible. As a uniquely Hebraic revelation, says Ellul, Qohelet's meditation is primarily an attack on Greek philosophy and wisdom; it is an "antiphilosophy" (150,295). Above all, genuine wisdom demands that we recognize our finiteness, especially that finitude that shows itself in our relation to the future (160-171) and to death (171-185). Ellul goes on to apply these two "pillars of wisdom" to three test cases-the word, possessions, and women and the couple.

In Chapter IV Ellul orients his thoughts about Ecclesiastes around the theme of God, beginning with observations about Qohelet's peculiar use of the word *elohim*. Again, traditional Ellul themes emerge here-a strong polemic against all attempts at religion, metaphysics, ontology, or apologetics; God as Wholly Other; the impossibility

of moralizing; the possibility of genuine choice when history is fluid, and the practical determinism or necessity that locks us in if we fail to detect these moments; God as the gracious one who gives gifts (of enjoyment, work, etc.) and who judges (but never condemns); and the identification of obedience with freedom.

As Ellul's declared favorite text and final word, and because of the Scriptural themes throughout Ecclesiastes that bear a distinct dialectical flavor that would justify Ellul's methodology elsewhere (eg: the vanity but necessity of technique), *Reason for Being* will be a good place to enter the Ellulian labyrinth. Those already familiar with him will not find much new here, but rather the same steady convictions that have guided his life and thought, now reaffirmed from the vantage point of Ellul's lifetime of study, prayer, reflection, and incarnated activity.

## ***Into the Darkness: Discipleship in the Sermon on the Mount* by Gene L. Davenport**

Nashville: Abindgon Press, 1988, 302 pp.

Reviewed by Darrell J. Fasching

*Into the Darkness* is a scriptural commentary in the tradition of Jacques Ellul's *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man* or *The Judgment of Jonah*. The challenge of writing in this genre is considerable, for it requires a blending of scriptural exegesis and theological criticism of culture. Therefore *Into the Darkness* is not simply a scriptural exegesis of the Sermon on the Mount, although the author clearly has an excellent command of the historical-critical exegetical nuances of the text. As a theological critique of contemporary culture it is necessarily episodic and unsystematic since contemporary issues are broached as the sequence of issues raised by the text permits. The weakness of this genre lies precisely in the episodic nature of the critique which at times seems "inefficient." But that weakness may well be its strength - the agenda is not set by the world but by the Gospel.

Will Campbell provides the foreword, reminding the reader that Gene Davenport's understanding of the "cost of discipleship" is not purely academic but has deep roots in his early pastoral days. Campbell relates the story of Davenport's defiance of the complicitous racism of the Klu Klux Klan and the U.S. Secret Service in Alabama in the late fifties. The details of that encounter are spellbinding and should not be skipped over in a rush to the first chapter.

The overarching metaphor of Davenport's exegesis is suggested by its title. The Jesus of the Sermon on the Mount is "the Light of God, which penetrates the Darkness" of our technological world. "The Sermon on the Mount," we are told, "is instruction in those motives, attitudes, perceptions, and habits which are characteristics of God himself and which are the dynamics by which the universe itself, in the New Age under the sovereign rule of God, operates" (17).

The book is divided into nine parts which follow the structure of the Sermon as presented in Matthew. Davenport immediately confronts the most typical objection to the Sermon on the Mount - that of those ethical realists who remind us that the Sermon's ethic is impossible and impractical in a fallen world. One sees immediately the influence of Ellul upon Davenport as he critiques current realism for its obsession with technical efficiency and efficacy. The technical imperative (Le., If it can be done it must be done), he tells us, has become a moral imperative. "The final step is to press the ethicists into service. Their role is to justify our desire by developing a rationale and an ideology that will show our actions to be the only moral and most loving course 'under the present circumstances.' Thus it has been with abortion, space exploration, nuclear energy, military weapons, computers, medical developments, 'advances' in education, church management, and so on" (26&27). And so under the guise of an ethic of realism darkness is spread as if it were light. In his critique, Davenport is as hard on the church as he is on the world. The institutional church and media evangelists are both called into question for being far too obsessed with numbers and success. They all too typically rely on the techniques of the world for "peddling the Gospel."

Like Ellul, from whom he has learned much, Davenport has a good deal to say to both the theological liberal and the theological conservative. And like Ellul what he has to say will appeal to both and yet offend both as well. For example:

Excessive biblical literalism is as naive an approach as that which speaks of biblical categories as merely symbolic... If the devil is merely literal, he must be located somewhere, and the opponent is the most logical and convenient place to look. If the devil is merely symbolic, we need not be alert to the danger and possibility that he might pitch his tent in our camp" (35&36).

This is a good book - which is to say that there is something here to offend and provoke almost everyone. If space permitted I would love to quote Davenport's provocative insights on everything from just war and patriotism to the universality of God's saving love which embraces both those within and outside the church. Ellul and Davenport are truly kindred spirits. My appreciation, however, does not mean that I agree with all of Davenport's views. I find both his critique of Gandhi's non-violent strategies as "spiritual technology" (197) and his views on the alienability of human rights (190) unconvincing. And his distinction between "children of God" and "creatures of God" (106,201) seems odd - and at odds with the genealogy in Luke's Gospel which suggests that to be a son of Adam is to be a son of God. Nevertheless, I think Davenport's grasp of the Sermon on the Mount highlights the true "scandal" which the Gospel presents to all realists who seek to explain to Christians why Jesus' Sermon on the Mount cannot be applied in a fallen world.

One of the most consistent habits of the powers and principalities is to convince us that Death is Life, that violence is justice, that power is benev-

olence, that war is peace. In such a world, whose who are truly sane are automatically perceived by the world as insane... Jesus, the only perfectly sane person who has ever lived, was murdered precisely because he bore witness to reality, and this was viewed by the powers and principalities, quite correctly, as a threat to their own authority to deliver the world over to genuine insanity (43&44).

Let's face it - the real scandal of the Sermon on the Mount is not that it cannot be applied but that living it requires that one be willing to embrace the way of the cross.

***Ethics After Babel* by Jeffrey Stout. Beacon Press: Boston, 1988, xiv + 338pp.**

Reviewed by David Werther

One of the most obvious features of ethical theory is that the great ethical theorists advocated different accounts of morality. Jeffrey Stout emphasizes this pluralism; "the languages of morals and their discontents" is the subtitle of his book. According to Professor Stout, understanding and evaluating alternative ethical views is difficult because one's perspective is always colored by one's own moral language. The ethicist, no more than the scientist, can claim to do her assessment from some neutral and perfectly objective vantage point. What she can do is engage in "immanent criticism" insofar as she is able to grasp aspects of another view.

Such criticism consists of drawing attention to the internal inconsistencies of a view. When adherents of the moral language so criticized come to recognize the inadequacies of their tradition they will want to modify it. In doing so, they may utilize aspects of other moral languages. Stout refers to the process of dropping some aspects of a received moral language and drawing upon different languages to replace those features, thereby solving otherwise intractable problems, as "bricolage." Thomistic ethics is cited as a classic case of bricolage.

As Stout sees it, our moral problems cannot be dealt with effectively apart from an understanding of Thomistic ethics, as well as other theologically informed moral theories, for at least two reasons. First, aspects of these views appear in contemporary ethical discourse. We cannot begin to understand our own moral vocabulary if we are not aware of its origins. Second, our liberal tradition can be seen as an attempt to avoid the bloody conflicts that came about because disagreements between religious groups could not be solved peacefully. It may be then that the language of liberalism has resources unavailable in religiously based ethical views for handling the problems posed by pluralism. If this is so, then there is good reason for preferring liberalism to the communitarian ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre and others.

In the final analysis Professor Stout wishes to distance himself from what he takes to be facile dichotomies between liberalism and communitarianism, subjectivity and ob-

jectivity, and creation and discovery. He tries to undermine these distinctions through immanent criticism and offers an alternative that is the result of his bricolage. Stout's internal critiques of work by Kai Nielsen, James Gustafson, Alan Donagan and Alasdair MacIntyre are superb.

Stout's bricolage seems to be less successful. For example, he sets out to formulate an account of morality that would avoid "the spectre of relativism." To be sure, he does manage to provide us with a view that avoids a number of kinds of relativism. Nevertheless, he opts for a theory in which truth is language dependent, "... truth is a property of interpreted sentences, and interpreted sentences belong to languages, which are human creations" (p. 54). If moral truths are human creations then their truth is contingent upon our existence and linguistic practices. Readers who consider this sort of commitment to contingency, and hence relativism, problematic will not find Stout's bricolage ultimately acceptable. Even so, I suspect that they will want to wrestle with the arguments in *Ethics After Babel* for it is the work of a gifted philosopher.

## Bulletin Board

**David Gill** has left his position as President and Professor of Christian Ethics at New College Berkeley and is currently at work on two books as well as speaking and consulting, especially in the area of business ethics. He can be reached at: Box 5358 Berkeley CA 94705 (415) 654-5513. Special thanks to Dave for his recent generous contribution to the Forum.

Special thanks to **Dan Clendenin** for his work as our Book Review Editor. He has done a terrific job. Changes going on in his life have made it necessary to resign that position. Dan has left William Tyndale College to accept a two year appointment with the International Institute for Christian Studies at Moscow State University. Mail addressed to Dan Clendenin, DCS, Box 13157, Overland Park, Kansas 66212 will be forwarded to him. We look forward to getting special reports from Moscow in the future.

**Russell Heddendorf** has published a new book: *Hidden Threads: Social Thought for Christians* (Richardson TX: Probe Books - distributed by Word, Inc., Dallas, TX), 1990), 228 pp., 14.95 in paperback. In the tradition of Ellul, this book explores the interface between sociology and Christian faith.

**Tony Carnes** announces the publication of a new Journal, *Areopagus*. Carnes who is the editor, explains that the focus of the journal is the critique of contemporary forms of idolatry. A one year subscription is \$10.00. Send *tozAreopagus*, King's College, Briarcliff Manor, N.Y., 10510.

**Darrell Fasching's** new book *Narrative Theology After Auschwitz: From Alienation to Ethics* will be published by Fortress Press during the Winter of 1991-92. The book draws upon the work of Irving Greenberg, Stanley Hauerwas and Jacques Ellul to reconstruct the Augustinian Christian narrative tradition and Luther's two-kingdom

ethic in the light of the history of anti-Semitism and murderous bureaucratic technicism which manifest themselves in the Holocaust.

**Book Reviewers are needed.** If you are willing to review books for the *Forum* please send a copy of your *Curriculum Vitae* and a list of preferred topic areas to Darrell Fasching, c/o the Forum. Also, if you would be interested in being considered for the position of book review editor please indicate this.

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# Forum

## Jacques Ellul and the Catholic Worker of the Next Century: Therefore Choose Life

by Jeff Dietrich

His breathing came in labored, spasmodic gasps. First the chest would heave a great sigh, then the head would snap back upon the pillow with such force that the jaws popped open automatically, sucking air like a greedy baby. Then came the gurgling sounds. Each hungry breath pushed his face deeper into conformity with the clear plastic oxygen mask that gave him the only sustenance he cared about now.

Any fool could see that Isaiah was dying, but when confronted, the doctors insisted that he was doing fine, and why didn't we all go home and get some sleep. Lots of people had pulled through this. And besides, having eight visitors was against hospital regulations. Their bland professional palliatives stood in marked contrast to our grieving countenances. Isaiah died four hours later.

It is almost impossible for health care professionals to accept the reality of death. In fact, for all the professionals who keep our country running smoothly, the denial of death is essential. As Walter Brueggemann writes in his book *The Prophetic Imagination*, "The royal consciousness leads people to numbness, especially to numbness about death. It is the task of prophetic ministry to bring people to engage their experiences of suffering to death."

As Catholic Workers we find ourselves engaged with suffering, despair and death on a daily basis. We believe that this is the authentic reality of the culture, but the message of the culture consistently confirms in powerful ways the very opposite. Until we can understand with some clarity that the "truth of the culture" is grounded in the worship of false gods, we are condemned to a schizophrenic existence.

The theology of Jacques Ellul offers us the prophetic clarity of naming with exquisite perfection the idolatries of contemporary culture. As the late William Stringfellow said, "For Ellul, the affirmation of death is the ultimate reality and hence the ground for immediate moral decision. [He recognizes] an idolatry of death in which all humans and societies are caught up."

Ellul believes that the contemporary manifestation of this idolatry of death lies in our worship of the "sacred ensemble" of techniques. "From the moment that techniques, the state or production are facts, we are required to worship them... This is the very heart of modern religion."

Simply put, technique is the systematic reduction of all human thought, action and organization to the logic and efficiency of the machine. (See *Catholic Agitator*, June 1990.)

The first duty of the Christian, Ellul says, is "to be aware... At the present time, all so-called progress consists in developing this technical framework of our civilization. All parties, whether revolutionary or conservative, liberal or socialist, of the right or left, agree to preserve these fundamental phenomena: the primacy of production, the continual growth of the state, the autonomous development of technique."

This situation is monstrous because it amounts to the virtual enslavement of humanity to the principalities and powers—the spiritual force of evil in the world. If we are not "awake and aware," we will enthusiastically cooperate with this demonic power. "If we let ourself drift along the stream of history, without knowing it, we will have chosen the power of suicide, which is at the heart of the world. ... We cannot have many illusions."

To the extent that our actions are founded upon the mythology of the contemporary reality, rather than the word of God, we reinforce this demonic direction. The mythology of progress, revolution and youth are the foundation of all our cultural ideologies. All of the motivating forces of the culture, from advertising copy to political propaganda, to the idealization of humanitarian impulses in medicine, education and public service are founded upon these false mythologies.

We cannot fight the world of power and technique, more and greater power and technique. Our situation is not unlike the Allied forces of World War II fighting the demonic forces of Nazism with the same tactics as Hitler: mass bombings, propaganda and terrorism of civilian populations. They won the physical war, but the demonic spirituality of Hitlerism triumphed in the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the subsequent willingness of U.S. foreign policy to transform the entire globe into a nuclear concentration camp.

God does not work through "technical means." Most contemporary Christians, especially Catholics, have an unconscious Chardinian theology. Teilhard de Chardin was the Jesuit paleontologist who believed that technology was an extension of natural biological evolution, and that as it developed and became more sophisticated, so too would human culture and human consciousness. This process would eventually lead to the encirclement of the entire globe by "noosphere," a cloud of higher consciousness culminating in the second coming of Christ.

But this view of culture and technology is, if not blasphemous, anti-scriptural. Any overview of the Hebrew-Christian Scripture would clarify that, except in rare cases, God only works through human beings. The Holy Spirit does not work through the electoral process, through war, revolution, scientific progress or the space program. Neither does the Holy Spirit work through mass movements, political reform or institutions. The Holy Spirit only works through people.

We cannot use the means of the world to bring in God's Kingdom of peace and justice. We cannot *bring in* peace and justice, says Ellul, we can only *be* peace and



justice. The Christian must be "the leaven in the loaf," "the light in the darkness," "the sheep among wolves." In other words, if we want the Kingdom of God to be a reality, then we must use the "means of the Kingdom" to achieve that end. If we "seek first God's Kingdom and righteousness," then all the other things, like peace, justice, sisterhood and brotherhood "will be added unto us."

Ellul's theological perspective radically liberates us from having to be successful, from having to respond to the false challenge of either violent revolution or liberal reform with which means the world is constantly seducing us. Now we don't have to kill all of the capitalists, nor do we have to go to graduate school to get an MSW, nor do we have to become a non-profit corporation and raise millions of dollars or make millions of converts. In short, we don't have to be effective!

We have been liberated to be the means of God, a channel for the Holy Spirit to act in the world. But this does not mean that we can just *be*, it means that we must be engaged with the suffering reality of the world, the sinfulness of the world, the injustice of the world. We must be present in the places of darkness, manifesting the Kingdom, opening a channel for the Holy Spirit to come into the world.

This is the essence of the "tension" that Ellul talks about. As Christian realists, we must be engaged with a sinful world, but aware that it is not possible for us to do anything about it. Our situation is not unlike the women who stayed with Jesus at the foot of the cross. Their love was stronger than their illusions, unlike the male disciples who had expected to become regional administrators in the new "Jesus corporation," the women had a more authentic orientation, and thus remained faithful to the end.

We live in a crucified world. We cannot make it uncrucified any more than the women could rescue Jesus from his cross. But, like the women, we will not abandon that suffering reality. The response of the women was to mourn and to grieve, to enter into the darkness of suffering.

We picked up Isaiah's body at the coroner's office and brought him to our house. We sat with him throughout the night, watching and praying. In the morning we put him in the old blue van and drove him over to Dolores Mission for the funeral. Finally, we buried him in a plot at the back corner of Sacred Heart Cemetery. We grieved the dying of a friend. We grieved the injustice that only in death could this homeless man finally have a home. We grieved the dying of a culture that numbs itself to the pain of the poor, and blinds itself to the reality of death.

Brueggemann says that "anguish is the door to historical existence, that only those who embrace the reality of death will receive new life." We believe that the denial of death and the subsequent narcissism that causes our insatiable consumption of products and experiences defines the essence of contemporary culture.

As Christopher Lasch says in his book *The Culture of Narcissism*, "There is a growing despair of the changing society, even of understanding it... Industrial civilization gives rise to a philosophy of futility, a pervasive fatigue, a disappointment with achievements that finds an outlet in changing the more superficial things... It addresses itself to the spiritual desolation of modern life, and proposes consumption as a cure."

But we refuse to take the cure. Trivial entertainments, superficial relationships and compulsive shopping are not the cure; they merely address the symptoms of our schizophrenic condition. We seek unitive wholeness and with Brueggemann we recognize "that all satiation is an eating of self to death." We refuse to be numb and narcotized-the prophetic call is to be aware and awake. We will not worship at the altar of the false god of technique. We will not accept the bland palliatives of the technocratic priesthood. When we encounter suffering, we will mourn. We will respond with compassionate engagement. Wholeness comes when we refuse any longer to deny death. Wholeness comes when we respond to the Word of God which calls us out of the bondage of death and oppression of life and liberation. In the words of Deuteronomy: "I set before you life or death, blessing or curse. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live."

## Jacques Ellul: A Catholic Worker Vision of the Culture

by Katharine Temple

About twenty years ago, in my first flush of enthusiasm at "dis-covering" the work of Jacques Ellul, someone came up to me and said, "I am surprised you're taken up with such a depressing thinker. How can you bear to read him, let alone find him helpful?" I was a bit taken aback. Still, it has to be admitted that M. Ellul is not widely read; even when he is respected, he is kept somewhat at arm's length. There is no such thing as an "Ellul school" emerging and no sweep of Ellul-ism to attract attention. Nor does M. Ellul himself seek to inspire a following of devotees. The net result, as far as I can see, is that his insights have been dismissed far too lightly.

It is always hard to know for sure how you arrive anywhere, but at the outset, I picked up *Hie Technological Society* because of a desire to know more about what makes our society tick. And also I was feeling rather jaded about the social analyses around me. Although disconcertingly massive, this masterpiece in no way dispirited me. On the contrary, it brought into focus my gut reactions to a whole host of things-trends that made me distinctly uneasy, despite the more popular Western view that ours is the best of all possible worlds, or the even more socially aware sentiment that things are wretched but inevitably going to get better. The very starkness of the book was bracing in that it gave me a toe-hold to articulate what was actually going on around me. Because he was refreshingly accurate, words like "depressing" or "pessimistic" seemed quite beside the point. He helped to unveil the world for me. As George Grant, a Canadian political philosopher, has written:

He [Ellul] does not write of necessity to scare men, but to make them free. I am certainly freer for having read this book... Keats put perfectly my response to this book. "Then felt I like some watcher of skies/When a new

planet swims into his ken.” Not to have read this book is to choose to remain socially myopic when somebody offers you free the proper spectacles.

*The Technological Society* is not a theological book, so for some time I had no idea that Ellul is also a biblical scholar, and I can’t say that I really cared. While I had not exactly fallen away from faith, I was decidedly wishy-washy and nothing much in the field of theology grabbed me. It was all in abeyance, on the back burner, as I turned to other matters. Almost by chance, I happened upon M. Ellul’s *Violence* and picked it up because it looked a lot shorter than *The Technological Society*. It turned out to be the first work of non-fiction that ever kept me up all night.

Although reading *Violence* was not a “conversion experience,” it was an illumination that Christianity could make a unique difference and theology has a cutting edge. It made me want to read the Bible again in a new way and to enter the fray again as a Christian. In thinking about the impact of this book, I am reminded of what M. Ellul has said about Karl Barth’s influence on him. “Barth went beyond the orthodox-liberal controversy.” What’s more, this possibility came to me in the same way he found it in Karl Barth.

First I discovered through him a flexible understanding of Scripture. Barth was infinitely less systematic than Calvin, and he was completely existential at a time when this concept did not exist. He put biblical thought in direct contact with actual experience; it wasn’t ann-chair theology.

Over the years it has been Ellul’s ongoing clarity about the world and his loyalty to the Bible, through thick and thin, that have most deeply impressed me. In person, his qualities of sanity, constancy, and attentiveness are very much in evidence, personal traits that also come through in his semi-autobiographical *In Season, Out of Season* (1982). To this day, it still comes as a mild surprise when some Christians find him too negative for words.

Quite a few people object less to his descriptions than to his refusal to “give the right answer at the back of the book.” Since Ellul has never suffered from a failure of nerve or personal aloofness, the most important thing is to understand *why* he rejects the role of guru.

[W]e learned that the Bible is not a collection of answers God has given to our questions; on the contrary, it is the place where God addresses us, where He asks *us* the question we have to answer. To hear the word of God is to hear the question which God asks of me, to which I must give a response out of my life and faith. I am made responsible (compelled to give a response). Thus when this all-powerful God speaks, He does not annihilate us, but renders us answerable.

Within this perspective, there's no game-plan to be imposed. The answers have to be worked out and re-worked again and again, always concretely and provisionally, by the faithful, within the scope of biblical freedom.

As Jean Bosc, Barth's most loyal disciple said, "One can be so much more flexible and open to all things when one has a central theological certainty." Barth also brought me a freedom with regard to the biblical text-the only and unique pillar of the revelation of God, of course, but thanks to which God speaks in a multiple and diverse manner, allowing us to mine the multiple riches from this unique treasure.

His intention is to shake us from our lethargy, to direct Christian attention to a path that is really neither fundamentalist nor liberal nor mystical. He follows a different route and resists the temptation to offer conclusions that might short-circuit our own engagement with the Bible.

In all of this, I think it would be misleading to suggest that Ellul has kept total silence on immediately practical questions or that he has had no influence in this regard. In my case, prolonged exposure to his biblical studies, his persistent questions, his espousal of something other than the *status quo*, has left its mark

One major difference he's made in my life comes from his deep attachment to the Hebrew Scriptures. His studies of the early chapters of Genesis, Jonah (*The Judgment of Jonah*, 1971), and his reflections on such neglected books as 1 Kings (*The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 1972), for instance, are unique in contemporary biblical commentary. By accepting that Hebrew Scripture as being fully the Word of God, Ellul has managed to avoid the teachings of contempt and the damage inflicted by historical criticism. As soon as I tried to pursue this kind of study further, I found myself a bit unsure about where to go next, so I asked him directly for help. He suggested that Christians do well to learn from the great teachers in the Jewish tradition, if our own understanding of Scripture is not going to shrivel up. I took his advice seriously, and now learn Hebrew Bible from the rabbis who have revered it most as *the* guide for life. From them, I am beginning to get intimations about what he calls the "multiple riches," and so to see new depths to the question, "What is to be done?"

M. Ellul also quite indirectly helped me become open to the Catholic Worker movement, founded in 1933 by the peasantworker-scholar Peter Maurin. It may sound odd to claim that an arch-Protestant pushed me toward a group with arch-Roman Catholic origins, and it is true that the links are not strictly linear. Although both are French, the differences between Ellul and Maurin-differences that go back to the original split between the two traditions over matters such as tradition itself, philosophy, Christendom, agrarianism, the sacraments -seem massive; and yet I am convinced that what binds that two men together is stronger than whatever separates them. Each has turned against the tide to develop critical analyses that move us beyond ideologies and state power; each is rooted in a Christianity that pre-dates confidence in "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness"; each has understood the Christian response as one of personalism, self-sacrifice, poverty, the daily works of mercy; each is a Christian intellectual in the true sense.

But Peter Maurin had a co-founder in the Catholic Worker-Dorothy Day. Inspiration took root at their meeting. In one of his "Easy Essays," Peter said, "Man proposes and woman disposes." Whatever else we may think of this aphorism, it aptly describes what happened in their case, for Dorothy always called Peter her mentor.

Peter's idea of hospices seemed like a simple and logical one to me; hospices such as they had in the Middle Ages are certainly very much needed today. But I like even better his talk about personal responsibility. He quoted St. Jerome, that every house should have a "Christ's room" for our brother who is in need-.. Peter brought up the idea of the paper the first time I met him and he kept harping on it, day after day. He told me I needed a Catholic background, and he came day after day with books and papers and digests of articles which he either read aloud or left with me to read. It was impossible to be with a person like Peter without sharing his simple faith that the Lord would provide what was necessary to do His work.

She was the ideal student, who absorbed his synthesis and then put the ideas into practice. Throughout her books and columns in *The Catholic Worker*, she passed along the vision she had received from Peter, by writing about the daily attempts to live it. When a friend gave me a subscription to the paper, my thought was, "Whether she has heard of him or not, this is the kind of thing Ellul is talking about. This is one answer as to what you can do when you get up in the morning.

## **Born-Again Catholic Workers: A Conversation between Jeff Dietrich and Katherine Temple**

A Conversation Between Jeff  
Dietrich and Katharine Temple

*This conversation ... was conducted by phone in May of this year<sup>1</sup>, Kassie has lived and worked at the New York Catholic Worker for the last 15 years. She is an editor of the Catholic Worker newspaper, and has been an avid Ellul scholar for over 20 years. We are grateful for her advice and encouragement in our efforts to understand and apply Ellul's thoughts to the Worker movement. For us, Kassie best embodies the highest qualities of Peter Maurin's worker/scholar tradition.*

JEFF DIETRICH: I talked to you a while back, and I told you how excited I was about the reading I have been doing in Jacques Ellul. I feel like a born-again Catholic Worker, if one can say that. I feel that what Jacques Ellul has done is to give us a consistent, contemporary critique of the culture in which we live, which makes what the Catholic Worker does so pertinent. I feel like sometimes people just dismiss us as "saints" or just nice people. Folks say, "Oh, you do such nice work;" "You're such good people." That's not why we're doing it. We want to be prophetic. We want to do it as a prophetic criticism of the culture.

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Politics of God and The Politics of Man*. Trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley

To have someone like Ellul, who gives you this elaborate perspective to work from, I feel liberated by this perspective, which I know some people find rather depressing.

KATHARINE TEMPLE: We have discussed this, and I was thinking as you were talking that I knew some of the writings of Jacques Ellul before I knew much about the Catholic Worker, and I was very taken with his analysis of the society and his other writings about what it means to be Christian in the world in which we live. And as I learned more about the Catholic Worker (this was before I came) it seemed like the philosophy and the theology of the Catholic Worker was the only movement that seemed to resonate with this same kind of understanding.

In some ways, I came to the Catholic Worker via the writings of Jacques Ellul. Our two comings to see the relationship between the Catholic Worker and Jacques Ellul are from different times, but I think the same relationship is there.

JEFF: I feel like as a Catholic Worker movement, we really haven't updated our analysis of the culture since Peter [Maurin] died. And the way Ellul talks about the technological society, I feel as though Peter Maurin, if he were alive today, would either be saying the same thing or writing "Easy Essays" about Jacques Ellul. What do you think?

KATHARINE: Well, I think that's very true. I think they come out of the same culture. They were both born in France. Peter, of course is older, but in terms of the environment for social analysis, they both did come out of the same intellectual and social world.

JEFF: What are some of those similar influences?

KATHARINE: First of all, they both come out of the first part of the twentieth century. There was the impact of the industrial revolution in France and that realm of social thought that began to question if this has brought about the benefits that people were certain it was going to bring about.

The intellectual ferment in France at that time was very strong and very rigorous. Also, although Ellul is a Protestant and Peter Maurin was Roman Catholic, the world of Christian thought in France at that time was minority thinking. Nonetheless, some very strong critiques of what was happening as a result of the industrial revolution from a Christian perspective were very active at that time.

Of course, Peter came out of a peasant background, and I think the evils or the dark side of the industrial revolution seemed to strike him from the very beginning. Whereas, Ellul's parents were immigrants, and he was brought up on the docks of Bordeaux, and grew up in the urbanized world of France. So he came directly with the workers' struggles and directly in contact with Karl Marx. Peter came out of an entirely earlier culture.

I think what is needed to be done in terms of a social analysis focusing on the problems of the world would be one which they would share as a requirement for social thought I think Ellul would see Peter Maurin's thought as focusing directly on

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(Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 192.

industrial society and what it has become and what it has done to people. Ellul, on the other hand, has focused since 1935 on what he calls "the question of technique." His thought is that industrial society has moved to a different phase. The ways and means of the machine age have passed on to a different stage, thus your analysis would be different

JEFF: What I thought was so validating is that in reading Ellul I felt supported in what the Catholic Worker does in simple living, the green revolution.

Ellul makes this contrast between the "means of God"-that God can only work through human beings, that God very rarely works directly in the world, that God most often chooses a human medium through which to work. And that God cannot work through the technical means of the world. That the more our culture becomes enslaved to technical means, the more difficult it is for God to work in the world.

Also there are all those metaphors from the Gospels that are so important to Ellul-to be the leaven in the loaf, to be a light unto the world, to be wakeful and watching, the pearl of great price. All of these things are the "little way" of the Catholic Worker.

You often feel overwhelmed by the means of the world. I know I've always had a tendency to buy into that perspective of "We're not being very effective here." So you stick with the Catholic Worker way - out of a kind of faithful, spiritual perspective.

What Ellul does is give you the ability to look critically at what the technical means are and say, "No, you can't use these to bring about the Kingdom of God." You can't use mass elections to bring about the Kingdom of God, you can't use television and radio to bring about the Kingdom. TV evangelists are not doing the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not working through technical means. Each person has to have a conversion of the heart and be open to the word of God, and be ready to be used by the Holy Spirit That's the only way it works and none of us want to believe that

KATHARINE: That's a very clear summary of what Ellul is saying to Christians, and I think it's a very clear summary, perhaps in a different language, of what Peter and Dorothy would have been saying. That is the call to all Christians, not just a select few, that we are called to witness to the way of God, the truth of God, which is different from the powers of the world. But they would both say very specifically that we need to do it in the world in which we live, and know that world. You can't be a light about (sic) a society that was a hundred years ago and not take into account what is going on now, what it is that is enslaving us now.

Sometimes Peter wouldn't use that language, but when Peter talked about voluntary poverty, for example, not only is that a very traditional means or root of Catholic thought, but he was talking to a society that is dominated by money - money is enslaving people. The weight of consumerism is literally killing people, and the Christian is called to open that up and liberate people from that force.

And that the means and ends, and this is a theme that both Ellul and Peter have very much in common: Is the means and end? If you want a society that is personalist, communitarian, based on the well-being of the other, you can't reach that through

impersonal, bureaucratic fund-raising means. Dorothy used to say, "AU the way to heaven is heaven," which is another statement of the "little way" or the question of ends and means.

Since the "efficient" means of having spectacular results on a large scale quickly is a dominant mode of this society, it is even more important to be cognizant of the fact that if you are going to have a society where it is easier to be good or have some sort of ceU in the old society, you're going to have to use different means than those that prevaU around us.

JEFF: And this is exactly why the Catholic Worker espouses an anarchist, non-stateist perspective. But again, there hasn't been a strong inteUectual groundwork or foundation for an anarchist perspective, and we all get sucked into the cultural ritual of elections and the media surrounding it.

KATHARINE: We've certainly had many discussions around here about whether people prefer the word personalist or anarchist, which in one understanding can be seen as the same. But I think the importance of the anarchist critique, and certainly in social theory Ellul gives an anarchist critique of technological society, in distinction to a Marxist critique or a Uberal critique, is that the form of anarchism that the CathoUc Worker would espouse would be a personalist anarchism. It is precisely a critique of stateism-that the increasing power of the state is the source of domination and that in our relationship to the state we need to be cognizant that it isn't one entity among many, so you can say, weU, we'll take the advantages from the state that we can and it won't have any repercussions on how we run our house. Rather, the state is a key point in our analysis of this society to see where the increasingly monolithic power structure is.

JEFF: I was particularly taken with Ellul's introduction in his book *The Political Illusion* where he talks about the French Revolution. We tend to think of kings of France as being absolute, total monarchs, the "Sun King" and all that. Before the French Revolution, the king had difficulty creating a standing army, he couldn't raise enough taxes to support a drive for empire. But after the Revolution, once the king was deposed and all people became part of the state and responsible for the state and to the state, then everybody, of course, served willingly. Then, once so-called democracy was there, people voluntarily enslaved themselves and gave themselves over to a taxation system and a system of law that they would never have done under a monarchy.

When you start looking at it that way, the whole idea of people just giving themselves over completely to the state, you need to have a stronger foundation to this anarchist-personalist perspective. I think that's what Ellul gives us.

KATHARINE: Yes, at the end of that book, he talks about what is needed, and these are just a few little excerpts from that:

It is important above all, never to permit oneself to ask the state to help us. Indeed we must try to create positions in which we reject and struggle with the state, not in order to modify some element of the regime or force



it to make some decision, but much more fundamentally, in order to permit the emergence of social, political, intellectual, artistic bodies, associations, interest groups or economic or Christian groups totally independent of the state. What is needed are groups capable of extreme diversification of the entire society's fundamental tendencies, capable of escaping the unitary structure, presenting themselves not as negations of the state, which would be absurd, but as *something else* not under the state's tutelage.

JEFF: He would say that the United States should not be patting itself on the back and saying we finally succeeded in winning the Cold War, and that the same kind of liberty and freedom that the United States has is just about to prevail throughout the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

KATHARINE: I think Ellul would agree with Peter and Dorothy, particularly Dorothy, who focused on the state and the large bureaucratic institutions. But he would say that the thinking is still too much in terms of the Marxist "mode of production." The mode of production has changed in the Catholic Worker analysis, even though Dorothy had the insight that we need to better coordinate and describe it in a way that is more exact

For instance, the role of the computer isn't simply shunned because Peter didn't like machines, but the computer is something quite different from other machines, and that's what we should be looking to.

JEFF: It seems to me that Ellul, in *The Technological System*, is saying that the computer as an information processor created a completely different environment. Previous to the computer, the techniques of the state, education, propaganda and various other techniques were separate and could not be coordinated. But now, they can be smoothly integrated into one smooth-running technical system through the information processing machine.

KATHARINE: Right And we need to analyze that, not moving away from our philosophy of what that is doing to people, how it is creating poverty. This would not say that there is no poverty or that the whole emphasis on the works of mercy would change, but in our analysis of where is the enslavement coming, where is the oppression. What's worse is that all of these things look good and they look like they're overcoming the oppression of the industrial era.

JEFF: It looks like they're liberating people, and people speak of... machines - satellite communications and information processing, as personalized, liberating machines.

KATHARINE: And I think what Ellul would say is that you really need to look at how precisely the poverty in Los Angeles, the poverty in New York, the people who come to our doors-how is this being shaped and formed, what is this doing to people.

JEFF: To me, that is exactly the power of the Catholic Worker—to be there with the poor, particularly the poor of the urban First World, the urban, technical world, to see how their lives have been completely destroyed. AU cultural supports are gone. All traditional culture has been erased. You can see it much more clearly in the poor

than you can in the wealthier classes, who are much more able to protect themselves against the disintegration, or at least to hide it.

The wealthy stiU operate on these traditional values and perspectives. But among the poorest of the poor you recognize the decimation of their lives by technology's destruction of traditional values. You realize the hypocrisy of American politicians, aU politicians, who preach family values with one breath, and preach technological growth with the next, and don't recognize that the two are incompatible.

KATHARINE: And they don't recognize that this new formulation of the information society, or the technical society is depersonalizing. You can't use impersonal means to bring about a more personalist way of being.

Also, you can't be liberated from the power of money simply by spending more money. Peter said you go into voluntary poverty to end the enslavement to money. I'm not sure if "voluntary poverty" is the phrase that Ellul has used, but he would say if this society is defined, say, by massive consumerism and the prestige of money, that certainly should be questioned. If large-scale bureaucracies are the order of the day, then we need small communities of personalist, non-bureaucratic ways of living our lives together.

JEFF: The whole issue of personalism. It seems when we go out and talk about it or when we write about it in our paper, I feel self-conscious almost because it seems like this quaint kind of perspective of the world, and what we really should be doing is having a massive revolution, or electing Jesse Jackson president or converting the editorial board of the L. A. Times. That this personalist perspective of person-to-person action, doing the works of mercy-that's a nice thing to do, and if you want to do it, that's fine, but those of us who are really going to make a difference in the world and bring social justice about, or bring in the Kingdom, we're going to work through these massive means to change the world.

I feel so much that Ellul gives me a way of looking critically at these technological means and saying no, they're not going to work, that's not going to bring about the kind of justice that you want. In fact, these technological means are doing exactly the opposite of what you think they're doing. Fortunately, or unfortunately, you have to work on this personal level.

KATHARINE: I think of the reasons why we sometimes espouse a philosophy of personalism that seems so quaint is that it can be seen that this world we live in is so overwhelming that we're going to retreat into a world of ones and twos. I'm going to look after my own personal well-being, I'm going to try to create this atmosphere where my person is affirmed.

But that certainly isn't what was meant by personalism, certainly not by Dorothy or Peter, in that it is a public response in the world. This isn't just getting a house and retreating into it because we have to have some other people living with us. But rather, this is a statement that people live together better in small personalist ways than through bureaucratic ways.

# Jacques Ellul and Thomas Merton on Technique

by Gene L. Davenport

As anyone who has read much of Jacques Ellul knows, there is a problem with the use of the English term *technology* to translate both French terms *la technique* and *la technologic*. From my very first contact with Ellul's writing, it has seemed to me unfortunate that English translators have not used *technique* for *la technique*, since the definition of *technique* is essentially a method or procedure by which artistic, scientific, or mechanical processes are carried out. Certainly, it still would be necessary to explain the specific twists that Ellul gives the term, but that would not be nearly as problematic as overcoming the connotation of *technology* as the use of machines or the application of science. Moreover, Ellul himself has recently emphasized *la technologie* as discourse about *la technique* (*The Technological* definition that he pointed out several years ago— and also has indicated his own disappointment that English translators have not used *technique* for their translations. For this essay, therefore, I have chosen to use *techtuque*, rather than the commonly used *technology* to refer to what Ellul calls *la technique*. And now to the subject at hand, a comparison of Ellul and Thomas Merton on technique.

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Thomas Merton was a monk in the Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance, an order commonly known as the Trappists, in Gethsemani, Kentucky. He entered the order in December, 1941, and for the next twenty-seven years wrote prolifically about a wide range of topics. The areas to which he most frequently turned were monastic life and spirituality, social issues, and Asian approaches to spirituality.

Although I do not recall any references to Merton in Ellul's writings, in a letter to Marco Pallis, Merton enthusiastically recommended *The Technological Society*, and in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* he reflected extensively on propaganda in light of Ellul's writing on the subject

Whereas Ellul has deliberately and consistently (with the possible exception of *The Humiliation of the Word*) kept his sociological analyses and his theological reflections separate, for Merton social criticism was an exercise in theological criticism. On the other hand, to assume that Ellul's social criticism is completely independent of his theological perspective would be to assume a dualism hardly acceptable from the standpoint of either theology or contemporary psychology.

Despite their differences in religious or theological perspectives, Ellul and Merton are strikingly similar in their perception of technique and of technique's hold on the world. The basic definition of technique in Ellul's work was spelled out in *The Technological Society* and has remained basic for all his succeeding writings: "*Technique is the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency (for a given stage of development) in every field of human activity.*" In his elaboration of this definition Ellul

lists the characteristics of techniques as automatism, self-augmentation (self-directing and irreversible in progress), monism (the unity of technique, efficiently ordered by one principle), inclination to linkage with other techniques, necessity, and autonomy (*The Technological Society*, pp. 79-147).

Merton never defines technology, but his few comments on Ellul indicate that he basically accepted Ellul's definition.

At the heart of technique for both Ellul and Merton is the drive for an efficiency that has no place for spontaneity or individual initiative. Consequently, the society of technique becomes a concentration camp to which each inmate must become pleasantly adjusted, convinced of the desirability of the way things are.

That Merton's analysis of contemporary western society was, to some extent at least, stimulated by Ellul's writing is indicated in a letter from Merton to Father Bernard Haring, a peritus at the Second Vatican Council. Merton tells Haring that in his opinion the preparatory draft on the Church in the Modern World needed to rest on a "deeper realization of the urgent problems posed by technology today," and he suggests that the Council fathers should read Ellul's *Technological Society*. Merton goes on to portray technology as a massive complex that reaches every aspect of social life, a complex of which no one really is in control and which "dictates its own solutions irrespective of human needs or even of reason." Technology, Merton says, "has reasons entirely of its own which do not necessarily take into account the needs of man." The human race does not command this complex, says Merton, but serves it. Technology, he fears, is "geared for the systematic destruction of the natural world, quite apart from the question of the 'bomb' which, in fact, is only one rather acute symptom of the whole disease (*The Hidden Ground of Love*, 383).

Merton is describing here, of course, those characteristics of technique to which Ellul refers in terms of automatism, self-augmentation, necessity, and autonomy. Technique becomes its own self-willing, self-driving master. But even if his view was stimulated by Ellul's writing, Merton did not merely parrot those writings. Rather Merton went on to his own reflections, informed by, but not prisoner to, Ellul's point of view. This may be seen in Merton's chilling picture of efficiency in the poem "Chant To Be Used In Processions Around A Site With Furnaces." The speaker in the poem describes the highly efficient way in which gas chambers were prepared for victims and the victims were prepared for the chambers. The speaker boasts of having "purified" and remaining decent through it all; of having improved the chambers, guaranteeing them and providing portholes through which one could look; and of having made soap according to a very precise recipe-though fat was hard to find.

The poem closes with two self-justifying lines:

*In my day we worked hard we saw what we did our self-sacrifice was  
conscientious and complete our work was faultless and detailed*

*Do not think yourself better because you bum up friends and enemies with  
long range missiles without ever seeing what you have done.*

*(Select Poems of Thomas Merton, 118-121)*

In this poem Merton portrays both the efficiency of the system and the loss of human identity by the one who carries out the work of the system. The dehumanization of the actor is conveyed in the very way the lines are written—without punctuation of any sort (excepting the period at the end of the last line) and without line arrangements indicating a rhythm. To read the poem as Merton has written it calls for an emotionless, arrhythmic monotone such as one might hear from a computerized synthetic voice.

For both Ellul and Merton an essential tool of the society of technique is propaganda, a tool that is primary in the forced adjustment of the individual to the society. The purpose of propaganda, says Ellul, is not to change opinions, but to change actions or inaction.

In a series of reflections on propaganda in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, Merton discusses propaganda as an "appeal to reason and to action which is in fact essentially iwaftonaZ...(though) not necessarily untrue" (*Conjectures*, 236). The most effective propaganda, says Merton, is "that which makes use of strictly true facts, but facts which do not mean what the propagandist claims they mean and which, in reality, mean nothing whatever."

In "A Letter to a Southern Churchman" (*Faith and Violence*, 145-164) Merton takes propaganda in his own direction as he reflects on what he calls *pseudo-events*. Pseudo-events are facts and situations that either are not especially significant or are given false or misleading significance. These pseudo-events are heaped upon us by newspapers, radio, and television, and they convince us that because we have absorbed them, we understand the world.

Merton associates the clamor of pseudo-events, or manufactured events, with the powers and principalities to which the Apostle Paul refers. Paul's view of the "elements" and "powers of the air," says Merton, was couched in the language of the cosmology of his day. Today, he says, these powers are to be sought "not in what is remote and mysterious, but in what is...at our elbow all day long—what speaks or sings in our ear, and practically does our thinking for us." The powers today "dominate us in the confusion and ambiguity of the Babel of tongues that we call mass-society."

Merton's own effort to thwart the lure of pseudo-events was to ignore the "news" until it was stale. He did not pretend that by not keeping up with the news he was free from it, but he refrained from trying to know events in their fresh condition as "news." He got his "news" more through books and magazines. "To 'fall behind' in this sense," he wrote, "is to get out of the big cloud of dust that everybody is kicking up, to breathe and to see a little more clearly."

Ellul sounds a similar note when he speaks of persons being deluged with facts they cannot assimilate, getting impressions rather than understanding, and coming to the conclusion *that those who know all this* have come to certain conclusions that are the right ones. We live, says Ellul, in a labyrinth of information, in which information is abundant, but one doesn't have a choice. As Merton puts it, propaganda exerts

violence over us. By means of apparent truth and apparent reason propaganda induces us to surrender our freedom and self-possession. We like to have others make decisions for us while we assume that *we* have decided.

Merton began the letter by saying that he had decided no longer to comment on public events. He seems, in his explanation of his decision, to have been resisting any efforts by well-meaning "disciples" to rely upon him in a way that would make him an unwilling source of propaganda. "When one has too many answers," he wrote, "and when one joins in a chorus of others chanting the same slogans, there is, it seems to me, a danger that one is trying to evade the loneliness of conscience that realizes itself to be in an inescapably evil situation." The effect of this chorus of sameness, of course, is the same as that of propaganda.

The result of propaganda in the society of technique, according to both Ellul and Merton, is the loss of identity and, consequently, of freedom. This loss is demanded by the society of technique and is the very purpose of propaganda. "No technique is possible when men are free," writes Ellul (*Technological Society*, 138). Technique requires predictability and, no less, exactness of prediction. It must reduce us to technical animals. Consequently, technique "eliminates all uninhabited places, leaving no place for the would-be solitary... It is vain to aspire to live alone when one is obliged to participate in all collective phenomena and to use all the collective's tools, without which it is impossible to earn a bare subsistence... He who maintains that he can escape it is either a hypocrite or unconscious" (*Technological Society*, 139-140).

Merton, who commonly refers to the monastic life as the solitary life, or the life of solitude, does not disagree with Ellul on this pervasiveness of technique. For example, Merton consistently warned that the person who entered the monastery thinking thereby to escape the world completely misunderstood the monastic life. He pointed out that the monastery is a way of living in the world and that the world invades the monastery. The purpose of the monastery is to provide, for those who have the vocation for the monastic life, a place to recover his or her individuality by being drawn closer to God.

In one of his best essays Merton portrays this invasion of the world in a simple, almost charming way. In "Rain and the Rhinoceros" he describes a rainy night at the monastery. He had plodded through the mud up to the small cabin which had become his living quarters in the last years of his life and had cooked some oatmeal on a Coleman stove. "Let me say this," he wrote, "before rain becomes a utility that they can plan and distribute for money. By they\* I mean the people who cannot understand that rain is a festival, who do not appreciate its gratuity, who think that what has no price has no value... At the moment it is still free, and I am in it. I celebrate its gratuity and its meaninglessness" (*Raids on the Unspeakable*).

Merton reflects on the rhythm of the rain on the roof of the cabin, rhythms not yet controlled by the engineers, he speaks of the difference between his rain and the rain of the city, and he reflects on Thoreau. But then he points out that he doesn't really see himself as escaping anything. "Technology," he says, "is here, even in the cabin. True,

the utility line is not here yet, and so G.E. is not here yet either. (Note: there *were* utility lines to various parts of the monastery grounds.) When the utilities and G.E. enter my cabin arm in arm it will be nobody's fault but my own. I am not kidding anybody, even myself. I will suffer their bluff and patronizing complacencies in silence." Then, reflecting back on comments made earlier about the words on the box for his Coleman lantern-*Strech*es days to have more fun-he says, "I will let them think they know what I am doing here. They are convinced *I am having fun* (*Raids...*, 13).

For Merton, the solitary, contemplative life not only should draw one closer to God, but should enable one-precisely by being drawn closer to God-to have a clearer picture of the world on whose behalf the solitary one lives out his or her life. Merton undoubtedly would agree with Ellul that one does not escape politics by being non-political and that becoming apolitical is in itself a political decision. Ellul himself has said that the private life must be reinvented (*The Political Illusion*, 205), and though it is not clear that Ellul would agree that the monastic life is the proper, or realistic, way to reinvent it, for Merton the monastic life offers one of the best, if not the best, opportunities to do so. It enables, Merton would say, precisely the kind of different perspective that Ellul sees as necessary. The automatism of technique requires the complicity of human beings robbed of a different perspective, robbed of all sense of private life and individual identity. For Merton, these are regained in being drawn to God, the life of solitude offers the setting for this to occur.

In *Perspectives on Our Age* Ellul points out that technique reduces Christianity to the inner life, to spirituality, to the salvation of the soul" (*Perspectives*, 98), as well as penetrating Christianity in the forms of propaganda, advertising, and Structuralism as a method of biblical study (100-101). The church, therefore, becomes just another tool of technique, just another instrument to bring about human adjustment to the system. Merton was well aware that the monastic life can become victim of this capture by technique if the rule becomes a way of ordering life from without and does not lead to inner recovery. As pointed out earlier, he was well aware of the presence of the world within the monastery. He saw both the value of continual reform of the monastic life and the danger that technique could garb itself in the cloak of reform.

Although both Ellul and Merton's writings deal at length with the problems and dangers of technique, neither wishes to be classified as anti-technique. Ellul is more explicit in the positive dimension of his view, seeing technique as something that God can use and something that God alone can judge. What we can and must do, says Ellul, is subject technique to the Revelation in Jesus Christ, thereby destroying the deified, religious character of technique (*Perspectives*, 108). We should not expect to defeat technique, he says, but meet its challenge just as human beings have met all other challenges and transcended them.

Successfully meeting the challenge, says Ellul, requires "something transcendent" (*Perspectives*, 101). We must receive a freedom that comes from outside the system, something not given in technique, and live as bearers of Hope-Hope that comes from outside technique-and bearers of freedom, bringing free play into the midst of every sit-

uation. Being bearers of freedom, however, also is possible only when we have received freedom from outside the system of technique. What is required is *mutants*, persons who can use techniques and not be used by those techniques. We need people who are *in* but *against* technique-which, Ellul admits, is a delicate balance. Ellul does not mean that only Christians can overcome technique, though he does think that the Christian Revelation-not to be confused with the church-is the unique event in which God's reconciliation of the world-and consequently of technique-is accomplished.

Merton sees, as one might expect a Roman Catholic to see, the new creation constantly appearing in the simple events of nature and human relationships, bearing indelible witness to the grace of God. Technique is something that attempts to suppress nature (nature not merely in the sense of rocks, trees, and animals, but in the sense of the original integrity of the creation), but over which nature eventually will be triumphant because nature still bears the potentiality for restoration. Ellul, on the other hand, as one might expect from a Protestant in the Reform tradition, says that we must look to a transcendence outside the system to break the hold of the system. Certainly, Merton would not deny the need for the transcendent. The goal of contemplation is union with the transcendent. Moreover, ecumenical discussions of the past few years have raised interesting questions about the traditional categories in which the old Catholic-Protestant debates have previously been carried out. The fact remains that for all their similarities with regard to the character and consequences of technique, the point at which Ellul and Merton probably would have some interesting dialogue is technique in light of *Genesis 1-3*.



**Issue #8 Jan 1992 — Ivan Illich's  
Theology of Technology**

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***Forum: Ivan Illich —Toward a Theology of Technology***

## From the Editor

In the last issue I announced that the January issue of *The Ellul Studies Fourm* would be devoted to an analysis of the mass media. Various factors have lead me to postpone that issue until next July. In the meantime Carl Mitcham agreed to be our guest editor for this issue. He has gathered an intriguing collection of essays on Ivan Illich's critique of technology and its theological implications. Because of the number of essays there will be no book reviews or bibliography in this issue. My thanks to Carl for his hard work in bringing this issue to press.

*Darrell J. Fasching, Editor*

## About This Issue

Carl Mitcham, Guest Editor

This issue of the *Forum* is devoted to recent reflection by Ivan Illich and some of his associates. The work of Illich has been praised by Jacques Ellul. See, e.g., *The Technological Bluff* (1990 trans.), p. 108: "Ivan Illich was the best if not the first of those to emphasize thresholds..." And Illich likewise has made favorable reference to Ellul. See, for example, *Medical Nemesis* (1976, p. 102, note), as well as the remark in "Health as One's Own Responsibility." But more than favorable cross references justify this special issue.

The truth is that for Illich the fundamental challenge of technological civilization is a theological one. This is not, however, generally appreciated.

Born in Vienna in 1926, Illich grew up in Europe. He studied theology, philosophy, history, and natural science. During the 1950s he worked as a parish priest among Puerto Ricans in Hell's Kitchen in New York City and served as rector of the Catholic University of Puerto Rico. During the 1960s he founded centers for cross-cultural communication first in Puerto Rico then in Cuernavaca. Since the late 1970s he has divided his time between Mexico, the United States, and Germany. He currently holds an appointment as Professor of Philosophy and of Science, Technology, and Society at Penn State University.

Although his first two books *The Church, Change and Development* (1970) and *Celebration of Awareness* (1970) are both theological tracts, after that point his work veers off into social criticism that makes little if any explicit reference to the spiritual life. *Deschooling Society* (1971), *Tools for Conviviality* (1973), *Energy and Equity* (1974), and *Medical Nemesis* (1976) are all ostensibly monographs in social criticism.

The second of two subsequent collections of occasional pieces *Toward a History of Needs* (1978) and *Shadow Work* (1981) hints again at theological issues, especially in the long article entitled "Research by People," which is in fact a commentary on the work of the 12th century theologian, Hugh of St Victor. The following year the new monograph on *Gender* (1982) reasserts Illich's demand for attention to unexplored aspects of economics, while *HJ) and the Waters of Forgetfulness* (1985) alludes once again to theological dimensions.

Then following *ABC: The Alphabetization of the Popular Mind* (1988), which once more makes reference to the intellectual tradition of the Victorines, Illich undertakes an extended study of the *Didascalicon* of Hugh of St. Victor. This book has already appeared in German and French, and will do so shortly in English as *In the Vineyard of the Text* (University of Chicago Press, 1992). With this work theological concerns are explicitly if elliptically engaged.

Although not as explicitly as Ellul, there has nevertheless been a tension and an alternation between theological and sociological reflection in Illich's work. One difference is that with Illich the theological has been much less well attended to and recognized, even among his careful readers. No doubt this may be in part because of

the more illusive and allusive character of his theology. In the Catholic, unlike the Protestant tradition, what is more important than the explicit witnessing to faith is hidden friendship and liturgical practice.

The seven pieces included here are all the result of reflection among a close circle of friends. The lead piece is actually translated (by Jutta Mason of Toronto, Canada) from the transcript of a talk in Hannover, Germany, September 1990, and retains something of its occasional flavor. The interview (granted to a German newspaper after the talk in Hannover, and translated by Stephen Lehman, an Illich associate from the Van Peltz Library at the University of Pennsylvania) with commentary by Lee Hoinacki, are attempts to clarify Illich's provocative critique of what has been called "health fascism."

Hoinacki (bom 1928), has worked with Illich since 1960, and recently finished editing a book-length interview between Illich and CBC radio producer David Caley (Jutta Mason's husband), which will appear in spring 1992. "The Teddy Bearracks" by David Schwartz, executive director of the Developmental Disabilities Planning Council of Pennsylvania and another friend of Illich, illuminates from a different angle aspects of Illich's critique of the health establishment. Illich's letter on "Posthumous Longevity" again offers a critical-theological perspective on advanced medical technology and its impact in our technological civilization.

The final two pieces - a letter by Illich and a commentary on the letter by Hoinacki - both deal directly with the issue of institutionalized (technologized?) priesthood. Together they constitute a critical revisiting of the issues first broached in "The Vanishing Clergyman" (included in *Celebration of Awareness* over twenty years ago). Illich's letter was written in response to a surprise visit during the summer of 1990. Hoinacki's commentary is in the form of a memo response to Joseph Cunneen, editor of *Cross Currents* magazine, as a result of his decision not to publish Illich's letter. (It is perhaps worth noting that Schwartz's "Teddy Bearracks" has also been rejected for publication numerous times, although it has become an oft-referred to story.) That two pieces by Illich take the form of letters to friends is itself not insignificant.

It is hoped that these pieces will help intensify awareness of the special spiritual challenges of "life" in technological civilization, and may serve to foreshadow a more substantive work on these topics by Illich in the near future. The texts have been brought together with the assistance of Hoinacki and the toleration of Illich. Special editorial work to finish things off has been done by Mary Paliotta.

## Bulletin Board

### About the Ellul Studies Forum

*The Ellul Studies Forum* was first published in August of 1988. Two issues are produced each year (in January and July). The goal of the *Forum* is to honor the

work of Jacques Ellul both by analyzing and applying his thought to aspects of our technological civilization and by carrying forward his concerns in new directions.

What *the Forum* is not intended to be is a vehicle for *true disciples* or *Ellul groupies*. The whole thrust of Ellul's work has been to encourage others to think for themselves and invent their own responses to the challenges of a technological civilization. Although we do review and discuss Ellul's work, it is not our intention to turn his writings into a body of sacred literature to be endlessly dissected. The appropriate tribute to his work will be to carry forward its spirit and its agenda for the critical analysis of our technical civilization.

Ellul invites us to think new thoughts and enact new deeds. To that end we invite you to submit essays on appropriate topics. If you have suggestions for themes that you would like to see addressed in future issues, they are also welcome.

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If you would be willing to be a reviewer of books for the *Forum*, send your *vita* and a list of the areas/issues you would be interested in reviewing to our new Book Review Editor:

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# Forum – Ivan Illich: Toward a Theology of Technology

## Health as One's Own Responsibility: No, Thank You!

Ivan Illich

I am convinced that health and responsibility belong to a lost past and - being neither a romantic, a visionary, nor a drop-out - that I must renounce both of them. But only if I succeed in unequivocally articulating this renunciation of health and responsibility can I escape the reproach that I appear here as a mere rhetorical critic.

This presentation forms part of a larger joint project for the "recovery of *askesis* in higher education." My preparation included a close collaboration with Dirk von Boetticher. We discussed every sentence with a group of young friends. When, in what follows, I say "we," I mean only this group.

We are occupied with a reflection on contemporary certainties and their history - that is, on assumptions which seem so commonplace that they escape critical testing. Over and over we find that the renunciation of these very certainties offers the only possibility remaining for us to take up a critical position regarding that which Jacques Ellul calls *la technique*. And we want to free ourselves from it, not just run away. For that reason, my reaction to "taking responsibility for one's own health" is an emphatic "No!"

But there is a risk here. Our "No, thank you!" in response to a suggestion for a new hygienic anatomy can be interpreted and used in five different ways to do exactly the opposite of what we intend:

1. First of all, the "No" can be understood as a call for the necessity of tutelage. Health, so it might be claimed, is too valuable, too sacred to leave to the discretion of lay people. I apodictically reject this arrogant disempowerment. For thirty years I have publicly defended the total decriminalization of self-abuse. And I continue to insist on the complete elimination of all legal statutes which regulate the consumption of drugs, and unconventional and/or irregular healing. Following Paul Goodman, I build my argument on the respect we owe to the dignity of the weakest.

2. Secondly, my fundamental "No" has nothing to do with the presumed scarcity of healing agents. Today, people are dying of hunger, not from a lack of medicine or surgical interventions. And the poorer people are, the more helplessly they become

the victims of ever cheaper medicine. For two decades, I have defended the position that the consumption of medicine, just as of liquor, tobacco and lotteries, ought to be subject to taxation as luxuries. Through taxation of dialysis, coronary bypasses, and AZT simple medical procedures such as appendectomies could be financed for everyone.

3. I do *not* say "No" as a global thinker seeking an unobstructed channel for ecological dictatorship. I can imagine no complex of controls capable of saving us from the flood of poisons, radiations, goods and services which sicken humans and animals more than ever before. There is no way out of this world. I live in a manufactured reality ever further removed from creation. And I know today its significance, what horror threatens each of us.

A few decades ago, I did not yet know this. At that time, it seemed possible that I could share responsibility for the re-making of this manufactured world. Today, I finally know what powerlessness is. "Responsibility" is now an illusion. In such a world, "being healthy" is reduced to a combination of the enjoyment of techniques, protection from the environment, and adaptation to the consequences of techniques - all three of which are, inevitably, privileges. In the Mexican valley that I know, the blue com, under whose planting calendar the village still names its cyclical feasts, was wiped out fifteen years ago. And there is no money for the destructive techniques needed to grow hybrids. There is also no protection against the poisonous clouds blowing over from the agribusiness plantation. But new places of employment are opened up for the pedagogy of health, with sops thrown to barefoot green enthusiasts in the process. Therefore, my "No!" is certainly not a "yes" for a pedagogy of health which entails the management of poisonous systems.

4. And I particularly do not say my "No!" to a new ethics of responsibility for health because I see in modern sickness and dying occasions for finding oneself. The suggestion that we ought to accept the unavoidable epidemics of the post-industrial age as a higher kind of health is an impudence currently fashionable among pedagogues. But such instruction in suffering and dying is shameful. Care through bereavement counselling, education for dying, and the making of health plans aims directly at the destruction of the traditional art of suffering and dying, practices developed over hundreds of years.

What sickens us today is something altogether new. What determines the epoch since *Kristallnacht* is the growing matter-of-fact acceptance of a bottomless evil which Hitler and Stalin did not reach, but which today is the theme for elevated discussions on the atom, the gene, poison, health and growth. These are evils and crimes which render us speechless. Unlike death, pestilence and devils, *these* evils are without meaning. They belong to a non-human order. They force us into impotence, helplessness, powerlessness, *ahimsa*. We can suffer such evil, we can be broken by it, but we cannot make sense of it; we cannot direct it. Only he who finds his joy in friends can bear up under it. Our "No!" is thus a universe apart from every "Yes!" to the secondary accompaniments of progress.



5. And, finally, it would be either stupid or malevolent to label the "No" of which I speak as cynical indifference. Quite the contrary! In the forefront of our thoughts stand the many - innumerable people - for whom four decades of development destroyed the cultural, technical, and architectural space in which the inherited arts of suffering and dying were formerly nurtured. *Today*, the vast majority is poor, and becomes poorer. When we say "No!" to implanting health at home or abroad, we first of all speak about something which for me is unthinkable: four billions in new wretchedness. Only if we ourselves start with "No, thank you!" can we attempt to be there with them.

The ground of our ethical "no," therefore, does not place us in the service of any of these five: professional paternalism, the ideology of scarcity, systems thinking, liberation psychology, or the new "commonsense" which asserts that in the fourth world no grass has grown over the consequences of development. But it grows, that grass; it is called self-limitation. And self-limitation stands in opposition to the currently fashionable self-help, self-management or even responsibility for oneself - all three of which produce an interiorization of global systems into the self, in the manner of a categorical imperative. Renunciation of health seems to us to be a starting point for conduct ethically, aesthetically, and eudaemonically fitting today. And I refuse to define self-limitation as responsibility for myself. With Orwell, I would rather speak of decency.

The concept of health in European modernity represents a break with the Galenic-Hippocratic tradition familiar to the historian. For Greek philosophers, "healthy" was a concept for harmonious mingling, balanced order, a rational interplay of the basic elements. People were healthy who integrated themselves into the harmony and totality of their world according to the time and place they lived. For Plato, health was a somatic virtue, and spiritual health, too, a virtue. In "healthy human understanding," the German language - despite critiques by Kant, Hamann, Hegel and Nietzsche - preserved something of this cosmotropic qualification.

But since the 17th century, the attempt to master nature displaced the ideal of the health of a people, who by this time were no longer a microcosm. This inversion gives the a-cosmic health created in this way the appearance of being engineerable. Under this hypothesis of engineerability, "health as possession" has gained acceptance since the last quarter of the 18th century. In the course of the 19th century, it became commonplace to speak of "my body" and "my health."

In the American Declaration of Independence, the right to happiness was affirmed. The right to health materialized in a parallel way. In the same way as happiness, modern-day health is the fruit of possessive individualism. There could have been no more brutal and, at the same time, more convincing way to legitimize a society based on self-serving greed. In a similarly parallel way, the concept of the responsibility of the individual gained acceptance in formally democratic societies. Responsibility then took on the semblance of ethical power over ever more distant regions of society and ever more specialized services for delivering "happiness."

In the 19th and early 20th century, then, health and responsibility were still believable ideals. Today they are elements of a lost past to which there is no return. Health and responsibility are normative concepts which no longer give any direction. When I try to structure my life according to such irrecoverable ideals, they become harmful I make myself sick. In order to live decently today, I must decisively renounce health and responsibility. Renounce, I say, not ignore I do not use the word to denote indifference. I must accept powerlessness, mourn that which is gone, renounce the irrecoverable. I must bear the powerlessness which, as Marianne Gronemeyer tends to emphasize, can perhaps rob me of my awareness, my senses.

I firmly believe in the possibility of renunciation. And this is not calculation. Renunciation signifies and demands more than sorrow over the irrecoverable. It can free one from powerlessness, and has nothing to do with resignation, impotence, or even repression. But renunciation is not a familiar concept today. We no longer have a word for courageous, disciplined, and self-critical renunciation accomplished within a community but that is what I am talking about. I will call it *askesis*. I would have preferred another word, for *askesis* today brings to mind Flaubert and Saint Antony in the desert turning away from wine, women and fragrance. But the renunciation of which I speak has very little to do with this.

The epoch in which we live is abstract and disembodied. The certainties on which it rests are largely *sense-less*. And their worldwide acceptance gives them a semblance of independence from history and culture. What I want to call *epistemological askesis* opens the path toward renouncing those axiomatic certainties on which the contemporary worldview rests. I speak of convivial and critically practiced disciplines. The so-called values of health and responsibility belong to these certainties. Examined in depth, one sees them as deeply sickening, disorienting phenomena. That is why I regard a call to take responsibility for my health as senseless, deceptive, indecent - and, in a very particular way, blasphemous.

*It is senseless today to speak of health.* Health and responsibility have been made largely impossible from a technical point of view. This was not clear to me when I wrote *Medical Nemesis*, and perhaps was not yet the case at that time. In hindsight, it was a mistake to understand health as the quality of "survival," and as the "intensity of coping behavior." Adaptation to the misanthropic genetic, climatic, chemical and cultural consequences of growth is now described as health. Neither the Galenic-Hippocratic representations of a humoral balance, nor the Enlightenment utopia of a right to "health and happiness," nor any Vedic or Chinese concepts of wellbeing, have anything to do with survival in a technical system.

"Health" as function, process, mode of communication, and health as an orienting behavior that requires management - these belong with the post-industrial conjuring formulas which suggestively connote but denote nothing that can be grasped. And as soon as health is addressed, it has already turned into a sense-destroying pathogen, a member of a word family which Uwe Poerksen calls plastic words, word husks which one can wave around, making oneself important, but which can say or do nothing.

*A political deception.* The situation is similar with responsibility, although to demonstrate this is much more difficult. In a world which worships an ontology of systems, ethical responsibility is reduced to a legitimizing formality. The poisoning of the world, to which I contribute with my flight from New York to Frankfurt, is not the result of an irresponsible decision, but rather of my presence in an unjustifiable web of interconnections. It would be politically naive, after health and responsibility have been made technically impossible, to somehow resurrect them through inclusion into a personal project; some kind of resistance is demanded.

Instead of brutal self-enforcement maxims, the new health requires the smooth integration of my immune system into a socioeconomic world system. Being asked to take responsibility is, when seen more clearly, a demand for the destruction of meaning and self. And this proposed self-assignment to a system that cannot be experienced stands in stark contrast to suicide. It demands self-extinction in a world hostile to death. Precisely because I also seek tolerance for suicide in a society which has become a-mortal, I must publicly expose the idealization of "healthy" self-integration. People cannot feel healthy; they can only enjoy their own functioning in the same way as they enjoy the use of their computer.

To demand that our children feel well in the world which we leave them is an insult to their dignity. Then to impose on them responsibility for th;, insult is a base act

*Indecent demand* In many respects, the biological, demographic, and medical research focused on health during the last decade has shown that medical achievements only contributed in an insignificant way to the medically defined level of health in the population. Moreover, studies have found that even preventative medicine is of secondary importance in this respect. Further, we now see that a majority of these medical achievements are deceptive misnomers, actually doing nothing more than prolonging the suffering of madmen, cripples, old fools and monsters. Therefore, I find it reprehensible that the self-appointed health experts now emerge as caring monitors who, with their slogans, put the responsibility of suffering onto the sick themselves. In the last fifteen years, propaganda in favor of hypochondria has certainly led to a reduction in smoking and butter consumption among the rich, and to an increase in their jogging. It has also led to the fact that the U.S. now exports more tobacco, butter, and jogging shoes.

But throughout the world, propaganda for medically defined health coincided with an increase in misery for the majority of people. This is how one can summarize the argument of Banerji. He demonstrates how the importation of western thought undermined hygienic customs and solidified advancement of elites in India. Twenty years ago, Hakin Mohammed Said, the leader of the Pakistan Unani, spoke about medical sickening through the importation of a western concept of health. What concerned him was the corruption of the praxis of traditional Galenic physicians, not by western pharmacopeia so much as by a western concept of health which sees death as the enemy. This hostility to death (sic!) - which is to be internalized along with personal responsibility for health - is why I regard the slogan of health as indecent

*Life as blasphemy.* The art of the historian consists in the interpretation of traces and texts of those long dead. In the course of my life as a medieval historian, there has been a fundamental change in this task. Before a recent radical transformation - roughly, in *actio aw&passio* - it was possible for the exegete to relate substantives and verbs to things and activities which lie within the circumference of his own sensed experience. After this radical transformation, that capacity was lost. This watershed, separating the historian from his object, becomes particularly clear when the experienced body is the subject of historical writing. Dr. Barbara Duden presents this convincingly in reference to body history in the experience of pregnancy. And I myself am made dizzy. How deeply the ways of speaking and experiencing have been altered in the last two decades!

In a very short time, the representation of the substantive concept "life" has prominently emerged. During the Vietnam War, there was still a body count of the enemy; only the lives of Americans were saved. But soon after it was taken for granted that something called "a life" begins and then ends. Around 1969, the *quality* of life suddenly became an issue. Immediately, the physician was required to take over responsibility for *life*. Biomedicine discovered its competence over "life."

Studying the history of well-being, the history of health, it is obvious that with the arrival of life and its quality - which was also called health - the thread which linked what is called health today with health in the past was broken. Health has become a scale on which one measures the fitness for living of an immune system. The conceptual reduction of a person to an immune system corresponds to the deceptive reduction of creation to a global system, Lovelock's Gaia. And from this perspective, responsibility ends up being understood as the self-steering of an immune system. "Responsibility" is a word that, as a philosophical concept, only appeared in German around 1920. As much as I might like to rescue the word for future use, to be able to use it to characterize my actions and omissions, I cannot do it. And this is true, not primarily because through this slogan for self-regulation of one's own "quality of life" meaning is extinguished, management transfigured into something beneficial, and politics reduced to feedback - but because God is thus blasphemed.

I ask you to pay careful attention to my form of expression. I am a Christian, but when I speak here about blaspheming God, I want to be understood as a historian and *not as a* theologian. I can only claim solidity for an argument constructed by a historian. I accepted the invitation to speak in order to contradict the opinion of many I know. I hope I do this respectfully, but I cannot mince words.

I have outlined my thinking. Longing for that which health and responsibility *might* have been in recently arrived modernity I leave to romantics and drop-outs. I consider it a perversion to use the names of high-sounding illusions which do not fit the world of computer and media for the internalization and embodiment of representations from systems and information theory. Further, I consider the renouncing of these fictions a real possibility. And I call the practice of this renunciation an epistemic askesis. I

believe that an art of suffering appropriate to contemporary life can grow out of this askesis.

What is important to the argument is to understand that all the central concepts that I discuss here are of profoundly western origin: health and responsibility, life and askesis... and God. They were put in the world and became powerful through beliefs that took hundreds of years to come into being. Only if one understands the history of health and life in their historical interconnection is there a basis for the passion with which I call for the renunciation of "life." I completely agree with Dirk von Boetticher when he quotes T.S. Eliot:

*Where is the Life we have lost in living?*

*Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?*

*Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?*

*The cycles of Heaven in twenty centuries*

*Bring us farther from God and nearer to the Dust*

Eliot here inquires about life pertaining to God, about the life of which Christ says in John 11:25 "I am the life."

Aristotle did not know about this. Aristotle knew living beings which were different from all other things because they had "psyche." He did not know "life." As an appearance in the world, only in the 18th century did life acquire that dominant and exclusive significance which gave it the character of its own answer, not from God, but from the world. Lamarck and Treviranus, who around 1800 founded biology as the "science of life" in a conscious turning away from the classifications of natural history, were quite aware of the fundamental newness of their object. This life, which owes its origin and definitions to the world is, however, profoundly influenced by western Christianity, and can only be understood as a perversion of the tradition in which the God become flesh describes himself as life, and calls everyone to this life.

This is mystery. And every person who occupies himself seriously with almost two thousand years of history must admit that not only individual mystics but great cultures between Novgorod and Santiago de Compostella, between Uppsala and Montreal, have honored this mystery. This is simply historical reality, even for a historian who has no concept and no sense of what it means. And just as plain and unquestionable is the derivation of the biological concept of life from the Christian mystery. When seen in this way, the concept of a life which can be reduced to a survival phase of the immune system is not only a caricature, not only an idol, but a blasphemy. And seen in this light, desire for responsibility for the quality of this life is not only stupid or impertinent - it is a sin.

**Translated by Jutta Mason, edited by Lee Hoinacki, from a talk in Hannover, Germany, September 14,1990**

## Against Health: An Interview with Ivan Illich

Question: "Taking Responsibility for Your Health" is the theme of this conference. Isn't this in accord with your way of thinking?

Illich: I didn't know what to think, because I hadn't intended to come here. I told the conference organizers that I have one single response to "taking responsibility for one's own health": a hearty "No thanks!"

Q: Why?

I: Health and responsibility are concepts from the 18th century. Health in the sense of the health of the people, in the sense of something desirable, begins around 1760, 1770, at the same time as the concept of happiness, the happiness that is inscribed by the Americans in the Declaration of Independence. This is a materialization of the right to happiness around which entire professions were formed whose duty is the happiness or the health of the nation. But even if I make fan of this concept which stems from the Enlightenment, it still made some sense at the time of my birth, 64 years ago. I was also able to give it meaning when I wrote the book *Medical Nemesis*, which begins with the sentence, "The biggest threat to public health is the medical profession." If someone were to say that to me today, I would say, "Well, so what?"

Q: What's changed?

I: We have been deluged with information about it: ozone hole, greenhouse effect, radiation, chemistry, overuse of antibiotics, the destruction of what one now calls the immune system, genetic impoverishment, urbanization. This is not a concept of health. It is adaptation to noise, adaptation to gluttony, adaptation to the rhythms we are living with - and, above all, adaptation to inner destruction.

Q: Describe this inner destruction.

I: A few days ago I was having dinner in Philadelphia with some friends. A French-Swiss Colleague, Robert, is there. He is speaking to Tracy, wanting to give her a second mug of good apple cider, and she says, "No, my system can't take that much sugar at once. I could be thrown off balance." This woman, now 27, had been in an elementary school in which she had been confronted in the second grade with pictures of the muscles, the nerves and the endocrine system. She projected them into her own self. She does not only think of herself but she experiences herself as something that is turned on and off, something to be regulated, something totally unreal.

Q: In other words, all the concepts of medicine...

I: ... are disembodied...

Q: ... and alienate us from ourselves...

I: ... because we take them from medicine. And I see in the slogan "Health is your own responsibility" a really malicious pedagogical intention which says to us: look at yourself and experience yourself in the perspective of the system-theories which we preach. Well, you that you are temporarily surviving little immune system in the womb of the world system of the goddess Gaia. She is life and you are a life! And we define life — like a snake that consumes its own tail - as the phenomenon that optimizes

the chances for its own survival. This excites the Greens who march in the streets and the systems analysts who babble about control of the world and the gentlemen whom I've heard at this conference - they all talk the same nonsense that I saw a few days ago in Washington, where thousands of school children marched in the streets and cried, "We are against the greenhouse effect, we don't want the ozone hole!"

Q: But who wants an ozone hole?

I: The point is we've got one! We have no alternative but to say: I renounce health. It's terrible. I refuse to delude myself with the possibility of an Enlightenment-like concept. I know that no path will lead me back into the Indian yoga or into the Chinese notion of a heaven and earth that correspond to one another and into which I would dissolve. I admit my powerlessness and experience it profoundly. One cannot do this alone - for this, friendship, the old *philia*, is the basis - it won't work without it. But renunciation is possible. Renunciation which is self-aware, critical, exercised with discipline and for which there was once a name - asceticism.

Q: That sounds very monastic?

I: Yes, I'd prefer another word. One thinks only of the "No, thank you" to wine, women and song. But that has nothing to do with asceticism as I mean it. It is much more challenging. It is a "No, thank you" to the certainties that our society is built on.

Q: For example?

I: Every era is like a firmament, with its conceptual fixed stars, under whose direction the ideas, but also the material experiences of the era come into existence. These basic concepts I call certainties, I should rather say assumptions which sound so obvious that no one examines them. My friends and I have made it our responsibility to write the history of the certainties of the modern era, systematically, carefully and scientifically - and one of these certainties is health.

Q: You once said that health is a plastic idea.

I: I adopted this term from my teacher and colleague, the linguist, Prof. Uwe Poerksen of Freiburg. He says that there is a new category of words, which we use ceaselessly. They don't refer to anything precise, but they carry great significance and self-importance with them. They are like stones which one throws into a lake, when one can't see where they end up, but they make big waves all the same. He calls these words plastic words, or amoeba words. I believe that conversation in amoeba words is the reason for our difficulty in getting to the heart of the matter, for example, of my "No-to-health," of my demand for renunciation. It can either be called nonsense, and it is necessarily called that by most people, or it can be seen as vanity: where do you stand, when you pronounce such a renunciation? My point of comparison is historical. For example, in the 19th century "health" meant primarily fewer lice, fleas and mice, larger windows, bandages, access to doctors. Aspirin didn't exist yet. In the medical practice of a doctor of that time - the historian Barbara Duden examined his notes - the word health hardly appears.

Q: What did people complain about then?

I: They were tired. Something has gone to their head. They hurt themselves. Their heart was broken ... I would go so far as to say that to propagate "Taking responsibility for your health" is politically insolent. It is asking people to look for something that they should know is not attainable.. I am disgusted by experts who can look back 30 or 40 years and know that world health has deteriorated incredibly in the last 20 years and wash their hands of it and beat up on the victims. I angers me that health refers nowadays to me as a system, as "a life." A *awy* propaganda has been perpetrated by the concept that each of us is "a life."

The concept "a life" is a Christian-Western concept. It is Jesus' answer to Martha: "Yes, I am *the* life." For 2000 years Christians have believed that to become one with him is to enter into life. This was the only life one knew. The inventors of biology the word comes into existence around 1801 or 1802 knew full well that they had created something new with their life-on-earth, for which there is now a science, biology. This life is increasingly presented as a system, a delicate immune system, to be treated with care, which should always be property kept in balance. To imagine health as "quality of life" is a further total dehumanization, a radical abstraction and to propagate it seems to me nonsensical, because it is a-sensual, but finally also because, given the Christian connection to this concept, it is even blasphemous.

And "responsibility" in a world in which one cannot even cast a ballot reasonably! In a world in which increasingly that which one earlier called "democratic freedom" has become symbolic conformity. In a world in which you are asked: what kind of birth do you want, c-section, vaginal or maybe even with a surrogate mother? In a world in which you are seemingly given a choice, but in which in reality you only endorse what a given profession has decided to do with you. To trumpet responsibility in such a world instead of saying: People, friends, we are powerless, we must accept our powerlessness to speak of one's responsibility for one's health publicly and normatively is profoundly annoying and offensive.

Q: You have sketched a depressing scenario. Do you also see a hope there?

I: Yes. And it is not only strong, it is also often fulfilled. This scenario of which I have spoken, in which we are very isolated if we seek and preserve meaning, is also an occasion for an intensity of friendship which would hardly be imaginable in a world of inherited ties, familiar culture, middle class values, wealth and security. This is my hope. Otherwise I have none.

**Translated by Stephen Lehman  
from the Berlin newspaper TAZ (23 October 1990)**

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## Reflections on "Health as One's Own Responsibility"

Lee Hoinacki

In the last several years, Illich has begun to talk and write about *askesis* in higher education. To understand the sterility and confusion in the West's institutions of higher learning, one can examine the division of reading which occurred in the 12th century. At that time, monastic reading was split into scholastic and spiritual reading, the former coming to characterize the universities, leading to what today is called "critical thought." Previously, Illich had asked for research into *askesis* in learning. In "Health," he calls for the convivial *practice* of *askesis*. Further, he maintains that to exercise this kind of disciplined "No" today, one needs friends. A striking feature of this piece, then, is the apparent distance between its "positions" and Illich's previous writings. I shall note other instances of this below.

In earlier writings, he has said that modern certainties - the unexamined axioms on which the West rests - must be questioned and, in various books, tried to show how this can be done. Now, for the first time, he baldly states that the certainties must be renounced, and begins with a denial of health and responsibility. Of course, these are not the only modern certainties for Illich. But this is an appropriate place to start.

The renunciation of these certainties is necessary in order that one might be able critically to confront what Jacques Ellul some years ago called, *la technique*. This is

the first time in his writings on industrial society that Illich explicitly takes up Ellul's concept. In "Health," *la technique* is seen as *the* mode in which contemporary society is organized and managed, or rather controlled, as a system.

In *The Technological Society*, Ellul attempted to analyze modern society, and concluded that because of the *necessary* character of *la technique*, people could not hope to exercise control over their inventions. "Health," taking *la technique* to mean the set of interlocking and coordinated systems in which society is structured, proposes a similar assessment.

Looking around, Illich finds that people today are in a situation of utter powerlessness. Since this is true, no social or political action is any longer possible... it is too late - assuming that such action would be aimed at genuine change. All social action can only work to reinforce the existing systems. Indeed, the more sensible, more rational, more ethical - the better such action, the worse the result, for the action can only serve to give greater legitimacy to one or several of the systems in place. This will happen because of the character and power of the various contemporary systems.

And this occurs in spite of the fact that modern systems - as a form of order and control - lack legitimation in any traditional rite, image, or custom. They are newly constructed and in a constant process of being up-dated. Hence, reform initiatives - serious or frivolous - distractions, highly developed specializations, are all welcomed warmly. It appears impossible to find any activity which cannot be appropriated by one of our abstract systems.

In the past, human beings acted through ideas, war-making, law-giving, and social movements to change their respective societies. The insights of "Health" reveal that such is no longer possible. But although I find myself in a position of total helplessness, there remains something I *can* do: Say "No." And Illich clearly states the specific sense in which he *must* say "No." This is the situation of a person who accepts the possibility of blasphemy. And it is Illich's position that blasphemy is *the* characteristic of contemporary society, that is, in its fundamental structure. Our world is built on blasphemy.

Blasphemy is to attribute something to God that does not pertain to the divine goodness, as the denial of that which does so pertain, usually accompanied by an attitude of contempt. But that which is most properly constitutive of the modern project - the attempt to conceptualize and manipulate reality as a system - is just such an attribution and denial, colored by a peculiarly modern arrogance. This modern project attributes a systematic character to what is while denying its created nature.

Ultimately, blasphemy is a sin against faith. Through faith, what I see and feel I *know* to be creation. What I see as real exists only by participation, through faith I know that the world *is* only contingently. But the world in which I am placed today is an artificial world, "a manufactured reality ever further removed from creation." This construct, issuing from the inventiveness of human experts, denies creation. In a kind of final hubris, they wish to assume responsibility for what was traditionally understood as creation.

Formerly, whether people acted humbly or arrogantly, trustingly or fearfully, all accepted creation as a gift, as *the* primary gift, the original expression of the divine goodness. But the world viewed as a global system, with the human being seen as an immune system responsible for maintaining order, is to deity this ancient belief.

Aquinas teaches that blasphemy is the most serious sin because it attacks what basically establishes us in the world - through faith we place ourselves *in* creation. Illich holds that to live in blasphemy is to live in "a bottomless evil," a place where "elevated discussions of the atom, the ge.se, poison, health and growth" take place. Some years ago, when lu was invited to participate in such a discussion, he insisted on "the right to dignified silence/ and stood mute on a street comer in Germany to protest, by his "silent scream," the stationing of American missiles on German soil. His action was a step toward the unequivocal "No" about which he writes in "Health."

For the person of faith in today's world, the very first question is: How shall I act, vis-S-vis the tystems construct? This is precisely where the denial of faith occurs. Ilich believes that one must begin with "No," with a renunciation - of health. This seems fitting, since health is often viewed as *the* unquestioned "good" of modernity. And modem medicine is said to produce miracles of healing. But, Illich claims, "the flood of poisons, radiations, goods and services which sicken humans and animals more than ever before" is a more accurate characterization of contemporary reality. Here also he is much more explicit than in his earlier writings.

In a strange irony of history, those things for which men and women in the labor movement fought and died must now be recognized as equivalent to deadly poison and radiation. But this can seem a terribly extreme judgment. How is it to be understood?

Today, the planning, production and delivery of goods and services is accomplished in systemic terms. This means, ultimately, the infliction of a new kind of sickness, something far beyond anything previously seen or imagined in history. The contemporary project is nothing less than to structure society in such a way that no human act is possible.

In the West, we have come to see that a human act is one in which a person, recognizing alternatives, chooses one over another. But this is precisely what cannot be done if one lives in a system. For example, during a recent visit to Germany, I was startled to discover that in places where the public has access almost every door had been fitted with an apparently simple and innocent device: an electronic eye which automatically opens and closes the door. For me it was immediately evident that this is an image which truly illustrates the structure of modem society. One can no longer choose to open the door for someone burdened with packages. One can no longer carefully and quietly close a door, or thoughtlessly - perhaps deliberately - slam it in another's face. One can no longer thank a stranger for courteously holding the door. In a word, one can no longer practice virtue - the comeliness and joy of living have been removed.

The world of interlocking systems - always being multiplied and perfected - annihilates the moral beauty formerly shining out from lives illumined by the life-long

practice of justice, fortitude, temperance and prudence. Such a mode of living no longer appears possible. The world of systems immerses one in "a bottomless evil" because its structure of society is such that it eliminates the setting in which one can love another. In place of opportunities to create beauty and experience joy, one is locked into the delivery of goods and services. All that which is supposed to establish a high quality of life actually sickens one to death.

Why is it that so few have said so little about these matters? - if the situation is as Ulich claims. One might begin to answer by suggesting that our world is, indeed, as it is described by Alasdair MacIntyre at the beginning of *After Virtue*. Historically, we may have lost the ability to make moral judgments, to recognize ugliness. Further, Illich's discussion of reading in the 12th century can help one to see the situation. Prior to the division into two kinds of reading - scholastic and spiritual - one simply entered the book in the act of reading, and the book entered the reader. There occurred a real transformation in one's being, taking place over a lifetime, and made possible through the discipline of a continual *askesis*. The various ascetic disciplines, developed over centuries, were designed to enable one to read in this way, namely, to be transformed through the reading with the result that one came to see - in charity. Over and over again in the medieval texts one meets the concept, *lumen* light. One was not the same person, before and after the act of reading. And the text was one of substance, eminently suited to invite a person to be incorporated into it.

Over the centuries the scholastic mode of reading - in which one could imagine an abstract text independent of both the page and oneself - developed into a kind of lifeless intellectual critique which, in its most extreme form today, finds its ultimate end in the critique, not in the original text, nor in the person of the reader. Contemporary academic specialization distracts one from seeing the world as it is. But contemporary reading vitiates the very act of seeing, that is, seeing as occurred in monastic reading. It is not surprising, then, that the character of our age is recognized, not by academic philosophy, but by those inspired by poetic imagination - persons such as Czeslaw Milosz, Flannery O'Connor, T. S. Eliot, and Mark Rothko. And it seems quite fitting that Illich, sometimes called a philosopher, does not express himself in the logical arguments generally found in philosophical discourse, but finds his own voice in stories and images.

In "Health" there is scant systematic progression of thought; one might have trouble tracing the line of the argument. He proceeds here and elsewhere — in a manner similar to what occurs when one is under the influence of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, here, specifically, the gift of understanding (*donum intellectus*). Through this gift, one *knows* through the apprehension of spiritual goods, subtly penetrating their intimate character. With a clarity of vision, one simply sees... what is there, having first sensed some of the outward aspects. According to Aquinas, the gift is opposed to blindness of mind and dullness of sense. These obstacles originate in the distractions resulting from the sensual delights of venereal and food/drink pleasures, respectively. Today, however, I think that additional, powerful, distractions are also at work.

Why, for example, do so few intellectuals - secular *or* religious seem capable of penetrating the darkneses of our age? I strongly suspect that the *luxuria* and *gula* of the middle ages do not nearly exhaust contemporary obstructions to seeing. Traditionally, two areas of experience contributed to the sharpening of one's intellectual vision: the very precariousness of existence and the various ascetical exercises practiced throughout one's lifetime in order to purify the external and internal senses. Contemporary religious and secular academics are the most protected and privileged persons in society. They are the ones who most benefit from the securities and perquisites which the various social systems offer. And they seem to be singularly unaware of the need for a *moral askesis*, that is, the complex of disciplines traditionally designed to affect and transform various aspects of one's being and faculties or powers with a view toward reaching a clear vision, a pure insight. In this sense one can recognize that the goods and services of modernity are a poison, sickening one, making one blind.

Now one can focus Illich's call for an *askesis* beginning with a renunciation of the principal illusion, health, that is, survival in a technical system. And such a renunciation can lead one toward the reality of precariousness. The world today is drearily lacking in the sensuality known to the middle ages, but inundated with the abstract fictions of disembodied systems. If one wants to see, it is necessary to free oneself from these systems. Further, faith in these institutionalized guarantees is yet another form of the current blasphemy. In this sense, blasphemy is the source of the darkness in which we stumble.

There is a final point, the most important one in Illich's call, and here it is clear that he proceeds according to insight or gifted vision, not according to discursive argument. This occurs in the discussion of Life... and... life.

The founders of biology sensed something which they believed could be the subject of their science. They named this "life," a concept available to them in their culture. They did not create their subject *ex nihilo*. And they had to give their subject meaning from *this* world, for they wished to found a science, a discipline of this world. But, over the years the subject became more and more abstract, totally removed from soil and slime, indeed, finally removed from creation. Their "life" came to get its meaning only from the internal demands of a system today, of an immune system. And this transformation, from a divine gift to a man-made abstraction, constitutes the principal blasphemy of the age.

## The Teddy Bearracks

David B. Schwartz

In a local weekly newspaper in New York State the other day there was a short item under the heading "Daycare News."

On a more helpful note, the Community Hospital is initiating a daycare program for sick children called TEDDY BEARRACKS. Located on the

hospital's pediatric unit, the service charges parents \$3 an hour, which includes meals, snacks, beverages, and supervision. The service will be open Monday through Friday from 6-30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. and is open to children over two months old whose registration is "on file" before parents need to use the program. . . . There are 16 beds on the pediatric floor and the average daily use is about eight patients. That leaves six to eight spaces open for sick children on a daycare basis. Those spaces may not go very far once flu season hits, but it's a much needed first step toward addressing the real needs of working parents.

At first thought a program like this didn't seem like a bad idea. After all, most day-care programs will not accept children who have the flu or some other kind of illness. This obviously poses a real problem for the many two-job and single-parent families who depend upon day care in order to work. But when I thought further about it some more disturbing implications came to mind. Is this really, I began to wonder, likely to be a program that is good for children and families?

Many people have commented on the increased use of day-care services for children in our society due to economic necessity, changes in the role of women, and erosion of traditional family structure. In a situation in which many adults who might once have been care-givers are working, and in which grandma is in a retirement village, child-raising is changing from a familial task to a purchased service. "When I was growing up in North Philadelphia," a woman told me recently, "we kids were just raised by the block. Any adult was likely to give you a swat if you were cutting up. Everything was all just together."

You have to search to find a place where life is like this anymore in this country. In the changes which have taken place, child-raising has become something which has entered the economic sphere. In the economic world, unlike the community world, there are providers of service and purchasers of service. Providers of service in this case are often human service organizations. Human service organizations, unlike communities, operate under the formal rules that govern large systems, i.e., bureaucratic rules.

In Pennsylvania, day-care providers are now required by law to conduct background checks on the people they hire, following scandals over child abuse in some centers. Day-care centers require registration and admission, and must worry about low enrollment if the staff/child ratio falls below planned economic parameters. In communities you always knew who was with your child because you lived on the same street, or in the same village. You didn't pre-register a child to go to Mrs. O'Brien's house - you just talked with her. And while there might be economics involved, they were the economics of community; informal, flexible, and outside the formal economic system.

The conversion to child care as a "human service" is visibly underway, through expansion of professional child-raising functions, as the trend moves to completion. Part of the next stage of this conversion can be expected to be the appearance of specialized programs for specific groups. As I thought about all of this I realized after a moment

that the hospital's day-care program for sick children probably had significance as a sign that the larger trend had reached a point in which this was already taking place. Even one's sick little child would now be given over to an institution for care

From the point of view of the individual parents concerned, the development of such a program is probably seen as a blessing. A single mother, after all, might even lose her job if she had to stay home too often to care for her sick child. But I worry greatly about these little children. And I worry about their families.

What must it be like, I wonder, to be a little boy or girl, even as young as a two-month-old baby, and be bundled, sick and miserable, taken out of your bedroom and through the early morning traffic up to the gleaming new hospital wards? The big white building, anxietyprovoking even to us adults because of its images of sickness and death, its complicated machinery and the bustle of doctors and nurses and technologists coming and going - what must it seem like to a little sick child? What must it be like to be taken over the gleaming waxed floors, under the endless bright fluorescent lights, to a crisp white unfamiliar bed in a ward? The nurses are nice, but they are not Mommy, or Mrs. Fredricks, or probably anyone you have ever even seen before.

Children will adapt to the necessity of being in the hospital when they have the flu. Children are very adaptable. They have always adapted to difficult and even scary and oppressive circumstances. Thousands and thousands of children have spent most of their childhood in sterile institutions and have, in one way or another, survived. We have learned, however, that this experience inevitably leaves scars.

One can speculate on what the scars might be for such children. What ideas might they begin to get about sickness, and what happens to you when you are sick, and what Mommy and Daddy do when you are sick because they are busy with their work? Might we not speculate that at least some children will gain or expand some haunting insecurities about their acceptance, when ill and troublesome? Might they not even begin to get the idea at an early age that when a person is sick or needs something what you do is take them to a big building somewhere where knowledgeable people in white uniforms know what to do?

In my years in human service and public policy I have become convinced that policy and program developments that are potentially injurious to people and to society are virtually always the result of hard work by good people who are sincerely trying to meet a pressing need that is before them. Yet while the immediate need always exists, I have begun to conclude that the ways in which such problems are addressed are usually shaped by larger and often unfavorable factors that are frequently unconscious.

We hear, for example, a great deal these days about the financial pressure on hospitals to utilize beds. We learn that this hospital's pediatric unit of 16 beds has a daily census of eight, a situation that translates in hospital terms into a utilization rate only 50%. A low occupancy rate can cause difficulty for a hospital. Perhaps this was a factor here, perhaps not. Perhaps the influence was more subtle only that the empty beds exist. No doubt there was a genuine desire to help. Without anyone realizing it, is it just possible that these vacant beds in the hospital ward have "drawn" youngsters

into, in their own words (and words signify and reveal a great deal) a "barracks" for sick children - a "Teddy Bearracks?" own words (and words signify and reveal a great deal) a "barracks" for sick children a "Teddy Bearracks?"

Could the creation of such a "sick child" program have been unconsciously driven by a combination of the expanding professionalization of child care and the availability of hospital beds? I don't know the details of this particular situation, so I can't say whether this speculation is true. But it makes me wonder.

I know little about programs for children, at least "normal children." My work is concerned with the welfare of people with disabilities. But from the vantage point of my own field, this little program at the community hospital brings a nagging sense of disquiet. For some years much of the work of my colleagues across the country has consisted in trying to take apart the institutional solutions of our predecessors. Our predecessors were wonderful and honorable people - giants of social conscience and action, in many cases. But as the late Syracuse University dean Burton Blatt pointed out, despite the best of intentions their work for mentally retarded people ultimately led to the loss of everything important for those about whom they cared. We have been trying very hard, my colleagues and I, to learn from their well-meaning but terrible mistake.

I wonder if the most far-reaching result of this little program may not be to further embed the habit of institutionalization in our hearts and in our society. Is not a child likely to learn that institutions, be they hospitals, mental hospitals, reformatories, prisons, or whatever, are the appropriate way to address personal and social problems? What long-term habits may we foster through such seemingly innocent attempts to meet real human needs?

The comparison with my own field brings this question more vividly to my attention. Once we said that children with mental retardation needed to be cared for (permanently, in this case) in large professional facilities, the "state schools." When these became visible failures and our consciences rebelled, we replaced them with smaller "community" facilities like special schools, and workshops, and day-care and treatment centers. Only recently have we realized that even the latter have more in common with big institutions than with true community.

Seymour Sarason, a noted scholar on this subject, commented that even small community centers of this kind paradoxically make the real community's ability to meet problems weaker, for they transfer both the need and the solution out of the hands of the community itself. For the benefit of meeting a short-term need, society pays the price of giving up a portion of its people. This is why the seemingly innocent creation of training institutions for children with mental retardation in the last century eventually led to the fact that I never really met a person with mental retardation until I was an adult. By that time, communities needed to learn all over again that these people were of their own social body, and didn't need to be served exclusively by professionals. This is proving difficult to relearn, for they listened too well to us before.



How curious it is, as I observe sick children starting to get day care in a hospital, to see my own field now moving in the opposite direction! Many people with developmental disabilities have very significant needs. We used to think that they all had to come to the same place. Just last month, though, my organization gave out grants to people to initiate what we term in my field "family support" by building upon the strengths of communities themselves. These children have far greater needs than those of a normal child with the flu, yet they can be cared for without leaving their homes or their neighborhoods. The program's goal is to link up parents and neighbors with each other, to provide petty cash to hire the elderly lady next door, to bring nurses and medical equipment, when needed, right into the child's home. This is being done now all over the country, and there is evidence that it works wonderfully well.

Paradoxically enough, now that we know that this can be done with really needy children, we discover that minorly ill children, children that we don't ordinarily worry about, are being taken right into the very hospital beds that we have finally started to get handicapped children out of. It is enough to make you worried.

If I were a parent and my board meeting was today and my child had the measles, and I couldn't find anyone else to look after her, I don't know what I'd do. I guess as the clock was approaching nine I'd have to take her to the hospital. I'd kiss her and reassure her, before I walked down the long corridor toward my car, that I loved her very much and that I'd be back. I know that children in hospitals tend to have irrational fears that they will be abandoned, that they in some way have been "bad." I would worry about her picking up an even worse bug there on the hospital ward. I know that hospitals tend to be very good places for getting other diseases; there are so many of them there, all right next to each other. And I would worry, deep in my heart as I rushed off to chair my meeting, that I would have to do this again because there was no other way, because everyone did it, and because I couldn't figure out anything else to do.

But I hope after this I might get all of the parents in my block, or at the day-care home, together in my living room and try to figure out some better way for us, all together, to care for our children in our own homes. I hope if I were a hospital administrator with empty pediatric beds, I wouldn't let them even be used at three dollars an hour for day care, even if parents were in need and asked, because I would be afraid of what ultimately might happen if we embarked upon this course. And I hope that if I were a government official making policy decisions regarding hospitals, and it was proposed that hospitals be permitted to offer day care of this type, I would work to prevent it. I hope that instead I might be able to find a little grant to help parents who have set up baby-sitting cooperatives meet those who would like to learn how. I hope I could carefully steer money toward local communitybased imaginative solutions that parents dream up themselves.

I am not, in this case, any of these people. So I will just watch the Teddy Bear barracks from afar. I think that after a little while it will feel pressure to grow. As the newspaper article noted, eight beds won't be much in flu season once this new program opens its

doors. There are so many parents in need, so many children who Call ill. No, eight, I am afraid, surely won't be enough, once we get into the habit.

## Posthumous Longevity

Epiphany, 1989

*Dear Mother Prioress,*

When I spoke with you and Lady Abbess after Advent Vespers you urged me to remember my ties to your sisters. I can assure you that I have never forgotten the roots I have on your side of the grill and the strength I draw from your community's love. And now, prompted by you and Mother Abbess, I invite you all to share a bit in my life. This letter is primarily a plea for prayer for a helpless woman in serious distress, a woman who is my friend. Some of you might also feel moved to accept these lines as an invitation to accompany me to the evil Newland into which she has strayed, and come to agree with me that this region deserves your attention as contemplative nuns.

I am writing as a friend who has known you since before you became a nun more than a quarter century ago. This allows me to write freely and in a personal manner on a very touchy subject. But you will have noticed that I address you as "Prioress." Doing so I am able to speak without worrying about the traps that lie in the domain of privacy and that destroy the traditional style of openness that was characteristic of our ascetical communities. What I write does not call for secretiveness but for utmost discretion.

Let no one among your sisters take scandal at my writing about two real people, myself and a friend. There is something concrete and surprisingly new here on which we—you and the Church—need *aiscretio*. Discretion, which Benedict called "the mother of virtues," is the measured discernment of unique situations; it makes our obedience the very opposite of regimentation. The reflection which I want to foster demands discretion on the part of the reader, but this does not make it "private." Privacy is a newfangled social construct It depends on possessive individualism which forms divisive opinions. What I want you to share with me is not an opinion, but an almost unbearable anguish at the commemoration of the *undead* who have slipped out of the reach of our ordinary forms of charity.

I want you to pray for my friend. She was bom early in this century, brought up as a socially self-conscious Protestant, but was not touched tty faith; she has never tasted prayer. Throughout our acquaintance, I admired and suffered her un-godly and graceless moral beauty. Though these two words may seem offensive in modem English, I use them deliberately, albeit with apprehension. I know of no others which would allow me to note the absence of an evangelical dimension but which, emphatically, imply no evil and tarnish no beauty.

As a young woman, my friend left her own country. She did so in protest against her philistine family, against the sickness of Nazism, and as an alternative to the kitsch

in which others of her class and generation tried to salve their conscience. She settled in the forest of Scandinavia. There she lived in obstinate, solitary independence. She earned her living by spinning, weaving, and teaching her skills in a trade school. She also shaped haunting, abstract objects, creating them out of the stuff she had woven on her loom. Occasionally, some of her "sculptures" received international recognition. We came to know each other discussing a soft, long, brown woolen cloth that she had drawn into tight knots spaced at irregular intervals and arranged on aluminum spikes in front of a dull mirror.

When my friend felt that the time had come to let herself die, she looked to me. We had just taken a walk through the woods to a little restaurant where she enjoyed being treated to a slice of venison.

Over cranberry sauce, she spoke about her end time. In a couple of months, she would walk down toward the sea, sit under a tree, drink from a bottle of schnapps, and fell asleep in the snow. I knew that she meant what she said. In her rasping matter-of-fact voice, she then asked me to procure something stronger than schnapps to swallow upon reaching the spot near the shore. But I knew that, being who she was, she did not depend on me to get what she wanted. She made the request because she wanted a sign that I had accepted her resolve. After decades of wary independence, she was perhaps ready to acknowledge fear to one friend. She wanted to hold me in her heart when the moment had come to step into the darkness.

On that November day I noticed something special in her - an unaccustomed serenity, but with a sense of its frailty. Without a word from her I understood that now she was ready for the step, and knew that the moment was precious. Scandinavian welfare systems are efficiently care-full and intrusive. For only a short while yet, the "art of dying" was still within her reach. As she spoke, I saw her life-long, self-willed obstinacy slacken and saw too a glimpse of the glowing embers in her heart. Looking back, it now seems that this was the dreaded moment at which the Lord passes by. I would not want to abandon the ancient maxim, *timeo Deum transeuntem*.

That year on the same wooded path I spoke with Dorn Helder Camara about the terrain onto which faithful friendship leads the believer if his friend is *desgraciado*, "graceless." How to let my hope become so transparent at that moment that it does not throw the slightest shadow on the other? Helder said that fidelity means to stand by, aware of one's empty hands, and without expectation. We might or might not ever come to see the glow of grace in the other's heart. I remember his words as much as his wrinkled face, "When your hands are folded, they are ready for that *delicado* puff, when the right moment has come." He showed me how to do it.

Looking back, I failed my friend. I failed to speak to her about Michael and his hosts ready to pick her up from beneath the birch tree, leaving the body behind in the snow. I failed to respond by simply respecting her freedom. I did not urge her to listen more carefully to what Moses called "the rustling." I took her question about an opening she was discovering to be one more attempt on her part to remain in control.

I now fear that I distracted her from listening to the Lord whose steps she might have followed without knowing whose they were.

Soon after she became ill with pneumonia and locked herself into her home. You probably know that well into the 19th century pneumonia was called "the old man's friend." But the caring state could not leave her in peace. Its minions picked the apartment lock in time to administer antibiotics. Since then, it has been too late. Welfare and medicine have broken and confused her, made her into an inmate. Now she worries all day whether there will again be a bed for her at night in the clinic where she has been placed. She missed the hour of her death. She let it slip by, and lost an autumnal moment's desire to let go.

For over sixty years she had forged her *own bios*. I use the Greek term that is opposed to *zoe* and *psyc/te* because the English word "life" cannot render the strong sense of *curriculum vitae* that *bios* expresses. For decades she had left traces on everything she touched, and had then been herself shaped by these traces. Catching her in danger of dying, society has deprived her of her *bios*, her own life's shape. Bereft of it, she has lost the ability to disentangle herself. Far removed from what St. Francis called "Lady Poverty," she is embraced by professional wardens. They make certain that she does not take off her cloak.

When she spoke to me at the inn, I had an inkling that she was ready to divest herself of all trappings (*nuda nudum sequere Christum* was the motto beloved in the 13th century), even if she did not suspect whom she was following. Now she is securely taken care of. The personal act of dying, which in English is expressed by an intransitive verb, is beyond her reach. Now that it is too late for graceful dying, she has become a frightened woman who shirks death. At eighty she has been socialized into the so-called aged. Sooner or later the house physician will write on her chart, "no more - animation." This is the woman I ask you to remember in your evening prayers, when the lights in the chapel go out, somewhere between *fratribus absentibus ...et animarum fidelium*.

It is, however, not only my friend whom I wish you to commemorate. There are other millions in the Newland into which she has moved. And this switch from her to them, from the friend in distress to the inhabitants of the psychic slums, is not easy. I cannot reflect on her state without being impelled to ask myself, "Could I not have her live with me?" or, "Is there no friend around who could invite her?" As long as she breathes, the "Why can't I?" will haunt me. But I cannot allow this anguish to distract me from the issue which we must think through. It is not the quality of care under which this one friend survives that is at issue, but the fact that, after confiding in me, she lost what might have been the last moment in which she could have accepted her death.

I hope it is clear that I am not raising the issue of euthanasia (professional assistance in suicide), or the practice of medicide (which, in the terminology I use, implies an ethics committee's judgment on the termination of life-support systems). I am exploring two aspects of friendship that are characteristic of the late 20th century: first,

respect for my friend who judges that the time has come for her to choose between dying now and being turned off later and, second, the mode of spiritual presence about her once that moment of decision has passed.

Further, I want to be able to reflect on this matter without being paralyzed by the issue of suicide. My friend would have been more than satisfied if I had presented her with a bottle of good whisky wrapped in fall-colored leaves. What she asked of me was not poison but a sign of unconditional trust. I can assure you that, at the luncheon, she was not contemplating killing herself. She wanted to die before it would be too late to consent to her own death. She explicitly wanted to avoid recruitment into that borderland where millions now vegetate who are neither here nor there.

All this I do not guess, I know. We first met at a conference in 1975, called by the World Health Organization, where I was to discuss the theses stated in *Medical Nemesis*, among them the medical expropriation of death. Since then she had thought about the Nowhere of which I speak. She came to understand that, as an aging inhabitant of the First World, you are recruited into this state where you are made impotent in front of death, unless you make a timely decision not to let yourself be kept - alive or dead. These are the neighbors whom I ask you to recognize in your prayers, those whose *bios* as persons has ended, but who are kept hovering on the brink of eternity as a result of modern techniques.

I do not know which word to choose to refer to this state of suspension and aimlessness, a spiritually debilitating *a-topia*. One reason for my loss of words is that the thing itself is new, a result of society's recent success in the war on death. Therefore, I am not speaking of the world of the aged. The old have always been with us. Nor am I speaking of the decrepit. Each traditional society had its own way for them, as for the mad or monsters. One culture extended a place for them, another restricted it.

I am also not speaking of those who, in the language of Hippocrates, have entered the *atrium mortis*, the antechamber on the way to the shadows. In the Greek-Arabic-European tradition, the physician's task was the restoration of a unique balance of humors, never the fight against death. He was trained to recognize the Hippocratic signs on the patient's face, symptoms which manifested to show that the patient's humors were irremediably out of balance. When his art showed him that he stood at a death bed, the physician had to return his fee and take leave from a room which had ceased to be a sickroom. The Hippocratic oath, which forbids the physician to use his art on those in agony, has been interpreted away.

Nine out of ten Americans who are not killed by car, bullet, or massive stroke become terminal care patients and are placed under the control of physicians before they have a chance to die. I am not speaking here of these last hours of medicide that have replaced the death struggle depicted in hundreds of illustrations of the *ars moriendi*. The great prayers of the *proficiscere anima Christiana* and the Litany of All Saints are still appropriate for assistance, even when we must say them in the waiting room out of fear that our presence interfere with the life support systems. I am also not

recommending improvements on the terminal education through which KObler-Ross and her pupils would like to normalize dying.

What I am speaking about is something historically unprecedented. I am speaking of those who have missed the opportunity to die when they were still able to do so, and for whom modern technology and organization effectively hold death at bay. I am calling your attention to a new social class. I am speaking of a New Age appended to the three-score and ten, which is as much a novelty now as the teenage years were two generations ago.

Finally, I am not asking - at this moment - what physicians, social workers, or policy makers should do with or to this new kind of people, or what their status ought to be in the law. You do not need me as a guide to the bibliographies on employment, investment, litigation, technology, or research which this new clientele has inspired. After the underdeveloped, the disappearing races, and then women, the disabled have become the pets of bleeding hearts and the wards for new careers. They have become so useful for so many that the viewpoint I propose has become taboo. I report to you, across the grill, something which I see as an epoch-specific evil, from which the grill is meant to protect you.

What I pursue is this: I ask that you make those who are caught up in this new evil the beneficiaries of your contemplative action, that you consider them as brothers and sisters for whom you offer prayers, as Benedictines have done for the poor souls who wait at the gate of Heaven, at least since Cluny was founded. And I ask for your help so that those of us who have not yet been caught by this evil learn to avoid this modern "fate." I myself ask for this grace each time I say the Hail Mary: "... pray for us now and... that we may not miss the hour of our death. Amen."

I just mentioned Cluny. I did so because you are Benedictines and I want to appeal to your family history. Cluny is a symbol for many innovations, among them the relatively recent date at which purgatory was discovered. Only since the 12th century has purgatory been understood as a special place, and the "poor souls" then came to loom large in popular religion, being recognized as the most helpless community within a tripartite Church. For a good millennium, the Church had been praying for the deceased before this distinction became part of belief and iconography, and before the cult of the poor souls found its solemn place within the liturgy. Without getting into theology or the history of ideas, I dare to suggest that there is a similarity here. The Church has always prayed for special people: the sick, those burdened by the power to govern, those specially tempted, travellers, and those in agony - before it discovered the "poor souls." Now, at the end of the 20th century, the time has come to recognize another community that, like the poor souls, is marginalized in a unique way: the captive souls whom science and technology, welfare and biocracy glue to their bodies, preventing their departure. I believe that this Wasting Age engendered by modernity deserves its special *memento*.

I am aware that I ask you to heed a kind of misery which, on a world-wide scale, is class-specific. It still mostly afflicts the affluent. Most of those unfortunate souls

whom I ask you to remember as the companions of my Scandinavian friend are citizens of rich countries. The privilege of escaping death and thereby quite often becoming unable to face it is one of the many doubtful benefits that economic development has brought. Excepting their exploitative elites, Africans, Indians, and Mexicans still lack the economic resources needed to close the door when the Angel of Death approaches. The Nether Region this side of death is still a gilded ghetto. But it will not remain exclusive much longer. Chemists and geneticists are doing their best to lower the entrance fee into this Nowhere, and thereby make its population more democratic.

By praying for my friend and those like her, by praying for enlightenment and courage, you would also advance the Christian exploration in the difficult and obscure moral issue recently created by social and biological engineering - how to relate the fear of God with the fear of being deprived of one's own death. To do so today requires extraordinary *discretio* to clarify the meaning of the *cupio dissolvi* in a society in which social policy mandates professional guardians, be they physicians or bioethicists, to procure optimal life prolongation as a universal social right.

I deeply appreciate the opportunity to reflect on this issue in the form of a letter to you. Let me know if this is a way in which you can share what it means to live on this side of the grill, as in your prayers that I join you on the other side.

*Ivan*

## Toward A Post-Clerical Church

*Dear Kelly,*

When you dropped in on my hideout it was two in the afternoon. Now it is two in the morning. You are on your way back north, for a second semester in a course of *aggiornamento* for aging missionaries offered at a Canadian Jesuit university. I am still ruminating on the conversation we had. For myself and a couple of friends, "Kelly" already evokes two realities: the thoughtful, generous, and delicate man and priest whom I was surprised to meet, and a contemporary "type" for whom I just cannot think of a more thought-provoking representative, and into which both Lee and I would want to fit.

This is not really a personal letter. It's a letter to the Kelly whom you have given us for reflection. I write it because I will not sleep peacefully until the format of a letter gives me the framework within which I can say something that has haunted many conversations during the last years. If something in this introduction sounds too personal for a letter I would like to share with others, you and I both know that the Kelly I address is a critter of my imagination.

When you called from downtown, where you had somehow gotten my number, I was sitting under the banana tree excerpting 12th-century rules of hospital communities. That's the century in which the very first houses specializing in the recovery of sick people had been established in western Christendom. Crusaders, who had been

impressed by such houses in Byzantium, and who had observed the practice of medical hospitalization in Islam, brought the idea of *nosokomium*, "the sick house," to southern France. In the course of only a few decades the new idea caught fire, and not just dozens but a few hundred examples of the new institution began to dot the world of the Pope.

With the idea of such a house a new kind of religious community came into existence whose members dedicated their lives in obedience, celibacy, and poverty to the care of the sick. To guide their common life, they picked up a letter addressed to pious women by the Church Father Augustine, and added a set of recommendations made at the beginning of the century by Raymond de Guy. He had founded such a house for crusaders in Jerusalem when they were too sick and tired to venture a return home. Some of these rules were for "sisters and brothers called to the hospital," healthy persons who had heard an intimate invitation to care for those marked by disease. In other early rules, the bodily mark of disease was interpreted as a divine calling to religious community life, and the healthy who joined as members found in leprosy or gangrenous ergotism a reason to live with those more visibly marked, apart from the rest of society.

I mention this at the outset of my letter because it indicates the mood I was in when you called. In conversation with Lee, I was trying to find the right sentences to make it believable to my readers that the very idea of "hospitalizing the sick under Christian care" has a beginning in history, and that half of the Christian history we know was over before it was accepted as an obvious "need" in the medieval town.

Then you walked in. What a pleasure it was to make your acquaintance! In a few minutes it was obvious that you were not only a fellow historian, but a learned one at that. First you began a decade of ecclesiastical studies, completed when the 19th-century routine of seminary training was still uncontested. This made you acquainted with a standard canon which - for those of us born sufficiently before World War II - gave a common culture to Catholic priests all over.

Just ordained, you went to Africa for a first "trial" without any preparation. You had to grope your way into the history and culture of the mission, trusting your basic intuition and letting yourself be imbued by the prejudices floating around at the mission station. A dozen years followed as a missionary in tropical Africa. You were sent to care for people whose language in the meantime had changed beyond recognition, and because you did not properly record it, will no longer be remembered.

Next came demanding studies. As a middle-aged man, you spent several years as a graduate student at one of the world's major universities and wrote a doctoral dissertation in cultural history, based on oral testimony you had collected. And back you went for another ample decade as a white cleric in a region which had turned into a blade nation, mostly "to care" for people who had little use for you. What a life! In many profound ways, a life that follows a pattern which people twenty years younger than we will be forced to reconstruct from biographies, because it will be beyond their grasp.



I do not know how you took the seminary fere of the postwar period with its insistence on Latin, its smattering of Thomas Aquinas for the sake of the clergy's mental insurance, its fragments of Biblical studies - just prestigious enough to discourage personal reading and totally insufficient for nourishing homilies. But one thing became clear as we sat around Valentina's table with your Central European traveling companion who works among the Basutos: The new generation, which poor John Paul II brings forth from contemporary places of clerical learning - in comparison to those of our time - no longer has either canon or study habits, nor that minimum of ambiguous rootedness which came as a bonus with our experience.

What a maddening idea, that you should now be on leave from your equatorial mission station to submit to a pedagogical potpourri of curricular offerings planned to bring you "up to date" in theology, spirituality and pastoral care! How sad the state of the Church that, after years of isolation and intellectual starvation, a lack of books and consequent dependence on journalistic reports about Church and faith, overwork and aging in the boondocks, she has nothing better to offer you on your sabbatical than one more return into the curricular market. This is the point at which our luncheon conversation became serious. Both of you asked questions, and I gave answers by which, unwittingly, I may have shocked you.

I meant what I said. Yes, I do believe that current discussions on the future of the priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church are overwhelmingly beside the point because they focus on *the future of the clergy*. Should there be a married clergy? Should ordination be limited to the male clergy? What place should be given to the local community - clerical and lay - when it comes to the election of a bishop or the shaping of liturgical forms? Must clerics who hold opinions divergent from the Roman tradition be removed from their posts? Not the mystery of the Trinity or of the Incarnation, but the "mystery" of the clergy now polarizes the Church. A mystifying "class struggle" has been thrashed out with such noise over the last twenty-five years that not only sophisticated Jews but even Japanese tourists have the impression that to be a Catholic means to take sides on these issues.

Please do not misunderstand me. I am not one who denies that these are important questions on which, to a high degree, the kind of political institution which the Roman Catholic Church becomes, depends. But they are relevant only as long as you accept a hypothesis that results from a historical accident, and not from anything in Scripture or Tradition. These questions are important only as long as you live with the certainty that "the clergy" is a God-willed attribute of the community founded by Christ.

From personal experience, many conversations, and phenomenological analysis, I have come to the conviction that clergy - when mentioned in connection with the Roman Catholic Church - has at least one essential characteristic today which was absent from the essence of any church-grouping in previous epochs of Church history. This characteristic is the result of a proposed *professional education*, first formulated by Cardinal Pole in England (in the National Synod of 1556), which slipped almost verbatim into the 3rd session of the Council of Trent through Cardinal Morone, and

whose provision was then defined as a duty incumbent on every bishop in the 23rd session of the Council. This proposal envisages the institutional formation of secular priests, something as unheard of in Latin Christendom at this time as poor houses which limit admittance exclusively to the sick had been unheard of during the 11th century. But unlike the idea of a specialized recovery of the sick - which spread like wildfire - it took several centuries before Canon Law began to define the attendance at seminaries as a prerequisite for ordination.

Perhaps these remarks will explain my deep interest in the "invention" of hospitals in the 12th century. I believe that this social creation of a new institutional device, motivated by heroic charity and deep trust in personal divine vocation, in the course of the next half millennium was to transform our perception of what a good society ought to be. We can no longer imagine a good society which would laud such special institutional agencies where people with special physical or mental incapacities can be bedded, stored, and treated. The need for hospitalization has become one of our basic certainties, and with it we accept as obvious that there are certain acts of charity which "just cannot be absolved by simple hospitality." I am studying not so much the history of the hospital, but the history of hospitality - now largely reduced to invitations for Christmas dinner. I argue that this degradation of hospitality happened in good faith, in the shadow of a society built on the idea of hospitalization.

Just as there is a profound difference between a society that abandons the stranger who finds no hospitality, and a society that mediates the needs of strangers through taxation and professionalism, it should be clear that there is an essential phenomenological difference between a Church which prescind from an institutionalized routine for the specialized preparation of its priests and one in which formal education is seen as a prerequisite for ordination, and increasingly to be repeated for the continued exercise of priestly functions.

What I find scandalous is the cocky innocence with which a Western Roman tradition that claims catholicity is bound up with the fate of clergy whose competence, status, function and income are determined by a factor which is radically alien to the first three-quarters of the history of the Church. I write you this letter in the hope that you, or other "Kellys" who are returning to old age inservice seminary retraining will help to make this point Unless persons such as you take the Church's non-clerical future into your own hands by sharing your wisdom and discipline as hosts rather than as educators, the reform of the Church will be a miracle rather than the promised marvel it has always been.

We had so little time, yesterday, that I take the liberty as a colleague to remind you of the literature which supports my claim. Let me sum up: Until the Council of Trent, there were no institutions of any kind whose purpose was the training of pastoral agents. What in retrospect is made to look like the ancestry of seminaries are historiographic phantoms invoked to justify the contemporary existence of an educational agency which, at its best, gifted those alumni it almost inevitably warped. Until the late 16th century, you became a priest the way in which you became a healer or cobbler

or musician - by picking up what it takes for the task. You picked up what you needed for your ordination as best you could get it - your Latin, your store of pious stories and your common sense - on which the bishop might test you before making you a priest. There is no evidence that the need for institutional initiation for the secular clergy had ever been felt. Certainly Canon Law which so often is a mirror for ecclesiastical utopias - gives no sign of a desire to institutionalize preparation for the priesthood. It is only the Second Lateran Council which admonishes bishops to employ a *Magister* in each cathedral, who will be available to teach poor clerics without asking for tuition. The decree reflects both the new opportunity available for scholars to make money on their learning and the new trend to put the emerging profession under ecclesiastical control.

The Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 made its wish more explicit: There should be a "theologian" who can instruct priests and others in Holy Scripture, and who could be placed particularly at the service of those who are engaged in the "care of souls." The Council did not dare request that this be done by every bishop, but only that such a charge be created by archbishops at their Metropolitan Sees. It took a millennium from the time of the Greek Fathers to the time of monastic and conventual training in early scholasticism - for a council to make a first attempt toward a separately institutionalized, "learned service" for the diocesan, as opposed to the religious, clergy. Two hundred years later the first colleges were created with the explicit purpose of housing students whose intent was pastoral rather than learned and legal: Capranica and Nardini in Rome, Antonio di Siguenza (1477) in Spain. But it would be reading a non-existent category into these early Renaissance foundations to interpret a few charitable hostels - meant mostly for poor boys who were looking for a curial benefice - as forerunners of the kind of college which came to be known as a seminary.

It took the Tridentine decree on seminaries as many centuries to be accepted by the Catholic world as it took to have all dioceses recognize the decree on the need to solemnize marriage. Most of the seminaries started in the first hundred years after the Council by the bishops themselves did not survive their first or second generation of students. The late 16th-century colleges that were run by Jesuits and later by other orders for future secular priests - as distinct from their own members - survived better, but served the formation of elite ecclesiastics rather than local pastors.

In Spain it took until the late 17th and 18th century for the idea of seminary training to enter the majority of dioceses. In Germany, the practice never was accepted. In France, Jean Jacques Olier created that unique company of St. Sulpice which, after 1642, succeeded in stemming the extinction of the few remaining seminaries founded in the aftermath of Trent.

As the seminary memories of your traveling companion brought to our attention, the spirit and literature generated by this band of spiritual pedagogues still affected people born in the second quarter of this century. Over the next 300 years the Sulpicians created an unprecedented style of fervent piety which would be a fascinating subject for an unusually gifted historian of religious mentalities. Outside of France, and especially in Latin America, only during the 19th century did seminaries become

standard equipment in the typical diocese. And at that, they were often the one place where a boy could get some classical preparation. I still remember the Puerto Rican generation of seminary alumni, most of whom became the province's lawyers or poets rather than priests.

When one discusses this background of Church reliance on seminary-trained clergy with churchmen or almost anyone, at least two points are immediately made. First, admiration is voiced for the seriousness with which the post-Reformation Church accepted the challenge by insuring "educational" progress, and then my interlocutors call attention to the claim that "modern times" demand formal education. They interpret the Church's dependence on professional preparation of its staff as a consequence of a secular trend, and are blind to the evidence that this trend might just as well be interpreted as a secularization of an ecclesiastical model. They ask me if I can imagine a modern Church indifferent to the "education" of its leadership and without professional formation among the myriad of new fields that must be related to the Gospel if the Christian message is to remain relevant to the modern world. This is a point made very explicitly yesterday while we ate our rice.

My answer to both these questions is "no." Of course, I could *imagine* both, but I abstain from doing so. History is what I know has been. *I need all the* imagination I have to grasp what has been, something I find even more difficult when the subject is the Church. But I would like to insist on two points: First, it is the Church which has pioneered the concept that a certain amount of "education" is the prerequisite for admission to status, function, and privilege. In the process of adapting the medieval *artes* into a condition for the ordination of its priests, the idea of the curriculum took shape, and with it the basic assumptions upon which the ideology of universal education could be built.

That social topology, within which our various institutions are concrete configurations, depends on the assumption that eminence in any specialty presupposes curricular inputs rather than what you pick up. The prejudice against the informal learner which has grown during the last several hundred years is a characteristic of all our institutions, not just of the Church. But, in a unique way, the Church initiated this prejudice: with the *seminarium* — the seed bed of the next generation - it set the model for a leadership qualified by curricular consumption. The one institution which solemnly celebrates its continuity over the last two thousand years is also that institution which pioneered a gnoseocratic bureaucracy based on certified curricular consumption, *and* the institution which claims that this kind of "knowledge"-based aristocracy is not just opportune or "natural" but the result of God's own will.

Second, men such as you, and many others I know, are in danger of *apostolic castration* due to these historical and ecclesiastical assumptions about the relationship between schooling and evangelical leadership. I purposely use the above word. After you had gone, and I tried to return to the 12th-century transmogrification of hospital-ity into hospitalization that was motivated by compassionate mercy, after long silence Lee (whom you met) quoted Matthew. "He sent them out..." Did He not trust each

of his disciples to gather with whom they met? Did He not expect, even bless, their "balls," encourage the practice of personal hospitality in men who, for his sake, had forsaken their own home?

Yes, you were right in your suspicion that twenty-five years ago I wrote that book on the deschooling of society in the hope that a secular discussion would lead to proposals for the deschooling of the Church. As far as I know, I failed. But my conviction has only deepened. The time of qualification by curricular attendance, the time of schooling which grew out of the idea of the seminary and the *ratio studiorum*, is over. Even now, higher learning depends crucially on hospitality and friendship and lifelong personal emulation in those virtues which establish the independent stance of heart and mind on which *stadium* — in the age of AI, sociobiology, and the apocalypse of science depends.

Bob, am I wrong when I feel certain that the future of Christian learning depends on how I share it with others, or you with your friends? Am I wrong when I suggest that you tell a few of your friends that next year, between two rainy seasons, you can give sack and sorgo to no more than seven; that you have two books which you want to follow when you address them between Psalms on Monday and Wednesday; that you would like to read beforehand the books which they will comment when they speak on the other evenings?

*IvanUich*

P.S. I do not believe that the de-clericalization of the priesthood and the de-clericalization of consecrated asceticism, at this moment, depend on the de-clericalization of learning; but rather, on the creation of *faits accomplis* here and there. Further, the unique view on the current predicament of the world which a rootedness in the Roman Catholic tradition enables us to have can be celebrated in with circles of friends by you and by Lee and by Dara (of whom I told you) and can be celebrated with a scope which is and must forever be out of the purview of those caught within the "educational assumption," be they the Pope himself.

## "Dear Kelly" Memo

TO: Joe Cunneen (editor, *Cross Currents*'), in response to your critique

FROM: Lee Hoinacki

Several readers of the letter have suggested that the format of the piece be changed. The feeling seems to be that an open letter is somewhat unsuitable, that it shows a certain lack of seriousness.

Over the years, I've noticed that in each of his "statements" published as articles or books - Illich attempts to create the proper or fitting genre for that particular moment, place, and, if appropriate, interlocutor. For the serious reader, it is instructive to study, for example, the great differences between *Deschooling Society* and *Gender*.

Here ("Dear Kelly") Illich writes directly to a person with whom he has just had lunch. Their conversation moved him, and he came to see this man's situation in the light of themes and perspectives which have been present in his work for some years. And "Kelly's" presence brought about the specific focus of his thought which then resulted in the letter.

In "The Vanishing Clergyman," Illich made a statement about clergy in the Church. Through a phenomenological approach, he found the Church to be a corporate bureaucracy - that is what he saw. And he suggested that this specific historical development might be questioned, it might be something unfaithful to the Founder's intention. What question would a man of faith raise today?

Instead of writing a treatise on the historical church, or a monograph on some aspect of institutional expression, he has taken up the precise question put to him, the question embodied in two men who "just happened" to drop in on him one day. He does not want to write in the artificial structure of a professional journal. I think he wants to express himself, in both content and form, in a manner true to his experience one afternoon in Mexico. His letter shows how theological reflection can come out of particular events, and be faithful to them. Illich has lived his life denouncing and fleeing from bureaucratic leviathans. And his love for the truthfulness of the Church requires a suitably ascetic expression fitting the circumstances of the origin of his statement.

And why must historical theology and Biblical exegesis be written in an arbitrary format elaborated by professionals deeply infected with the current bureaucratic fashion? Can one believe that these standards have any real authority? In contrast, I would argue that Illich's authority rests solidly on his life of prayer, virtue and study. I am not aware that anyone has ever claimed that his scholarship is thin. And the truth of this statement ("Kelly") depends on his reading of history. To ask him to present his research in a form acceptable to the "guardians" of academic expression is as deeply insulting as to ask him for a sociological solution to the problem of gender. His faith does not encompass sociology; his vocabulary resolutely shuns solutions and problems except for those found, for example, in plane geometry.

In *Tools for Conviviality* Illich writes that "The industrial mode of production was first fully rationalized in the manufacture of a new invisible commodity, called 'education'" (p. 19). This book contains his most complete outline for a theory of industrial society, the one which rules the lives of those of us who live in the West. And he demonstrates, first in *Deschooling* and later in *Tools*, that the industrial mode of production characterizes the making of *both* goods and services.

In "Dear Kelly" he sets up two parallel arguments: Just as the Church first institutionalized the care of the sick (that is, bequeathing *this* structure, the hospital, to the West, thereby making it more and more difficult to practice hospitality), so the Church also gave the West the *institution* of education. In this sense, the Church is "responsible" for the industrialization of the West. Such is the argument. In both *Deschooling* and *Tools*, Illich describes how education - that education we have all known and experienced is organized in an industrial mode. Then, in the penultimate paragraph of

*Tools*, he notes that "the industrial dominance over production [is] the ultimate form of idolatry" (p. 119).

Perhaps I should put these last words in italics - they are the most explicit statement in this book that it, too, forms part of his lifelong "exercise in apophatic theology" (the phrase comes from Sally Cunneen's *Cross Currents* review of *And one can work*

toward an understanding of why he takes this approach through reflection on this long-held thesis, *corruptio optirnipessima*, namely, that those horrors which haunt our society are of an unimaginably frightening character, worse than anything he observes in other ("non-Christian") societies, *and* they are mysteriously derived from the corruption and perversion of the sublime truths of Biblical revelation. (He and Jacques Ellul share this opinion.)

As Cunneen rightly points out, "Kelly" is not a "contribution to current discussion of the shortage of priests or who should be ordained or how do we produce a more adult laity." Illich unequivocally states that "current discussions on the future of the priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church are overwhelmingly beside the point because they focus on the *future of the clergy* [his italics]." And he means precisely, fully, what he says. The questions I hear being discussed today, regarding a vocation to ministry, have meaning *only*.

- if one believes that the Church is divinely organized as a corporate, bureaucratic organization, uniting early Byzantine, Renaissance court and rational managerial elements;
- and if one accepts "the clergy" as a divinely-willed component of the community which finds its origins in Jesus Christ.

In "The Vanishing Clergyman," Illich questions the first belief, and in "Dear Kelly," the second. Through his studies, he discovers that the organization *and* clergy of the Church are indeed historically contingent. In a Thomistic sense, I guess, one can say that the Church today enjoys (or suffers) a clergy and *this* organization, per *modum accidens*. While he has not published any study on the historical etiology of the Church's structure, he does point out how the phenomenon of clergy is specifically constituted by "professional education."

Further, with far-reaching results for the society at large, the Church pioneered the idea that education –understood as curricular consumption - be a "prerequisite for admission to status, function, and privilege" ("Kelly"). And this resulted in the basic modern assumption questioned *only* by people such as Illich upon which "the ideology of universal education could be built" (*ibidem*).

As Cunneen points out, Illich is suspicious of "refresher courses to keep academe going." But "accidentally" running into this person who is offered such fare by the Church, he seizes the occasion as a springboard for his reflections on the very notion of a clergy, thereby exposing the flimsy - and destructive - assumptions on which

these various modern certainties rest. But I don't think the issue here is confined to the fact "that Kelly is in a better position to train... future priests," that he can do something more than pass out "the new theological fads" (Cunneen). Illich's argument here definitively implies what "Clergyman" earlier suggested: the disappearance of a priest-*hood*. And it provides much more...

When he uses the word "crisis" Illich takes it to mean the opportunity to make a choice (as he pointed out years ago, the Greek verb of origin means "to decide"). Cunneen would like to see Illich "suggest possible new directions." I think that he does indeed to do this. *In Deschooling*, he wrote:

[W]hat characterizes the true master-disciple relationship is its priceless character. Aristotle speaks of it as a "moral type of friendship, which is not on fixed terms: it makes a gift, or does whatever it does, as to a friend." Thomas Aquinas says of this kind of teaching that inevitably it is an act of love and mercy. This kind of teaching is always a luxury for the teacher and a form of leisure (in Greek, "*scholē*") for him and his pupil: an activity meaningful for both, having no ulterior purpose (p. 146).

We can see, as Illich notes (in the quote from Matthew "Dear Kelly"), that there is a consonance between the action of the Lord and the thought of Aristotle-Aquinas, vis-d-vis teaching and learning. And, twenty years ago, Illich had sincerely hoped *that Deschool-ing* would lead to proposals to re-think present institutional forms in the light of the Gospel. He suggests the possibility of a more radical view of divine vocation, a more radical abandonment to grace. He contrasts grace/vocation with institutional insurance, believing them to be contradictory.

A question must be asked: Is the reliance on *this* formal arrangement - clerical education - the denial of the reality of personal vocation in response to the Lord's voice? Is this to reject the example of the Lord sending out his disciples? to say - with the Grand Inquisitor - we know better?

Illich's letter is also on friendship, on the essential place of friendship in learning today. He is definitely *not* concerned with the reform of clerical education. He recognizes, however, that the vocation to follow the Lord does indeed entail a kind of learning. But all higher learning today, quite apart from any reference to a ministry vocation, "depends crucially on hospitality and friendship and lifelong personal emulation in those virtues which establish the independent stance of heart and mind on which *stadium*... depends" ("Kelly"). In a position which makes him far more radical than the current critics of higher education, Illich states his belief that the modern university is bankrupt, that it has reached an impasse out of which - given its principles, structure, and operating ethos - it cannot move. A fortiori, learning in the context of the Gospel must seek a milieu totally different from the available examples of higher learning, a spirit and structure appropriate both to the time in which we live and to its (Gospel) origins.



To claim, literally, that the very shape of learning in the Church rests on friendship is to suggest a new version of the Church. "The Vanishing Clergyman" did not go so far. It only prepared its readers for this later, evangelically-inspired proposal. Here, Illich goes to his sources to outline the basis for a de-clericalized church, for what he earlier called a *secularized* church. Through his historical research, we can now see that the Church need not be so dependent on bureaucratic and hierarchic structures, but can rest precariously - evangelically - on the friendship between me, this other person, and the Lord.

Many in the Church today appear to be fear-and anxiety-ridden. But there is no cause for alarm, Illich says. Genuine church reform can begin, now, with two or three gathered in His name - that's all it takes.

## Recent & Forthcoming Works By Jacques Ellul

by David W. Gill  
(Box 5358, Berkeley, CA 94705).

Two of Jacques Ellul's most important sociological works were reprinted at long last in 1990. *La Technique, ou, L'enjeu du siecle* (ET: *The Technological Society*) is now available from the publisher Economica (49/ue Hericart, 75015 Paris). The publisher's cover note says that in 1960 Ellul submitted a second, revised edition of *La Technique* but his publisher decided not to publish it. The Economica text is this 1960 revision. *Propagandes* (ET: *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*) was also reprinted at the same time by Economica. Both *La Technique* and *Propagandes* are in a series called "*Classiques des Sciences Sociales*." Both volumes are listed at 195 francs.

It should also be noted that the same Economica series has made available two works by Ellul's old friend and intellectual conversation partner, Bernard Charbonneau: *L'Etat* and *Lesystemeetlechaos*.

*Ce Dieu Injuste...? Theologie Chretienne pour le peuple d'Israel* appeared in April 1991 from the publisher Arlea (Librairie Les Fruits du Congo, 8, rue de l'Odeon, 75006 Paris). The book is being distributed (also?) by Le Seuil /ue Jacob, 75006 Paris. 203 pp. paperback. 100 francs. In this book, Ellul discusses St. Paul's famous statement of Romans (9:1-12:2) on the status of Israel in light of Jesus Christ and the New Testament. This is a biblical Christian theology in support of the ongoing, unique and special election of the Jewish people by God.

*Si tu es le Fils de Dieu: Souffrances et tentations de Jesus* appeared in June 1991 from the publisher Le Centurion (Paris). This brief paperback (110 pages; 78 francs) was co-published with R. Brockhaus Verlag in Zurich. In Part One, Ellul explores the Gospel accounts of the "suffering servant" and in Part Two the various "temptations of Jesus" beginning with Satan in the desert. What Ellul has offered us here are some fifty brief meditations on the humanity of Jesus.

In conversation at his home in Bordeaux on June 25,1991, Ellul clarified once again that he has a completed manuscript on "Technique and Theology" for which he has never found a publisher. He also has a thousand hand-written manuscript pages on "The Ethics of Holiness" but has not had the time or secretarial support to convert this to typescript and complete his own revisions and editorial work.

The only other work in the pipeline at present is his major study of Islam. As of last summer Ellul felt that one third of this book was completed, another third (on the Koran) had been finished but now needed major revisions because of the appearance of new translations of the Koran, and yet another third had barely been started. The shock of Yvette Ellul's death in the Spring and Jacques Ellul's own ongoing health struggles have quite understandably slowed his progress on his writing projects. I assured him of the prayers and best wishes of his North American students, colleagues and friends.

**Issue #9 Jul 1992 — Ellul on  
Communications Technology**

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A Forum for Theology in a Technological Civilization  
July 1992 Issue #9 ©1992 Department of Religious Studies, University of South  
Florida, Tampa, FL 33620

## From the Editor

As promised, this issue is devoted to Ellul's critique of our mass media society. My thanks to our guest editor, Clifford Christians, for putting this issue together. I will let Cliff brief you on the contents.

*Darrell J. Fasching, Editor*

## About This Issue

by Clifford Christians, Guest Editor

English-speaking students of mass communications first noticed Ellul when *Propagandes* was translated in 1965. Propaganda studies following World War n had centered on overt, political manipulation with Hitler's Goebbels the archetypal case. Ellul helped us come to grips with the subtle, covert and devastating ways in which media technologies reorient our values around efficiency. Communication scholars interested in theology have welcomed Ellul's other books and essays in this area.

Ellul's contributions to symbolic theory are the least well known and they are outlined in this issue by J. Wesley Baker. Darrell Fasching examines one of Ellul's most disturbing claims - that the visual media short-circuit our critical capacities. I review Ellul's hard-hitting *Hunufihdon of the Word* in the light of recent theoretical work on the nature of communication systems. And, as typical with *The Ellul Studies Forum*, representative books covering the same territory are introduced as a way of encouraging dialogue with similar and contradictory viewpoints. Two recent dissertations applying Ellul to communications are introduced, in the hope that other dissertations on Ellul will be abstracted in future issues of the *Forum*.

Communications is not a discipline per se, but a region of common intellectual concerns where many disciplines cross. Given Ellul's own breadth and interdisciplinary interests, he has been fully at home when dealing with problems in communications. And because the mass media are such a dominant social institution today, those acquainted with Ellul from many disciplines have also followed closely his studies on communication technologies. They serve as a productive arena for examining Ellul's central ideas.

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## Bulletin Board

### **Ethics After Auschwitz and Hiroshima**

The first book of a two volume project on narrative ethics after Auschwitz and Hiroshima by Darrell Fasching has just been released by Fortress Press under the title *Narrative Theology After Auschwitz-From Alienation to Ethics (1992)*. The second book will be published next summer (1993) by SUNY Press under the title: *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia?* The following is taken from the prologue of the first book:

These two volumes are intended to be an experiment in theology of culture as an approach to comparative religious ethics. This first volume, *Narrative Theology After Auschwitz*, from the perspective of a narrative ethic approach, attempts to restructure the Christian narrative tradition, in the light of Auschwitz, through a dialogue with that strand of post-Holocaust Jewish theology and ethics which draws upon the Jewish narrative tradition of *chutzpah*. This volume culminates in an ethic of personal and professional responsibility proposed as a strategy for constraining the human capacity for the demonic. This takes the form of an ethic of audacity (*chutzpah*) on behalf of the stranger.

In the next volume, *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia?*, I continue the narrative ethics approach but extend the ethical focus of the discussion to encompass religion, technology and public policy in a cross-cultural perspective. There I suggest that the dominant myth or narrative of our modern global technological civilization is the Janus-faced myth of "Apocalypse or Utopia." This

mythic narrative tends to render us ethically impotent, for, mesmerized by the power of technology, we become trapped in the manic-depressive rhythms of a sacral awe - i.e., of fascination and dread. When we are caught up in the utopian euphoria created by the marvelous promises of technology we do not wish to change anything. And when, in our darker moments, we fear that this same technology is out of control and leading us to our own apocalyptic self-destruction, we feel overwhelmed and unable to do anything. The paradox is that the very strength of our literal utopian euphoria sends us careening toward some literal apocalyptic "final solution."

In the second volume I argue that the narrative theme of the demonic which dominated Auschwitz - "killing in order to heal" - has become globalized and incorporated into the Janus-faced technological mythos which emerged out of Hiroshima. It is this mythic narrative which underlies and structures much of public policy in our nuclear age. Finally, in response, I endeavor to extend the Jewish-Christian dialogue of the first volume to include Buddhism, in order to suggest a cross-cultural coalition for an ethic of human dignity, human rights and human liberation in response to this technological globalization of the demonic. At the heart of my position in these two volumes is the conviction that the *kairos* of our time is one which calls forth the badly neglected ethic of "welcoming the stranger" which underlies the biblical tradition, and analogously "welcoming the outcast" which underlies the Buddhist tradition. It is this care for the stranger and the outcast, I shall argue, which provides the critical norm for an ethic of human dignity, human rights and human liberation.

It is in the second volume that I construct a theory of theology of culture as comparative religious ethics. However, the theory I develop there and the conclusions I arrive at, concerning a cross-cultural pluralistic ethic of human rights in response to Auschwitz and Hiroshima, would be impossible for me without having first come to grips with Auschwitz as a singular event for Western religion, culture and ethics. Each book is written as an argument which is intended to stand on its own. At the same time, however, the full scope of what I am proposing can only be grasped by reading both. My immediate goal in this volume is to span the abyss between Jews and Christians in a suggested coalition against the unprecedented power of the demonic which has erupted in this century. My ultimate goal, in the next volume, is to expand this coalition so as to bridge not only the abyss between religions, East and West, but also between religious and secular ethics.

The total project, then, is about religion, ethics and public polity after Auschwitz and Hiroshima. It is about: (a) rethinking the meaning of civilization and public order in an emerging pluralistic world civilization as we approach the end of a millennium — the year 2000 C.E.; (b) the need of a cross-cultural ethic in a world racked by ethical relativism and ideological conflict and; (c) the mythologies of the sacred and the secular in a technological civilization and the appropriate role for religion in the shaping of public values in a "secular" world.

The perspective from which these books are written is that of theology. However, it is not "Christian" theology although it is assuredly theology written by a Christian.

It is not "confessional theology" but theology understood as an academic discipline within the humanities, whose purpose is the illumination of the human experience (individual and communal) of transcendence as self-transcendence. Needless to say, the same subject matter would be treated differently had this project been written by a Buddhist or some other more "secular" a-theist, or by a Hindu, Jew or Muslim rather than a Christian. And yet I intend it to be a theology which has something to say not only to Christians but also to Jews and Buddhists and others without being either a Jewish or Buddhist theology, etc. And I mean it to be a theology relevant to "secular" or humanistic a-theists as well...

The first volume, I hope, suggests the possibility of a common coalition between Jews and Christians against any future eruptions of the demonic. In the next volume I attempt to extend this coalition, suggesting a cross-cultural ethic of human dignity, human rights and human liberation through the synergy of the diverse narrative traditions (East and West, religious and secular) of hospitality, whose common theme is *welcoming the stranger*. Contrary to the usual critique of human rights (launched by narrative ethicists) as an attempt to impose a single universal "storyless" ethic on the whole human race, I argue that an ethic of human dignity and human rights requires just the opposite, namely, a pluralistic coalition of the narrative traditions of holy communities which only need to share one thing in common — audacity in defense of the stranger.

# Forum: Ellul on Communications Technology

## Ellul on the Need for Symbolism

by J. Wesley Baker  
Cedarville College

The more I have studied Ellul's writings, the more impressed I have become with the central role "communication" plays in his thought. Since my field of study is communication technologies, I initially was drawn to Ellul because of his insistence that the technological system (*la technique*) is dominating our era. There was, as well, an initial attraction because of the number of examples he draws from the media. But I have come to see that Ellul's concern with communication is at a far more important level: We can hope for the survival of what is human only if we engage in the creation of symbols which allow us to retain mastery in a technological environment. The purpose of this essay is to outline for Ellul scholars the central place our need to symbolize plays in Ellul's thought.

## Ellul's Terminology

In his writings about communication, Ellul makes a point of insisting he does not take a specialist's viewpoint on the topic. Temple says that while this "outsider's" orientation contributes to an imprecision in his terminology, its strength is in providing a "common sense" approach.

Perhaps he is not always fair to leaders in the linguistic sciences, but (as in all his other books) he is neither a philosopher nor a literary critic. He writes as social commentator (and as an "ordinary" layman) observing the effects of changes in the role of language and also as a voice for common sense on behalf of all of us who feel that somehow the substance of language has been replaced by a trick with smoke and mirror images.<sup>1</sup>

It is this orientation which leads Ellul to argue: "Defining language by talking about codes, signifiers, the syntagma, semiotics, and semiology does not solve the problem" of

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<sup>1</sup> Katharine Temple, "Jacques Ellul: A Consistent Distinction," *Media Development* 35, no. 2 (1988):



language we face today. Always we must come back to simple facts, common sense, and commonplaces as our starting point”<sup>2</sup> He is concerned that an approach to language which is too ”scientific” can rob it of its symbolic function.

Human language cannot be reduced strictly to a transmission of information. Communication/information theory is extremely impoverished for it reduces language to a reality, doubtless scientifically knowable, but one that excludes the principal aspect of the phenomenon. The symbolization of society is effected through language and, since the beginning, this process has considered the social relationship as not merely the immediate contact of human being to human being, but as a *mediated* relationship. This mediation creates a symbolic space for the obligatory interpretation of relationships. It provides a ”windbreak” between man and man and causes brutality to be excluded so that coexistence becomes possible. Man cannot subsist on mere physical contact alone; he must symbolize it and situate it in a symbolic universe.<sup>3</sup>

The risk comes from our ability to ”separate the code from the language, the information from the spoken words, or reduce information to bytes.”<sup>4</sup> This technical approach to language leads to a reductionism which eliminates ”from human language everything that goes beyond visual information, everything that is inaccessible to the code. The result would be just an amputation, which is the traditional reductionist method of all the sciences, but a surgical excision of language’s very heart.”<sup>5</sup> As a result, Ellul is opposed to any approach which limits language’s ”breadth of meaning, ambiguity, and variation in interpretation.”<sup>6</sup> Most importantly for Ellul, the uncertainty inherent in our symbols provides us with individual freedom as we seek for truth and coherence.

## Symbolization as a Basic Human Need

Ellul calls human symbol-making ”one of the most basic functions of life.”<sup>7</sup> He believes that our creation in the image of the God-who-speaks is at the base of our symbolizing and thus serves as an important part of what distinguishes us from the

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<sup>2</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 1-2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

<sup>4</sup> Jacques Ellul, ”Preconceived Ideas About Mediated Information,” in *The Media Revolution in America and in Western Europe*, eds. Everett M. Rogers and Francis Balle (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1985), 103.

<sup>5</sup> Ellul, *Humiliation of die Word*, 3.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Jacques Ellul, *What I Believe*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 100.

rest of creation.<sup>8</sup> It is, he says, "the specific characteristic of *Homo sapiens*...." But, besides defining man, this symbol-making function is also "the key to his success."<sup>9</sup> The "success" to which Ellul refers is humankind's ability to survive in its milieu or environment by gaining mastery over it through symbolization.<sup>10</sup>

Ellul links milieu and symbolization quite closely, noting that "symbolization is always effected in relation to the environment in which man lives, and as a function of the environment"<sup>11</sup> Ellul points out that it is only within "the environment [that] we have occasion to exercise one of the most basic functions of life, that is, symbolism. The environment gives us the chance to create symbols, and here are riches that spur us to development"<sup>12</sup> It is through this process of a sense-making ordering of the world that "man [is able] to engage himself in a certain mastery of nature."<sup>13</sup>

Mastery over our environment is made possible by this symbolic function as it provides humans "domination through distance and differentiation."<sup>14</sup> On the first point, domination through distance, Ellul argues that, "for there to be symbolization at all, the symbol-creator must be outside what he is symbolizing; there must be some distance between the symbolizer and the symbolized."<sup>15</sup> On the second, domination through differentiation, distinctions for Ellul result from our designation of names, because the "word is creator in that it names things, thus specifying them by differentiating them."<sup>16</sup> This gives us mastery over what we name as we attach importance, meaning, and place to it. "To name someone or something," he says, "is to show one's superiority over him or it."<sup>17</sup> As an example, Ellul refers to the Genesis account, where "Adam is confirmed as the head of creation when God brings all the animals to him so that he can give each one a name (Gen. 2:19)."<sup>18</sup> Thus, being comes through naming.

The Genesis passage that establishes creation on the basis of separation contains the germ of the most modern ideas about language: it tells us that difference both establishes the word and proceeds from it. The word bestows being on each reality, attributing truth to it; it gives dynamism to reality and prescribes a fixed trajectory for it. In this way the word disentangles confusion and nonbeing?<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ellul, *Humiliation of die Word*, 50-51.

<sup>9</sup> Jacques Ellul, "Symbolic Function, Technology and Society," *Journal of Social and Biological Structures* 1 (1978): 207.

<sup>10</sup> Jacques Ellul, "An Aspect of the Role of Persuasion in a Technical Society," trans. Elena Radutsky and Charles Stern, *Et cetera* 36 (Summer 1979): 149.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Ellul, *What I Believe*, 100.

<sup>13</sup> Ellul, "Symbolic Function," 208.

<sup>14</sup> Ellul, "Role of Persuasion," 151.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>16</sup> Ellul, *Humiliation of die Word*, 53.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

Our name-making is driven by our need for coherence. The creative process allows us to order our environment through symbols. "From the moment man proceeds to the denomination of things," Ellul writes, "he has made them enter his universe and they belong to a coherent ensemble. They belong to man by virtue of the name he has bestowed on them. He has not only put his mark on things, he has also made them [sic] exist."<sup>20</sup> This transformation comes as one symbolizes, making "his natural, objective reality into a special universe that he constitutes from within himself,"<sup>21</sup> and resulting in the "creation of a universe different from the one in which he is situated, but fully a part of his real milieu."<sup>22</sup>

The whole process of symbol-making is interpretive, making signs "enter into a coherent explanatory ensemble (even if only fictively explanatory) of which man stands as master."<sup>23</sup> Ellul says the coherence is gained as one selects which elements to feature or mask, in the same way as an artist interprets reality.

[Symbolization] is not like a photographic reproduction, which would serve no function: the painter makes choices of which characteristics of reality to retain, highlighting some and making them carriers of meaning, while others he marks for obliteration, pushing them into the shadows or making them disappear altogether... There is a transformation into a new universe, which renders explicit and in terms of relationship, that which is implicit and without apparent relationship.<sup>24</sup>

Ellul places supreme importance on this interpretive process which provides structure for our world because it is through "the symbolic transformation of reality" that one "creates the possibility of acquiring a non-material grasp on reality, without which he would be completely unprovided for."<sup>25</sup>

Since the creation of symbols is rooted in the environment or milieu in which we find ourselves, problems arise during a time of transition. As we have moved into the environment of *la technique*, our use of symbols has become outdated. "[S]ince thinking is slow to move and verbal forms are always a step behind reality, the older environment serves as an ideological reference for those who have been plunged into the new one."<sup>26</sup> Importantly for Ellul, as we live during a time of transition, this tendency toward anachronistic symbolization leads to "enormous errors of judgment" which result in a failure to identify properly the challenge of *la technique*?<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ellul, "Symbolic Function," 212.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 207; note deleted.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>26</sup> Ellul, *Wuu I Believe*, 101.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 102.

## Self-Symbolization of *la technique*

As we attempt to make sense of our new technological environment, Ellul argues that *la technique* itself provides coherence through its self-symbolization.<sup>28</sup> Ellul contends that "technology is itself productive of symbols and becomes by itself its own symbol... . Technology is not only an environment, nor merely an ensemble of means and instruments; it is itself a symbolic universe. It furnishes itself with its own symbols."<sup>29</sup> As a result, "[n]ow it is technology which has taken over and which produces for man the coherent symbols that are attributable to the technological universe."<sup>30</sup>

Through the images produced by *la technique* some of our needs seem to be met. But Ellul argues that we have experienced "a complete inversion of the scale of needs."<sup>31</sup> As a result, the needs which are met are "artificial needs, which are unimportant, not in the least essential to man, but which become irrepressible, exigent, imperious, the only ones to be taken seriously in the long run..."<sup>32</sup>

Images help us make up for the loss of the natural environment, a loss to which we have never quite reconciled ourselves. Without contact with the reality of the natural environment "we develop an extremely deep need for another reality." This need is met though "[t]he image is mirage [which] reconciles contradictions, makes absent nature present and real again ... Images counterbalance all the abstractions. And they restore to us at last a reality in which we can live: the reality of the world of images."<sup>33</sup> But this "world imagined by the media" is a "perfectly artificial world, recomposed by the images and sounds of these media. Consequently," Ellul says, "there is no place for symbolization to occur."<sup>34</sup>

The end result is that we cannot gain mastery over our technological environment because the only experience we accept as "real" is itself the result of *la technique's* self-symbolization. "[T]he images of a technical society only seem to be symbolizing *by reflecting* a reality that is itself only a reflection." Thus, instead of providing distance and differentiation, this self-symbolization "has the effect of integrating, adapting, and assimilating man to technique."<sup>35</sup> This integration is encouraged by our distraction from the reality of the system. "Images are essential if I am to avoid seeing the day-to-day reality I live in. They glitter continuously around me, allowing me to live in a sort of image-oriented fantasy."<sup>36</sup> Ellul draws a distinction between images as "a substitute reality" and the word, which "obliges me to consider reality from the point of view of

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<sup>28</sup> Ellul, "Role of Persuasion," 151.

<sup>29</sup> Ellul, "Symbolic Function," 217.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Jacques Ellul, "The Obstacles to Communication Arising from Propaganda Habits," *The Student World* 52 (1959): 405. 1.32. . Ibid., 404.

<sup>32</sup> *EBvd, Humiliatum of die Word*, 207.

<sup>33</sup> Ellul, "Symbolic Function," 215.

<sup>34</sup> Ellul, "Role of Persuasion," 151.

<sup>35</sup> Ellul, *Humiliation of the Word*, 128.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

truth." He writes, "Artificial images, passing themselves off for truth, obliterate and erase the reality of my life and my society."<sup>37</sup>

## The Need for New Symbols

Living in an environment of artificial images results in the elimination of meaning: "Language becomes, in effect, a system of signs which answer to certain archetypes, to certain uses and to certain habits, but the symbolic dimension of language is destroyed."<sup>38</sup> The "reality" of the poetic, mythic and metaphysical falls before the "reality" of the empirical. What can be "seen" by the soul is replaced by what can be seen with the eyes. The word becomes humiliated by the image. Symbol becomes sign. Language "becomes no more than a sort of organized noise," so that "a whole part of man's symbolic activity is rendered impossible. Among other things, he is capable neither of true consciousness nor of recognition."<sup>39</sup>

Part of the problem is that the Enlightenment's elimination of the metaphysical makes it difficult for people in modern society to create a "symbolic universe," that is, a superordinate sense-making of our environment which is based on the ultimate. Instead, we are limited to that which can be handled "scientifically." When it comes to language, the result has been the study of signs apart from meaning; "... the mentality of scientism has pounced upon language," Ellul complains, "and has involved us in reducing the word to the state of an object: a scientific object"<sup>40</sup> The tangible, what can be seen, becomes what is "real."

I cannot observe the signified, nor the relationship of the signifier with the signified. These are "philosophical" problems. On the contrary, I can observe the emission of a phrase, its circulation, deformation, and audition. I can even make nice diagrams of this process. This shows in the first place that this attitude follows the traditional "scientific" tendency: only what can be observed and analyzed by the classical scientific method is important (or even exists, in the extreme view). Since only the communication process involving the signifier can be thus analyzed, it is the only thing that matters to us. Everything else is a metaphysical argument that serves only to confuse the scientific relationship between subject and object.<sup>41</sup>

But in excluding meaning as beyond examination (and therefore unimportant) and in concentrating "exclusively on reality and the concrete," we lose the truth which is "to be read between the lines or heard in the silent moments of discourse." While the Image limits us to "[t]ruth verifiable by science," the word "continually casts doubt on this claim."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ellul, "Symbolic Function," 215.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ellul, *Humiliation of the Word*, 165.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>42</sup> Ellul, "Symbolic Function," 217.

The ultimate bankruptcy of the universe of images is out of sight for us in the environment *oflatechnique*. The system "presents itself as an environment so coherent and so unitary that it does not seem to have a point where man can insert anything else."<sup>43</sup> It "devalues all other mediations and man seems to have no need of symbolic mediation because he has technological mediation."<sup>44</sup> As a result, "[n]ow it is technology which has taken over and which produces for man the coherent symbols that are attributable to the technological universe."<sup>45</sup>

The problem with this new reality is that its dependence on images produces the "tendency toward the disappearance of the symbolic function."<sup>46</sup> Given the unity of the system, "man seems to have no need of symbolic mediation because he has technological mediation. It even appears to man that technology is more efficacious and permits him a greater domination over what threatens him and a more certain protection against danger than does the symbolic process."<sup>47</sup> Our ability to create symbols has been sterilized by the ease with which we can "consume" the system's images. "Just as vaccines have progressively reduced the capacity of the organism to create spontaneously natural immunities, so in the same way, man no longer creates symbols because too many are offered him at too simple a level of consumption."<sup>48</sup> But these images "have not elaborated a significant and meaningful symbolic universe."<sup>49</sup> They have "ceased to assure us of permanence; ceased to call forth a deepened consciousness and thus cannot be creators of history."<sup>50</sup> They ultimately fail because they cannot meet our need for a "deep" coherence.

Provided with a technological mediation which is so efficient and so complete that it becomes embraced to the exclusion of all else, we have lost sight of the human need to create our own symbols if we are to survive and grow. "Man no longer feels specifically the need to launch himself into the adventure of initial symbolic creation precisely because he sees himself surrounded by those symbols that are actually produced by the technological system."<sup>51</sup> The easy access to the existing symbolic universe of *la technique* "sterilizes man's desire" to create one's own symbols<sup>52</sup>

## Intervention Into the Cycle

The vicious circle which is suggested by Ellul's analysis reveals to us the double importance of communication in his thinking: the seemingly complete mediation of *la*

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 211.

*technique* reduces our perceived need to create symbols, and without the creation of new symbols with which we can gain mastery over our new environment, no challenge to the technological mediation is possible. Thus Ellul seeks to provide an intervention into the cycle through his demonstration of the emptiness of the needs which are being met by *la technique* and the danger resulting from our loss of awareness of our need to symbolize. Only by breaking this vicious circle are adaptation and growth possible. "So long as the evolution of the symbolic universe remains possible, the normal evolution of society is possible without crisis and within humanely acceptable bounds."<sup>53</sup> Therefore, man's "only chance to subsist in his human specificity" is "to effect a symbolization of technology" toward human ends.<sup>54</sup> The "univocal" mediation by technology must be replaced with symbolization which is "plurivocal, equivocal, unstable in [its] applications, and also deeply rooted in a rich and creative unconsciousness."<sup>55</sup> Ellul believes that we must "work to create new values, to reach a consensus on a new meaning, to create new symbols." If this is done, then it is possible that technologies can be placed in the role of servant once again. But "if society is not successful, it surely will disintegrate. In other words," he says, "it is now a time for invention... It is to that invention of a new communication which adequately symbolizes the elements of *la technique* that Ellul calls us.

## Where Mass Media Abound, The Word Abounds Greater Still

—Reflections on Robert Cole's Study of Children, Movies and Ethics  
by Darrell J. Fasching University of South Florida

### Where Mass Media Abound Ethical Freedom Disappears - Or Does It?

Jacques Ellul's analysis of the mass media's influence, at first glance, makes it seem as if we are without resources in a mass media civilization. The media, he suggests, rob us of our individuality and our capacity for critical thinking. Our thought and action become stereotypical. Consequently we lose our capacity for ethical reflection and action. For Ellul, our only hope lies in the power of the word to free us from our illusions. What I hope to show, with the help of Robert Coles recent work on the moral life of children, is that where media images abound, the word abounds greater

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>54</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: The Continuum Publishing Corporation, 1980), 37.

<sup>55</sup> Jacques Ellul, "Search for an Image," trans. Henry Darcy and Gloria and Lionel Abel, *The Humanist* 33 (Nov.-Dec. 1973): 23.

still Children, we usually assume, are less capable of critical thought and analysis and therefore are even more vulnerable to mass media imagery than adults. However, in *The Moral Life of Children* Coles shows that while children can indeed mouth the stereotypes of the adult mass media world they also show an amazing capacity for independent ethical reflection. Such reflection is often provoked by the media themselves, especially television and film.

As Ellul has pointed out, in a technical civilization we live immersed in a media environment so total and constant that it is virtually invisible. What is dangerous about this environment is that media make it possible to address individuals within the masses, creating the illusion of personal involvement while actually eliminating their individuality. To the degree that such persons rely on the media for information they are subjected to oversimplified characterizations of social and political situations. Complex issues are reduced to basic positive and negative options formed around stereotypes. The unique thoughts of the reflective self are replaced with a media generated collection of fragmentary stereotypical public opinions. There is no longer a progression from private to public opinion, says Ellul, "only from one state of public opinion to another state of that same public opinion."<sup>56</sup>

Television and film, especially, create an environment of images and illusions that short-circuit our ability to sustain critical distance. Rather than stimulating critical reflection, visual images bring thought to a halt. "A picture is worth a thousand words." The facts speak for themselves. Knowing becomes equated with "taking a look." All further reflection becomes unnecessary. The power of the news telecast is in giving us a feeling of presence, of immediateness, so we can see for ourselves. "Seeing is believing." One sees the facts, and having seen them, the issue is resolved. However, while seeing gives one the illusion of objectivity, it in fact totally abolishes the distance necessary for critical objective thought.

All of this brings about a fundamental mutation in our thought processes. Rational reflection is replaced by associative thinking. Films, photos, even words are used to evoke stereotypical feelings and reactions. The institutional infrastructure of society, says Ellul, is a "reality" legitimated by a superstructure or "sacred canopy" of images. The power of images, mediated through film and television, is such that we are removed from our everyday world of interpersonal interaction, where what we do has some effect, and placed instead in a fictional world which presents itself as "reality." It is a non-dialogical world of one way communication which our thoughts and actions can never touch or influence. The end result of living in this "reality" is that we are totally immobilized and prevented from significantly affecting the shape of our social world.

The image integrates us into the illusion of that "reality". By contrast, the word makes us conscious of our separateness, our individuality, our freedom. The word inserts the creative tension of transforming freedom into the closed realm of mass media society. Although he needs to be challenged on this, Ellul argues that the very nature of the

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<sup>56</sup> *Propaganda*, (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1972), p. 204.



word elicits reasoning and analysis, freeing one from mesmerization by the image.<sup>57</sup> The word restores the personalizing dimension of time and memory and evokes our capacity for freedom and revolt. "The word," for Ellul, "must always remain a door opening to the Wholly Other."<sup>58</sup> As a result the word "is strictly contradictory to technique in every way."<sup>59</sup> It is through the word, Ellul suggests, that human sovereignty can be recovered over the domain of technique. It is not a matter of doing away with images. No human society can function without images. It is simply a matter of restoring a balance and with it the possibility of critical reflection.

Ellul's sociological analysis of the impact of mass media upon human freedom produces a discouraging perspective. Media seem to create an environment in which ethical freedom is impossible. The integration of the image and technique make Ellul very pessimistic about the possibilities of the word finding a place in the life of the individual who is immersed in a media environment. And yet, as Ellul himself argues, everything depends upon the individual. At the macro level of social analysis everything may seem determined and yet at the individual level freedom might yet be possible. Robert Coles work with the children of this mass media world in fact suggests that not only is freedom possible but it abounds. It abounds because the power of the word abounds in the lives of these children.

## The Word Abounds Greater Still

Robert Coles, who received a Pulitzer Prize for his series *Children of Crisis*, began his career by studying the impact of integration on black and white children in the South in the sixties. Since then he has studied the responses of children to crises in a variety of cultures. Recently this work has culminated in three important books - *The Political Life of Children*, *The Moral Life of Children* and *The Spiritual Life of Children*.<sup>60</sup> In *The Moral Life of Children* he devotes a chapter to "Movies and Moral Energy" in which he suggests that both television and film can sometimes serve as

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<sup>57</sup> Ellul exaggerates this link between word and reason. Ellul prefers the oral word over the written word, which is why he prefers Socrates over Plato and Aristotle. But a good deal of research on orality and writing would seem to call Ellul's claim here into question. Myth, as an imaginal language, is primarily an oral language. It is only with writing that critical rational reflection really became possible. Walter Ong persuasively argues that it is not the spoken word which promotes reason and analysis but the written word. See *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, (London and New York: Methuen, 1982), especially chapters 3 and 4. I suspect that it is really the dialectical balance of movement back and forth between the written and the oral word that makes possible the Socratic critical reflection which Ellul so much admires. Although Socrates may not have left us any writings (apart from Plato), it is doubtful that he could have engaged in his critical dialogues in a totally oral culture. Hence the critical distance Ellul advocates as an antidote to mesmerization by media images can only occur through this kind of dialectical balance, which is exemplified in Ellul's own life as a teacher and an author, even if it is not fully accounted for in his own theoretical reflections.

<sup>58</sup> *The Humiliation of the Word* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Co., 1985), p. 32.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>60</sup> *The Political Life of Children* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1986), *The Moral Life of Children*

important ethical resources for children, provoking their capacity for ethical reflection in unexpected ways.

In the sixties TV sets were found in the homes of southern children wherever he went. He reports that, annoyed by the common habit of leaving the TV on even when no one was watching, he once got up and turned off a TV set in an adjoining room. He did this because he wanted to conduct, without distraction, his interview with Ruby, a poor young black girl (age 6) who was a central figure in the forced integration of a white school in New Orleans. The mother immediately got up and turned it back on. Later the child explained to him that the movies and serials kept her mama going in hard times. They apparently served this role for the daughter as well. She was one of a handful of black children being escorted to school everyday by federal marshals. Her trips to the movies in the midst of all this tension and hatred, she said, seemed "providential" (56). "There will be times, like now, when... they [her mother and father] wonder why God gave all this trouble to the Negro people, and the white people have a better time. Then my mother will remember something she's seen in the movie, and she says you musn't forget that the white people aren't all having such a good time, either" (57).

Movies, whether in the theater or on TV, are composed of more than just images. They are a balance of word and image. They are a form of storytelling which offers us opportunities to identify with others whose lives would otherwise be totally alien to our own. In so doing, we gain ethical perspective. They offer us, as well, the full range of human emotions to be explored and put into ethical perspective. Thus they provide occasions for ethical conversion and new life. Once an author completes a story, says Flannery O'Connor, it takes on a life of its own - "You never know the new life that will result!" (59). With this thought in mind, Coles reflects on the role that movies played in preparing people to deal with integration. In the early sixties black and white families caught up in the integration controversy were seeing and discussing films like *A Raisin in the Sun* (1961) and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962).

Coles was struck by how some children related primarily to the race issue while others focused on the mother-daughter relationship in the film *Raisin in the Sun*. The black mother strikes her daughter for mocking the mother's belief in God. One child, an 8 year old white girl, responded by repeating the stereotypes of much of the adult world around her "When the mother slapped her daughter and told her to believe in God, she was being smart. If you walk away from God, you're walking toward a lot of trouble. Maybe the colored will get into more and more trouble, because everyone is telling them they're bad off, and they believe it, and then there's trouble, like now, in our schools. If those people in the movie only listened to the mother, they'd be better off. The trouble was, even the mother wanted to move [i.e., into a better "white" neighborhood]. If she really believed in God, wouldn't she want to say right where she

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(Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1986) *The Spiritual Life of Children* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1990).

was?" (63). But Ruby comes to a different conclusion: "The mother can make her say it [i.e., \*there is a God'], but the daughter might not believe what she says. The mother smacked her daughter on the face, and our minister says you don't hurt someone, even if someone tries to hurt you, not if you believe in God" (62). A third child who viewed the film, failed to pick up on the mother-daughter conflict at all and reported the lesson of the movie was: "don't leave the South" (64).

No two children experienced the film in exactly the same way. Each filtered the film through the prism of his or her own inner life. Each took the film as an occasion to test the limits of his or her own moral worldview in some way. In the first case, it reinforced the mass stereotypes of the surrounding society; but in the case of Ruby, a deep ethical reflection occurred which allowed her to champion the importance of belief in God being uncoerced. Indeed lack of coercion becomes for her a test of authentic belief in God.

After seeing *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Ruby was struck by the paradox that Boo Radley, whom everyone feared as crazy and potentially dangerous, turns out to be the protector of children. Ruby confesses: "I wasn't scared for the man, the negro they all were wanting to kill. I knew they'd want to get him, and so did he!... No, I was scared for the white kids, and I felt sorry for that man next door [Boo]... My grandma said it's people like him who get a bad name, but they're good people; and it's the people standing out there in front of the school, and they're the ones who are the bad people, but no one's calling them crazy... They say they stand for everybody in the city. That's what one man tells me in the morning: 'Hey, you little nigger, ' he says, 'I'm here for the whole of New Orleans to tell you off!' I just walk on, and I think of all the people I know in New Orleans who aren't like him. The poor man in the movie [Boo] - if he lived in New Orleans he'd sure not be out on the street screaming at us.'" As Coles notes, here the film became for Ruby a vehicle for making an ethical distinction between appearance and reality which she applied to the world of her own persecution. It enabled her to have faith and go on, confident that at least some white people could be counted upon, like Boo, to be secretly on her side.

Far from arriving at a depersonalizing collectivist response, Ruby transcended black-white stereotypes to find hidden goodness among those who could have been viewed as all alike in their hatred. Thus, Coles concludes that "one is left with the mystery that takes place between each reader and each text, and each viewer and each film: the diversity of stimulation that emerges from several characters embedded in a complex plot, and the considerable latitude of awareness and moral concern in an audience" (65). Something can happen between the child and the film that cannot be accounted for by any psychology, sociology or even theology - something that transcends these categories to engage the ethical and spiritual energy of the child. Perhaps it is something we could call grace or the power of the word. Drawing on this power, Ruby used the film story to call into question the stereotypical image of all whites as racist. Ruby even hoped that movies might be a force for redemption in a world divided by racial hatred: "I've been thinking, '... 'If all the [white] people on the street [who were heckling her mercilessly]

saw the movie they might stop coming out to bother us... Because... the people in the movies would work on them, and maybe they'd listen." (65-66). "It is a mistake," says Coles, "to regard these children as mere moral puppets, driven by the workings of some contemporary sociodrama to hunt down cheap symbols in order to help express whatever psychological tensions were at work inside their heads... The human mind in the first decade of life can conjure up the demonic even in the close at hand world of a small and familiar rural setting and that same mind may be instructed in the error of its way by life's events" (75-76).

The ethical imagination of these children draws out of these films what they need in order to reflect on the moral perplexities of their own lives. "It is not a matter of reflex reaction, a behavioral sequence of sociological and psychological stimuli finding their mark. Rather, those behavioral stimuli are, not infrequently, ignored, or absorbed in some broader moral visions of things that even small children seem unselfconsciously able to construct for themselves" (77). Although we are all supposedly "turned to putty" by the power of the media, says Coles, still "we have it within our power, young or old, to attend selectively, to summon a sense of proportion, to call upon humor and common sense, to assume a varying or even quite insistent critical distance from the subject under scrutiny in the film, and later, in a given mind's life" (77). As a 14 year old boy comments on traditional "cowboy and Indian" films: "I don't try to remember my American History... while I see the cowboys going after the Indians. But I don't forget my history, either... People don't give you credit a lot of the time for having your head screwed on straight!" (78-79). This young boy from Albuquerque was in fact angered by the mistreatment the Indians had received and continued to receive at the hands of Anglos.

Far from automatically destroying our ethical freedom, films can be the occasions which provoke ethical reflection and heighten ethical sensibilities. Around the world, Coles, argues, "movies stir up" the ethical imagination. "I have found among rich children, poor children, black children, white children, American children, children of Ireland or England or Brazil or South Africa, that all are intrigued by the mixture of release from the earth and the persistence of our earthly capacities for decency and for malice, for good deeds and bad deeds. The combination is irresistible. I could fill hundreds of pages of print with transcriptions of what I've heard children say about these films" (84). Movies can enable us to see ourselves through the eyes of others because they can seduce us into seeing the world as others see it, for both good and evil. These stories on film speak to us because we are all "wayfarers, wanderers, alarmed castaways, or transients who find ourselves here on earth, and trying to figure out the moral significance of that realization" (90). Movies can help us gain an ethical perspective on our situation. As Ruby put it: "I went to that movie and afterward I kept thinking of it, thinking and thinking, and the next day it made me wonder what I should do, and would I be doing right or wrong" (92).<sup>61</sup> Such ethical reflections are

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<sup>61</sup> Over the last several years I have developed a course on Religion, Ethics and Society in which we

possible because our humanity resides in our inalienable capacity for language. As sign language testifies, not even the deaf and dumb can be robbed of their humanity. In their every gesture the word becomes flesh. Nothing can separate our humanness from this capacity for the word. Put theologically, no child of God is ever abandoned by the Word, for all things are created, held together and fulfilled through the Word in which we live, move and have our being. In a world of apparent necessity where the media abound, the gracious gift of the Word abounds greater still, making all things possible and all things new.

## Promo for Narrative Theology after Auschwitz

From Alienation to Ethics

by Darrell J. Fasching

*Narrative Theology After Auschwitz* is a critique and reconstruction of Christian theology and ethics through a dialogue with the Jewish narrative tradition of *Chutzpah* (i.e., audacity). It proposes a shared ethic of audacity in defense of the dignity of the stranger as a response to the threats of our techno-bureaucratic world.

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## Communication Theory in Ellul's Sociology

by Clifford G. Christians University of Illinois-Urbana

Since 1948 communication has played a prominent role in Ellul's sociology. Already in his thesis statement, *The Presence of the Kingdom*, Ellul isolated the problem of communication as central to understanding the contemporary age. As Joyce Hanks

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view and discuss a wide variety of contemporary films, such as *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, *Wall Street*,

observes, *Propaganda* (1962) was the first of Ellul's books to give *la technique* an indepth study.<sup>62</sup> *Prayer and Modern Man* (1970) was cast against today's crisis in language.

Ellul's long-term interest in communications makes *The Humiliation of the Word* an important laboratory for understanding his social philosophy. This volume is the site of my analysis here, and I work the territory with a sympathetic mind. *Propaganda has been* a formative book for me since I first read it in 1970. In contrast to superficial treatments innocent of the infrastructure-transmission views of communication in the behaviorist mode-Ellul situates the media in their socio-political context. He understands them as a technological and cultural form, and develops a normative framework light years beyond our commonplaces. He has almost singlehandedly moved the axis of propaganda studies away from overt intention among individuals to covert integration sociologically.

And I consider *Humiliation of the Word* an instructive book as well. Its major theme is unassailable-the need in our time to liberate language as an agent of human freedom. He privileges the *medium* throughout. He understands the significant fact that media technology itself is a central interpretive framework. McLuhan's aphorism - the medium is the message - in other words, he recognizes as a powerful notion. Ellul realizes that the technological form must be isolated on its own terms and not overlooked in our preoccupation with content. Ellul gives that notion his own inflection, recognizing a sea change occurs when media shift from books to television. And in his usually indomitable manner, his wide appeal to symbolic representation is stunning in scope.

I am argumentative in this article, but before outlining my dispute *over Humiliation of the Word* let me reiterate my profound appreciation for Ellul's scholarship. Without a philosophy of technology, the religious community stands emptyhanded regarding the mass media. Without a theory of technology, media instruments accommodate the status quo. Devoid of an explicit orientation regarding technology, the church co-opts media for the Great Commission and leaves the remainder-the so-called secular-unattended. A Christian perspective on technology is the north star by which we can set our intellectual compass. Ellul contributes a mighty voice to our technological discourse, an arena where Christians find it difficult to shape the agenda.

Within that favorable pre-disposition, let me deconstruct *Humiliation of the Word* in the light of communication theory and investigate its possible contribution to mass media studies.

Similar to Neil Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Ellul's book is set within an influential line of communication scholarship originating with the Canadian, Harold

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*Casualties of War* and *Do the Right Thing*. I have found that the interaction between word and image in such an approach leads to greater student involvement and insight than simply lecturing.

<sup>62</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Humiliation of the Word*, Trans. Joyce M. Hanks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), p. ix.

Innis.<sup>63</sup> This theory presumes that the history of communications is central to the history of civilization, that social change results from media transformations, that changes in communicative forms alter the structure of consciousness. Innis studied the introduction of papyrus, the printing press, radio, and the telegraph-and documented a bias (tendency, propensity, impulse) regarding space and time. Oral communication systems, he argued, are biased toward time, rendering time continuous while making space discontinuous. Print systems, tty contrast, are biased toward space, making geography continuous and breaking time into distinct units. As a minor premise, Innis argued for a monopoly of knowledge, that is, one form of communication tending to monopolize and rendering other forms residual rather than all communications media simply existing innocently alongside one another.

*Innis\** work on communication technology has been elaborated further by Marshall McLuhan, Elizabeth Eisenstein, Walter Ong, and James Carey. Thus from the introduction of cuneiform writing to today's fiber optics, media technologies have attracted considerable attention-scholars in the Innis tradition examining all significant shifts in technological form, identifying through them subsequent alterations in culture and in perception. Within this paradigm of bias in communication systems, the intellectual challenge is to identify the distinguishing properties of particular media technologies such as books, cinema, church sculpture, and satellites. As the physicist steps inside the world of atoms, matter and motion to understand them from the inside, the communications scholar, regarding television or magazines or audio cassettes must work deeply into their symbolic properties in order to know them fundamentally and distinctly as their own.

From the viewpoint of this important approach to communication scholarship, Ellul is raising the appropriate questions. His concern with hearing and seeing, with cinema and photography as compared to print, his fascination with the image-indicates a strong analysis located generatively.

Careful readers of *Humiliation of the Word* will note that Marshall McLuhan is Ellul's entree to this theoretical framework. He cites McLuhan approvingly on occasion and quarrels only with particular arguments. It ought not be read as merefy an application of McLuhan, but as embodying the larger framework of which McLuhan is a representative. And my allusion to McLuhan enables me to initiate my argument.

McLuhan was Innis' successor at the University of Toronto. Whereas McLuhan continued the emphasis on the medium, Innis was broadly sociological and historical, and McLuhan intensely psychological in orientation. McLuhan's notions about visual closure, the sensorium, hot and cool, simultaneity, massage, and so forth, were formulated in narrowly psychological terms. His argument that television as a cool medium is a revolutionary force for global bonding, presumes a host of psychological claims about perception, mental processing of images, tactility, and the nervous system.

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<sup>63</sup> Of. Harold Innis' two majorworks on communicatons technolcgy, *Empire and Communications* (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), and *The Bias of Communication* (Tononto: University of

It is the uniform judgment of media scholars-pro and con-that McLuhan's provocative vocabulary and stunning insights about media systems finally turned disastrous. It begged too many questions about our physiological, mental, and psychological apparatus, and claimed more as a lay observer than even the most sophisticated students of the psychological arena could deliver.

Or, in slightly less perfunctory terms, Harold Innis' comprehensive sociological and historical framework has proved far more penetrating and enduring. By connecting media forms to social organization, power, empire, and bureaucracy, Innis dominated the field persuasively while McLuhan was entertained by Madison Avenue but already has been relegated to the dustbin of academic history.

The history of communication scholarship convinces me that Ellul is making a fatal mistake by orienting his argument around psychological motifs. Ellul's trademark has always been the social and historical contours, but in this book his references are decidedly McLuhanesque. Chapters 1, 3, 6 make the same overwrought conclusions about perception, consciousness, vision, and hearing that in the literature among communication scholars has yielded few definitive conclusions. With billions at stake in advertising revenue, for example, researchers have attempted to document attitude change and media impact on our psyches with little success. It is profoundly unsatisfying, in my opinion, for Ellul to assemble such a massive range of symbolic material and then locate it on the same frail reed as McLuhan's.

Again, the overall thesis is sound-about the critical importance of today's rush toward visual symbols. But the mountain of image data Ellul investigates must be reconstructed in terms of Innis. In *The Humiliation of the Word* Ellul works his sociological-theological counterpoint. His problematic in chapters 1-6 operates dialectically with his religious concerns of chapter 7-particularly in terms of the Gospel of John. Again, I am not disputing his counterpoint here, but contending that an Innis-like frame would irrigate the problematic and dramatically strengthen its application to religious life in the twentieth century.

Let me illustrate what I mean. Using a correspondence notion of truth, Ellul writes:

No longer are we surrounded by fields, woods, and rivers, but by signs, signals, billboards, screens, labels and trademarks: this is our universe. And when the screen shows us a living reality-such as people's faces or other countries-this is still a fiction: it is a constructed and recombined reality... It produces acute suffering and panic; a person cannot be deprived of truth and situated in fiction (p. 228).

And in McLuhanesque fashion, Ellul draws this speculative conclusion:

The visual world leaves empty places (which usually bore the city dweller when he goes to the country. On the contrary, the sight of mountains or



of the ocean is full and fills the eyes). But the universe manufactured by artificial images must keep itself filled up (143).

This line of argumentation is grounded in the assumption that an objective natural reality stands outside knowing subjects to give them a sense of stability. Given this reality which exists independently of our own human creations, the idea of principial truth is at least conceivable. Now that electronic forms of communication have multiplied dramatically and create an alternative environment of images, we have lost our sense of truthfulness altogether. Apparently word forms of communication in oral and print are less ambiguous than the visual, and could feed our understanding of truth by enabling thought processes to function. Instead we are inundated with impressions from visual symbols which dance in anarchy around our mind.

Ellul repeats in this volume an argument he develops more fully in *Propaganda*, a 1978 essay, and elsewhere. Whereas previous social orders operated with a triad-humans/nature, in technological societies nature recedes and humans perceive themselves as living in a technical artifice. We have become aware that we do not exist in nature but in culture.

Man does not any longer live in a natural environment but rather in a milieu composed of the products of his technology... He can no longer take any significant action without technological intermediation. Technology constitutes an engulfing universe for man, who finds himself in it as in a cocoon.<sup>64</sup>

The communications media represent the meaning-edge of the technological system, the arena where technique's soul is most clearly exposed. The media exhibit the structural elements of all technical artifacts, but their particular identity as a technology inheres in their function as bearers of symbols. Information technologies thus incarnate the properties of technology while serving as the agent for interpreting the meaning of the very phenomenon it embodies. Ellul calls our communication systems the "innermost, and most elusive manifestation" of human technological activity.<sup>65</sup> All artifacts communicate meaning in an important sense, but media instruments carry that role exclusively. As the media sketch out our world for us, organize our conversations, determine our decisions, and influence our self-identity, they do so with a technological cadence, massaging in our soul a technological rhythm and predisposition. In his scheme, the principle of efficiency which characterizes the technological enterprise as a whole also dominates the communications apparatus; the media do not transmit neutral stimuli, but they integrate us into the system. The mass media have become so powerful, Ellul argues, that congruity with the system is considered normal-

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Toronto Press, 1951).

<sup>64</sup> Jacques Ellul, "Symbolic Function, Technology and Society," *Journal of Social and Biological Structures*, October 1978, p. 216.

<sup>65</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1969), p. xvii.

even desirable-and we ironically declare that new ideas or alternative worldviews are ideologies or "just propaganda."

I have no fundamental quarrel with Ellul's contention that we live essentially in a technological artifice in which natural reality recedes. I am convinced also by the argument that mass media form the outermost ring of the technological system and organize the dialectic between humans and the technological order. But to characterize the visual media in *Humiliation of the Word* as a fictitious system of untrue images, cannot be sustained in terms of communication theory.

In Innis' historical and sociological orientation, the anchoring mode of communication is oral. Before the invention of the alphabet in 1500 B.C., civilization was exclusively oral, and until the rise of the printing press in the 16th century, human society was predominantly oral. Even today, nearly half of the world's languages have not been reduced to writing. Ellul puts image and word in contradiction; the word versus the visual is the focus of Ellul's analysis. He prefers oral words over print, but given his emphasis on words themselves, he blurs the critical distinction between the verbal and written. Innis would complain that in spite of Ellul's predisposition toward speech, he fails to recognize how irretrievably and congenitally communication is embedded in sound. Neil Postman, who worries with Ellul about today's overweening visualization, at least recognizes that the antidote is print. Print media are the best transmitters of linear logic and systematic discourse. While most communication scholars do not agree with Postman's anti-television bias, he understands accurately the disjunctions among orality, print, and electronic systems.

Oral life is our common property, language spoken and heard God's gift exclusively to the human species. All normal humans naturally learn to speak and hear; none needs the educational skills for print or the economic means to buy electronic equipment. Printed words and electronic images are both derived from speech. The multi-dimensional acoustical world of sound is ear-oriented, and not sight driven (as with print and electronics). In a long footnote on McLuhan (pp. 26-27), Ellul notes the distinction between a communication of hearing and one of sight, but then dismisses McLuhan as erroneous. Ellul misconstrues the issues here and draws the outrageous conclusion that McLuhan's only illustration of acoustical communication is music. Precisely at this point, Innis' historical framework keeps our priorities on oral communication and prevents dead-ended speculation whether visual systems are Active, and speech and writing realistic.

In an oralsociety, the referent is another human. The framing device in communication is not natural reality, but humanity. Oral communication creates presence, it binds humans into social groups. And oral communication in principle works in the binding mode, whether in exclusively oral, predominantly oral, or residually oral (e.g. our mass-mediated civilization today) social systems. Printed text and electronic images are both secondary forms, actually more similar to each other than either is to orality.

Ellul's insistence that images are illusory leads him to his well-known rejection of technicism in chapter 7. He warns the church not to sacralize images, but to destroy those visual icons that steer us toward commercialism and efficiency. And such prophetic warnings are pertinent and totally necessary. But chapter 7 finally amounts to little more than urging the religious community to see in the biblical sense of concentrating on the divine invisible, knowing that in the apocalyptic moment such seeing will at last be realized.

A more adequate final chapter would urge the church to concentrate on visual literacy. Granted the church faces a Himalayan task of maintaining its theological vitality while at this historical moment electronic systems gain superior power over print. But the buffer for this transformation is training in visual literacy. Presumably Ellul's point is that a culture overweeningly dependent on electronic imagery needs a critical consciousness; those who are visually literate actually have that capacity, at least in principle. Possessors of the eternal message may only create the dissonance of a foreign language, if they insist on abundant words for addressing visual culture. Speaking prophetically to a visual age requires a visual cadence. If we are willing to make the same educational commitment to school one another in visual systems as we have in print, the world of images will no longer seem like alien territory.

While increasingly the complexities of our age are cast in picture form, that does not mean we cannot comprehend them critically. The visual mind seizes not the minute parts but the story as an organic whole. Visual grammar centers on "a syntax of spatial relationships" with the "goal of achieving a Gestalt, an effectively unified message."<sup>66</sup> The visually literate catch a stream or grasp several images simultaneously. Traffic lights are not mistaken for Christmas decorations and audiences know that cowboys in white hats will save the day. Last year, 1.1 billion books were checked out of American libraries, but 1.2 billion videos were rented. As Ellul would insist correctly, these statistics are not neutral facts, but telling social indicators. Generations are emerging at present which might not be print literate. However, not all are bamboozled, even though our educational system in general and our literacy training in particular have not been reoriented as yet. People whose primary means of coherence are visual deserve an adequate framework for developing their visual competence, not dismissed as incapable of reflective thought.

Imagine one million dollars in my hand - a stack of 100 dollar bills four inches high. That is a visual statement. A friend of mine describes his adolescent days as a photograph out of focus, that's visual imagery. Human cognition can be viewed as a cycle of dawn and dusk-creation and reflection. Or from the poet: "The human heart is a small town where people live." Visual thinking. And Ecclesiastes 12: "Before the silver

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<sup>66</sup> Linda Schamber, "Core Course in Visual Literacy for Ideas, Not Tech-nique," *Journalism Educator*, Spring 1991, p. 18; she cites the basic text for educators, such as Donis A. Dondis, *Primer of Visual Literacy* and Deborah Curtiss, *Introduction to Visual Literacy*. See Michael Griffin in the same issue of *Journalism Educator*, "Defining Visual Communication for a Multimedia World," for a review of the theoretical work since Walter Benjamin and William Ivins in the 1930s (pp., 9-15).

cord snaps, and the golden bowl is broken at the cistem.” The technological artifice which is our modern home creates complexities of an extraordinary sort. The tide is turning relentlessly toward electronic communication, now only dimly understood. It is not dear at this stage what relationships exist between the linguistic, cognitive, and cultural dimensions of a visual text, but film, television, and photography. But why not busy ourselves with the awesome task of understanding their particular grammars, their properties, elements, and systemic features?

The history of communication scholarship convinces me that Ellul draws an erroneous conclusion about fiction and reality, and fails to grasp the nature of oral versus mediated language. His urgent tone and penetrating style at least indicate the seriousness of our current shift to visual technology. But rather than issue tedious ultimatums on the image’s role in our modern malaise, I believe our task centers on enabling visual media to become aesthetically superior. Television and cinema, for example, should be assisted in becoming distinctive popular art. Critical consciousness is our educational mission, regardless of the symbolic forms that dominate a historical period.

Communication theory suggests that we can develop a sense of truthfulness through visual literacy within an environment of images. Structural evil remains much too entrenched for breezy sleights of hand. But convictions born of the Spirit, a ventilated conscience, a morally honed life can flourish within a visual habitat as well as it did on occasion in pre-visual societies. While the overall mass-mediated system seems nearly impregnable, that does not preclude the visually literate from living with honor and authenticity. *Humiliation of the Word* allows that possibility only by default.

# Book Reviews

## *Dancing in the Dark: Youth, Popular Culture and the Electronic Media*

by Quentin J. Schultze, Roy M. Anker, et al. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1991. Paperback, 347 pages.

This book is based on the premise that "most adults have not really considered how they themselves have conspired among themselves, with the electronic media, and with various social institutions to make life increasingly difficult for youth" (p. 2). The authors attempt to investigate how young people, the electronic media and popular culture interact in contemporary North American society.

"Our thesis is that youth and the electronic media today are dependent on each other. The media need the youth market, as it is called, for their own economic survival. Youth, in turn, need the media for guidance and nurture in a society where other social institutions, such as the family and the school, do not shape the youth culture as powerfully as they once did" (pp. 11-12). The book takes a long and detailed look at the history of North American youth culture, how communication technologies have affected the cultural and social environment, the rise of youth culture in the 1950s and 1960s, portraits of rock music, rock videos, music television (MTV), and teenage films. Finally, the authors discuss the role of leisure in contemporary culture and offer guidelines to evaluate the quality and appropriateness of popular art for youth and adults.

The book is an entertaining but sometimes repetitive account of the difficult interaction between youth and adults. Here lies the first problem. Although the authors are at pains to identify youth, reading the evidence for their arguments in the chapters themselves produces the eerie feeling that there is no real distinction. An adult seems to be a youth who has been initiated into the mysteries of sex and work. The transition period, which used to be called adolescence, has been engulfed by the electronic consumer industry for its own profit. The authors comment that "many young people are anchored in a specialised media world, a youth subculture, that gives their lives meaning but at the same time distances them from their own family life" (p. 47). While this is especially true for youth, it is no less true for adults. Wherein lies the real distinction?

The main argument of the book, as already noted, is that youth and the entertainment media exist in symbiosis. "North American youth and the entertainment media

together form a quasi-educational culture - a culture that is about youth and for youth and for profit. The entertainment industry makes money from the symbiosis, while youth acquire the maps that help them steer their way through the troubled and confusing waters of teenage life" (p. 78). This seems to be a positive statement. If the entertainment industry is really helping youth to steer through troubled waters, all well and good. In fact it is not, and the authors seem to be caught in the ambivalence of wanting to be on the side of youth, liking what youth likes and yet being critical of it at the same time. Of course, that's the trap for adults who are really youth in disguise.

The moralistic overtones of the authors' Calvinist background come through in several places. Their Christian perspective is one reason for their concern, which is made clear in the Preface. However, this bias leads them to make claims for traditional sources of moral authority which they fail to justify. "So much entertainment geared directly and persuasively toward youth has effectively redefined the roles of traditional institutions in the nurture of youth. Amid the powerful presence of popular entertainment, the influence of family, school and church in the instruction of successive generations has declined dramatically" (p. 109). But this is too simple, despite the wealth of evidence brought to bear. People live their lives on many levels, in different ways. The entertainment industry is only one aspect of contemporary culture.

The chapters on rock music, rock videos, MTV and teenage films provide a lot of interesting information. The authors demonstrate that these are not "adequate bases for true community, meaningful identities, strong intimacies and high moral purpose" (p. 210). But in amply proving their point, they do not show how family, school and church should behave to counter-balance the impact of youth culture. The last two chapters discuss the leisure revolution and the problem of evaluating popular art morally and religiously. In some ways, these seem to stand apart from the preceding chapters. Their themes are related to youth, but apply equally to adulthood. What this reviewer misses is a chapter drawing together the various threads of the arguments and proposing a counter-revolution. If families and communities, together with education and religion, are to be the source of real identity in a pluralistic and divided society, then they need clear guidelines. These are not apparent in this book.

*Dancing in the Dark* is rich in detail, but at times rather dense. A book written by six authors is like a soup made by six chefs. A good editor might have turned a potage into a consommé. Nevertheless, it is still rewarding and gives cause for profound reflection.

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## *Mythmakers: Gospel, Culture, and the Media*

by William F. Fore. New York: Friendship Press, 1990. Paperback. 150 pages, index.

William Fore, currently teaching at Yale Divinity School, has written many pages in his distinguished career as church statesman and media scholar. This book reads like a summation of his years of thinking, teaching, and travel - a tour of his reflections on how and why the Christian gospel makes sense on TV and in film, and when it doesn't.

A worthy summation it is. From his culturalist perspective, Fore calls on the right set of theorists for the issues raised his focus on religion and media. From McLuhan and Innis he adopts the idea of a "sea change" sweeping across North America in 1844, the year of the telegraph. From Gerbner's cultural indicators project and Donnerstein's lab studies, Fore writes intelligently and modestly about media effects. From Eisenstein and Ong he culls broader notions of perception and cultural change. Fore weaves semiotics, political economy, and popular culture approaches into his analysis of media. He raises questions about media monopoly, the wisdom of televangelism, and omnipresent commercial messages. He calls on churches to educate members to "read television" and resist its secularity. He urges media mummies to come alive by producing their own video stories. In all, Fore advocates an activist stance toward media problems, energized by an optimism that electronic media offer a potential for human beneficence yet to be tapped.

Fore's theological moorings are all within "mainstream" protestantism, and here a longer review might probe some weaker spokes in the wheel. I suggest only two areas that strike me as worth a late afternoon talk in New Haven, or wherever in the world one can catch up with Mr. Fore.

First, the thorny quagmire of the public's role in correcting excessive sex and violence on TV, cable, and videocassettes. For problems so entrenched and so conspicuous, Fore's solutions are exceedingly calm. He urges stronger industry self-regulation (including descriptive flags on R-rated material), stockholder action, and (did we hear him right?) boycotts. On that last point, we must point out, Fore shares turf with Christian conservatives who claim that economic sparring is the only game corporate executives know to play. Fore's suggestion here seems disingenuous, as he provides only negative examples of boycott action and actually compares the tactic to inquisitions and Holy Wars. Thou shalt not," reads Fore's commandment, "abuse [thy] privilege by attempting to dictate what is said on the air," a comment surely aimed at all successful media boycotters from the Legion of Decency to the American Family Association.

On media violence, Fore seems content to rest his case on the reasonableness of corporate leaders' good will. He is much less sanguine, however, on questions related to media imperialism and cigarette advertising. Here he seeks government intervention and the gentle muscle of the organization over which he presided until recently, the World Association of Christian Communications. Is this strategy adequate to dislodge

the mentality which produces more sexually and violently explicit programming each season? There is reason to wonder.

Second, for talk time in *New Haven: theological foundations of culture, symbol, and knowledge*. Tillich is rightly cited first, and Newbigin enriches Fore's argument. But on such matters as the nature of meaning, the role of story, public policy and faith, and the crux of the Christian gospel, there exists a range and breadth of theological thinking conspicuous by its absence. Is the point of the gospel to "free people" (from what?) to find happiness in work, play, and family? Is it indeed impossible to uncover a "real gospel story," given cultural bounds? Are there "no meanings except as people give meanings"? On these questions, the likes of Bonhoeffer, Neuhaus, McGrath, and more of Newbigin would help round and deepen the argument

I believe Ellul's critique of *la technique* would play a formative role here in clarifying relations between public and corporation, qualifying Fore's confidence in reasonableness while problematizing Fore's conservative counterparts. But such must wait for longer reviews than this, and longer books than *Mythmakers*. Read this one as a thoughtful, intelligent summary of television research, its institutional handicaps, and its role in religious pedagogy.

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## ***Religious Television: Controversies and Conclusions***

by Robert Abelman and Stewart M. Hoover, eds. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corp. Cloth, 1990, 366 pages.

Religious television has been a topic of discussion and debate for several decades. Much of this has been based on subjective likes or dislikes, though some analysis has been rooted in more general observations about religion and communication. This book represents the latter type. It is an attempt to present factual findings and a wide range of scholarly reflections on the issue of religious television. Twenty-five competent specialists in the field of mass communications research and practice contributed in order to cover the field. Two of these are the editors of the book. Of these 25 contributors, one is from Australia and one from Great Britain; the others are based in the United States. The book is divided into nine major sections. In order to provide continuity, each section starts with a brief editorial sum-up of the key aspects of the particular issue being considered.

The person reviewing this book has observed and studied religious television in the USA during two visits to the country in 1955-56 and 1978-79. This book has helped me get an updated and solid base upon which I could reassess my understanding of



the nature and the role of religious television in the USA at the present moment. The book is a fresh blend of factual information and thought-provoking analysis.

The contributors are on the whole very critical towards what has been named the electronic church. But many are hostile toward it now, as a result of the sex and finance scandals among some televangelists. In my opinion, this book provides premises for a critical attitude towards the electronic church that is totally independent of the negative reaction that highly visible scandals naturally create. I shall mention some of these premises.

- The electronic church creates a superficial enemy image. Those who disagree with its leaders are labeled enemies.
- Reductionism. Not a full biblical message because it constantly concentrates on a health and wealth perspective where the audience is told to be a winner, getting its just due, luxury, health and prestige.
- An authoritarian approach to the audience. There is no place for dialogue. Talking and listening to each other are impossible. In fact, these programs often are designed to force and manipulate their audiences.
- Giving a false picture of the American family situation.
- Unclear with regard to religion and politics.
- No serious reflection on conviction and tolerance in a multicultural society.
- Using the media to collect money in a very aggressive way.

Looking at the list above, I too react strongly against the electronic church theologically as well as from a communication point of view. It certainly is not a full gospel that is proclaimed. Many Biblical aspects are not taken seriously in these broadcasts. I feel, however, that the electronic church need not take on this character. It continues a tradition that was started by Bishop Fulton Sheen and Norman Vincent Peale. They were authoritarian in a soft and friendly way, they also were very selective in their message. They dominated and impressed the audience, and shocked some, by their superficiality. But on the American scene I also have met fine religious television programs which communicate well, for example, Billy Graham's preaching and the Lutheran program "This is the Life."

The discussion about the electronic church and its weaknesses should challenge mainstream, churches to reconsider their way of using religious television. Rather than condemning it all wholesale, it must be done with integrity. Of course, manipulation must be out in religious television. A meeting of minds and dialogue must replace it, and we must search for ways to accomplish that.

I want to close with the words of a Dutch media professional who says: "Your beliefs, your religious world, can only be spread to a larger audience when you understand their world as well." The book *Religious Television: Controversies and Conclusions* underlines in a strong and competent way the need for religious television in which meeting other minds is taken seriously.

Gudm. Gjelsten

Volsdalen Kirke-Og Menighetscenter

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# Dissertations

## *The Hope Of Intervention: A Rhetorical Analysis Of The English Translations Of The Writings Of Jacques Ellul,*

by James Wesley Baker, Ph.D. The Ohio State University, 1991. Professor William R. Brown, Advisor.

This study calls attention to the "humanities critique" of the convergence of communication technologies by explicating the work of Jacques Ellul, whose writings long have recognized the integrating nature of technology. The purpose of the study is to clarify Ellul's goals in writing about *la technique*, which he defines as "efficient methods applicable in all areas."

The thesis is that Ellul is engaged in the rhetoric of social intervention. His writings promote an intervention by his readers into the technological system by challenging the ideological assumptions they make about technology.

In developing a framework by which Ellul may be understood, the study presents Organicism as his way of organizing knowledge, General Systems Theory as the theoretical base he uses to conceptualize the way *la technique* operates, and the Social Intervention Model (SIM) as a way of studying the pragmatic approach he takes in his books and articles. The SIM highlights Ellul's overall goal of intervening into our understanding of the place of *la technique* in our era. As part of this intervention, he is promoting a change in our attention from technologies-as-means to *la technique-as-system*, an awareness of our need for symbolization in order to control the growth of the system, and an ethics of non-power which is willing to say "no" to the inevitability of technological growth.

Contrary to most assessments of Ellul as a pessimist, the study presents Ellul's insistence on hope. This hope results from the possibility of an "exterior intervention" through a religious perspective, since God is the only one who is completely outside the system.

The study concludes that Ellul's purpose in writing can be understood when one sees the dialectic between his sociological and religious works. His rejection as too pessimistic by communication scholars comes as a result of reading only one part of his analysis. Although his refusal to engage in an artificial synthesis between the two

poles of his thought prevents him from providing easy solutions to the problems we face, Ellul makes us aware of the constant tension in which we live today.

## *The Technological City: 1984 In Singapore,*

By Law-son Liat-Ho Lau, University of Illinois-Urbana, 1991. Professor Clifford G. Christians, Advisor.

Ellul organizes his analysis of modern society around a macro concept: *la technique*. This dissertation presupposes that Ellul's brainchild is seminal in nature although viewpoints of his work - both sociological and theological - fluctuate considerably. Barbed differences in evaluation arise in part because of Ellul's markedly polarizing prophetic voice. An increasingly technological planet that often sings the praises of technology, however, is in dire need of an incisive commentator and interpreter. This macro-level dissertation sets his work within the context of a specific country: the Republic of Singapore. Ellul's concept of *la technique* has considerable explanatory power. It is a principle that provides a frame with which to synthesize a large number of political, economic, educational, media, legal, religious events or policies. On the one hand it furnishes a sophisticated theoretical structure. On the other hand it grapples with experiences and phenomena, that is, with reality.

From 1959-1990, the city-state of Singapore has been ruled by one political party, the People's Action Party, under prime minister Lee Kuan Yew. Lee has always been anxious that Singapore make rapid advances into the world of technology; he wants it to continue its competitive edge, and, more recently, to amass ever-increasing foreign reserves. Technological progress and hence economic prosperity have been achieved largely through particular ways in which Singapore society has been molded by the PAP. Lee Kuan Yew has over three decades established the PAP as the hegemonic political structure in Singapore. He has assiduously organized and exploited Singapore's human resources so as to maximize the yield of both the people and the technologies. Scholars of Singapore have acknowledged it as a country where social engineering is practiced unabashedly as a political craft. Since 1959, the PAP has been committed to that which is politically expedient; ideology and principles are subservient to any course of action that is construed to be the most efficient. As Ellul constantly notes, ideology is secondary when technique is dominant.

Chapter One, "The People's Action Party and *La Technique*: A Marriage of Convenience," organizes a diverse range of events and policies in Singapore around Ellul's contention that the hallmark of technique is efficiency and that technique has a totalitarian disposition. It contends that Lee Kuan Yew could well be Ellul's paradigm of the politician-technician. Chapter Two, "Truth and Falsehood: Propaganda in an Authoritarian State," focuses on the pervasive presence of political and sociological propaganda in the manifestly elitist one-way flow of information in Singapore. Ellul argues that propaganda must be total. The PAP Government regards uncompromis-

ing governmental control of the media as an efficient way of not only propagating its policies but also of checking the spread of "falsehoods." Chapter Three, "Efficiency and Wealth Versus Values and Culture," deals with the dominance of technique over values and culture. It explores two of Ellul's interrelated concerns - first, that "in our society everything has become political" and second, that the structures of political parties have assumed bureaucratic forms. Chapter Four, "1984: A Breakdown of Efficiency's Telescreen" refers to the 1984 general election in Singapore when an increase of a relatively massive twelve percent of Singaporeans voted against the PAP Government. Chapter Five, "The Individual in Community Versus Technique," examines alternatives to the dehumanizing effects of *la technique*. A political system that unrelentingly strives for efficiency at all levels of existence and propagandizes its efficiency ethic through a system of punitive punishments and rewards over three decades cannot but mold many so insidiously in its totalitarian image that they are either virtually unaware of being PAP commodities or have acquiesced to it. With education to counteract propaganda, Singaporeans could take steps to restore their humanity.

## Bibliographic Notes on Theology and Technology

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relationships among species sharing the same habitat a moral perspective, not a technical theory which I call *biblical ecology*. Liberation is my opening theme. God began work of salvation by rescuing from oppression and sin those who would come to know and serve the Lord; and the biblical liberation includes not just oppressed people but also oppressed lands. The words *covenant* and *promise* apply to the range of created life as well as to human beings" (Book 3, pp. 4-5). Reflection on liberation is followed by exegesis toward our creativity, sabbath ecology, the fall, and ecological visions in both the Hebrew and Greek scriptures. Book 4 brings the *Environmental Theology* series "to the point of acting ... Here strategies are formulated to embrace nature within American culture, to protect our distinctive landscapes, to curb America's huge appetite for earth's resources, and to reduce our impact upon the biosphere. The volume also proposes reform within Christian Churches so that our worship and witness may become relevant to the environmental crises that threatens all God's creation" (Book 4, pp. 1-2). Each volume includes narrative "Suggestions for Reading," Notes, Index, and Biblical Citations. Volume 4 has as well an "Index to Series Themes" (pp. 239-243) that complements the "Series Relationships" analysis for Volume 3, pp. 237-239.

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Dreyer, Elizabeth. "Toward a Spirituality of Work," *New Theology Review* 2, no. 2 (May 1988), pp. 53-65. Impressionistic reflection on work in relation to experience of community, as opportunity for practicing the presence of God and the dark nights, as means to self-knowledge. Considers also the possibility of a specifically Christian "way" at work. Argues the need to be honest about the many dimensions and ambiguities of work.

Elsdon, Ron. "A Still-bent World: Some Reflections on Current Environmental Issues," *Science and Christian Belief* 1, no. 2 (October 1989), pp. 99-121. Issues in environmental management pose threats to the continued well-being of humanity and creation.

On the basis of the many secular and Christian publications in recent years, reflection suggests a number of special questions for a biblical theology of creation, fall, and redemption. Such questions focus the character of scientific processes, the prediction of the future, and the problems of risk analysis. This approach offers the opportunity for Christians to engage in dialogue with others involved in decision making at a time when governments are increasingly sensitive to public concern over environmental problems.

"The Environment: Caring for God's Creation." *Lutheran Theological Seminary Bulletin* 69, no. 3 (Summer 1989), pp. 1-57.

Contents:

Roy J. Enquist's "In This Issue" (pp. 2-3), Clay E. Peters' "Blueprint for the Environment" (pp. 4-9), I. Garth Youngberg's "Agriculture and the Environment: New Directions in the Search for Sustainability" (pp. 10-14), Peggy H. Knight's "The Task of the Environmental Protection Agency" (pp. 15-20), Paul F. Bente Jr.'s "An Environmentalist's Assessment of the EPA" (pp. 21-26), Karen L. Bloomquist's "Creation, Domination and the Environment" (pp. 27-31), "Panel: The Responsibility of Business for the Environment" (which includes W. J. Hindman's "A Prescient Entrepreneur Reflects," Ernest S. Rosenberg's "Moral Responsibility for Environmental Protection," and James A. Nash's "Six Criteria for Environmental Responsibility," pp. 32-36, 37-44, and 45-48, respectively), Paul F. Bente Jr.'s "Becoming a Responsible Entity in God's Creation" (pp. 49-56), and Paul F. Bente Jr.'s "A Sample Letter" (p. 57).

Ferrd, Frederick. "Technology and Religion," chapter 7 in *Philosophy of Technology* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1988), pp. 97-116. Good brief review of mythic



images of technology, arguments for and against on the dependency of modern technology on Judeo-Christian theology, and some views of relations between non-Western religions and technology.

Fore, William F. *Television and Religion: The Shaping of Faith, Values, and Culture*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987. Pp. 219. Television has replaced the church as cultivator of contemporary culture. A diagnosis and etiology plus realistic strategies for the church to serve in a society where the TV dominates. Creative and subversive strategies emerge from the Niebuhrian models of "Christ transforming culture" and "Christ and culture in paradox."

Freedman, Benjamin. "Leviticus and DNA\* A Very Old Look at a Very New Problem," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1980), pp. 105-113. An examination of "Thou shalt not let thy cattle gender with diverse kind; thou shalt not sow thy field with two kinds of seed" (Leviticus 19:19). After a survey of classical commentaries, concludes that the traditional Jewish prohibition against hybridization is limited and does not apply to DNA engineering, but admits there are other possible interpretations.

Girard, René. *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987. Pp. 469. Within an exhaustive overview of Girard's theories of the victimhood mechanism and mimetic desire, the relation of science, Christianity, and violent apocalypse is discussed on pp. 253-262. Christianity's demythologization of sacrificial ritual mechanisms has revealed the human origin of violence. However, nuclear warfare now replaces the ancient sacrificial system. "In a world that is continually losing its sacred character, only the permanent threat of immediate and total destruction can prevent men from destroying one another. Once again, violence prevents violence from breaking out" (p. 255). Nuclear warfare even takes its names from the "direct" divinities in

Greek mythology, like Titan, Poseidon, and Saturn, the god who devoured his own children. We who sacrifice fabulous resources to fatten the most inhuman form of violence... how can we have the extraordinary hypocrisy to pretend that we do not understand all those people who did such things long before us: those, for example, who made it their practice to throw a single child, or two at the most, into the furnace of a certain Moloch in order to ensure the safety of the others?" (p. 256).

Gosling, David. "Towards a Credible Ecumenical Theology of Nature," *Ecumenical Review* 38, no. 3 (July 1986), pp. 322-331. Notes emphasizing the importance of the "integrity of nature."

Greenberger, Robert S. "What's Up in Israel? Elevators, Thanks to a Special Institute," *Wall Street Journal* (December 3, 1990), pp. A1 and A11. Brief story on the work of engineer-theologians who use science and technology to solve problems of Halachic observance.

Gregorios, Paulos. "Science and Faith," *Ecumenical Review* 37, no. 1 (January 1985), pp. 140-151. Discussions of absolute causality and the existence of a world independent from our consciousness. The author argues that there "will have to be some repentance

expressed on behalf of science, in relation to some of its arrogant exclusivism and tall claims in the past" (p. 149).

Hollinger, Dennis. "Can Bioethics Be Evangelical?" *Journal of Religious Ethics* 17, no. 2 (Fall 1989), pp. 161-179. Yes, but only if it modifies "its past biblicalism and ethical rigorism" (p. 177). (Article should be subtitled: How to use bioethics to preach the good news of science and technology to evangelicals.)

Link, Christian. "La Crise 6cologique et IMthique thologique," *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses* 61, no. 2 (April June 1981), pp. 147-160. Translated from German by Elisabeth Geiger. Condensed English version: "Ecological Ethics and Christian Ethics," *Theology Digest* 31, no. 2 (Summer 1984), pp. 149-153. Relying on the insights of others, Link argues that Christians must see themselves as part of the problem.

Lyon, David. "Modes of Production and Information: Does Computer Technology Challenge Marxist Analysis?" *Christian Scholar's Review* 18, no. 3 (March 1989), pp. 238-245. Modes of information have replaced modes of production as the central medium of domination today. Illustrates this historical shift with Foucault's concept of "panoptic surveillance." Foucault's thought is a crucial challenge to Christian social analysis in the 1990s.

Morris, Colin. "Love at a Distance The Spiritual Challenge of Religious Broadcasting," *Media Development* 33, no. 4 (1986), pp. 40-41. "The act of broadcasting, however well-intentional and sincerely executed, tears apart the unity of word and action personified in and by Jesus" (p. 40).

"New Technology and Pastoral Challenges." *New Theology Review* 2, no. 4 (November 1989), pp. 3-74. Contents: Robert J. Schreiter CPPS's "Editorial New Technology and Pastoral Challenges" (pp. 34), Paul Lakeland's "Technology and Critical Theory. The Case of Technology" (pp. 5-19), Richard A. McCormick SJ's "Technology and Morality: The Example of Medicine" (pp. 20-34), Regis A. Duffy OFM's "Only the Dance? Ritual in A Technologized World" (pp. 35-47), Robert P. Waznak SS's "Preaching the Gospel in an Age of Technology" (pp. 48-60), David F.

O'Connor STs "Discretion and Capacity for Marriage: Some Canonical and Pastoral Reflections" (pp. 61-74), Joel Rippinger OSB's "Local Theologies in a World Church: The Indigena as Anawim" (pp. 75-78), Roland J. Faley TOR's "Signs of the Times: Capturing Moonbeams, Holding the Vision" (pp. 79-86), Joseph V. Kiernan OFM's "On My Mind: Reconciliation The Sacrament in Search of a Constituency" (pp. 87-88).

Noore, Susan. "Religious Television Destroys the Sacred," *Media Development* 34, no 2 (1987), pp. 31-33. "The decision to decline active involvement with the electronic media" can be an exercise of responsibility for the church.

O'Donovan, Joan E. *George Grant and the Twilight of Justice*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984. Pp. ix, 196. Comprehensive review of Grant's thought on politics, theology, and technology. Originally a doctoral dissertation. Reviewed by James Skillen in *Christian Scholar's Review* 15, no. 4 (June 1986), pp. 403-405.

Reichenbach, Bruce R. "C.S. Lewis on the Desolation of Devalued Science," *Christian Scholar's Review* 11, no 2 (December 1982), pp. 99-111. Examination of Lewis' philosophical objections to naturalism in *Miracles* (1947) and his fictional critique of science in *That Hideous Strength* (1946). Lewis' primary concern is the temptation of science to "reach beyond the experimental to provide a metaphysical account of the universe" (p. 104).

Rolston, Holmes III. *Science and Religion: A Critical Survey*. New York: Random House, 1987. Pp. x, 358. First-rate textbook alternative to Ian Barbour's *Issues in Science and Religion* (1966). Rolston's survey of the dialogue between religion and science contains a sustained criticism of the process theology assimilation of God to the natural world. Reviewed by S. Mark Heim in *Christian Scholar's Review* 17, no. 4 (June 1988), pp. 490-491.

Russell, Robert John, William R. Stoeger SJ, and George V. Coyne SJ, eds. *John Paul II on Science and Religion: Reflections on the New View from Rome*. Vatican City and Notre Dame, IN: Vatican Observatory Publications and University of Notre Dame Press, 1990. Pp. xxvi, 122. John Paul II's message to a Vatican conference on the 300th anniversary of Newton's *Principia*, and commentaries by 19 scholars, only a few of whom address the issue of technology (see, e.g., the contributions by John B. Cobb Jr., Lindon Eaves, George F. R. Ellis, Elizabeth A. Johnson, Carl Mitcham, Tullio Regge, and Rosemary Radford Reutner).

"Science and Religion." *Anglican Theological Review* 63, no. 4 (October 1981), pp. 367-513. Special issue, guest edited by Ruth Tiffany Bamhouse, containing Huston Smith's "Science and Theology: The Unstable Detente," William G. Pollard's "Science and Transcendence," David J. Rose's "Energy and Attitudes," E. Mansell Pattison's "The Behavioral Sciences in a Christian Perspective," James A. Hall's "Psychiatry and Religion: A Review and a Projection of Future Needs," Edward L. Alpen's "The Biotechnology Race," Richard K. Toner's "Thermodynamics and Theology," David A. Ames' "Science and Religion: Toward Understanding and Collaborating in the University Setting," Philip Morrison's "Warfare Today: Limits to Growth," Allan M. Parrent's "Review Article: Faith, Science and the Future: What Happens When Science and Religion Actually Meet," and "A Selected Bibliography of Books in English Concerning Science and Religion" by David K. Himrod and Richard S.

Brooks. The bibliography contains a section on "Technology and Religious Values."

Smith, David H. "Bioethics: Recent Literature," *Anglican Theological Review* 64, no. 1 (January 1982), pp. 85-89. Brief review highlighting Joseph Fletcher, Tom Beauchamp, Stanley Hauervas, Richard McCormick, and Paul Ramsey.

Soukup, Paul A. "Interweaving Theology and Communication," *Media Development* 32, no. 1 (1985), pp. 30-33. To analyze the relations between communication and theology it is necessary to distinguish fundamental, systematic, and pastoral theology in relation to various aspects of church, culture, and communication.

Staudenmaier, John M., SJ. *Advent for Capitalists: Grief, Joy, and Gender in Contemporary Society*. Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada: Campion College, University of Regina, 1988. Pp. 26. Pamphlet publication of a lecture from 1987.

Staudenmaier, John M., SJ. "Liturgy in a Technological Age," in Peter E. Fink SJ, ed., *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), pp. 762-768. Pre-Vatican II balance of universal Latin liturgies and popular devotions based in local communities has been broken. Technological transportation and communication undermines local community, consumerist advertising weakens universal symbols. Considers how the church might "retrieve the basis for a community rooted in sacred symbols in a culture whose technological infrastructure fragments community even as its best funded form of public discourse, advertising, demeans the symbols themselves" (p. 766). Cults and TV entertainments are false responses to real needs. Hope for more authentic responses can be found in reviving Catholic traditions of theater, spiritual direction, and narrative theology.

Staudenmaier, John M., SJ. "Restoring the Lost Art: Storytelling, Electronic Media and Fragmented Public Discourse," *The Way* 28, no. 4 (October 1988), pp. 313-322. "The vitality and depth of our public and personal lives requires [narrative. But] nearly two centuries of western history have led to an electronic style of public discourse that fragments the ancient bonds of speaker and hearer. • ." (p.320).

Technology and Religion." *Research in Philosophy and Technology*, vol 9 (1990). Pp. xv, 376. Theme section contents: William B. Jones and A. Warren Matthews' "Toward a Taxonomy of Technology and Religion" (pp. 3-23), A. Arnold Wettstein's "Ultimate Weapons in a Penultimate Age: A Theological Assessment of SDI Technology" (pp. 2541), David Novak's "Technology and Its Ultimate Threat: A Jewish Meditation" (pp. 43-70), Waldo Beach's "The Impact of the Electronic Media on American Religion" (pp. 71-79), Robert C. Good's "Religion and Technology: A Look at Television Evangelists and Viewers" (pp. 81-91), J. Mark Thomas' "Are Science and Technology Quasi-Religions?" (pp. 93-102), Frank R. Harrison's "The Judeo-Christian Tradition and Crises in Contemporary Technology" (pp. 103-118), Larry Rasmussen's "Mindset and Moral Vision" (pp. 119-128), Charles Mabee's "The Fragility of Time: Orwell and Ellul in the Matrix of Theological Origins" (129-148), Darrell J. Fasching's "The Dialectic of Apocalypse and Utopia in the Theological Ethics of Jacques Ellul" (pp. 149-165), Gabriel Vahanian's "Artificial Intelligence and Western Culture: A Christian Approach" (pp. 167-183), Robert Cummings Neville, "Technology and The Richness of the World" (pp. 185-204), David E. Schrader's "Technology: Our Contemporary Snake" (pp. 205-215) and Martin H. Krieger's "Temptations of Design: A Meditation on Practice" (pp.

217-230). Colloquium section contents: Jane Mary Trau's "*Humanae Vitae* and the Current Instruction on the Origins of Human life" (pp. 233-242), John F. Post's "On Reenchanted the World" (pp. 243-279), Frederick Ferrd's "Technology, Nature, and Miracle" (pp. 281-286), John F. Post's "A Reply to Ferrd, and a Comment on Trau" (pp. 287-290), Jane Mary Trau's "God-Talk, Physicalism, and Technology: A Mutual Endeavor" (pp. 291-295), Michael J. Carella's "The Myths of Thomas Szasz" (pp. 299-

313), and Albert Borgmann's "Communities of Celebration: Technology and Public Life" (pp. 315-345). Review section contents: Reviews of C. Mitcham and J. Grote, eds., *Theology and Technology: Essays in Christian Analysis and Exegesis* (1984) by Friedrich Rapp, David A. Hoekema, and James F. Salmon, with a response by Carl Mitcham and Jim Grote; of F. Ferrd, *Philosophy of Technology* (1988) by Thomas Rogers, Charles Dyke, and Steven Lee with a reply by Ferrd; and of A.L. and R.P. Hiskes, *Science, Technology, and Policy Decisions* (1986) by David C. Snyder.

Verhey, Allen. "The Morality of Genetic Engineering," *Christian Scholar's Review* 14, no. 2 (December 1985), pp. 124-139. Critique of utilitarian theories applied to genetic engineering (e.g. Joseph Fletcher) in favor of a more traditional approach (e.g. C.S. Lewis). The biological revolution requires wise people, not just clever people" (p. 124).

Waters, Brent, and Verlyn L. Barber, eds. *Science, Technology and the Christian Faith: An Account of Some Pilgrims in Search of Progress*. Charlotte, NC: United Ministries in Higher Education, 1991. Pp. vii, 145. Final Report of a United Ministries in Educa-tion/United Ministries in Higher Education Exploratory Committee on Science, Technology and the Christian Faith (1983-1990). Part One is the Report (pp. 3-39). Part Two, The Redlands consultation Papers: 1985," includes Rustum Roy's "STS: A New Opportunity for the Re-Integration of Christian Concern into American Academic Life (pp. 43-53), James B. Miller's "Foundations and Challenges" (pp. 54-63), Ronald Cole-Turner's Theological Engagement with Science and Technology" (pp. 64-68), Brent Waters' "An Ethical Framework for Campus Ministry in a Scientific and Technological Age" (pp. 69-76), Scott I. Paradise's "A Ministry to Scientists and Engineers" (pp. 77-84). Part Three, The Duke Consultation Papers: 1987," includes Edith Sylla's "The Modern Problem" (pp. 87-90), Patrick H. McDonalds' Two Hands, Two Feet, One Hand, One Heart" (pp. 91-101). Part Four, The Jacksonville Beach Consultation Papers: 1989," indudes Ansley Coe Throckmorton's "Bible Study: Psalm 24" (pp. 105-108), Langdon Gilkey's The Influence of Sdence on Theology" (pp. 109-116), Roger L. Shinn's Technology, Theology and Human Decisions" (pp. 117-125), Verlyn L. Barker's "Sdence, Technology and the Church" (pp. 126-131), Ansley Coe Throckmor-ton's "Bible Study: Mark 6:30" (pp. 132-135). Part Five contains three documentation appendices on partidpants and chronology.

Wilkinson, Loren E. "A Christian Ecology of Death: Biblical Imagery and 'The Ecological Crisis'," *Christian Scholar's Review* 5, no. 4 (June 1976), pp. 319-338. Struggles with the relationship between theodicy and the bloody exchange of death for life inherent in the ecology of the food chain. Even in Eden, life is sustained only at the expense of other life. Vegetarianism does not alter this inescapable fact. Wilkinson concludes: "It may not be that the Fall brought death into the world, but that at the Fall, death became an enemy" (p. 324). Death may not be totally the result of sin. Develops a theology of substitution relating the Eucharist meal of Christ to the principle of exchange inherent in the food chain. Quotes Bertholt Brecht: "The slogan of Heaven: Eat *and* be eaten" (p. 334).

Wilkinson, Loren. "Cosmic Christology and the Christian's Role in Creation," *Christian Scholar's Review* 11, no. 1 (September 1981), pp. 18-40. The Christian church has largely failed to develop fully the implications of Christ's Incarnation for an understanding of the divine immanence.

Wybrow, Cameron. "The Old Testament and the Conquest of Nature: A Fresh Examination," *Epworth Review* 17, no. 1 (January 1990), pp. 77-88. Makes three arguments against the view that Christianity is a cause of the modern technological mastery of nature: "(1) 'Nature' in the Old Testament, though not sacred or divine, is not therefore inanimate or merely a shock of resources; (2) The Genesis account of dominion does not give man the entire world, but only a part of it, and only a partial control over that; (3) The technological enterprise, insofar as it goes beyond the acquisition of ordinary arts and crafts, is viewed by the Old Testament with suspicion" (p. 80).

## About The Ellul Studies Forum

### Background

*The Ellul Studies Forum* was first published in August of 1988. Two issues are produced each year (in January and July). The goal of *the Forum* is to honor the work of Jacques Ellul both by analyzing and applying his thought to aspects of our technological civilization and by carrying forward his concerns in new directions.

What *the Forum* is not intended to be is a vehicle for *true disciples* or *Ellul groupies*. The whole thrust of Ellul's work has been to encourage others to think for themselves and invent their own responses to the challenges of a technological civilization. Although we do review and discuss Ellul's work, it is not our intention to turn his writings into a body of sacred literature to be endlessly dissected. The appropriate tribute to his work will be to carry forward its spirit and its agenda for the critical analysis of our technical civilization.

Ellul invites us to think new thoughts and enact new deeds. To that end we invite you to submit essays on appropriate topics. If you have suggestions for themes that you would like to see addressed in future issues, they are also welcome.

### Manuscript Submissions

Original manuscripts or manuscripts responding to essays in previous issues should be sent to Darrell J. Fasching, Editor, *The Ellul Studies Forum*, Department of Religious Studies, University of South Florida, Tampa FL 33620. Hard copy and DOS diskette should be sent together, indicating software and version number. (Diskettes will be returned.) Endnotes should be typed as text to facilitate laser typesetting. Length may vary from five to fifteen double spaced pages. Suggestions of themes for future issues are also welcome.

## Subscriptions

To Subscribe to the *Forum* for one year (two issues), send your name and address and a check made out to The *Ellul Studies Forum* in the amount of \$6.00 (\$8.00 outside the U.S. The check must be drawn from the foreign branch of a U.S. Bank or be a U.S. Postal Money Order). Back issues are \$4.00 each.

Mail to: The Ellul Studies Forum  
Department of Religious Studies  
University of South Florida,  
Tampa, FL 33620

## Bibliographic Reviews

Readers are invited to contribute to the ongoing annotated bibliographic column on theology and technology. Please send books or articles to be noted, or notes themselves, to:

Carl Mitcham  
Science, Technology & Society Program Pennsylvania State University 133 Willard  
Building University Park, PA 16802

## Book Reviews

If you would be willing to be a reviewer of books for the *Forum*, send your *vita* and a list of the areas/issues you would be interested in reviewing to our Book Review Editor:

Nicole Hoggard Creegan  
North Carolina Wesleyan College  
Rocky Mount, NC 27804.

**Issue #10 Jan 1993 — Technique  
and the Paradoxes of Development**



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*Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul I* by David Lovekin j

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## From the Editor

I am very fortunate to have a good editorial board who continue to contribute their talents to *The Ellul Forum*. For this issue Joyce Hanks, from the University of Scranton, is serving as Guest Editor. She has not only organized and edited this issue but translated all the main articles as well. This was a labor of love on her part which puts us all deeply in her debt. I am very grateful for her efforts in this regard. I will let Joyce tell you about this issue.

Darrell J. Fasching, Editor

## About This Issue

This number of the *Ellul Studies Forum* attempts to show how Ellul's theories and principles can be pursued and applied in areas readers may not have seen before. My original intention was to request articles from French scholars who have used something from Ellul as a basis for their own work, but who have gone beyond merely summarizing or reaffirming what Ellul had previously stated. Both Daniel CSrdzuelle and Serge Latouche exemplify this trend, I believe, and I am happy to present my

translations of their articles to you in this issue of the *Forum*. Both authors were exceptionally helpful when I wrote them for clarifications of what they had originally submitted to me.

My own article was not originally intended for publication in the *Forum*. When Serge Latouche's article seemed to take some of Ellul's stance on development for granted, however, I felt my article might serve as an introduction to his study.

When Timothy Casey, a colleague, saw me reading David Lovekin's new book on Ellul, *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul*, he expressed an interest in looking at it. Later he agreed to review it for this issue of the Forum.

Serge Latouche teaches economics at the University of Paris XI and at the Institute for the Study of Economic and Social Development. His many published books include *Le proces de la science sodale (1984)*, *Faut-il refuser le developpement? (1986)*, *L'ocddentalisation du monde (1989)*, and *La planete des naufrages (1991)*.

Daniel CSrSzuelle, a former student of Ellul's at the University of Bordeaux who also studied under Jean Brun and Hans Jonas, has taught philosophy and worked as a sociologist. He serves as secretary of the international Society for the Philosophy of Technique, and participates in an ecological study group.

Timothy Casey chairs the Department of Philosophy at the University of Scranton (PA).

Joyce Hanks, Guest Editor

## Bulletin Board

### A Facelift and Change of Philosophy for the Forum

You may have noticed that this issue of the Forum has a different look to it. Improvements in typesetting software have made it possible to do new things. With the change in layout also comes a slight change in name and philosophy. The name has been changed from *The Ellul Studies Forum* to *Tie Sttul*. The tag line has also been changed from "A Forum for Theology in a Technological Gvilization" to "for the Critique of Technological Civilization." Dropping the word "studies" from the masthead is meant to suggest that we honor the work of Jacques Ellul best when we go beyond just studying Ellul and tackle the issues raised by technology which Ellul's work highlights. Dropping the word "theology" from the tag line is meant to indicate that while a central interest of the Forum is the theological critique of technological civilization, we are also interested in other critical approaches - sociological, historical, philosophical, etc. This issue is a case in point. In this issue the central focus is not on theological issues but sociological ones. It is good to keep in mind the double focus of Ellul's work and carry that focus forward in our own work.

## About Ellul

Jacques Ellul has received several distinguished honors this year. An auditorium at the Institute for Political Studies in Bordeaux has been named for him, he was chosen as a member of the Bordeaux Academy, and he received the Grand Literary Prize of the Gty of Bordeaux in June. Ellul fell ill and was unable to attend the ceremony for the awarding of this prize at the Bordeaux Gty Hall, with Jacques Chaban-Delmas, the mayor, presiding and speaking. Ellul's son Jean attended, and read Iris speech in his stead.

Ellul's most recent books include *L homme a lui* meme, published in 1992 by Editions du Felin (address: 42, rue Servan, 75011 Paris; tel. 48.05.80.71). This work explores the writer's impact on readers. A second new book by Ellul deals with the subject of "deviance" as a product of modern society, but we still lack its title and publisher.

Patrick Troude-Chastenet's long-awaited study on Ellul was published in November 1992: *Lire Ellul: Introduction a l'oeuvre socio-politique de Jacques Ellul* (202 pages). It can be obtained from the publisher, Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, University de Bordeaux IB, Domaine Universitaire, 33405 Talence, Cedex, France, for 90 francs (not including postage).

## L'Association Jacques Ellul

During the past year, Ellul family members and colleagues have joined together for the purpose of preserving the collection of his writings and manuscripts, and making his work better known. The Association has now been legally registered in France, and will soon be ready to invite interested citizens of other countries to join. If you would like more information about the Association as it becomes available, please send your name and address to: Joyce M. Hanks, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Scranton, Scranton PA 18510-4646.

## Ellul Documentary Debuts in Holland

*(I wish to thank Professor Sape Zylstra, University of South Florida, for preparing this report based on Dutch press materials sent to us by the producers, - D. Fasching, Editor)*

A Dutch film institute, *ReRun Productions*, has announced the release of a fifty minute film on Jacques Ellul entitled *The Betrayal by Technology*. The film which was edited from over six hours of interviews with Ellul done in December of 1990, was broadcast on Dutch television in October of 1992. A version of this film is available with English subtitles. Interested parties should contact: Stichting ReRun Producties, Postbus 43021, 1009 ZA Amsterdam Holland. (Phone 020-6922036.)

The film was previewed by a panel of three university professors as well as members of the press. Members of the panel criticized Ellul for his abstractions, determinism,

exaggeration and lack of practical solutions. According to one — "Everything that happens fits in his theory and hence the theory is wrong. The culture is responsible, not technology." However, journalists were less inclined to dismiss Ellul that easily. They pointed out, among other things, that Ellul's fate was typical of society's critics since they are judged by the very norms and schemata with they criticize. In defense of Ellul it was further pointed out that his clearly formulated thought forced television viewers to become aware of their technological environment

A Dutch newspaper article also devoted a long article to the Ellul controversy. The article pointed out that after WWII, Ellul wrote an essay with the title "Hitler has Won." In it he posited that what was characteristic of the Third Reich was not its ideology but its limitless technological thinking in terms of problem solving, efficiency, and goal-orientation, all brought into practice with the most developed means of power. In Western Society since that time, goal-directed, rationalistic, technological thought makes it difficult to entertain ideas which are not oriented to usefulness, end results and quantitative analysis. Aldous Huxley is quoted as saying of Ellul's *The Technological Society (La Technique)* — "This is what I meant to say earlier in *Brave New World*." The article ends by pointing out that only among students in the United States in the sixties did Jacques Ellul find a true appreciation and following. (Editor's note: It is out of this context that *de Stal* was born.)

# Forum: Technique and the Paradoxes of Development

## Reflections on Social Techniques

by Daniel Cerezuelie

Over a period of a dozen years, from 1979 to 1991, my professional activities as a sociologist often involved me in studying "social techniques." My efforts dealt especially with social techniques implemented in the context of public policy for fighting social inadaptation and marginalization.

Using these empirical studies as a basis, I have tried to develop a more theoretical and synthetic reflection concerning the role and limits of social techniques.<sup>1</sup> These have rarely been studied as techniques. My work owes much to Jacques Ellul's analyses of the social impact of techniques, and essentially confirms his insights. But my studies also suggest some new departures with respect to what Ellul found. This is particularly true in the area of human techniques and the possibilities of effective and efficient closure of a technical system.

Beginning in 1954, with his *The Technological Society*<sup>2</sup>, Ellul emphasized the importance of human techniques, devoting the last hundred pages of his book to them. In particular, he pointed out that rapid technical development in society brings with it significant problems of social inadaptation. Such problems arise when an individual does not adapt to the "new sociological organism, which becomes his world" (*Tech. Soc.*, p. 334). When this occurs a person loses his possibilities of subsistence, and is at last tossed on the social rubbish heap, whatever his personal talents maybe" (*Tech. Soc.*, p. 334).

Ellul saw very clearly that technical development inevitably produces problems of social integration, and that human techniques come along to respond precisely to these problems. In fact, since the end of the Second World War, in France we have witnessed a considerable development of professional agencies in the area of social action. This development involves not only quantitative growth—of personnel, structures, and budgets, for example. It also involves qualitative growth in terms of more and more

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<sup>1</sup> See Daniel Cerezuelle, *Crise de l'emploi, exclusion et developpement social-Synthdse presentde en vue de l'habilitation d diriger des recherches en sociologie* (Bordeaux: University de Bordeaux II, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> English translation: Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Knopf, 1964). Hereafter referred to as *Tech. Soc.*

professionalization and specialization of personnel, and greater diversification in the institutions and techniques of intervention.

My empirical studies, carried out over a period of more than ten years, were designed mainly to evaluate tire specialized agencies for implementing social techniques (relating to Welfare, the struggle against poverty, help for maladjusted children, etc.). But evaluating the implementation of a single technique leads to a consideration of the problem of the potential effectiveness of the implementation of social techniques in general, in professional agencies. This question leads in turn to a consideration of general theoretical problems rooted in sociology and the philosophy of technique.

As with any engineering procedure, evaluation must take into account the fact that no technique is ever perfectly put into {day. Between the conception of any technique and its application, we always find a gap stemming from the interaction of various social factors. We must do our best to reduce this gap to a minimum, realizing that we will always be left with an irreducible "residue" of inefficiency. \_

But the question of the efficacy of structures also involves the issue of the perfectibility of the techniques themselves.

We need to determine the source of the inadequacies we observe. Are they circumstantial; that is, due to prevailing political, economic, ideological, or other conditions when the techniques were implemented? Or are they inherent, stemming instead from the very nature of the techniques themselves, and from the means they use?

On a more fundamental level, we need to discover if the perfecting of these social techniques, and of human techniques in general, can enable us to overcome the social upheavals produced by modernization. How can we halt the process we observe at work in the technological society, where people find themselves divided into two groups, resulting in the exclusion of many? Will it be enough to use rational methods, diversifying the structures for social action and solidarity? Will it suffice if we accept the necessary financial sacrifices to make such techniques fully efficacious? In other words, can technique restore the social integration it has destroyed?

My work leads me to believe that social action techniques and the institutional structures that put them into play do not have, and cannot have, more than a limited efficacy. They do not enable us to struggle with any degree of success against the processes of exclusion and division that are at work in our society, foreseen by Ellul as early as 1954. My interpretation at this point contradicts most sociological analyses of social action. These analyses tend to attribute the inefficiency of social action to external ideological or political causes stemming from social relationships.

Using concepts formulated by Ellul, we can show, on the contrary, that social action techniques have little success because techniques tend to organize themselves into an autonomous system. From the point of view of bureaucratic management, social action techniques prove rather successful, since they do not produce clashes or serious conflicts (this has not always been the case!). A large number of measures are put into place every year; many families receive help and are followed up; many children are taken

into custody and placed within specialized structures. Competent specialists at all levels accomplish their tasks responsibly.

If, however, instead of evaluating the quality of each professional's work, we consider how well this overall arrangement functions, we become aware of serious areas of malfunction: action takes place piecemeal, follow-up and coordination are lacking, and at all levels we observe that information fails to circulate adequately. Many specialists deal with people in connection with each of these areas, but the work is carried out on the basis of the least common denominator, as far as the various jurisdictions are concerned. No truly personalized strategy emerges for taking charge, although such a strategy would enable the various specialists to coordinate their work and adapt it to individual circumstances. Instead, each works independently.

These specialists take action concerning a given person, group, or organization. We note the same compartmentalization in institutions and social agencies. They cannot define truly coordinated policies for a given population or territory, if only because they lack information about the group that benefits from their work—and this is even more true for groups unrelated to them.

Thus the weakness lies not in the work of specialists, but rather in the functioning of the system within which they work, because it makes personalized action difficult. Specialists cannot redefine their objectives in a coordinated manner, depending on how situations evolve. Instead, we perceive juxtaposed, separate actions lacking in continuity. Whether we look at institutions concerned with teenage dropouts or child welfare services, each structure lies at the center of a very complicated system of interactions that produce a proliferation of internal and external interdependent relationships. As a result, the amount of information theoretically necessary to coordinate with other specialists or institutions continues to increase.

What characterizes this system is not complexity, but complication. But the level of complication is aggravated by the fact that in practice, we find chronic mutual ignorance between large and small agencies devoted to social action. Their ignorance leads to paralysis in policy formation and to bureaucratic management. In addition, the lack of information circulating among specialists produces the technical formalism we observe in the operation of institutions and social service agencies. Under such conditions, it is hard to see how a coordinated and personalized approach can become an option.

Such limits seem difficult to surmount: technical formalism and poor circulation of information cannot be interpreted as mere circumstantial malfunctions resulting from errors in organization. Nor can such problems be attributed to power struggles or to the class distinctions between professionals and their clients. Rather, these deficiencies appear to be inherent, stemming from the very nature of the technical actions to be put into play. Such problems have their origin in the process of placing social action within a technical framework.

The technical context reproduces the general characteristics of technical phenomena as Ellul has analyzed and described them: first we note a process of self-augmentation

that is both qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative self-augmentation takes place by means of the diversification of specializations and the emergence of specific institutions, whereas quantitative self-augmentation occurs through the multiplication of institutions and the growth of professional staffs. We also observe something approaching automatism in this process of technification: one technical specialty calls for another, and changes are imposed on all, whatever their moral or political stance. Thus we can speak of universality and also of an irreversible process, in the sense that once it has been put in gear, no going back is possible: all institutions are obliged to follow suit

These observations lead us to another essential facet of this technification: agencies tend to become systems through the proliferation of their functional regulations and information. Internal unification and consistency in the use of a technique, as well as consistency in external relations, require the establishment of a system. It becomes impossible to leave each technician and institution to function independently, able to respond to an understanding of local conditions. Planning in all its forms becomes more and more important, bringing with it a generalized interdependence of the elements of the technical arrangement. This interdependence takes place both among the elements of the technical arrangement itself and with other technical entities. Two main consequences of this technical system explain how the development of *zweckrationalitat* can bring about irrationality, as Max Weber recognized.<sup>3</sup> The first consequence is that the level of techno-organizational complication continues to grow, leaving in its wake a constant deficit in communication and information. As a result, the consistency and efficacy of technical systems are continually compromised by insufficient information. Lack of information in turn augments the risk of errors in decision-making, blunders in execution, and, most of all, inertia and delay in decision-making.<sup>4</sup> The second consequence of the technical system is the tendency toward autonomy in the functioning of techniques and of logical mechanisms, to the detriment of whatever objectives are being pursued.

When we apply these general characteristics of all technical systems to social work, we understand why it involves such a disturbing contradiction. On the one hand, we have the needs of clients (assuming these can be expressed), along with the objectives and values of the professionals who serve them, contrasted, on the other hand, with the usual functioning of the means that have been put in place to reach these objectives.

This contradiction confirms Ellul's understanding of ambivalence and unity as they characterize all technical systems. Technical systems are ambivalent in that all techni-

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<sup>3</sup> Translator's note: Talcott Parsons defines Weber's *Zweckrationalität* as "action as motivated by a plurality of relatively independent ends, none of which is absolute," adding that "*Zweckrationalität* refers primarily to considerations respecting the choice of means and ends which in turn means to further ends, such as money," and that "expediency" sometimes suffices as a definition. Quoted in J. E. T. Eldridge, ed., *Max Weber. The Interpretation of Social Reality* (New York: Scribner's, 1971), pp. 78-80 n.l.

<sup>4</sup> See I. Grandstedt, *L'impasse industrielle* (Paris: Seuil, 1980).



cal progress gives rise to advantages, yet exacts a price in terms of the inconveniences it causes. In sodal work, for example, specialization at first permitted greater efficiency in the measures taken and in the particular operations put into place by each professional. But these indisputable gains exacted a price in terms of negative effects in the functioning of sodal institutions and their interactions. The unity of technique prevents us from separating its "good" effects from the undesirable ones. They remain indissolubly linked, so that if we want some of its effects, we must accept the others.

From a sodological point of view, then, it seems that depersonalized measures taken, bureaucratic compartmentalization, and technical formalism are consistently the normal way sodal techniques function, and quickly hobble their efficiency. As a result, these techniques' ability to struggle effectively against sodal exclusion rapidly reaches its upper limit (which is not the same thing as saying that their capacity is negligible in this regard).

We can generalize this proposition: careful study enables us to observe the same malfunctions in all similar technical entities: sodal action, health, cultural leadership and action, planning, territorial development, etc. We see the same principles at work in all heavily institutionalized organizations where technicians attempt to have an effect on people or sodal situations.

I believe these dysfunctions stem from a significant incompatibility. On the one hand, we have an institutional organization managed on the legal-rational basis typical of bureaucracies. This type of organization is strongly hierarchical, along the lines of a technical experimental model of operation. Its operations are quantifiably objective. On the other hand, we have skills and practices based on interpretations and qualitative evaluations that inevitably call for value judgments and, in the final analysis, for ethical points of reference. What is done in this realm cannot be depersonalized, as legal-rational logic would have it.

In the way sodal action is organized, the interests of technicians (looking for their own advantage, for recognition, promotion, and higher salaries) have merged with those of technical ideology. As a result, sodal action has become a technical system involving the separation of the person from his function. The system is regulated like a system organized for purposes of production, with a formal hierarchy of jurisdictions and powers. Such a system does not provide (in my view, it cannot provide) the conditions necessary for evaluation and regulation that would be adapted to the nature of the techniques effectively put into place by practitioners.

For this reason, in order to avoid conflicts, specialists sooner or later come to the point of keeping their technological involvement to a minimum. In this way the rationality behind technical mechanisms works itself out by functioning poorly. This arrangement serves the interests of all concerned, since the essential problem is to coordinate techniques, rendering them compatible in a non-conflictive whole.

It is normal that this unification among various techniques should prove detrimental, as far as the specificity of the problem being treated is concerned. In this context work tends to become bureaucratized. Regulations that should be based on evaluations of

the content of an action tend to be based instead on lines of power and hierarchy that are unrelated to the problem at hand.

We can see then how the categories formulated by Ellul for thinking about modern technique enable us to explain the dysfunctions and irrationalities that hamper the effectiveness of social techniques. It is also clear why I believe it necessary to modify somewhat the concepts of human techniques Ellul proposes. He showed with amazing clarity how the general process of technification leads to the establishment of technical entities whose mission is to take charge of or modify a given aspect of society or human life. The development of society and the human sciences feed into these techniques, offering them operational models.

As a result, following Ellul in *The Technological Society*, we can speak of the "encircling" of the person,<sup>5</sup> as illustrated by the multiplication of specializations and means. All the same, we can also wonder if the tendency of techniques within the technical system to integrate everything with themselves is not what makes the system constitutionally incapable of effectively integrating humanity and society into its logic.

I believe this incapacity is inherent, stemming precisely from the systemic nature of technique, especially where human techniques are concerned. Human techniques are "soft" and subject to interpretation, so that it is not possible to objectify completely the conditions that make them effective. For this reason, when these techniques are set in an institutional environment, they seem destined to break down quickly, turning into mere formalistic procedures. This occurs even when the techniques are constructed according to a rigorous operational model.

Clearly, I offer these remarks only as a hypothesis, formulated on the basis of the study of social action, rather than of the totality of human techniques. If this view is confirmed, it offers a possible limit to Ellul's idea of technique as a world that closes in on itself, and of the totalization of technical logic, as one of the possible horizons of our history. If my hypothesis proves true, the technical system, in order to function well, needs to produce a certain social system, but cannot produce it. Concretely, the technological society will find itself constantly troubled by a persistent lack of social integration that threatens its cohesion, and no technique will be able to eliminate the problem.

Ellul has also contemplated such a limit to the technological system's capacity for closing in on itself. At the end of *The Technological System*, he emphasizes that technique is utterly rational, but that irrational elements come into play when technique comes into contact with a reality of a different order, whether nature or society (pp. 293-309). These reflections show the importance, for both sociological and philosophical purposes, of a careful study of social techniques, and, more generally, of human techniques. These constitute the "new frontier" of technical progress, on which I am concentrating my research efforts.

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<sup>5</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Continuum, 1980), pp. 382-392.

# Promo for Narrative Theology After Auschwitz

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by Darrell J. Fasching

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# Jacques Ellul on Development: Why It Doesn't Work

by Joyce M. Hanks

People all over France were up in arms several years ago, over the powerful image they had encountered in a novel. Jacques Ellul often tells the story of readers' reaction at the prospect of millions of unexpected Third World refugees debarking on France's southern shores, in search of food. The supplies in their famine-ridden countries have given out, and they have taken to sea to keep from starving, looking for a civilization with some remaining stores. Their sheer numbers prevent the authorities from stopping them or sending them back where they came from. What to do with these endless hordes?

In the United States, most of us have no recollection of invading armies. We have not even heard stories from our elders about our land being overrun by outsiders. But in Europe such memories remain fresh, and earlier history abounds with such tales—thus the impact of the French story. Ellul uses it to drive home the necessity of doing *something* about the Third World. No longer can we ignore its needs, or hope its problems will simply go away. They affect all of us in our interdependent world. Some way to develop the Third World and bring it up to an acceptable standard of living seems urgent.

Ellul began writing on technique and development in 1972.<sup>6</sup> He had already concerned himself with the problems of the Third World, before we began using that term.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Jacques Ellul, "Technique et développement," in C. A. O. Van Nieuwen-huijze, ed., *Development: The Western View/La perspective occidentale du développement* (The Hague: Mouton, 1972), pp. 258-295.

<sup>7</sup> See Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Knopf, 1964);

More recently he wrote a book that features development and the Third World as its main themes: *Changer de revolution* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1982). Not yet available in English, we might translate this book's title as *Snitching Revolutions*, or *Changing to Another (Kind of) Revolution*. The book's subtitle reads *The Inevitable Proletariat*. When he considers the Third World in this work, Ellul appears to take a sociological approach, but we will see that he adds a theological twist.

Actually, it amounts to more than a twist. Ellul's sociology is couched in his theology, although most scholars I have heard on the subject seem unaware of his Christian commitment. Reading his most famous book, *The Technological Society*, a person finds no clues that would indicate Ellul had ever heard of Christianity. I have checked his notes from university courses he gave on propaganda and Marxism without finding any hint of a Christian perspective.

Yet Ellul clearly maintains that he conceives of sociology at least in part as a means of understanding our society in order to discover how Christians should participate in it. Christian believers need to comprehend the world in order to proclaim the Christian message in an understandable fashion. Ellul would like his sociological works to serve as an "instrument of knowledge," and his theological studies to help towards a Christian understanding of sociological reality.<sup>8</sup> But up to now scholars have rarely confronted these two strains of his thought.

Change as a theme runs through both Ellul's sociology and his theology. He believes human life must include change in order to have meaning ("On Dialectic," p. 296). But, parting company with Hegel and Marx, Ellul denies that a new state of things inevitably entails progress. His refusal to view change as necessarily positive forms the key to Ellul's view of what the Third World needs. At the risk of sounding extremely conservative and thoroughly negative, he distinguishes development from growth (see the article by Serge Latouche in this issue for the growth-development distinction as it applies to biology, according to Charles Darwin). In Ellul's view, technological growth, especially when it takes place rapidly, inhibits human development on all levels, including economic development. In what follows, we will explore this view, and observe how life in the Third World illustrates it.

Why does Technique fail to help development along, we may ask? Partly, Ellul suggests, because technology grows in spurts, here and there, in one area and then another. Human development however, needs to take place in a *balanced* fashion—and Technique's jagged motion disrupts this balance.

At this point we should review Ellul's definition of Technique, to avoid misunderstanding. Some people use the word "technology" to describe what he prefers to call "Technique," defined as "the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency (for a given stage of development) in every field of human activity" (*The*

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*Autopsy of Revolution*, trans. Patricia Wolf (New York: Knopf, 1971); and *De la revolution aux revoltes* (Paris: Cal-mann-Lévy, 1972).

<sup>8</sup> Jacques Ellul, "On Dialectic," in Gifford G. Christians and Jay M. Van Hook, eds., *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays* (Urbana: University of IL Press, 1981), pp. 306-307.

*Technological Society*, p. xxv). To simplify, we will follow Ellul's tendency to concentrate on efficiency as the focus of Technique. Technological growth involves searching for the most efficient way of doing things, and then adopting that method. Normally it is very difficult to control this process once it has been put in place, Ellul believes—but we will return to this idea when we talk about solutions for the Third World.

Ellul sees human development as proceeding by a slow, trial and error process, involving experimentation, resolution of conflicts, and compromise. True development leads to consequences that are not predetermined but that stem from value judgments hammered out by a group working together. Growth based on Technique and efficiency, however, tends to produce something like puzzle pieces that no longer fit together, at least not the way we intended them to.

In-vitro fertilization can serve as an example, with the fallout it produces in family relationships. We can readily see that nobody worked on figuring out how our society wants or needs the family to develop, and then came up with in vitro fertilization as a way to arrive at that development. On the contrary, this laboratory procedure was discovered, perfected, and used as a way to combat infertility. At the same time, it created new family relationships that we have great difficulty piecing back together in any manageable way.

Similar trends plague the Third World. For example, the growth of technology tends to lure people to the cities, thoroughly disrupting families in the process. We continue to applaud growth in industries and urban levels of luxury that attract more and more people toward urban centers, and then we seem surprised when traditional cultures have difficulty adapting and surviving in a city environment they were not developed to deal with. Balance has been unceremoniously disrupted, with consequences we all know about.

I remember distinctly my experiences in the year 1977, when I was involved in building a house in San José, the capital of Costa Rica. Most unskilled construction workers had migrated to the city from relatively stable rural communities. In the capital they found themselves on the bottom of the economic ladder, paid such a low wage it was nearly impossible for them to survive, let alone support a family. At first I wondered why many of them had hangovers so fierce they failed to report to work on Monday mornings. When these workers missed work on Monday, they forfeited their entire overtime pay for the week! But gradually I learned to understand something of how degraded and alone they felt, and how hopeless. They had none of the supportive structures around them, none of the help they would have received if they had been living in the communities they had grown up in.

Ellul's maintains that technological growth with its unforeseen consequences makes gradual, careful development difficult or even impossible. What sort of model can you set up for development when you never know what technical advances will come along to turn it upside down? How can you find the resources necessary for development—raw materials, energy, and human capacity—when Technique as it grows tends to absorb them all?

An example: Costa Rica's foreign exchange, hard-earned from cultivating coffee and bananas largely by hand, evaporates, most of it spent on petroleum to keep fancy imported automobiles supplied (although most people in the Third World, including Costa Rica, get around by riding public buses). The country must severely limit the number of advanced degree students it sends abroad to study, since dollars are so hard to come by. Costa Rica also, of course, has great difficulty paying its foreign debt, for the same reason. Has anyone consciously decided that maintaining the price of gasoline at bargain levels for the sake of the wealthy, who drive a Mercedes-Benz, should have higher priority than enabling professors to travel abroad to obtain their doctorates? Probably no choice was ever made—the country just assumed it needed to keep importing more petroleum in order to become more "developed" and "progressive."

Ellul feels strongly that we cannot advance true development so long as we continue to assume that economic and technological growth, as the solution to everything, hold the only means of realizing our hopes. We have made a myth, even a god, of our notion of technical progress, so that no one is allowed to attack it. People see progress as inherently necessary, obviously crucial, and unfailingly good, so that if a person suggests that progress may not be inevitable and wonderful, he is treated like an outcast. As Ellul explains, the notion of the value of progress constitutes an unexamined assumption in our society.

What are we supposed to do, then? Hand-wringing will not accomplish much, nor will shedding of tears—these constitute our industrial society's frequent response to images of Third World suffering. Learning to take a critical attitude towards Technique is the place Ellul believes we must begin. We can begin to control and use technology only when we have emptied it of its mystique. This applies to industrial societies as well as to the Third World. Although he contends we must control Technique, Ellul has no illusions, no wish to eliminate it, as some writers have charged.

In fact, he makes concrete suggestions for its careful Third World use, in *Changer de revolution*. Ordinarily Ellul shies away from proposing sociological solutions, holding that first we must arrive at a thorough understanding of the problems we want to solve. As for the Third World, he prefers to leave the working out of specific solutions to those who know individual countries and ethnic groups intimately. The best designers of specific solutions for the Third World are those who have lived their lives there.

Uncharacteristically, however, Ellul brims with suggestions for what to do about the Third World in *Changer de revolution*.

In his previous writing, Ellul had recommended Third World development that was not oriented toward Technique. But with dramatic changes taking place in Technique itself, he begins in this work to recommend its sparing and careful use, once its probable effects have been thoroughly studied. In this way, he feels, we can hope to tame technological growth so that it serves Third World societies. He warns, however, that we will still have to deal with Technique's unforeseeable consequences, which often prove extremely disruptive.

With the development of practical robots for industry, for example, Ellul suggests that highly technical production units could be introduced in the Third World without drastically disrupting traditional cultures, since they would require few people to work in them. And new developments in information systems, based on the personal computer, could enable the Third World to by-pass what had seemed an inevitable centralization of many aspects of life. Commercial and industrial enterprises can now be managed locally, in small units of perhaps no more than 100 people, and coordinated with other units by computer networks. In other words, we can find ways to control Technique instead of letting it control us. We could say that the personal computer makes "small" possible as well as beautiful.

In *Changer de revolution*, Ellul mentions a further advantage in these new possibilities: the latest, automated factories would enable growth to take place without displacing large groups of people. Most Third World families already engaged in agriculture could remain in place, and could return to producing food crops, instead of concentrating on exportable products. With new automated factories, Third World countries would depend less on foreign trade, and could feed their people.

Reducing exports and accumulating fancy new factories sound to most people like utterly utopian ideas for today's Third World. Most of us have assumed that poor countries needed to gear up to export more and more, in order to pay their debt. But Ellul proposes we attempt something much more radical.

Ellul believes the Third World's problems are so complex and intractable that piecemeal solutions cannot work. Yet we must find a solution, or modern society will not survive. Ellul, along with many others, believes we are headed for a cataclysm of unthinkable proportions, if the Third World is not turned around. At this stage, with our world as interdependent as it has become, no nation will escape the consequences of relentlessly increasing population and poverty in the world's southern peoples. We must do something drastic, but he doubts we will.

When the nightmarish novel mentioned at the beginning of this article troubled French society so deeply, Ellul thought practical steps might be taken to work for change in the Third World, to avoid just such a scenario as the one depicted in the book. But people got over their fright, and nothing changed.

Jonathan Kozol's book, *Savage Inequalities* (New York: Crown, 1991), makes a similar point: Americans who feel well-off may wish the problems in poor school districts would simply go away. But since that will not happen, we would do well to take ghetto problems seriously, if only for the sake of our own longterm interests.

Ellul proposes we take the Third World's dilemma seriously, as well, donating large amounts of aid—so much aid, so freely given, that it will noticeably reduce our society's standard of living. Ellul maintains we would be giving up nothing but gadgets we do not need, but probably most of us would feel seriously deprived.

He says we must stop depleting the Third World's resources, and instead give these countries what they really need: specifically, what *they* perceive they need. We cannot understand Ellul on the Third World unless we appreciate this point. Concretely, for

example, he believes he knows young French-trained Africans who have not bought into the establishment in their countries, who could recommend what their countries need most for real development. Ellul maintains we should orient a significant sector of our economy toward producing for the Third World, at great cost to ourselves, since no other way exists to avoid catastrophe.

We need to offer carefully studied and adapted agricultural help, soft technologies, automated production units and other items the Third World needs not just in order to survive, but to move ahead, on the basis of its own culture and social structures. As an example, Ellul suggests we could help some societies develop a simple technology, based on locally available resources, for the production of solar pumps.

Ellul may give the impression in *Changer de revolution* that he is uncharacteristically in favor of a world-wide, universal scheme, but in any case he does not think it could ever succeed unless essentially personalized. He proposes a kind of "twin dries" approach, or an institution-to-institution basis for involving ourselves in the Third World's needs. Now that computers enable us to coordinate just about anything, such a structure should be possible.

Readers of *Changer de revolution* find it easy to criticize such a bold plan, especially since it depends heavily on recent technological developments. Ellul's proposal for developing the Third World undoubtedly holds many pitfalls, but his analysis of Third World problems that need solving cannot easily be dismissed. Despite the generally recognized urgency of these problems, we resist radical suggestions—Ellul's or anyone else's—for improving things. We prefer to believe that somehow the situation will take care of itself. We firmly resist any challenge that would result in a lowering of our standard of living, even when it seems likely that a head-in-the-sand approach will eventually lower our standard of living a great deal more. Ellul does not believe enlightened self-interest is strong enough to motivate rich societies to give part of their wealth away, however necessary it may be to do so.

In the final two pages of *Changer de revolution*, however, Ellul contends that Christian believers have more to draw on than self-interest. He believes they have sufficient motivation to help others, and sufficient faith to take risks—an ability to look at the world realistically and take steps to save it. Such acts normally take place only if people have adequate information—which may explain why Ellul has written so many books.

I believe we can best grasp Ellul's distinction between technological growth and human development by means of examples. In "Ellul and Development in Central America" (*Cross Currents*, 35.1 [Spring 1985]:65-71), Bob Ekblad recounts the adventure he and his wife, Grade, shared as they attempted to apply Ellul's principles while living and farming in rural Honduras.

Bob and Grade's approach was to concentrate on observing and learning, rather than criticizing their neighbors' methods. But they absorbed everything they could from a farmer whose agricultural approach had enabled him to live off formerly useless land. At considerable sacrifice, they lived on a very simple level, and in this way gained some understanding of the people around them. They used local tools, antiquated



transportation, and did their own work, without electricity, preparing and eating the food typical of their region.

When their ridiculous-looking agricultural methods produced a crop the likes of which no one in their area had ever seen, the Ekblads suddenly found themselves surrounded by an audience of eager learners. These later learned to teach others, in a complex, on-going effort in which the Ekblads continue to participate actively by means of annual visits. When, as Ellul suggests, they found that material progress did not solve people's basic problems, they developed a spiritual ministry related to their agricultural program. The Ekblads encountered many difficulties as they sought to contribute to human development in Honduras, but clearly they succeeded.

In Costa Rica, I witnessed a less happy sort of "progress." Traditional Costa Rican food consists of three basic items: rice, beans, and tortillas. Formerly hundreds of Costa Rican women provided the tortillas for consumption in their neighborhoods. They prepared them at home, beginning at 3 or 4 in the morning, every day. Someone picked them up to transport them to comer stores and super markets, by bicycle or very small truck.

It was a kind of slave labor, working hard every day, getting up before anyone else in the family did, making hundreds and hundreds of tortillas between the palms of their hands, then cooking them over the fire in a pan that looks like a miniature wok. We might wonder where the *masa*, the ground com used to make a tortilla, spent the night, or what animals and insects ate their share before the *masa* was turned into tortillas. Probably the process was not very hygienic. And when the woman turned the tortilla over in its "wok," she may have licked her fingers first, to keep from getting burned. These women were not paid very well, either, for all their hard work. All in all, we can find much to criticize in such a system. "Development" would seem to be in order. Time for progress.

Enter a shiny new factory, owned by foreigners. It was designed to turn out thousands and thousands of perfect tortillas, very fast. And, best of all, they were packaged in neat hygienic, orange plastic bags (transparent on the back, so you could see if the tortillas had already turned moldy from sitting too long in the store). The bags had nice, smiling happy faces that looked like human tortillas on the front. It was all very hygienic, and involved no slave labor. Distribution involved a large, shiny truck that was much more efficient than the old delivery system.

Best of all, said some people, the price was right. With the new system, tortillas were cheaper than when the women made them. Naive soul that I am, I thought perhaps the machines could make the tortillas more cheaply. But a wiser observer predicted that the price would go up as soon as the women's tortillas had been driven from the market as a result of the factory competition—just as fancy new imported colas had shot up in price once the traditional, locally-made soft drinks disappeared, years before. Sure enough. After a while the women had no buyers to speak of, and tortillas soon began to cost more.

Who are the winners and the losers here? The winners are the foreign factory owners, whereas the women who supported or helped support their families by making tortillas are clearly the losers. And what about the people of Costa Rica? They may enjoy slightly more identical tortillas, but I doubt they're as fresh—and they certainly cost more than before. Not to mention that the profit from the whole operation fails to stay in the country. Like the quantities of imported gasoline Costa Rica bums, its tortillas may be convenient, but they contribute to the lack of foreign exchange.

When we evaluate the tortilla war according to Ellul's principles, we cannot count a factory as a contribution to development, when it merely replaces hand labor that was already in place, or when it serves only to put people out of work, by fancying things up a bit Ellul would label this kind of "progress" gadgetry. And he encourages us not to throw out time-honored ways of doing things without careful study.

On the contrary, through the change they brought about, Bob and Gracie Ekblad made a significant contribution to Honduras' ability to feed itself. The Ekblads accomplished this by learning before they attempted to teach, and taking their [dace humbly alongside Honduran peasants. Significantly, they helped a group of poor farming families to grow in human dignity as they improved the quality of their lives and then learned to help others do the same. This is the kind of "development" I believe Ellul proposes—costly but genuinely useful for the Third World.

## "Good" Development and Its Mirages

by Serge Latouche

To develop an area\* signifies the radical destruction of all natural vegetation in the area involved. It means resurfacing the newly-bared earth with concrete, or, in the best-case scenario, with grass or parking. If there is left-over space, it gives way to a concrete wall for consolidation purposes. Dams straighten out any small streams that cannot be channeled. Development means infesting the entire area with pesticides, and finally selling it at the highest possible price to some citified fool of a customer.<sup>9</sup>

*Sustainable development* has become fashionable as the basis for conferences. We have seen it at work in Rio at the United Nations' "Earth Summit" on development and the environment (June 1992), and in the Forum of the world's Nongovernmental Organizations at La Villette, in Paris (December 1991), which prepared the Rio summit. Considering all the various kinds of dangers that development poses to humanity, we can only rejoice at this rather late-blooming insight.

Hundreds of thousands of members of the human species have already died as a result of the development of civilization. The civilization of development threatens

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<sup>9</sup> Konrad Lorenz, *L'homme tn piril*, trans. Jeanne Etori (Paris: Flam-marion, 1975), p. 13.

thousands of others with genocide, or at least ethnodde. They range from north to south, from the Inuits and the Lapps of the far north's frozen steppes to tropical Indians like the Yanomano of the Roraima territory in Brazil, and the Tuareg people of the scorching Sahara.

Even more alarming, as far as our survival is concerned, 175,000 plant and animal species become extinct every year. Six million hectares (nearly fifteen million acres) of Amazonian jungle go up in smoke annually so that large-scale/azenzfeiros can produce more cattle, and so that their smaller counterparts can survive.<sup>10</sup>

Are we threatened with skin problems because of holes in the ozone layer? Are we victimized by NASA's huge maneuvers as it attempts to give new life to its programs, or by Dupont's manipulations of the stock market?<sup>11</sup> Such threats distress us even more when we realize that we have no control over the gigantic and insidious pollution of our oceans and atmosphere due to radiation and toxic chemicals.

In spite of the recent summit, careful observers of society may remain skeptical-not suspicious of anyone's sincerity about the goals expressed, but questioning the consistency of current demands. We may legitimately ask whether it is possible to provide everyone with guaranteed development and a dean environment at the same time. "Sustainable" development is merely the latest entry in a long series of conceptual innovations intended to inject the harsh reality of economic growth with a dose of idealism.

Reflecting on the bad experiences and contradictions involved in "good" development may help us understand why some remain pessimistic about the probability and stability of "sustainable" development This process will also enable us to delineate the practical consequences of such skeptidism.

## *I. Development as Always "Good"*

"Permanent, "sustainable," or "lasting" development is simply the most recent phase of "good" development<sup>12</sup> Development has had to be corrected, almost since its inception in the 1960's, to satisfy the aspirations of the masses and the elites who were supposed to bring it about. The multiplication of terms used to describe development amounts to an attempt to ward off its negative effects through magic. Thus we have seen developments labeled Indigenous," "endogenous," "partidpatory," "communi-tary," Integrated," "authentic," "autonomous and popular," and "equitable," not to mention Tocal," "micro-,""endo-," and even "ethno-development"!

Sodalist development probably opened the door for all these strategies based on incantation. The wildly spectacular effort to make socialism's mythical paradigm prevail over the equally mythical paradigm of development fared poorly, as is well known.

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<sup>10</sup> Patrice van Eersel, "Le Brisil dichiri par i'ficologie," *Ac/u<4 no. 12 (3 Dec. 1991)*.

<sup>11</sup> See Claude J. Alligre, *Economiser la planite*, Coll. Le Temps des Sciences (Paris: Fayard, 1990).

<sup>12</sup> Economics is a religion that has English as its sacred tongue. As a result, French experts have

The intention was to avoid the *bad* result that development might produce for accidental, rather than congenital, reasons. So a non-existent monster, a straw man was created: "bad development." But nothing "bad" can actually touch development for the simple reason that development is considered the very incarnation of the "good." It would be more precise and logical to use Albert Tevoedjre's term, "counter-development," when one wants to attach a stigma to perversions that need denouncing.<sup>13</sup>

The expression "good development" is redundant, since development by definition consists of "good" growth. And "growth" is also considered to be a good against which no evil force can prevail.

### ***Development as good growth.***

"Growth" and "development" as intertwined concepts come to us from biology, especially from Charles Darwin. Georges Canguilhem comments:

When he makes a precise distinction between growth and development, Darwin opposes the adult and the embryo on the basis of both size and structure. Any living thing can continue to grow while ceasing to develop. Resembling an adult, in weight and volume, it will remain fixed at a given stage of its specific infancy, as far as development is concerned.<sup>14</sup>

Transposed to the social sphere, development is *non-homologous* growth of the economic organism. If industrialization had proceeded since the nineteenth century along the lines of purely quantitative growth, we would have arrived at a monstrous absurdity. The earth would be covered with steam engines, coal resources exhausted, and pollution would have killed off all life forms. Instead, physical, technical, and ecological *self-regulation* took (dace, by force of circumstances. These led to fundamental *qualitative* mutations, so that we can speak of a process of *self correction*, which does not stop at this point. The vigorous pursuit of this corrected growth gives birth more or less spontaneously to *social* regulation.

In view of these facts, we can properly define economic development as the "trickle down" effect of industrial growth.<sup>15</sup> This term, sometimes referred to as what "percolates down," simply means that, beyond a certain threshold, growth in production results in social *fallout*. Growth cannot help but more or less benefit everyone.

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struggled to translate its terms. After Ignacy Sachs' very good "ecodevelopment" was not accepted in the 1970's, "sustainable development" became the norm fifteen years later.

<sup>13</sup> Albert Tevoedjre, *La pauvreté, richesse des peuples* (Paris: Editions Ouvrières, 1978); English ed. *Poverty, Wealth of Mankind* (Oxford and New York: Pergamon Press, 1979).

<sup>14</sup> Georges Canguilhem, *Etudes d'histoire et de philosophie des sciences* (Paris: Vrin, 1968), p. 115.

<sup>15</sup> In the report of Lawrence F. Salmen of the World Bank dated 29 August 1991, we read: "During the first two decades of its existence, the World Bank tended to identify development with economic growth. The benefits of growth were supposed to trickle down, so that the poor benefitted automatically

In developed countries, even the most economically liberal ones, the poor of Victorian England described by Charles Dickens and proclaimed by Kari Marx did not multiply. Wealth spread to all. Here again, development corrects growth and constitutes a *good* thing.

In consumer societies, Keynesian economics, coupled with fordism, leads to an additional step towards the "good." This method of social and political regulation aims at the distribution of wealth (big salaries and corporate profits resulting from regular growth in productivity), with a view to maintaining the economy at a high level. Perhaps we could go still further and say with Pope Paul VI that "development . . . cannot be restricted to economic growth alone. To be authentic, it must be well rounded; it must foster the development of each man and of the whole man."<sup>16</sup> Surely we should consider this point of view extreme and pointless, since it would imply some doubt about the ethical value of growth. But, as we have already seen, growth constitutes what is truly "good" and "beautiful" in modern times.

### *Growth as the "good"*

Since 1949, when we started our race toward the highest possible Gross National Product per person, human societies have chosen as their goal an increase in the *standard of living*. Clearly this has to be a "good" thing, since the very term "well-being" helps to define the living standard. Industrialization and technique are means which could lead to good or evil, in the abstract. But the growth of these means becomes an end in itself. Furthermore, these means are considered the only possible way of arriving at the Good, as if no civilization had preceded the industrial age!

We find a striking illustration of such thinking in the report given by French engineer and economist Edouard Parker to the international Forum of the High Road (Nov. 1991), endorsed by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.<sup>17</sup> Parker's report demolishes all criticisms of growth and proposes nothing less than a goal of ten percent annual growth for the Third World. Why such a high rate of growth? Because a minimal level of two or three percent is required to avoid stagnation and to compensate for demographic growth. An additional four percent is needed to improve the living standard, and three percent more for the purpose of reducing unemployment.

At this stage, the famous "trickle down" effect makes itself felt: growth becomes development. Next we enter the equally famous "demographic transition," in which well-being induces a strong reduction in the birth rate. At this point, we can indulge

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from the creation of jobs and the increased production of goods and services." See *Counter International*, no. 68 (20 Feb. 1992).

<sup>16</sup> Pope Paul VI, "Populorum progressio," encyclical on the development of peoples, 26 March 1967, no. 275, in Claudia Carlen Ihm, ed., *The Papal Encyclicals 1958-1981* (Raleigh: Pierian Press, 1991), p. 185.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Fabra, "10% de croissance pour le tiers-monde?," *Zz Monde* (3 Dec. 1991), p. 28.

in the luxury of fighting pollution and preserving our culture; Parker writes: "by the year 2000, we expect an Algeria proud of its Islamic identity with \$4800 per person, based on present levels."

Good or bad, technique and growth are always "good", since they increase possibilities, create jobs (even when they eliminate others), and offer solutions for all the problems they create.

Finally, the factor that makes economic growth an indisputable good, according to prevailing morality, is that it results from *behavior* which is also moral. According to Max Weber's analysis,<sup>18</sup> Western economies took off as a result of the culture's widespread work ethic and entrepreneurial spirit, based on scrupulous honesty, a taste for hard work, integrity, punctuality, denial of the pleasures of the flesh, and thrift. Unlimited accumulation of material wealth constitutes the visible evidence of the accumulation of merit-undeniable proof of divine blessing.

*Failure and the test of facts*

Over against such strong belief, the repeated resounding failures of development projects in the Third World during the past four decades and the spectacle of "bad development" in many countries have proved powerless to challenge the "good development" model. Certainly, as Dominique Perrot has written, "by means of a systematic transformation of nature and social relations into commercial goods and services... development appears as the most enormous and all-encompassing enterprise of dispossession and expropriation for the sake of the dominant minorities of all time."<sup>19</sup>

We have seen that well-being defines in part the goal of a rising standard of living. But the reality of this "well"-being consists not of a *quality of life* but rather of a *quantity* of gadgets presented as useful, on the very basis of their production and consumption.

Development is a mass of "things"; "well-being" amounts to nothing more than possessing them. Development disillusiones the world by eliminating the value of things. By reducing the universe of creatures to the level of the production of useful things, development degrades ethics itself. The Good merges with goods and possessions, and becomes identical with them. There is no escape from vulgar utilitarianism.

Morality becomes more a hypocritical facade than a reality. In fact, we find trickery everywhere. Business ethics exalts the will to power, egoism, and contempt for the weak and the losers.<sup>20</sup>

The advocates of "good" development know and say all this, but the spectacle of the fantastic power of our technological society inhibits them from questioning it in any fundamental way—yet another witness to technique's totalitarianism. Instead, they look to development to cure the very ills it inflicts.

In the conclusion of his book, *Les chrétiens et le Tiers-Monde*, Bertrand Cabedoche writes: "The word 'development' may have lost its appeal after so many disappointing

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<sup>18</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Scribner, 1958).

<sup>19</sup> Dominique Perrot, "Les empêcheurs de développer en rond," *Revue Ethnies*, 6, no. 13 (1991), 5.

<sup>20</sup> See my book, *La planète des naufrages* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991), especially chapter 3.

experiences. But it remains the only word shared by all human beings that can express their hope.”<sup>21</sup> Let the planet perish, just so long as development is saved!

## II. Sustainable Development as a Paradox

*The paradox of political economy's view of "nature"*

From one point of view, "nature" and taking the environment into account are at the heart of the founding of economics, as we see it in the words of classic economists. Economic science is *naturalist*. The "nature" that economists have made for themselves is even more constraining than the one described by contemporary ecologists. It is constructed by capitalist economy, a kind of miserly mother.

Scarcity occupies a central place in the economic scheme of things. This scarcity, unknown in traditional societies, has been shown to be a product of enclosure laws and the establishment of individualist society.<sup>22</sup> Economists are the first to sound the alarm when it comes to the *limits of growth*. David Ricardo, like Thomas Malthus, points out the natural limits of wealth determined by the finite availability of fertile land and the existence of decreasing yields. W. Stanley Jevons, in his book *The Coal Question* (1865) was probably the first to warn of the depletion of ore reserves.<sup>23</sup>

This hostile nature, however, is stripped of all value, and considered as lying outside the economy. Jean-Baptiste Say wrote of "natural objects... air, water, or solar light. These may be denominated *natural* wealth, because they are the spontaneous offering of nature; and, as such, mankind is not called upon to earn them by any sacrifice or exertion whatever; for which reason, they are never possessed of exchangeable value."<sup>24</sup>

This exclusion of nature will weigh quite heavily on future patrimony, but it is no stranger to the metaphysical dogma of the natural harmony of interests. This postulate, which denies human conflict for the sake of growth and optimal economic development, is at the heart of economics. It is a postulate based on the will to subdue nature, and opposes nature. Believing it requires that one accept many simplifications and illusions. The result is that lasting development can only be paradoxical.

In the hands of the economy, the environmental crisis reinforces the productivism of our technological society. The United Nations pamphlet for Rio's Earth Summit 1992 speaks of managing the environment by means of "ecologically rational techniques." Environmental management may lead us to a new Western imperialism that would involve no teal protection for nature.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Bertrand Cabedoche, *Les chrétiens et le Tiers-Monde* (Paris: Karthala, 1990), p. 255.

<sup>22</sup> See especially Jean-Pierre Dupuy and Jean Robert, *La trahison de l'opulence* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1976).

<sup>23</sup> W. Stanley Jevons, *The Coal Question: An Inquiry concerning the Progress of the Nation, and the Probable Exhaustion of Our Coal Mines*, ed. A. W. Flux (London: Macmillan, 1865).

<sup>24</sup> Jean-Baptiste Say, *A Treatise on Political Economy, or The Production, Distribution & Consumption of Wealth* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1964; 1st American ed. 1821; Fr. ed. 1803), p. 286.

<sup>25</sup> Guy Beney, "L'écologie globale, nouveau danger *totalitaire*" *Actuel*, no. 12 (3 Dec. 1991).

Adam Smith's "Invisible Hand" forms the framework for classic, and later neo-classic, economic theory. On the basis of the minimal observation that it is in wolves' interest that there be lots of sheep, and that they be well fed, some economists drew the maximal conclusions of the libertarians. This road leads to the strongly-held underlying belief in the myth of *development*: growth profits everyone, and development is within everyone's reach-the famous "trickle down" effect.

Nature has to be denied if one is to move from observing a fact (that there are non-contradictory interests in the economic domain) to believing that the well-understood fundamental economic interests of humanity are not conflictive in nature (that there is a single path for the development of all). The only apparently certain interest human beings hold in common is the fight against nature. Nature's potential finitude justifies the cooperation of all for the good of all.

The universality of modernity and of the economy depends on constituting nature as humanity's enemy. We have an undeniable illustration of this principle in the fight against AIDS. In spite of the violent conflict between the French team of Professor Mon-tagnier and the American team of Professor Gallo, collaboration continues for the sake of saving humankind. We can see this attitude that opposes humanity and nature as early as Aristotle: "no friendship with inanimate things is possible, just as there is no justice toward them-no more than there is human justice for a horse or an ox."<sup>26</sup>

The project of modernity that makes humanity the possessor and master of nature, pacifies us by constituting humankind as the virtual subject of history by means of a declaration of war on nature. This amounts to a very aggressive attitude. Francis Bacon wrote that "nature is a prostitute; we should humble her, penetrate her secrets, and chain her up at will" (Rouland, p. 249). We see this approach illustrated in the squandering of natural resources, just as we see it in the treatment of guinea-pigs. Violence between human beings, and conflicts and contradictions of all sorts are deflected against nature, our common scapegoat.

#### *The trap of "permanent development"*

The definition of "permanent" development as it appears in the Brundtland report takes nothing but permanence into account. It involves a "process of change through which the exploitation of resources, investment policy, and technical and institutional changes all harmonize together, reinforcing people's present potential and their future needs."<sup>27</sup>

"Permanence" refers not to "genuinely existing" development, but to reproduction. Sustainable reproduction reigned over the planet as a whole until the eighteenth century. It is still possible to find "experts" in sustainable reproduction among the Third World's older generation. Artisans and peasants who have preserved much of their an-

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<sup>26</sup> Aristotle, cited by Norbert Rouland, *Aux confins du droit* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1991), p. 248. Aristotle goes so far as to add "or even on the part of the master toward the slave, as slave."

<sup>27</sup> See World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).



cestors' ways of thinking and acting live in harmony with their environment. They do not act as predators toward nature.

In contrast, the historical and practical meaning of development, linked with the project of modernity, goes contrary to the idea of permanence. It involves exploiting, making the most of, and reaping benefits from human and natural resources. The Invisible Hand and the natural harmony of interests guarantee that all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds. Why worry about anything?

Integrating artificially quantified elements of the environment with economic calculations does not change the nature of development or the logic of modernity. It is good, for example, to take agriculture's caloric production into account and to reduce the squandering of fossil energy. We know that to produce a calorie, traditional agriculture consumes 0.01 calorie, compared with 500 for the most modern methods. Taking such facts into account does not change the obsession with maximizing, or the reduction of social factors to numbers. Fleeing further into technique is our approach to resolving the problems posed by the technological system.

The assumption of the natural harmony of interests is not radically questioned (it cannot be challenged unless we question the universalism of humanity). Rather, it is expanded in a sort of "ecological keynesianism." In this view, one affirms that the expense of preserving the environment is cost-effective in the long run. "Ecological keynesianism" also considers that this cost suits the interests of all economic players (when their interests are *properly understood*), since it creates outside effects and a large amount of spillover in the form of jobs. Ecology and the environment are in a sense booby-trapped by development, by the logic of the technological society and modernity.

At times "alternative," "Tasting," or "sustainable" development is used as a rationale for the proposal of widely varying anti-capitalist and anti-productivist projects. Their purpose is the elimination of the plagues associated with under-development and the excesses of "bad" development. Aiming to produce a people-centered, inclusive, convivial society, such projects have no more to do with development than "affluent primitive societies" did.<sup>28</sup> Some pre-industrial societies reached remarkable human and esthetic heights without knowing anything at all about "development."

The debate over the word "development" is not a matter of words. Whether we like it or not, we cannot make development something different from what it has been. Development has been and is the westernization of the world. Words take their root in a story; they are connected with representations that usually escape the speaker's consciousness, but which have a hold on our emotions. There are smooth words that act as a balm to the heart, and words that wound. There are words that stir up a people and tum the world upside down. Liberty and democracy have been and remain words of that kind. Then we have poisonous words that infiltrate the heart like drugs, perverting desire and clouding judgment.

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<sup>28</sup> Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (Chicago: Aldine-Atherton, 1972).

Development is one of these toxic words. We can of course proclaim that from now on "development" will mean the opposite of what it has meant. Declaring that "good development" means first of all placing value on what one's parents did, on having roots, amounts to defining a word by its opposite.<sup>29</sup> Development has been, and remains, an uprooting.

Whether we like it or not, so long as we continue to struggle against the effects and evils of development, all the while placing ourselves under the protection of its banner, we will be encouraging the arrogance of economists who can perfectly well appropriate these demands, turning them inside out. We have an example of such co-opting in the Parker report to the Forum of the High Road: "industry and high-tech are much less detrimental to nature than the Third World with its extreme poverty." Parker also states that "ecology as it is presently conceived by most minor groups... leads straight to ecological disaster."<sup>30</sup> Parker comes close to the declaration by Gilberto Mestrinho, governor of the state of Amazonas and the great terror of the 1992 Rio summit: "we will develop the Amazon, in spite of the Greens' vile plot."<sup>31</sup>

For now, we need to remember that an inhabitant of the northern hemisphere consumes eighty times more energy than a person from the south; that the United States alone sends between seven and eight tons of carbon per capita into the atmosphere; and that ninety percent of the 320,000,000 tons of toxic waste produced in 1989 originated in member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development<sup>32</sup>

### *III. Conclusion*

The greatest threat hanging over our planet may not be the destruction resulting from our infatuation with the Megamachine. Our blindness and our powerlessness constitute the real threat. Like the Romans when their republic was declining, "we can endure neither our evils nor their cures."<sup>33</sup> We refuse to make the proper diagnosis of the disease, and we content ourselves with bandaging its symptoms. We expect remedies from the very source that is aggravating the ill. Proposing "lasting" development as a remedy for the evils of development amounts to prolonging the agony of the patient as long as possible by keeping the virus alive.

According to Jacques Ellul, asking our contemporaries to renounce technique (and, we might add, development) is like asking neolithic society to bum the forest that constitutes its environment.<sup>34</sup> It is clear that we will renounce neither technique nor

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<sup>29</sup> Halidou Sawadogo quoted in Pierre Pradervant, *Listening to Africa: Developing Africa from the Grassroots* (New York: Praeger, 1989), pp. 77 and 198.

<sup>30</sup> Fabra, "10% de croissance," p. 28.

<sup>31</sup> van Eersel, p. 60.

<sup>32</sup> Dominique Sicot, "L'aide met son habit vert," *Alternatives Economiques*, no. 92 (Dec. 1991), p. 33.

<sup>33</sup> Livy, cited by Jacques Ellul in his *The Technological Bluff*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), p. 72.

<sup>34</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Continuum, 1980), p. 82.

development. It is not even certain that we will hesitate to bum the last forests and the last neolithic societies that still live there. Is there then no hope or future perspective for the planet or for humanity?

The Indians of British Colombia, on the eastern shore of the Pacific (the Kwakiults, Haidas, Tshimshians, etc.), believed the salmon to be living beings like themselves, that lived in tribes at the bottom of the sea, in their tepees. At the time of year when the fish began to return upstream, the Indians welcomed the first salmon to arrive as an important visitor. They ate it ceremoniously. Its sacrifice constituted only a temporary loan. They returned its skeleton and other inedible parts to the sea, thus permitting the devoured guest's rebirth. In this way the coexistence and symbiosis of the salmon and the Indians was perpetuated in a satisfactory manner. With the arrival of the Europeans and the establishment of a canning factory at the mouth of every river, the race for profit brought overfishing in its wake. The Indians concluded that the salmon disappeared because the Europeans failed to respect the ancient rite. Who could claim they were wrong?

This attitude toward nature, found in most societies, is based on our participation in the cosmos. It implies a reciprocal relationship between us and the rest of the universe. People are prepared to give themselves to "Gaia," just as she gives herself to them.

Returning to this pre-Aristotelian spirit may well be necessary for our survival. We must note, however, that we lack the resolve to take this path, in spite of the great commotion made about ecology and in spite of significant protective measures we have taken.<sup>35</sup>

My book *La planete des naufrages* begins with this epigraph, a statement by the chief of the Lakota Oglala Sioux, Russell Means: "it is only a question of time before we see what Westerners call 'an average catastrophe of global proportions.' It will be the job of Amerindian peoples, and of all 'natural' peoples, to survive."<sup>36</sup>

Those excluded from development and left out by modernity, the shipwrecked of the great society, are surely better equipped to work out a new pact with "Nature." Their alliance will bypass the West's rape of nature and enable them to rejoin the harmony of the cosmos.

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<sup>35</sup> Most recently, American jurisprudence has been moving in the direction of reinforcing the ever increasing human control of natural processes through legal means. See Rouland, *Aux confins du droit*, p. 253.

<sup>36</sup> "Toujours la meme rengaine," *Revue du MA. U.S.S.* (Mouvement Anti-Utilitariste dans les Sciences Sociales), no. 7 (1990), p. 71.

# Book Reviews

## Technique, Discourse and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul

By David Lovekin, (Lehigh University Press, 1991).

Reviewed by Timothy Casey

There can be no question anymore of the importance of Jacques Ellul's place in 20th century thought or of his influence on a variety of disciplines and thinkers concerned with modern technology and its alleged benefits and harms. What remains unclear is how to assess the locus and value of his major achievements. David Lovekin's *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 1991) is a provocative attempt to argue that the thrust of Ellul's work ties in the direction of philosophy and a theory of culture. In this rendering theology takes a back seat and is subordinated to the more general postmodern problem of "the Other" and its role in keeping alive transcendence in the face of technique and the reductionistic tendencies of the technical phenomenon.

While Ellul himself seems to recoil from being tagged a philosopher or, worse yet, a metaphysician, Lovekin makes a persuasive case for the philosophical cast of Ellul's critique of technology, inviting his readers to see and judge Ellul on strictly philosophical terms. Indeed, Lovekin believes that an almost universal ignorance of Ellul's philosophical message accounts for a myriad of serious misconstruals and misguided judgments on the part of his many critics and even a few of his followers. Lovekin asks us, in other words, to read Ellul not just as a sociological critic of technology with traditional theological and religious answers to the problems technology poses, but primarily as a philosopher who addresses the great philosophical questions of our day.

It is not surprising that as a Frenchman Ellul addresses the basic concerns of structuralism and deconstructionism, concerns which can be gathered under the general rubric of philosophy of language. Ellul's rejection of contemporary French philosophy reflects his own metaphysical conception of the word as symbol and the image as a copy subordinated to some pre-given original. Lovekin cites *The Humiliation of the Word* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1985) regarding the status of the image according to Ellul:

The image contains within itself a deep contradiction. It is not ambiguous: it is coherent, reliable, and inclusive; but it is insignificant. It can have

innumerable meanings, depending on culture, learning, or the intervention of some other dimension. For this reason, I must learn to interpret it. The image is dear, but this clarity does not imply certainty or comprehension. My certainty is limited to this directly perceived reality that my sight reveals to me (Lovekin, p. 235; Ellul, p. 8).

On Lovekin's reading, Ellul interprets the post-modern death of the author/speaker and the reduction of language to self-referential signs and images as further indications of the dominance of technique and the loss of transcendence toward an Other which enables communication and the sharing of a stable world held in common. The technological proliferation of mainly visual images through television, film, photography and video has transformed what was essentially a typographic culture into a world of fastmoving images that throttle the brain and seem to stop thinking and critical reflection in their tracks. Here the real world of technique fatefully conjoins with a deconstructive nihilism for which nothing exists outside the text.

In Ellul's philosophical court modern art also must plead guilty to this secular assault on the Other. Art in our time exhibits little if any suspicion of the image. Rather, it seems more than eager to wallow in the play of surfaces and to mock the symbolic character that art works of old embodied and encouraged. Apparently in league with the deconstructionists, contemporary artists seem intent on denying the truth-function of art in favor of mindless parody with no origin or transcendent end. This art, in effect, is an anti-art, the kind of imaging that neither recognizes nor respects any originals to be imitated or symbolized. As Lovekin expresses it, "Language is reduced to one dimension by the machine-by the computer—to be followed by the artists. Flaubert feared the cliché. Modern artists embrace them" (p. 210).

What ties behind this slow descent into a Platonic cave with no exterior is, for Lovekin's Ellul, the essentially technical transformation of the word from spoken to written language. As Plato made clear in the *Phaedrus*, the replacement of an oral with a written tradition is dangerous to memory and its role in the recollection of Being; such forgetfulness sends us on a way that increasingly obscures our vision of truth and goodness. The written word ceases to be a symbolic instrument that places us in direct contact with the truth, as oral language does. Because it is *seen*, writing usurps the role of the original and traps us in a world of our own making, a world of images that deflect our right away from the Other towards what is comfortably the Same. The spoken word, on the other hand, retains its function as symbol and serves as a medium of transcendence. According to Lovekin, it breaks the downward pull of images into the cave and opens us to "the realm of the story, the narrative," where humans can meet as humans outside the technical system and its de-humanizing demands. Here the Other can be as Other and not as one more functional component in the system beyond which there is no Other.

In Lovekin's depiction, Ellul is dearly a philosopher of an old-fashioned sort who believes in the priority of original over image, oral language over written, the transcendent

over the immanent (in spite of Christ's transcendent immanence). More specifically, Lovekin traces Ellul's philosophy of technology in the tradition of Hegelian dialectic and Ernst Cassirer's *Kulturphilosophie*. If anything this goes a long way toward defusing the popular image of Ellul as a wild-eyed radical inimical to the Western tradition and its standards of rationality and philosophical discourse. If Ellul is a radical, it is only in the sense that he wants to take us back to our roots - both Biblical and philosophical - as a way of regaining a measure against which we can compare and judge the distortions of our technological society.

It is instructive, then, to reflect on the traditional, and especially metaphysical, aspects of Ellul's thought. From a contemporary philosophical vantage-point Ellul seems not so much representative of Western metaphysics as entrapped in it. What is more, this metaphysics is of particularly modern vintage - Cartesian, to be exact. In describing technique as a mentality or form of consciousness, Ellul takes over the ontology of the self as *subject* and the thing as *object*, quite unintentionally reinforcing the anthropocentrism that lies at the very center of the modern technological assault on nature. Modern anthropocentrism simply asserts that humans can know only what they make. As Lovekin puts it,

One does not live in a world in which significance is simply given. Significance is made and apprehended at the same time. The given always has a symbolic nature: meaning points to the object of meaning as well as back to whom that object has meaning. Meaning is the *result* of experience with an object. It is not simply outside or inside the observer. Meaning is in the conjunction of innerness and outerness (p. 117).

Humanity as *homo symbolicus* is the creator of its own reality. Just how this human subject, outside religious and theological assumptions, is ever to make contact with the truly Other remains philosophically unclear. For Lovekin, the problem seems hardly to exist, let alone to throw Ellul's philosophical project into serious doubt.

For while Lovekin is right in pointing to Descartes' elevation of method as the herald of the technical phenomenon, he is either unaware of, or unwilling to acknowledge, the Cartesian elements running through Hegel, Cassirer and Ellul. This is most apparent in Ellul's suspicion of the image in contrast to the word. The modern denigration of the perceptible, visible world begins with Descartes' metaphysical justification of a *res extensa* devoid of any sensuous content or qualitative substance and plays itself out in the technological degradation of nature and concomitant creation of a technosphere inhospitable to the senses and aesthetic sensibility. It is hard, then, to accept the Ellulian subordination of the visual image in favor of the word even in light of the daily visual bombardment showered upon us by the modern media. One feels in Ellul's metaphysics the faint presence of a particularly Cartesian brand of nihilism which in the name of the *logos* would have us turn our backs on the visible world so as not to affirm the desiccated sphere of *la technique*. But just as we can distinguish between authentic, loving speech and idle, malicious gossip - both forms of orality and direct communication — surely we can discriminate between the superficial images that tie us to the cave and those that liberate the spirit.

More generally, Lovekin's treatment of Ellul's philosophical side, while a valuable service in itself, suffers from the enthusiasm of a devotee. Lovekin is simply too eager to accept Ellul's self-characterizations and descriptions of his philosophical project. When, for example, Ellul states that "I have sometimes been captivated by a line of poetry or by an expression from a novel. There is a mysterious instant Suddenly a phrase becomes a personal utterance. It penetrates your life," Lovekin comments without irony that "Reading and knowing carried very profound existential weight for Ellul" (p. 126). More serious is Lovekin's assumption that Ellul has seen beyond the technological phenomenon, even though Lovekin keeps Ellul's Christianity at arm's length and respectfully refuses to grant it philosophical status. While there are other Ellulians who do not share in Ellul's religiosity, Lovekin's secularism is particularly disturbing since he provides no philosophical counterpart to Christianity that can underpin an authentic transcendence of the technological society or provide a significant Wholly Other that can serve as the *telos* of that transcendence.

The book is maddening on several other, less serious counts. As an "introduction" to Ellul's philosophy it fails to lead the reader into Ellul's tangled web of terminology and ideas. Key terms are broadly defined - when they are defined — so much so that Lovekin almost seems to revel in inconsistency and ambiguity. What, for example, is one to make of a sentence like this: "*La technique* is a mentality within the society, it is the attitude of society toward technique" (p. 68)? Furthermore, the style is dense, and the chapters are poorly organized. The book gets off to a rocky start with Lovekin taking on Ellul's critics before introducing us to the core of Ellul's philosophy. (There is a brief introduction to Ellul's overall position, but it hardly suffices to prepare the reader for the critical forays of the opening chapter.) What is worse, Lovekin sidesteps the objections of these critics - most notably those of Samuel Florman and Melvin Kranzberg - by rejecting them as academic examples of technique itself. While this may be true, it is incumbent upon Lovekin to show the reader why this is a bad thing. Lovekin is shrewd enough to recognize the alleged neutrality of technology as the underlying assumption of these criticisms, but he misses the opportunity to discredit this rather common but misleading notion about our machines and technologies.

Instead, an embattled, defensive tone takes the place of argument and persists throughout the rest of the book, lending the unfortunate impression that it is Lovekin and Jacques Ellul against the rest of the world. This absence of critical distance from its subject underlies the book's lack of balance and measure. Lovekin's only attempt at a critical assessment of Ellul occurs in two brief paragraphs toward the end of the book (pp. 214-15) and is at best perfunctory. This does not inspire confidence in Lovekin's reading of Ellul or in his situating of the Ellulian corpus in the field of philosophy of technology. In an early chapter on "Ellul and the Problem of a Philosophy of Technology," Lovekin omits any reference to Marx, Heidegger or Lewis Mumford, key figures in anybody's history of the philosophy of technology. His reluctance to set Ellul off against different or opposing philosophical views ultimately mars this attempt to uncover a full-throated Ellulian philosophy of technology. Like technique itself, Ellul

is in need of an Other against which he can be measured and evaluated. Unhappily, Lovekin fails to provide us with this contrast.



**Issue #11 Jul 1993 — Technique  
and Utopia Revisited**

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## From the Editor

I must apologize for the lateness of this issue of the *EHul Forum* which should have been published in July. On June 7th, I had an operation and spent the month of June recuperating. That lost month put me hopelessly behind in all my commitments and I am only now beginning to catch up. As a consequence, I have postponed the subject matter I was planning for this issue—ethics in a techno-bureaucratic society — until the January issue, and I called upon my good friend and mentor, Gabriel Vahanian (University de Strasbourg), to share with us a dialogue that has been going on between him and Maurice Weyembergh, a philosopher from the Vrije Universiteit Brussel who has recently published a book on politics and technique. With this issue(#11), the *Forum* begins its sixth year. It was back in issue #5 (June 1990) that the *Forum* first focused on Gabriel Vahanian’s utopian theology. With this issue, we return to that theme to reflect on of technology and utopia in Ellul and Vahanian. Since the theme of apocalypse and utopia in Ellul and Vahanian has dominated my own work, especially my new book *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia.?*, I could not resist intruding into the dialogue between Vahanian and Weyembergh to voice a third opinion. I hope they will forgive me for doing so. In any case, I am very grateful to Gabby Vahanian for his editorial work on this issue and I and I will let him tell you about it.

But before I do, I wish to call your attention to what seems to me to be a new stage emerging in Ellul studies. You will note several significant announcements on the Bulletin Board (pp. 2-3). A new Ellul Institute has been formed in the U.S. and a new Ellul Association has been formed in France. At the same time Wheaton College

has established a microfilmed collection of Ellul's work and a conference is being held in Bordeaux on Ellul's work on technique and society. Qearly the study of Ellul's work is undergoing a new level of consolidation which seems to be occurring simultaneously on both sides of the Atlantic.

## About This Issue

It all began when our paths crossed and, remembering the *Ellul Forum*, I naturally asked Maurice Weyembergh for an article. He knew Ellul, and had devoted over a third of a book just published to a study of Ellul and Hans Jonas: *Entropolitique et technique: aspects de l'utopisme contemporain* (Vrin, Paris 1991, FF150.00).

A philosopher, interested in political theory and social policy, Weyembergh teaches both at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel and at the Universite Libre de Bruxelles. With Gilbert Hottois, he also is in charge of the renowned and most prolific Center for Interdisciplinary Research in Bioethics.

Not only does Weyembergh know Ellul, but he has practiced him from an angle entirely different from yours or mine - that of a philosopher, who probably is not ignorant of Ellul's almost visceral reticence about philosophy, and whose assessment of Ellul's contribution is therefore all the more significant. With Weyembergh, the authors whose company Ellul "keeps" suddenly appear bearing different names: those of Sartre, Rene Girard, Hannah Arendt, Schelsky, Bloch, Heidegger, Marx, Hegel, and so on. Barth is never mentioned. Nor is the reason simply because Weyembergh is not theologian. The reason, I surmise, is that, by eliding the shadow Barth's thought casts over Ellul's, while retaining Ellul's religious problematic, he allows Ellul to appear, not only undiminished, but also wholesome. Thus society and technology, rather than merely corrupting one another, belong to an ellipse, utopia, of which they are the two foci. Not that, to repeat, the religious configuration of Ellul's thought is blotted out. It simply has ceased demarcating a special domain side by side with that of nature and that of history or, for that matter, fused with one or the other. Weyembergh sees Ellul as trying to avoid two antagonistic pitfalls: naturalism and artificialism - although, on the one hand, ecology, retrieved from naturalism, is not rejected and, on the other, *making* is adjudicated as not being less noble an act than *being*. Still, artificialism, felt as ominous and thoroughly resented all the way, is systematically run down, while naturalism, Christian or otherwise, fails to make sense today. The latter's anti-technological utopianism. At this point, Weyembergh's distinction between utopianism and utopia comes in handy, but doesn't entirely win my support. Like Ellul's, his man or woman is not so much a symbol-making animal, yearning for utopia or the New Jerusalem, as he or she is an inveterate sacralizer, bent on building one Babel after another.

Be that as it may, Weyembergh responded to my request with the lead article that follows. For reasons of health, Jacques Ellul was not able to comment on it. And I

chose to adopt a different tack by proposing, so to speak, to go "back to Ellul" by way of a reply to Weyembergh. Only, in order to give it a personal touch, I should like to clarify a few points.

With respect to the question whether technology is neutral-or not, I differ from Ellul for the same reason that, as the Christian tradition has asserted, humanity is sinful only *before* God, and not *per se*.

Charging me with verbal *magisme*, Weyembergh nonetheless contends that "technology does not tell what the essence of a thing is, but transforms its essence." Where does one find essences, if not in language and its magic (if one must call it so)? And, worse still, is not such a sentence the very same kind of description which technology supposedly shies off?

Nor am I intimidated by Weyembergh's assimilation of *logos* and being and, moreover, just because technology dismisses ontology, I resist the temptation to which he yields by identifying technology with the demise of language. Or could it possibly be that I must simply admit to being less beholden than he is to traditional categories still caught up in the web of substantialist ideology.

Finally, I am literally dumbfounded by the charge that I am replacing one dualism by another — and the one Weyembergh suggests is definitely the least likely of all! Truly, I should not have to defend myself. With Martin Buber, whom I quote from memory, all I am saying is that the bible speaks of no division between sacred and profane; it only speaks of the Holy and that which is not yet holy. The table speaks of hallowing and, accordingly, asserts that in the beginning was the word, a word that acts - and changes the world, by changing swords into ploughshares, water into wine, cliches into metaphors.

## Bulletin Board

### The Ellul Institute Founded in Riverside California

The Ellul Institute has recently been established in Riverside California under the leadership of Dr. Donald J. Evans, Executive Director. Dr. Evans indicates that "higher education and particularly some Christian institutions do little to enter into fruitful dialogue on the wide variety of social and political issues facing American society and the world." The Institute seeks to change that. He believes that Ellul's work has "the potential to shape Christian thinking and better equip them to preach and teach their message of hope to a needy world." The goals of the institute are to:

- Advance the spirit of Ellul's work
- Conduct educational activities
- Maintain a media center

- Foster a scholarly network
- Provide a theological-ethical perspective
- Promote Christian Scholarship
- Disseminate results to interested publics

The institute will organize conferences, workshops and seminars as well as publish occasional papers, a quarterly newsletter, conference proceedings, etc. The Institute especially seeks to establish a communications network between interested scholars via both printed and electronic media. For further information contact: Dr. Donald J. Evans, Executive Director, The Ellul Institute, 8432 Magnolia Avenue, Suite 113, Riverside, CA 92504-3297. Phone (909) 689-5771, ext. 211, FAX (909) 351-18081.

## **New Editorial Board Appointments and International Subscriptions**

Clifford Christians has accepted my invitation to become the Associate Editor of the *Ellul Forum*. He has been a valued contributing member of the Editorial Board since the beginning and I look forward to working more closely with him on future issues of the *Forum*.

Peter W.F. Davies of Buckinghamshire College in England has joined the editorial board of the *Ellul Forum*. Dr. Davies teaches in Business School. He will also act as circulation manager for the *Forum* in England. In the near future the *Forum* hopes to establish circulation managers in Holland and/or France. This means that international subscribers should find it easier to subscribe since they will not have to have their subscription checks made out in American dollars. I hope to have more news on these arrangements for the next issue. In the meantime persons in England and on the Continent can subscribe in English pounds. Send inquiries to: Peter W.F. Davies,

The Hollies, Back Lane,  
Chalfont-St.-Giles, Buckinghamshire,  
HP8 4PB, England.

## **Wheaton College Establishes the Jacques Ellul Collection**

The Special Collections division of the Buswell Library at Wheaton College has established a special collection of materials devoted to the writings of Jacques Ellul. The collection is the gift of Dr. Joyce Main Hanks. Wheaton's collection is based upon a three-reel microfilm set (Series I) compiled for "Jacques Ellul: A Comprehensive Bibliography," in *Research in Philosophy and Technology*, supplement 1, 1984, which Hanks prepared with the assistance of Rolf Asai, and followed in 1991 with "Jacques Ellul: A Comprehensive Bibliography Update," *Research in Philosophy and Technology*,

vol. 11. Photocopies have been made from the microfilm and include nearly all of Ellul's articles, essays, etc., as well as reviews of his work. The collection comprises approximately 12 linear feet.

Series II - prints from the microfilm, numbering over 6,000 - comprise the bulk of the collection (73 linear feet). These prints are primary sources of Ellul's writings, dissertations, and books (1936-83). Secondary sources include articles and book reviews (1939-1984). Ellul's writings are arranged chronologically (per the Bibliography which serves as a finding aid).

Series VII contains media material, including interviews with Ellul conducted by Joyce Hanks (16 cassettes) and others (3 cassettes), 4 cassettes of lectures, addresses, and a transcription of the October 1979 CBC program, "Ideas," with Russ Germain, Bill Vandenburg and Morris Wolfe.

Secondary material finishes the collection with works on Ellul, critical reviews, correspondence concerning Ellul, and serials on Ellul studies.

The collection was primarily processed by Jeffrey Darensburg during the academic years 1991-92 and 1992-93. It is the policy of the Special Collections, in compliance with copyright law, to not photocopy manuscript and unpublished material without the author's approval.

For further information contact the Wheaton College Special Collections:

Buswell Library Special Collections

Wheaton College

Wheaton, IL 60187-5593

(708) 752-5705, (708) 752-5855 FAX

wcarchiv@wheaton.edu

## **The "Association Jacques Ellul" Formed in Bordeaux**

Colleagues and students of the work of Jacques Ellul in France have announced the formation of the "Association Jacques Ellul." The main objectives of the Association are to:

Preserve the collected works and carry on the initiatives begun by Ellul. This includes:

1. Preserving both his published and unpublished writings; conference notes of his lectures taken by his students and others, and also audio and video recordings. Also writings on Jacques Ellul or inspired by his thought and other diverse archival materials.

2. Organizing scholarly activities on his thought or around the dominant themes of his work.

3. The establishment of relations with other organizations or associations in France and other countries who have an interest in Ellul's scientific and/or theological work.

If you are interested in joining send your name and address (and institutional affiliation if any) with a check for 50 Francs to: 1'Assodation Jacques ELLUL, 42 avenue

Henri Fruges -33600 PESSAC France. Checks should be made out to TAssociation Jacques *FT TUT*.”

### **Conference Planned in Bordeaux on ”Technique and Society in the Work of Jacques Ellul”**

On November 12th and 13th 1993 a conference on ”Technique and Society in the Work of Jacques Ellul” will beheld at the Institut d’Etudes Politiques in Bordeaux France. This conference is bringing together scholars from around the world to address the following questions:

1. Is Ellul’s analysis of the social transformations engendered by the development of technique confirmable?

2. Are the concepts elaborated by Ellul for analyzing ”technique” adequate? Especially how can the conceptual problems posed by the notions of ”technical autonomy” (autonomie de la technique) and ”technical system” (systeme technicien) be clarified.

Anyone interested in attending should call Chantal DEMONGIN or Isabelle TANNIOU at 011-56-17-11-02 in Bordeaux.

# Forum: Technique and Utopianism Revisited

## Ellul and Vahanian on Technology and Utopianism

by Maurice Weyembergh<sup>1</sup>

Before comparing Ellul's and Vahanian's conceptions of utopia and technology, I would like to put my article in perspective and indicate its limits. My analysis will be based on Vahanian's last book, *L'utopie chretienne*<sup>2</sup> and I will compare his thesis with Ellul's. Both authors are in search of a Christian theology and an ethics for the modern world. Convinced of the specificity of our world, they try to define it and to reconstruct its genealogy. Science and technology have become the determining factors of our life and the problem is how to cope with their exigencies without giving up our humanity. If Ellul has written many books about theology, he is also the author of numerous historical, sociological and juridical works: the non-theological aspects of technology and politics, for instance, belong to his field of research. Vahanian is essentially a theologian: technology, then, is not analyzed in itself; what interests him is the possible religious origin or background of the technological development in our modern world and its consequences for the religious life and thinking. Another major aspect of the specificity of our world, which is related, as we shall see, to technology, is its utopianism. Both thinkers have analyzed this phenomenon, but they differ radically in their judgment, essentially positive for Vahanian, definitely negative for Ellul. If the comparison between both thinkers needs any further justification, it should be noted that the direct or indirect references to Ellul's work are numerous in Vahanian's book (pp.10,33,48,41,53,62,129,191, 218,221,223,305,312). *L'utopie chretienne* is somehow a personal meditation on and an answer to many Ellulian themes.

As for myself, and speaking of limits, I am not a theologian, but a philosopher; my interest in the topic is not religious, but historical and critical: to see how two Protestant theologians analyze and judge the modern world. It is obvious that a short article cannot explore and take into account the richness and variety of their thought. Concerning Ellul, I refer the interested reader to my other studies.<sup>3</sup> In the following

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<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank my wife who has looked over the English.

<sup>2</sup> Desclee de Brouwer, Paris 1992.

<sup>3</sup> "Espoir et esprance chez J. Ellul" in *L'experience du temps. Melanges offerts a J. Paumen*, Ousia, Bruxelles, 1989, pp. 199-226; *Entrepolitique et technique. Aspects de l'utopisme contemporain*, es-



pages I will limit myself to a sketch of three main themes of Ellul and Vahanian - the specificity of the West, utopianism and technology, and the problem of the language.

## 1) The Specificity of the West

Ellul has presented his vision of the western world in \*La trahison de l'Occident (The Betrayal of the West).<sup>4</sup> The title is very clear: the West has betrayed the West, it has become unfaithful to its origins; the result of a *self-betrayal* can of course only be negative. It is based on the inversion of three fundamental human faculties:

1) The West has understood the best, among all cultures, what liberty means, especially on the level of *history* man can and should make history; but the West has not been careful enough to avoid the paroxysmic component of liberty: liberty always tends towards more liberty and ends by destroying itself. If man can make history, he is not, however, its absolute master: God has his way in the process;

2) The West has brought out the potentialities of *reason*, the task of which is not to eliminate feelings and passions, but to control them. Reason however can go too far and forget its balance-bringing function. It becomes *dien rationality* and *rationalism*. Rationality reduces everything to its quantitative aspects and neglects or eliminates its non-quantifiable components. Measure (balance) becomes measuring. Rationalism forgets the critical function of reason, especially towards reason itself, and changes into the myth of reason, into scientism;

3) The dynamics of the West is due to the development of two antithetical forms of love, *eras* and *agape*, the possessive love, the will to power, and the brotherly love, charity. Possessive love is just another name for *espoir* (hope related to human needs and achievements), brotherly love for *esperance* (hope related to the expectations of faith). Ellul interprets one of St. Paul's dreams, which invites him to go to Greece, as a divine intervention: it indicates that the Greek *eras* has to be completed and balanced by the Christian *agape*. The opposition between them has caused, in Ellul's understanding, the extraordinary dynamics of the West. But *eras* has subdued and destroyed, little by little, *agape*.

If you bring together paroxysmic liberty, rationality, rationalism and will to power, you get a rather explosive cocktail: this dangerous mixture explains Ellul's Concern about the future of the West. One of the results of this development is the rise of the technological system and the madness of utopianism, which constitutes the peak of *l'espoir*. Ellul, needless to say, is a prophet of doom.

Vahanian's vision is quite different. He sees this specificity as the consequence of the history of Europe: it is linked to a change in the religious paradigm, the passage from the paradigm of the sacred to that of the utopian. Although there exists no

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precisely chapter IV, "La critique de la technique et de l'utopie chez J. Ellul et H. Jonas", Vrin, Paris, 1991, pp.151-218.

<sup>4</sup> Calmann-Lévy, Paris, 1975.

pure paradigm — there are elements of the utopian conception in myth and mythical vestiges in utopianism — Vahanian contends that that change, which is still going on, is the real background, the determining factor of western history. Technology, then, is a product of the utopianism of the new religious paradigm; it is, however, an effect which reinforces its cause. For Vahanian, this move is essentially *positive*, even if he recognizes that classic utopia (literary utopia) and technological utopianism, left uncontrolled, can lead to the destruction of the planet.

Let us look more closely at the two paradigms and underline from the start that *L'utopie chretienne* is based on a systematic opposition between them and on sets of antithetic concepts. The passage from one paradigm to the other brings about the death of God, which does not at all mean the accession of humanity to adulthood and the obsolescence of the Father figure, but the passage from a soteriological myth to an utopian religiosity. In the first you expect to leave *this* world for another (*changer de monde*), in the latter you try to change the world (*changer le monde*), a world of scarcity, and to eliminate the shortages. In the myth everything is based on the determinism of nature (being) and its evolution or on the determinism of history and its fatality; their laws cannot be transgressed and you have to follow the path which goes from the *beginning* to the *end*. With utopian religiosity the determinisms of nature and history are broken: the fundamental categories are creation and the *new* (*novum*) on the one hand and the *ultimate* (*eschaton*) on the other. Creation implies that you start anew, that the new building is without any precedent. In its perspective nature is not only the given (*la donnee*), which you cannot change, but a gift (*le don, la donnee*), which can and has to be improved (p.257). The ultimate refers to the land of Promise: the land of Canaan or the church as the body of Christ are its approximations, but they may not be confused with the Reign of God itself. The difference implies that the future remains open.

In the paradigm of the sacred there is no room for discussion and the use of language is irrelevant, since any "no" is excluded (saying "yes" implies the possibility of saying "no"). To God, however, you can say "no": God reveals himself (*Dieu s'expose*), he does not *impose* anything. The possibility opened by the dialogue with God explains that He can be challenged: the *holy* is not the *sacred*. At the same time it makes us responsible for our choices and our decisions: the ethical dimension becomes essential.

A great deal of Vahanian's book is dedicated to the description of this change of paradigm; secularization, desacralization, demythologization, disenchantment and deconstruction are dealt with and analyzed. The religions of the East belong to the paradigm of the sacred, those of the West to the utopian paradigm. Vahanian tries to show that Judaism and Greek thought are at the origins of this process of secularization (it brings *this* world to the fore) and of the desacralization of religion through religion itself. In Christ these two elements, the Jewish and the Greek, come together and reinforce one another. Vahanian too refers to St. Paul's trip to Greece, but to underline that there is, despite the differences, something in common between the *Logos* and the

*Word*: the openness to the new, to utopianism (the utopia of the *cosmos* and that of the *land of promise* for instance).

This brief sketch of Ellul's and Vahannian's conceptions allows us to see the fundamental difference in approach: the development of the technological system and of utopianism is the result of a betrayal of the most remarkable western achievements for Ellul. For Vahannian, technology and utopianism are the "children" of Greece, Judaism and Christianity, and it would be foolish to reject them; it would be an enormous historical mistake not to see that the line which relates them to their "parents" is direct, in spite of the possible distortions. To put it bluntly, technology is a basic potentiality of the Christian heritage, not its betrayal.

## 2) Technology and Utopianism

Ellul has analyzed technology in three of his books, *La technique ou l'enjeu du siècle* (*The Technological Society*), *Le système technique* and *Le bluff technologique*.<sup>5</sup> The six or eight characteristics of technology, six in 1954, eight in 1977, are well-known. As a system, made possible by the invention of the computer and the theory of information, it tries to submit everything to its totalizing tendency. This tendency, however, is doomed to fail, because the substrates of technology, nature, society and man, cannot be totally reduced without being destroyed: dysfunctions develop and will finally ruin the system. But in the meantime, nature, society, man and his world of symbols will have been savaged. Ellul's description follows a recurrent pattern in his works: man is merely a sorcerer's apprentice, when he abandons his religious faith and only relies on human hope to change this world. The tools he invents, be it money, the city, the State or technology in general, become independent of their inventor's control and impose their own logic, which is not at all a human one. They become systems which work for their own sake, neither for man's sake nor for God's glory. In his theological works he describes them as *exousiae*, demonic powers which oppose God's intentions and take possession of man's soul.<sup>6</sup>

Utopianism makes the totalizing tendency inherent in the system (the city, the State, technology) *explicit* and *conscious*: it gives the system its inspiration (ideology) and/or its "finishing touch". The technological system and the technological utopianism are parallel phenomena which make one another complete, perfect. Ellul then radically rejects every form of utopia - he is more "utopiaphobic" than "technophobic" —, and for an obvious reason: utopia, the peak of the purely human hope, is the malevolent, perverse rival of *l'espérance*, the hope based on faith. Only the latter knows that a purely human enterprise, devoid of any divine inspiration, cannot succeed. The curse of the prophet Ellul on utopianism is total. *Espoir* and *espérance* are as different as will to power and brotherly love or as revolution and revelation.

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<sup>5</sup> Armand Colin, Paris 1954; Calmann-Lévy, Paris, 1977; Hachette, Paris 1988.

<sup>6</sup> *Les nouveaux possédés* Fayard, Paris, 1973.

The specificity of the religious hope cannot be reduced without destroying the core of faith. Otherwise Ellul and Ernst Bloch, the author of *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, would preach the same gospel; in fact they are rival brothers, bitter enemies (in Bloch's eyes the classless society implies that religion, the people's opium, would be given up). Messaianism and utopianism (marxism) do not coincide. The Reign of God will come, but *He* and *He alone* chooses the moment; in the meantime, the Christian, who is *in* this world but *not from* this world (*il est dans le monde mais pas de ce monde*),<sup>7</sup> has to live according to his faith. He is like the Knight of Durer; with his eyes fixed on his aim, the New Jerusalem, he is riding between Death and Devil. He knows that his enterprise here on earth might fail, but his *esperance* will allow him to start anew.

Vahanian's comments on technology as such are scarce and, as I said earlier, he does not give us any thorough description or critique of the *phenomena technique*, although he uses this well-known Ellulian expression (from *The Technological Society*). He considers that technology, from the simplest tool to the most sophisticated computer, is *one*: it changes man. There are of course differences in the way in which and the degree to which they affect him; technology as *method* is more than just a tool (which only prolongs the human body): it not only alters man more radically but also transforms the world, it humanizes them both. The thesis of the "oneness" of technology has to be discussed and not only asserted; it could be, and that is just Ellul's conception, that the nature of technology changes in the course of its development. What is positive in the beginning can become negative or threatening by its quantitative growth. A change in quantity can cause a change in quality. For Vahanian -and this is anti-Ellulian too-, technology is *neutral* in itself (pp.53,216), neither good nor bad; its consequences depend on the manner in which man uses it. In Ellul's opinion, with the appearance of the *phenomene technique* and the *systeme technician*, technology has its autonomy, its own development: he contends that any discourse about the neutrality of technology is a platitude or a dangerous mistake.

But, as I noted earlier, Vahanian's aim is not to give a description of modern technology, but to try to interpret "the theological significance" (p.53) of its rise and evolution in the West and its consequences for religion. We have seen that the passage from the paradigm of the sacred to that of the utopian is Vahanian's explanation of the origins of technology. The problem is to know if secularization, which has been the condition of possibility of technology, will not lead, reinforced as it is by the development of science and technology (they do not need Christianity any more), to sheer secularism, to the end of Christianity, to the death of God (and not only of the soteriological God).

Vahanian refuses this interpretation. In his opinion — and this is in my eyes the most original and at the same time the most risky part of his book — technology could help to rediscover and to deepen the utopianism of Christianity, it could help to purify the utopian paradigm from its sacred "reminiscences". Vahanian contends that at bottom the problem of technology is theological.

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<sup>7</sup> *La fix au prix du doute*, Hachette, Paris, 1980, p.322.

But this means that theology should accept to modify itself radically, that it should create *une nouvelle matrice noétique* ("a new noetic matrix", p.294), that the church should "convert itself again" (p.227) in order to bring about a "spiritual revolution" (p.87), without which it would be "a world too late"(p.85).

Why, then, can technology be the motor of a new civilization (and let us not forget that Christianity is not bound to a special civilization)? For different reasons: it is global and planetary; it brings classes, cultures, and religions together; it puts "the world into man's hands" (p.193); it throws a new light on man and shows that he is still to be made (p.315): man produces products which produce him (p.315); it challenges God (p.312). Since it creates a new man and a new world and since it helps to solve the problem of scarcity which obliged man to leave this world for another instead of changing it, technology can henceforth realize all possibilities. But, since not all of them are useful or desirable, man has to choose between them. Technology, then, brings us back to the *necessity* of a new ethics: looking backward cannot offer any solutions, because the possibilities are new. Our decisions concern the future, the utopia, in which we shall have to live. All in all, this *theological understanding* of technology brings the Christian back to the sources of the Judeo-Christian tradition: the utopianism which inspires the technological civilization, in fact the *modern experience of transcendence* (p.414), has to be reinterpreted, along the lines of Christian utopianism (which includes creation, hope (*esperance*), redemption and the Reign of God).

Vahanian is thus quite positive towards utopia and utopianism. Of course, he is not blind to their dangers; the classic utopias, for instance, which reduce religion to politics or politics to religion are criticized. More important yet: many utopias propose that the author calls *l'État final solution*, a perfect state or society which, once realized, may not be changed any more; it would mean altering and destroying the perfection. Utopianism for Vahanian has to remain open: a final solution implies the sacralization of a situation, it falls back into the paradigm of the sacred. The land of Canaan bears some resemblance to the Promised Land, but they do not coincide: any sort of state of a fully developed technological civilization is not to be confused with the New Jerusalem, the Reign of God.

The difference then is irreducible: to Vahanian technological utopianism has its roots in Christian utopianism and it has to be reinvested by religious hope. To Ellul utopianism and technology have their roots in *eras*, the will to power, and *espoir* and *esperance* differ in nature, not in degree. The opposition will become quite clear in Ellul's and Vahanian's conception of language. Vahanian's interpretation of God and of the Christian faith is much more metaphorical, while Ellul's conception remains much more literal.

### **3) The Problem of Language**

In Ellul's view God has initiated the dialogue with man. But man is free and he has the possibility to refuse the divine call: many prophets-Jonas for instance to whom Ellul

is particularly attached-do not respond immediately to God's appeal. History then is unforeseeable, even for God. Other options are possible: man can create his own tools in such a way, as we noted, that they take possession of his mind. He sacralizes them and becomes their servant: God's Word is finally covered by their noise, ignored or forgotten. The result can be the silence of God, His turning away from man. Our modern world is dominated by these two events, and nihilism is the unavoidable consequence.

In *Le système technique* Ellul has contended that with the development of the system and its totalizing tendency, the symbolical mediations, which in the West are related for a good part to the Christian religion, are destroyed by or subordinated to the technological mediations. The cost of technological progress is the destruction of the symbolical orientation systems and man's symbolical misery. The Word, as Ellul puts it in the title of one of his books,<sup>8</sup> has been humiliated, partly by the production, reproduction and spreading of the images and idols. The need of symbolical orientation can lead modern man, and particularly the artist who is bound to symbols, to two extreme and useless endeavors: on the one hand tire flight into a symbolical but Active and irrational world, cut from the reality of the technological system, as if a life outside or above the system were possible; on the other the attempt to supersede it by an artificial production of symbols, which must fail: the technological system is quite alien to the symbolical mediation, it only works according to its own demands. *Laoanism* (the school of the French analyst) develops for instance, in Ellul's view, a kind of verbal *magicianry* (*un magisme verbal*) which deludes itself with the thought that words can master the world of things.<sup>9</sup> The unity of technology (wherever it appears, it has the same characteristics, produces the same consequences and the same rhythm and mode of life) and its *universality* (all activities can be submitted to and organized along technological rules which require the same mode of thinking) destroy the particularities of the different cultural worlds. Up-rootedness and uniformity are the consequences.

Ellul is very critical of the recent trends in linguistics, especially of structural linguistics, which, in his opinion, reduces symbols to signs and language to technological communication. This reduction is parallel to the invasion by the theory of information and by the binary language of the computer. Since that language is based on the principle of non-contradiction, Ellul goes so far as to contend that the computer would be incapable of apprehending a dialectical comprehension of the world.<sup>10</sup> This assertion needs to be clarified and specified: the "language" of the computer itself has to be distinguished from the language of its users. If Hegel and Marx had had a computer with word processing programs at their disposal, they could have used it without any difficulty for their dialectical thinking. The binary language of the computer does not prevent from writing symbolical, poetical or dialectical texts; it is just the manner in which it stores the words. Most computer users completely ignore the "language" of

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<sup>8</sup> *La parole humiliée*, Seuil, Paris, 1981.

<sup>9</sup> *Le système technique*, p.128.

<sup>10</sup> *Le système technique*, p.117.

the "machine". The engineers who design the computer are compelled to respect the demands of the binary system in order to have the machine work but they are not obliged to think along its lines, even when they wonder how to improve it.

Vahanian's views on the subject are quite different. Let us begin with a critical note. His chapters on language are perhaps the most difficult to read: they are allusive and associative rather than analytical or argumentative. Moreover his attitude as a writer towards language differs radically from Ellul's, which can be inspired, especially in the theological works as, for instance, *Sans feu ni lieu*,<sup>11</sup> but remains essentially classical or traditionalist. Vahanian likes to play with words, being in turn funny, ironical, disrespectful, deirive, poetical or oracular. He admires Lacan, whom he quotes rather often, and is interested by the recent evolution of linguistics. Thus, he accepts the reduction of symbols or signs and finds it positive; in a bold movement, he even proposes to interpret the line which separates the signifier from the signified as a *screen* rather than as a *mask*. He cannot resist a pun (some are excellent as that about *ancrer/encrer, to anchor/to ink, p.250*), he likes to play with ready-made expressions but to distort them and have them say just the opposite of what one might expect. In his chapters about language, the reader gets the impression that Vahanian's language becomes somehow independent of the subject, language in general, and plays its own games, for its own sake. This may, of course, be intended as an illustration of the creative, utopian power of language, but it does not help the reader.

Now God is not an idol, he is holy and not sacred. For Vahanian, His creation through the Word is, as we noted, creation of something new, something without precedent coming out of a *non-lieu*, a juridical term meaning that there is no basis for prosecution; however, Vahanian uses the expression in its etymological meaning of being "without a place", in Greek "ou-topos", utopia.

Speech then is utopian. The danger is that what was new and came from *nowhere* at the moment of its creation can be fixed, sacralized, and become *É final solution*. The *non-lieu* from which it emerged can be reduced to a *lieu-dit*, a well-known spot. That is what happened to the language of faith; it was sterilized and frozen through mere repetition. Vahanian proposes to rejuvenate the "language of faith" by "faith as language". He hopes that, through faith, speech and interpretation of texts will find their creative, risky character again. If I understand him rightly, saying *I believe* should be such a creative, utopian speech act, coming from a nowhere (from non-belief), not turned to the past and to the rejection of tire technological civilization, but to the future. Theology then has to defrost its language.

In the speech relation between God and man or between men, faith as language liberates the partners from the determinism of nature and histoiy. Language has a fundamental role to play in the humanization of man and nature: its utopian character means that man can never feel himself as complete, as being *tout l'homme-*, and think of society as making possible that *touthomme* (every man) becomes *tout l'homme* man

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<sup>11</sup> Gallimard, Paris, 1975.

is his totality. If this were ever to be realized, the Reign of God, the pleroma, would have been achieved.

What is the relationship, then, between technology and language? Vahanian's answer is that technology is merely a form of language which has been made possible through the use of language itself. This is contrary to Ellul's view: God's or man's language do not have the same features as technology. Between the symbolical mediation and the technological mediation there is, as between *esperance* and *espoir*, a difference of nature, not of degree. You can reduce the symbolical to the technological (*esperance* to *espoir*, faith to belief) and lose all its substance, but you cannot jump or go back from the technological to the symbolical (from *espoir* to *esperance*, from belief to faith) without rejecting the technological exigencies.<sup>12</sup> I see the proof of this radical opposition to Vahanian's thesis in the fact that Ellul has written a quite positive foreword to a (remarkable) book by G. Hottois, *Le signe et la technique*.<sup>13</sup> Hottois' main thesis is that *technique*<sup>14</sup> is not all of the nature of the *logos*, (discourse), and especially theo-logy and philosophy (onto-logy), are rather at a loss when confronted with technology: technology does not *describe* man, nature or the world, it does not tell what man ought to do, it *acts into* them (and not only *upon* them); it does not tell what the *essence* of a thing is, it *transforms* its essence. In fact, technology makes ontology impossible: it creates new beings and changes the old ones. To think that language has the same properties as technology is somehow to remain in or fall back into magic. From Ellul's and Hottois' point of view, Vahanian's conception is essentially metaphorical, it is comparable to Lacanism and partakes of its *magisme verbal*

If I understand him rightly, from Vahanian's point of view, Ellul remains the prisoner of the dualism inherent in the sacred (the symbol is different from the sign, as *esperance* is different from *espoir*, and faith from belief). But Ellul could answer that Vahanian replaces one dualism, that of the sacred and the profane, by another, but between the paradigm of the sacred and the utopian paradigm. He could argue that Vahanian's book is based on a very long list of pairs of antithetic concepts.

To end this sketch I would like to address a critique to both Ellul and Vahanian. From my point of view, it is necessary to distinguish between eschatology, utopia and utopianism. Eschatology is the knowledge of the ultimate things and is essentially religious: the *eschaton* is revealed by God, by an apocalypse. Utopia is a literary genre, in which the author tries by speculation to imagine a better or a perfect type of man and society. He knows, that that society does not exist anywhere and that it is quite probably not realizable. The partisan of utopianism, on the contrary, is convinced that the perfect society is realizable and will be realized by his own efforts: the passage from utopia to utopianism is a consequence of the myth of the French Revolution. Through

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<sup>12</sup> *La foiauprix du doute*, pp.158-162.

<sup>13</sup> Aubier, Paris, 1984.

<sup>14</sup> It is quite typical that, in his writings in French, Ellul, refuses to use the word *technologic* for *technique*. In techno-logy you have the word *logos*. *Le bluff technologique* means the bluff of the discourse about technology, not the bluff of technology.



revolution man will indeed achieve utopia, perfection. In my view utopia is a very useful exercise, because it is critical of the evils of every existing situation; utopianism, on the contrary, is rather dangerous: its partisans are *true believers*, militants (for instance the communists) who easily jump to the conclusion that the perfection of things to come justifies whichever measure they take. Ellul insists on the distinction between eschatology on the one hand and utopia and utopianism on the other. But he does not make any difference between utopia and utopianism, which explains why he rejects them both without nuances. It fits his strategy of discrediting profane hope in order to elevate religious hope. Vahanian does not ignore these distinctions, but his main thesis – technological utopianism is a product of Christian utopianism — obliges him to blur them or at least to reduce them: he does so by using the word utopia and utopianism in its etymological meaning, *ou-topos*, *non-lieu*, "nowhere", and by extending it to eschatology. The device matches his purpose: metaphorical language has its merits, but I wonder whether it serves the interest of clarity.

## Back to Ellul by Way of Weyembergh

by Gabriel Vahanian

He still defies classification, but Jacques Ellul no longer is as solitary a figure as his legend has persistently claimed him to be. Though the number of articles and books - not to speak of dissertations - written about him abroad by far outweighs those published in France, his name constantly, regularly, appears in an increasingly wider range of works. Cited even by people who have not really read him, Ellul is rather close to having become sort of a public monument passers-by see without looking at it. Known yet ignored, his influence can be felt in anything that deals with technology generally and, in particular, with the fact that this thing one talks about is no longer extraneously identified with the machine or the megamachine, but is interiorized and assimilated and identified as a social phenomenon, the technological phenomenon by contrast with the mere technical operation.

Thus, even in France, Ellul is not unknown. Irritatingly rubbing against the grain, he upsets the apple cart. But, in so disrupted a world as ours, where people seek only to escape from it all instead of being confronted with it, let alone with themselves, Ellul is no guru. He does not even claim to proffer some sophisticated version of religion, contenting himself with playing the role of a physician who, because he has some idea of what health and its preservation is all about, is in no need whatever to lecture at his patient, but seeks to heal her.

Of course, Ellul's socio-political analysis of our technological civilization goes hand in hand with his religious investigation and his theological assessment of the human predicament. And, of course, likewise which hand leads the other is a moot question. But I would not go so far as Ellul does when, at times, he denies or, at least seems

to deny that his sociology and the pessimism that adumbrates it is influenced by his theology and its fundamentally inalienable optimism, or vice versa. There is, actually, no need to blur the issue. And, I surmise, what Ellul himself means, when he contends that his sociology owes nothing to his theology, or the other way around, is simply that one needs no specifically Christian equipment in order to assess the impact of technology on the apparent depersonalization of the individual or on the no less apparent dehumanization of the social network. Still, it behooves not to forget that Ellul is too much of a Calvinist for him to overlook the final implication of that Protestant notion par excellence when it comes to social policy, namely the priesthood of all believers. A notion in whose perspective, theology does not fill its role and its task is not fulfilled by subordinating or by annexing this or that other field of inquiry. There is nothing religious that has no secular dimension, and there is nothing secular that has no religious dimension. The task of the theologian is fulfilled only to the extent that is also fulfilled the task of the sociologist — only to the extent, in other words, that, so far as Ellul is concerned, if he should be taken for a good theologian, he would not like that that was the reason he was considered a good sociologist.

Whether Ellul is as good a religious thinker as he is a sociopolitical analyst, or vice versa, is not the question: there is no cleavage in his thinking. But there is, I dare say, a "fault". It comes, however, not from the fact that he is fluent with either of the two Karls — Marx and Barth —, but from the fact that, unlike Marx, Barth had nothing to say about technology. It comes from the fact that, unlike Marx again, who somehow saw religion at least as an ersatz of utopia, Barth entirely evaded the issue, and its intention, by withdrawing and isolating the Christian faith from the arena of religion altogether and sadly, I am afraid, settled for some theological Newspeak. Not that, *I consequently consider Ellul* to be an unconditional Barthian, on the contrary. The fact nevertheless is that Barth's influence, whether accepted or suffered, has hindered and choked Ellul's own creative approach to theological reflection, as is ultimately evidenced even by his notion of universal salvation, of which Barth himself said that it could only be taught by a fool while only the impious would not believe it. In other words, the fact is that Ellul's socio-political analysis of the technological phenomenon calls for another theological method than one borrowed from Barth, precluded as it is from coping with the problem otherwise than in terms of such classical categories as subject and object, body and soul, contemplation and action, already and not yet, etc.

Paradoxically, Ellul is therefore somehow justified in claiming that his spiritual convictions do not interfere with his sociological findings. That is, objectively speaking, he is right: his technological pessimism (so to speak) does not merely reflect the pessimistic side of his religious conviction. But, subjectively speaking, he fails to or is prevented from drawing a correlation between his ultimately theological optimism and his no less ultimate technological optimism: he does not square his statements about universal salvation with the recurrent optimism of statements like the following: "I have never said that [technology] could not be mastered." He would have needed another theological method.

Put differently, as Ellul himself is not aware, discourse about technology, funded as it is by newfangled categories, requires at least an adequate type of conceptuality than is allowed by traditional theological discourse, itself dependent on an entirely different experience of the human predicament and its world. Instead, insisting on demythologizing the world rather than the bible or, more precisely, the biblical view of the world, he won't realize that, in fact, the two belong together, that, demythologizing one without demythologizing also the other, we should be faced and stuck with the unacceptable as well as unwarranted option of secularism on the one hand and, on the other, fideism — a mesmerizing option, especially in a country like France.

In cultural terms, the French revolution of 1789 has resulted in consolidating so unilateral an understanding of secularization as to be exclusively synonymous with the expropriation of the church and the demise of Christianity. With the exception of Strasbourg and the regions of Alsace and Lorraine which still enjoy the shelter of a peculiar, legal status, France is probably, to this day, the only developed nation whose educational system has deliberately inhibited if not repressed religion. It follows that, culturally speaking, no theologian is more isolated than a French theologian, unless, like Teilhard de Chardin, who lived abroad and coined new concepts, or (though he has done neither) like Jacques Ellul, he strikes it rich in some other field of inquiry. For the same reason, most French theologians continue to labor under the weight of old-fashioned categories, remaining oblivious to the fact that atoms and molecules or neutrons and protons are not objects in the same sense as were objects previously. Is it conceivable that this difference should be considered significant enough to affect scientific discourse, while being practically shunned by the language of faith. Nor is it surprising that, besides the theologies of liberation, even particularly the so-called theology of the death of God has cut no ice with Ellul,<sup>15</sup> in spite of the fact that, with the exception of one of its exponents, all the others had been weaned on vintage Barth.

The various stands Ellul takes with respect to society, the state or religion are thus heavily dependent upon this cultural horizon, typical of the French mind-set. A mind-set which, under the guise of the worst bureaucratic system ever devised, nonetheless prides itself on its Cartesian heritage or, actually, what's left of the caricature thereof. No administration is as impersonal, even — the term is far from inappropriate - clerical as the French. None is as deservingly laden with the worst connotations of *la technique*, the pyramidal structure of which, whether in social affairs or in the academic field, invariably culminates in Paris. To the medieval, clerical dichotomy of priesthood and laity has succeeded a no less clerical and equally classly division of the French mind-set between parisian and provincial. I wonder, as did Harvey Cox if I am not mistaken, whether some of Ellul's sharpest strictures levelled at *la technique* do not stem from his first-hand and exclusive acquaintance with this clerical, bureaucratic mindset.

But then, I am equally puzzled and wonder why Ellul, who surely knows better and has known better all along, has supplied credence to the notion that technology

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Maurice Weyembergh, *Entre politique et technique*, Paris 1991, p. 173.

could only fan into structures that dehumanize the social network or dislocate the human person. Even Weyembergh, though partial to Ellul, points out that in the latter's view "technology best accommodates itself with a centralized economy and an anti-democratic, authoritarian system," but hastens to observe that this view has not been "corroborated by recent developments."<sup>16</sup> Indeed, Ellul himself can on the one hand write that "technology engenders totalitarianism,"<sup>17</sup> and assert, on the other hand, that, though it is autonomous, technology nevertheless can be conquered and tamed<sup>18</sup> — albeit through being sacralized! In other words, we are enslaved to technology, though not by technology so much as through the sacralization of technology. In other words, again, although *la technique* is autonomous, it is not immunized against being sacralized, against the sacred! Writes Ellul: "We must avoid a misunderstanding: people are absolutely not free from sacralizing or not sacralizing technology; they cannot help from making sense of life if based even on technology."<sup>19</sup> Much as he is tantalized by the sacred, Ellul keeps plowing. In 1982 he does not exclude the possibility for technology to appear at last as harbinger of a new hope for humanity, and he writes: "We are today witnessing a development which triggers a good deal of hope — a transformation of *la Technique*. I would say that till ca 1970 technology was an unshakable power and went only one direction. It really was the system and had only one conceivable goal, growth, in every sense, in terms of power, of production, etc., though this growth was beginning to be questioned by some. Now, mutations have occurred, such as automation (to be sure it has existed for a long time, I talked about it in my first book in 1950) or computerization, can eventually alter the orientation of technology, give society a new direction."<sup>20</sup> Moreover, having made his point, Ellul feels the need even to add a complaint. He deplores that in a book Jacques Delors (now President of the European Economic Commission) has just developed theses very close to his own yet without noticing it.<sup>21</sup>

Nor will Ellul fail subsequently to stress this point. Contrary to widespread opinion, he is no enemy of technology. In fact, his attitude in this respect is not ambivalent at all.

But it is ambiguous.

And the question, then, will be: whence the source of this ambiguity? But, first, let me cite as evidence of this contention the passage, partially quoted already, from the epilogue of *Les nouveaux possédés*, published in 1973: "Now is the time more than ever, when people become enslaved to things and to other people through a religious

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<sup>16</sup> Maurice Weyembergh, *Entre politique et technique*, p. 156.

<sup>17</sup> Jacques Ellul, *La technique ou l'enjeu du siècle*, Calmann-Lévy, Paris 1954, p. 257.

<sup>18</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Les nouveaux possédés*, Fayard, Paris 1973, p. 259; *Changer de révolution*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1982, p. 224. Cf. Patrick Troude-Chasteney, Lire Ellul, P.U., Bordeaux n.d., p. 67, 167.

<sup>19</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Les nouveaux possédés*, p. 259, n.l.

<sup>20</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Les nouveaux possédés*, p. 224.

<sup>21</sup> Jacques Delors, *La révolution du temps choisi*, Albin Michel, Paris 1980, cited by Jacques Ellul, *Changer de révolution*, p. 224, n.l.

process. It is not la technique which enslaves us, but the sacred which, once transferred to technology, prevents us from having a critical function in the service of human development. It is not the State which enslaves us, though it be a centralized and a police state, but it is its sacral transfiguration (as inevitable as is that of technology) which turns our adoration towards this concatenation of bureaux... Thus it is that religiosity, from which no one in the situation where we are is immune, is the surest agent of our alienation..."<sup>22</sup>

The ambiguity betrayed by Ellul's position clearly stems, on the one hand, from his contention that, as Barth would have it, and a host of anthropologists and assorted sociologists since Durkheim, religion is bound up with the sacred rather than with the holy and, in the last analysis, with hallowing the name of God as well as the land of promise in anticipation of the kingdom of God, i.e. with utopia; on the other hand, it stems from the fact that, in the footsteps of Barth, having thus deprived religion of its biblUcally legitimate utopian dimension, Ellul is logically led to minimize, even to edulcorate, the intrinsic utopianism of technology itself. This he does by claiming that, while technology desacralilzes everything it touches, it inevitably remains a stooge of the sacred. But such a consideration is worth taking into account if, and only if, utopia is identified with the quest of a final solution, the very kind of solution of which the biblical notion of the kingdom or, put differently, the utopianism of biblical religion wants to be and is the constant and perennial subversion. Evidently, in accordance with biblical religion, so long as utopia means changing the world instead of changing worlds, it cannot pave the way for any final solution. Or else, it would have to thwart both nature and history, instead of assuming them while at.the same time broadening their respective horizons. Utopia loses ground and becomes a bottomless pit as soon as, under its guise, is advocated a final solution. A final solution is the goal of nature or of history in the same sense that an oak tree is the goal of an acom: it belongs to a realm where ends and means are not differentiated. Like biblical utopianism (the kingdom of God is no achievement of nature or history), technological utopianism rests on differentiated ends and means. Accordingly, utopia can only be provisional as well as proleptic, i.e. an anticipation. Just because it is an anticipation, utopia can only be nothing more, and must be nothing less, than an approximation'<sup>23</sup>

## Ellul and Vahanian: Apocalypse or Utopia?

by Darrell J. Fasching

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<sup>22</sup> Jacques Ellul *Les nouveauxpossedes*, p. 259.

<sup>23</sup> For further insights into utopianism and the connection between utopia, revoution, and the final solution, or artificialism and fabricabilit6 (that is, utopian as fabricated world order), see not only Maurice Weyembergh's *Entre politique et technique* but also his latest book on *Charles Maurras et la revolution fanгаise*, Vrin, Paris 1992.

There is a great deal in Jacques Ellul's writings which lends justification to Maurice Weyembergh's interpretation of Ellul as totally anti-utopian, and yet, as I have argued in *The Thought of Jacques Ellul*, Ellul can only be anti-utopian by being inconsistent with himself, which in this case he is. Weyembergh argues that Ellul totally opposes human hope (*espoir*) — including all utopian hopes — and the hope of faith (*esperance*). And yet in his best moments Ellul argues that "whoever receives the revelation of God should give heed to men's hope, not in order to tell them that they are deluded ... not in order to take up a position of superiority, but to help them give birth to their hope.. ." <sup>24</sup> So Ellul has argued that Christians should support others in their revolutionary hopes, seeking to rehabilitate human revolutionary hope (*espoir*) by introducing into it the hope of faith (*esperance*). If this is so, then why can't utopia be likewise rehabilitated? This is the challenge to Ellul brought about by the theology of Gabriel Vahanian.

After struggling with the theological perspectives of both Ellul and Vahanian I have come to a slightly different conclusion than that offered by Weyembergh. Although he is right to point to the impasse between them concerning the relation between technique and language, still there is more agreement between them than Weyembergh allows. My own reading of their arguments leads me to believe that this is the case because each is largely right in what he affirms and wrong in what he denies.

When all is said and done, I believe Ellul must be considered a utopian thinker. Few claims about Jacques Ellul would seem more paradoxical (that is, "contrary to appearances") than this claim. You do not have to read very far in Ellul before you discover that he considers utopian thought the primary myth of our technological civilization, whose sole function is to render human beings totally subservient to its necessities. We will put up with any dehumanization, he argues, we will accept any demand for efficiency, and give up any freedom, as long as we believe we shall be rewarded with utopia. If there is such a thing as fate or necessity in a technological society, if technology has a certain autonomy, it is because we have been seduced into surrendering ourselves to its demands in return for the promise that it will fulfill our wildest utopian dreams for comfort, for pleasure and for success.

Yet, despite this, Ellul must be categorized as a utopian thinker. Ellul's own theological ethics is oriented toward a utopian transformation of society. But that utopianism gets drowned in the rhetoric of apocalypse. Ellul's phobia about the word "utopia" has prevented him from seeing that his unique appropriation of apocalyptic tradition is utopian. In fact Ellul inverts the popular meanings of *apocalypse* and *utopia* in his own theological writings. Where the world embraces utopian hopes and fears apocalyptic scenarios, Ellul embraces apocalyptic hopes and fears utopian scenarios. This reversal is intimately tied to his distinction between the sacred and the holy. Contrary to popular usage, Ellul treats the terms "sacred" and "holy" not as synonyms but as antonyms. Thus the sacred is, for him, the reverse image of the holy. And whereas the sacred

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<sup>24</sup> *To Will and To Do*, (Pilgrim Press, 1969), p. 81.

encloses society in a fixed order, the holy introduces that element of transcendence which opens society to the future.

For Ellul, utopia is an expression of the sacral imagination of our technicist society and the apocalyptic mode of thought expresses the transforming power of the holy. As a sociologist, Ellul argues that the sacred is simply an inherent element in the psycho-social structure of our human world which serves to legitimate the structure of a technicist society so that it becomes totalitarian, demonic and dehumanizing. Only by breaking with the seductive allure of this sacral world, he argues, can a transcendent freedom be reintroduced into the technological city whereby it can become an anticipation of a new city - the New Jerusalem. For Ellul, the theologian, apocalyptic hope is just that hope in the Wholly Other which ruptures one's psychological and spiritual dependency on the sacral structures of this world. It is precisely that hope which is not conformed to this world and therefore able to transform the world.

The thrust of Gabriel Vahanian's theological critique of Ellul, especially in *God and Utopia*, has been precisely to chide Ellul for not recognizing that there is such a thing as a biblical form of utopianism, an iconoclastic form of utopianism which Vahanian would take to be normative.<sup>25</sup> Unlike the dualistic ideologies of apocalyptic thought which afflict "man with visions of another world,..." he argues, "utopia, like the kingdom, is moved by the vision of a new world, radically other than the "other world" itself. ... Echoing, as it were the biblical view of the world as creation, utopia holds that only the *novum* is realizable, everything else being nothing but repetition,..."<sup>26</sup>

If Ellul shies from giving *utopianism* a positive meaning, Vahanian reacts to *apocalypticism* in a like manner, for he equates it with an ideological dualism more concerned with *changing worlds* than *changing the world*. Ellul's work, however, should serve as a reminder to Vahanian (who already acknowledges a large indebtedness to him) that biblical apocalypticism is not about *changing worlds* but precisely about *changing the world*. Ellul's understanding of the apocalyptic narrative tradition sounds suspiciously like Vahanian's understanding of the utopian narrative tradition. The problem is that Ellul fails to appreciate the utopianism of the very apocalyptic tradition which stands at the center of his thought. By the same token Vahanian fails to appreciate that Ellul's apocalypticism really does draw on the authentic utopianism of the biblical tradition. Despite their seeming opposition, it does not seem to me that the disagreement between them is unbridgeable. For Vahanian's eschatological *novum* like Ellul's *apocalypse of the eschaton* is nothing other than the presence of the Wholly Other in

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<sup>25</sup> See Gabriel Vahanian, *God and Utopia: The Church in a Technological Civilization* (NY: Seabury Press, 1976).

<sup>26</sup> Vahanian, *God and Utopia*, p. 38. The *novum* referred to here should be understood as that which is genuinely new and not just the kind of change which is superficial. The *novum* clearly must not be equated with some ideology of progress. On the contrary *novum* suggests "new creation," new beginnings, the grace or forgiveness which enables one to start afresh. It approximates what Ellul would characterize as the eruption of the apocalyptic or eschatological end (i.e., God) here in this present moment which gives birth to a transcending and transforming freedom.

the here and now which calls into question the sacred order of, "reality" in order to make all things possible and all things new.<sup>27</sup>

In Vahanian's view, the deliverance of technological utopianism from its propensity to become an ideology depends on an ecclesial revolution as the foundation for a cultural revolution.<sup>28</sup> But for the church to engage in this revolution, which could open up the language of technological utopianism to its eschatological possibilities, it must first of all *appropriate* the language of technological utopianism so that it might *expropriate* technological utopianism as a language of faith.

Far more than the medieval world which imagined the human in terms of nature, our contemporary technological civilization is open to the linguistic utopianism of the Gospel narratives. For both the Gospels and technological utopianism speak of the human through the language of new creation. It remains only for utopianism to be linked with the biblical eschatological experience of the holy, Vahanian argues, in order to give birth to the *novum*, a genuinely new creation of the human in which we discover our utopianism in the image and likeness of the God who has no image.<sup>29</sup> The Christ event, the word made flesh, is but the affirmation of the coming of the human, the affirmation that human destiny is tied to neither nature nor history nor the utopian techniques through which it comes into being but to the eschaton.<sup>30</sup> In Christ the human person is not trapped in a "human nature" but experiences a truly utopian invitation to become a new creature, here and now.<sup>31</sup> One should not be misled however, for Vahanian is not identifying biblical utopianism with technological utopianism but relating them to each other dialectically. "Utopia is not the kingdom. Utopia is to the kingdom as nature is to creation, or as history is to redemption, or, simply as the flesh is to the spirit. If there is a relationship between them, it is one of radical otherness..."<sup>32</sup>

As I struggled with these seemingly opposing viewpoints I began to believe that Ellul and Vahanian each had grasped half of a Janus-faced myth which was in fact a unity –the myth of *ApocafypsetUtopia*. What is really occurring between them is a conflict of the narrative imagination in which for Ellul the language of apocalypse is understood as the language of transcendence or the holy through which all things can be transformed whereas utopian language is viewed as a sacral ideological language which legitimates the technicist *status quo*. For Vahanian the categories are reversed: apocalyptic language is sacral and ideological, and utopian language is the language of the holyftran-scendence which calls all things into question so as to make all things new. Putting two and two together, I realized that there were in fact two modes of linguistic

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<sup>27</sup> Vahanian tends to treat "apocalypse" and "eschatology" as terms with opposing meanings which one must choose between, whereas Ellul tends to virtually equate these terms.

<sup>28</sup> *God and Utopia*, p. 92.

<sup>29</sup> *God and Utopia*, p. 137.

<sup>30</sup> *God and Utopia*, pp. 45,46,54.

<sup>31</sup> *God and Utopia*, p. 71.

<sup>32</sup> *God and Utopia*, p. 137.



imagination focused on the terms "Apocalypse/Utopia." The first expresses the non-dialectical dualism of a narrative imagination under the influence of the experience of the sacred which divides all things into the irreconcilably opposing categories of sacred and profane. The second expresses the dialectical relationship of the holy and the secular. For the holy, as both Ellul and Vahanian insist, desacralizes and hence secularizes the sacred, opening up the human world to the possibility of transcendence and transformation.

Ellul and Vahanian use the terms "apocalypse" and "utopia" respectively to express the transforming power of the holy while each suspects the other of using the opposing term in its sacral form. But as expressions of the holy, these terms are not opposites but a dialectical unity. It was reading Karl Mannheim, one of the founding fathers of the sociology of knowledge, which enabled me to grasp the dialectical unity of apocalypse and utopia. Mannheim constructs a very interesting argument, in his book *Ideology and Utopia*, for the roots of utopianism in the apocalyptic tradition and of the importance of that tradition for the making of history.<sup>33</sup> Utopias, he argues, introduce a tension into the present order of things which is creatively disruptive. Without this tension we would live "in a world in which there is never anything new, in which all is finished and each moment is a repetition of the past... With the relinquishment of utopias, man would lose his will to shape history and therewith his ability to understand it."<sup>34</sup>

In tracing the history of utopianism, Mannheim identifies the apocalyptic tradition as the most important source for this kind of radical utopianism. He cites the apocalypticism of Thomas Munzer as an example and argues that this kind of apocalypticism embodies a radically utopian mode of transformative consciousness "in which the impossible gives birth to the possible and the absolute interferes with the world and conditions actual events."<sup>35</sup> This utopian consciousness introduces an attitude of "tense expectation" in which "the promise of the future which is to come is not... a reason for postponement, but merely a point of orientation, something external to the ordinary course of events from where be (i.e., an individual) is on the lookout, ready to take the leap." Such apocalyptic utopianism "sees revolution as a value in itself, not as an unavoidable means to a rationally set end..."<sup>36</sup> For Mannheim, apocalyptic consciousness expresses the utopian mentality which is revealed in those "hopes and yearnings" which give rise to an inherently iconoclastic mode of consciousness "incongruous with the state of reality within which it occurs." It is this mode of consciousness which inspires those actions which tend to "shatter, either partially or wholly, the order of things prevailing at the time... [and] break the bonds of the existing order."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, (New York: Harcourt, Bruce & World, 1936). See especially chapter four, "Ure Utopian Mentality."

<sup>34</sup> *Ideology and Utopia*-, pp. 262-263.

<sup>35</sup> *Ideology and Utopia*, p. 213.

<sup>36</sup> *Ideology and Utopia*, p. 217.

<sup>37</sup> *Ideology and Utopia*, pp. 192 & 199.

Mannheim's analysis makes it possible to see both Ellul and Vahanian as sharing the same narrative tradition. Mannheim's analysis of apocalyptic and utopian themes offers the opportunity of dispelling the illusion of fundamental disagreement between Ellul and Vahanian. If Vahanian would acknowledge that there is more than one kind of apocalyptic narrative and Ellul that there is more than one kind of utopian narrative the seeming chasm between them might yet be bridged. What both wish to deny is a sacral/ideological use of these terms and what both wish to affirm is the transformative power of the holy.

There are signs that Ellul is moving closer to Vahanian if not vice versa. After a long history of using the word only in a negative fashion, in *The Humiliation of the Word*, for the first time Ellul refers to "utopias" as belonging "to the order of truth... known and created by the word" (p. 230).<sup>38</sup> And in a public address of the Society for the Philosophy of Technology conference on Democracy and Technology at the University of Bordeaux in 1989, Ellul argued that the only hope for the future lay in the direction of a "utopianism" in the sense that "my good friend Vahanian uses that term." When I asked him about this statement after the speech, he said that although he resisted at first, he had gradually become convinced by Vahanian's utopianism. However, for this to really become an integral theme in his theological work he would have to completely rethink the relation between language and technique. In that respect Weyembergh is absolutely right about the difference between Vahanian and Ellul.

What the argument between Vahanian and Ellul helps us understand is that the popular "mythological" meanings of the terms "apocalypse" as cataclysmic total destruction and "utopia" as an ideal world of total perfection are really fragments and distortions of a biblical eschatology which underlies the historical imagination of Western civilization. The result of this fragmentation has been to break apart the dialectical unity of *realism* and *transcendence* in the biblical proclamation resulting in the non-dialectical dualistic opposition of *apocalypse* and *utopia* — expressing a pessimistic *Procrustean* realism on the one hand and a naive *Protean* optimism on the other. The one expresses a cosmological orientation which tells us "that's the way things are and we can't change them." The other reflects an anarchical existentialist orientation which insists "we can become whoever we wish to become and do whatever we wish to do." These fragments are the result of dismantling of the dialectical unity of biblical eschatology which holds *realism* and *openness to transcendence and transformation* in a tense unity — 'one which enables those eschatological holy communities which embody this unity to be a fermenting and transforming utopian presences *in* but not of the world.

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<sup>38</sup> *The Humiliation of the Word*, Eerdmans, 1985, p. 230.

# Book Reviews

## *Lire Ellul: introduction a l'oeuvre socio-politique de Jacques Ellul*, by Patrick Troude-Chastenet

(Presses Universitaires, Bordeaux, no date).

For this sensible analysis amid its careful documentation of Ellul's impressive work, Patrick Troude-Chastenet ought to be commended and, no doubt, deserves heartfelt considerations on the part of anyone conscious of the risks involved in such an undertaking. Especially, he ought to be commended for filling a crying gap, and for doing so without adulating Ellul in the least, yet in such a way that Ellul, precisely because he is not courted, should be pleased. Whatever the reason, no major book, collective or not, had been devoted to the wide-ranging corpus of Ellul's writings whether as a professional thinker or as a thoughtful social worker among dropouts and other juvenile delinquents. The task laid before Chastenet was forbidding. From beginning to end, however, he performs it with unflinching talent, though his theological assessment, insofar as I am concerned, betrays an approach which, for being that of a non-specialist, tends to *limn* a more dualistic picture of Ellul's religious stance than is actually warranted. Be that as it may, in the main, Chastenet shows that Ellul is not the prophet of doom he has been claimed to be and that nothing is more erroneous than the image of a systematic, puritan nay-sayer who despises the world, let alone technology. He moreover succeeds and provides us with an accurate and well-balanced interpretation of a challenging if at times impetuous pattern of thought.

Under the heading — a telling one right from the start - of "Corrupting the World," the first part of *Lire Ellul* (On reading Ellul) confronts us with the emergence of technology as the fundamental element and determining factor of social as well as human development if not progress. (Incidentally, Ellul adheres to the distinction between *technique* and *technology*, exclusively reserving the latter for the discourse about technique as evidenced, e.g., by the contrast between *le systeme technicien* and *le bluff technologique*.) Politics as well as the social reality in all its aspects suffer the impact of propaganda. In a *sodete technicienne*, propaganda plays the role of no more than a makeshift meant to help people bear the unbearable. At an increasingly onerous cost, however: it corrupts the very core of what makes us human, namely language itself. As a result, overtly or covertly, regardless of regime, the state itself becomes more and more monolithic, and is increasingly, characterized by practices of spiritual oppression.

To some extent, this may be so. But, to my mind, it makes it obvious that, in and through technology, Troude-Chastenet apprehends in no way any eclosion of some new type of religiosity but, rather, even a fatal step in our alienation *from* religion - construed however in strictly traditional terms.

Not inappropriately does therefore the second part of Chas-tenet's book focus on the question: "Salvation, it is impossible?" Examining how Ellul's thought bounces back and forth between two of the hardest facts of life, he shows how life, if it seeks a way out, as it does even under the imperialism of technology, points to the necessity of a revolution, and how, on the other hand, it remains hemmed in by the very impossibility of this same revolution - unless...

Unless, somewhat "recovering hope," as the third part suggests, people and above all Christians have as grains of salt or, to change the metaphor, as grains of sand in the mechanism of the technological system. Ellul has always claimed he was an anarchist. "Dissenter" would have been a better term, but no such term, though it comes from Latin, has a French equivalent; regrettably, if only because it even has a smack of utopian relish in a way that "anarchy" doesn't quite convey, at least not in its usual French connotations. Anyhow, there can be no doubt that Ellul is an iconoclast. But, on religious grounds, an iconoclast only longs for the Qty of God and, longing for it, builds the only city he actually knows how to build -the City of man: neither Babel nor the Kingdom of God on earth, but the promise of a kingdom open to all so long as faith is not, Ellul himself ultimately avers, surrendered to and exhausted by its traditional exclusivistic soteriologi-cal dimension.

Finally, given the overall quality of Chastenet's presentation of Ellul's thought, I am puzzled by his bibliography, whose logic I fail to perceive. Besides its curious arrangement of rubrics, it omits apparently the other major books published (by a single author) on Jacques Ellul: *The Thought of Jacques Ellul: a Systematic Exposition* by Darrell J. Fasching, Edwin Mellen Press, New York & Toronto 1981; *The Word of God in the Ethics of Jacques Ellul* by David Gill, The American Theological Library Association and The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1984.; *Theological Method in Jacques EZZuZ* by Daniel Clendenin University Press of America, 1987 and *Technique, Discourse and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul* by David Lovekin, Lehigh University Press, 1991.

Gabriel Vahanian, University de Strasbourg

## ***The Social Creation of Nature* by Neil Evenden, (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).**

Technique may be a problem for humans because it distorts our natural rhythms, separates us from a more natural world, and disturbs the ecology. But what is nature? How would we feel at home in a more natural world? Evenden is an environmentalist

writing in defense of a nature from which he claims we have long been alienated. He sees little progress in the conservation movement, heralded by Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, thirty years ago. Environmentalism has been disappointing, he claims, yielding little, and providing solutions which tend to objectify nature; we manage it, protect it or devise new techniques to save it. Like Ellul, he faults our discourse. We have to begin again, ask new questions, expose the obstacles in our language and see the world of nature anew.

Evenden's entry into this discussion is via the concept of pollution. Why do the environmentalist and the industrialist, for example, not agree on the facts of pollution? They disagree, he claims, because pollution is a construction, requiring a prior concept of ordering, and the industrialist and the environmentalist differ on what constitutes proper order, and what constitutes the good life. We mistakenly assume that pollution, nature, and the ecological balance are all observable neutral phenomena. To prove otherwise Evenden posits a hypothetical alien ecologist with selective amnesia. If such a person were to observe our world he or she might mistake our anomalous species for the destructive unstable budworm, which destroys mightily, giving other species a turn at rejuvenating, and then recedes for a generation. Examples of domination, harmony and the budworm are all found in nature, rendering any transfer of values from nature to the human domain problematic. In fact, Evenden argues that nature is a socially constructed reality, which we then posit as a given, and a repository for all our favourite values and ideologies. Similarly, from the point of view of semiotics, nature is a myth. It is perceived "as nature, as a 'factual system' when it is actually a 'semiological system.'" This is how we come to confuse history and nature, seeking absolute norms in the nature we falsely believe lies beyond or underneath history, when in fact nature has been created historically. At this point his argument can be confusing. Evenden does not see 'nature' as a word with reference only to other words and to language. There is something out there, and it is living. He wants us to know and feel that living out-there wildness. But his underlying realism is sometimes lost in the turns of his "spiral" argument about construction. All language, of course, is constructed, but few concepts have quite the authoritative weight nature does. The many meanings and values associated with nature render it a very problematic standard, even a dangerous one to us, he argues, and leave nature itself very vulnerable.

Evenden traces the history of the construction of nature from the discovery of "everything" by the Greeks, and its first taming by being named. Nature then came to mean everything but us and God. Nevertheless, the medieval view of nature, inherited from remnants of the Aristotelian, Platonic and Christian views, was one resplendent with notions of vitality and otherness, overflowing with the "rignatures" of God, its creator. It was not ours to tame or to own. Nature could be known only empathically. This was a type of vitalistic monism.

With the Renaissance, and then Cartesian dualism, came the revolution which brought the modern view of nature, as object, as necessity, as the repository of truth because it can be empirically studied, as constituted of visual surfaces, and as increas-

ingly dead and lifeless. Evenden refers to this nature as Nature, a terrain "devoid of human involvement," knowable not by intuition and empathy, but by the elite technically or mathematically trained few. The essentially human was defined over against Nature, though our bodies might be part of it. The human self became the sole repository of all values, life, vitality and free will. We became lonely observers, and a massive education system was required to socialize new humans into the objective stance. What Evenden is talking about, of course, is the rise of the modern scientific epistemology, which he admits has been immensely fruitful. His polemic points out the cost of this revolution, a cost he thinks we are only now beginning to feel lethally.

Evenden details Leonardo's role in popularizing this revolution. Perspective, the collaboration of mathematics and art, enables us to see the world more realistically than ever before. Seeing comes to be construed as believing and knowing. A visual understanding of reality was born, and transferred to the grammar of our discourse. "Pushing, pulling and seeing what happens, ...are not a means to knowledge; they are knowledge." Evenden laments that "if we contrast the rich and heterogeneous world that was the experience of the medieval with our strictly sanitized collection of empirical objects, we can appreciate the price paid for our deference to social consensus as the sole legitimator of reality."

This is a strong claim. Does he really want us to return to a medieval view of nature? And is this medieval construction compatible with maintaining vast populations? Is he asserting the superiority of the medieval construction or suggesting that we assimilate both the modern and the medieval natures? On what grounds does he or do we choose between constructions? These issues are not fully explained in the text, though part of the answer to the last question lies in the next section, when he details how more recently the dualism which bolsters this world view has begun to collapse. Neurobiology, for example, has examined the brain, a part of Nature, and found no consciousness, the part exempt from Nature. We have been swallowed up into Nature, the dualism dissolved, and a materialistic monism has emerged. Evenden claims that we don't really want this slow suicide of the self, and hence, there must be something wrong with the whole construction which leads to such a point. "The only way to get off our own dissecting table is to admit the fiction," he says.

In the contemporary world, in trying to overcome what Evenden calls the "fragile division" between ourselves and Nature we tend to use two strategies, he argues. In one we deal with Nature by claiming that we are really like Nature, the nature-as-object position. Or we posit that Nature is really like us, the nature-as-self position. Both attitudes lead to the management, saving, or protecting of the objective Nature.

What then is the solution? Like Bellah in *Habits of the Heart*, Evenden argues that we have lost an old vocabulary. Most of us are no longer able to view nature as we once did, except as pre-literate children, and hence we are not able to approach the environmental crisis effectively. "To encounter the other beings as other, as living subjects of significance, requires some loosening of the conceptual bindings of nature so that subjectivity can flow back in, like water to a scorched garden." Children, he claims,

experience the shock of otherness, alive out there, but this appreciation is gradually eroded with age; the experience of water gives way to the concept "water" and finally to "H<sub>2</sub>O." Wonder, wildness, and stories are the answer. Wildness is the characteristic of nature which is destroyed by taming, saving, and managing.

Evenden gives us a great deal in this luridly written book to think about, and there are many points at which his argument steps on the familiar terrain of the natural or human versus technique, the grammar of our discourse and the ensnarement of a visually oriented society. But there remain nagging problems with his argument and his conclusions. The first is that mentioned above. How does one choose between constructions of reality? On what basis is one more true than the other? Does he want us just to "loosen" our "conceptual bindings," or to discard our modern thinking altogether? How does a more vitalistic apprehension of nature coexist with the modern mind, and with supporting massive populations? Evenden hints that we are headed to destruction so long as we keep managing, and dealing with nature, even in the guise of protecting it or ourselves, and hence we must get out of our conceptual cages soon. But the reasoning is not explicit.

The second problem is that the final section adopts the language of "otherness" and "other." Is nature then to be the new divinity, to be both creation and creator? How many new religions and sects will emerge from a nature mysticism which is not historically informed. One thinks of the balance Schleiermacher might bring to this conclusion, with his beginnings in self consciousness, proceeding to consciousness of otherness, of a world in which we are both passive and active, and finally and logically to consciousness of absolute dependence and of God.

Lastly, Evenden wants us to develop a new language, to break out of the language games which surround and envelop us. He wants us to bear witness to a new way of regarding ourselves in the world by growing and appreciating weeds, and developing a new grammar and a new language game. But what will become of nature in the meantime? Surely Nature must sometimes be saved, if we get the chance, while we await the utopian or eschatological future when all of us "acquire the vocabulary needed to accommodate wildness and [to] extinguish the technological flashfire of planetary domestication."

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A critique of technological civilization in the light of Auschwitz and Hiroshima using a narrative ethics approach. Although narrative ethicists have typically argued that it cannot be done, Fasching proposes a cross cultural ethic of human dignity, human rights and human liberation grounded in the convergence of diverse narratives of hospitality to the stranger and the outcast. On this basis he argues for an ethical coalition of Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, Gandhian Hinduism and Humanistic A-theism, to shape public policy in an apocalyptic nuclear era.

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## From the Editor

Welcome to issue number 12 of the Ellul Forum. Our focus for this issue is ethical relativism in a technological civilization. It contains an essay by Peter Haas of Vanderbilt University and another by myself. Peter and I met at the international Holocaust conference held at Oxford University in 1988. At that time his book *Morality After Auschwitz* had just been published by Fortress Press. My two recent books *Narrative Theology After Auschwitz: From Alienation to Ethics* and *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia?* were first conceived at that conference. It was there that as a result of conversations with people like Peter and Richard Rubenstein, Marc Ellis and Irving Greenberg that I first wrote the outline for these books. (Actually, it was originally planned as one book but grew too long, so at the suggestion of Fortress Press I divided into two books, even though this required about 30 pages of overlap between the two.) Later, Peter and I met a second time when we were both invited to speak on ethics after Auschwitz at a conference in Washington D.C. He graciously agreed to my recent request that we continue our dialogue in the pages of the Forum. Please note that we have also reviewed each other's books. I have turned my review of his book into an essay introducing the Forum for this issue (see page 3). His review of my book *Narrative Theology After Auschwitz* can be found in the Book Review section (see page 17). You will also find two reviews of my book, *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima* by Ridiard A. Dietrich and David P. Gushee. We ended up with two reviews because when one wasn't sure he could make the deadline a second was sought, then both arrived on the same day. I have never met either reviewer. Both seem to me to offer critical yet fair reviews. Their contrasting perspectives may be of interest

This issue gives me the occasion to focus attention on some of the core themes of my two volume project on ethics after Auschwitz and Hiroshima. When Ellul's ethics of freedom came out, he promised to follow it up with an ethic of holiness. I still hope that someday that volume will be published. This project is *my* own attempt to construct an ethics of the Holy in response to the sacral ethic of a technological civilization. My attempt has been to construct a cross-cultural ethic, using a narrative ethics approach in combination with a theology of the history of religions. In my view, the experience of the holy is an experience of a wholly other reality which can neither be named or imaged, an experience marked by the creation of a religious community separated from the larger society which gives rise to a two kingdom ethic whose defining feature is hospitality to the stranger. A sacred society, by contrast (like that which emerged in

Nazi Germany), has no place for such "separated" or holy communities and a sacral ethic treats the stranger as an enemy. My argument is that those holy communities that are defined by narratives of hospitality to the stranger are traditions that recognize the human dignity precisely of those who are not part of their own community and its story. After Auschwitz and Hiroshima, I believe our best hope lies in an ethical coalition of such communities (especially Jewish, Christian and Buddhist) to promote an international ethic of human dignity, human rights and human liberation. Such a coalition can tolerate a great deal of ethical diversity so long as each shares a common concern for the stranger, the downcast and the outcast.

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## Bulletin Board

### Colloquium Held In Bourdeaux: "Technique and Society in the Work of Jacques Ellul"

By Joyce Hanks

A significant milestone has been reached: the first conference with Jacques Ellul as its focus occurred in Bordeaux on November 12-13,1993. Some twenty invited specialists from France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, the Ivory Coast, Mexico, Canada, and tire United States deliberated for two days before an audience that averaged about 100.

Ellul himself attended the final sessions, in spite of illness, speaking after Ivan Blich's touching tribute. He emphasized his debt to his father, who taught him honor: not to

lie to himself or anyone else, to have pity for the weak, and to be inflexible towards those in power.

Technique in general, and its autonomy in particular, proved central to many of the papers given, several of which took issue with Ellul. Others compared Ellul to Kari Marx, Alexis de Tocqueville, Martin Heidegger, and Bernard Charbonneau (whose son Simon attended the conference and often represented his father's point of view during question periods). The Bible, the Personalist movement, art, politics, and the sacred-each provided the focus of one of the sessions.

Roughly half of these took place in the new "Ellul Auditorium" of the Institute for Political Studies on the campus of the University of Bordeaux in Talence (a suburb of Bordeaux). Fittingly, when Ellul made his appearance at the colloquium, he was ushered into this auditorium named for him, which he had not previously seen. Ellul was one of the founders and professors of the Institute for Political Studies, which sponsored the gathering, along with the Association Jacques Ellul (see information about Association membership elsewhere in this issue), the Society for Philosophy and Technology, and the School of Law and Social and Political Sciences at the University of Bordeaux. Local newspapers featured articles and photographs from the conference.

Following the first day's events, attendees gathered for a showing of the impressive new film by Serge Steyer, "Jacques Ellul: L'homme entier." Filmed primarily in France, but partly in Chicago, it is already available for viewing in French (with some interviews in English) at the Wheaton College Archives (Wheaton IL), and should eventually be translated into English, as funds for the project become available.

Frequent simultaneous sessions obliged those in attendance to choose one speaker over another, but such decisions proved easier than expected, thanks to the abstracts of papers gathered by the organizing committee and distributed to everyone. The committee performed many complex tasks extremely well-from transportation and book table to lodgings, subsidies, and meals. For speakers and guests, a dinner invitation to the famous institution in downtown Bordeaux, "La Maison du Vin," proved a delicious and memorable highlight of the proceedings.

Speakers from the western hemisphere besides Ulich included Carl Mitcham, Langdon Winner, and Pierre de Coninck. As those in attendance considered the importance of celebrating a second Ellul conference, some speculated that it might well take place in the United States or Canada, and focus on Ellul's contribution to theology. -

## **New Film on Ellul**

A new film on Ellul entitled, " Jacques Ellul, L'homme entier," was screen at the Bordeaux conference. It will cost about \$5000.00 to produce a version with English subtitles. Anyone interested in contributing to this project should send a check to Joyce Hanks, made payable to her and designated for *Ellul Film projects*. When this project is complete there are plans for a larger project producing several film interviews with Ellul which are already complete but must be edited.

## L'Association Jacques Ellul

During the past year, Ellul family members and colleagues have joined together for the purpose of preserving the collection of his writings and manuscripts, and making his work better known. The Association has now been legally registered in France, and will soon be ready to invite interested citizens of other countries to join. If you would like more information about the Association as it becomes available, please send your name and address to: Joyce M. Hanks, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Scranton, Scranton PA 18510-4646. If you wish to join please send her a check made payable to Joyce M. Hanks for \$15.00. Joyce is willing to register all American applicants and save us from the hassle of having to change our American dollars into French francs.

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*by Darrell J. Fasching*

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# Forum: Ethical Relativism and Technological Civilisation

## *Morality After Auschwitz* by Peter Haas (Fortress, 1988)–

*An Essay Review* by D. Fasching

This is a very good book with a somewhat misleading title, for the discussion of morality after Auschwitz comes up only briefly in the final pages at the end of the book. A more accurate title would have been *The Morality of Auschwitz*. For what this book really deals with is the way in which a society can adopt an ethic which permits it to redefine human values so as to make evil seem good and vice versa. The author's thesis is simple and profound: "Auschwitz" and "ethics" are not the mutually exclusive terms they might appear to be. On the contrary, had the Nazis not developed an ethic, the pursuit of genocide as a societal policy would have been impossible. Everything the Nazi's did was ethical, says Haas, even though not everything that is ethical is necessarily moral.

I share Haas' concern to understand how techno-bureaucratic nation-states are able to subvert and redefine ethical values to serve their own ideological interests. I also want to know how we can make moral judgments of such societies in a world that has largely capitulated to ethical relativism. Indeed I have made an attempt to respond to these issues in my own recent works: *Narrative Theology After Auschwitz: From Alienation to Ethics* and *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia?*

Haas and I both make a distinction between a society's system of values or "mores" and critical evaluative judgments of those mores. He chooses to call a society's mores its "ethic" and the critical judgment of that ethic, "morality." In my work I have made the same distinction but reversed the terms. We are both struggling to use a vocabulary that has not been adequately differentiated to deal with this distinction and therefore we were each forced to improvise.

Setting aside that merely nominal difference in the usage of "morality" and "ethics," we share the conviction that every society has an ethic which shapes and encourages specific human behaviors and that such an ethic can easily transform evil into good and good into evil. We also share the conviction that the Nazi Holocaust is the most dramatic example of the power of an ethic to justify human atrocity. Finally, we share the view that if we can understand how the Nazi ethic came to assume this role in

German society it should provide us with important ethical insights into the nature of evil in every society. This in turn should help us devise ways to subvert such evil in the future, before it escalates to the level of another genocidal project.

*Morality After Auschwitz* then is not a book about philosophical or theological theories of ethics, nor does the book present an ethical theory of its own. It is rather a socio-historical analysis of how a society adopts and implements a new ethic. Its greatest kinship is with the sociology of knowledge (in this case applied to ethical knowledge) and it uses the Holocaust as its case study.

The book begins with an introduction followed by twenty chapters divided almost equally into four parts. Part One, examines "The Intellectual Matrix of an Ethic." It traces the dissolution of the "old ethic" as the Weimar Republic collapsed. At the same time, it traces the weaving of a new ethic out of existent strands of religious and racial anti-Semitism, and Fascist ethnic nationalism - the latter rooted in a Romantic historical particularism which distrusts all international movements. Part Two: "The Growth of an Ethic" examines the expansion of the Nazi ethic from its sectarian base in a small political party (the National Socialist Workers Party) to its growth into a trans-societal cultural ethos covering most of Europe under Nazi rule. In this part we learn that bureaucracies of professionals played a key role in the development of a genocidal government policy and that everything that was done was both legal and ethical by the standards German society had adopted. Moreover, we learn that what enabled professionals to participate was the development of highly efficient and impersonal bureaucratic policies for implementing mass death accompanied by the development of the capacity to lead a double life, compartmentalizing and separating personal life from public duty. Indeed it was their ethic of public duty which enabled them to do what oftentimes revolted them on the personal level (86-90).

Part Three, "Ethics and the Shaping of Social Institutions" then examines the bureaucratization and politicization of this ethic as it became embodied in the institutions created by the 3rd Reich. It traces the political and bureaucratic growth of the National Socialist Workers party from its beginnings as a drinking party into a national political movement that overtook first Germany and then most of Europe. We are led through the process of "Gleichschaltung" or bureaucratic coordination where, by 1934, all institutions of German society were systematically disestablished and/or taken over and integrated into the Nazi party machine until there was virtually no institution or organization "outside" the party in a position to critique or subvert it. The state and the party were one. Drawing on Richard Rubenstein, Haas shows how the German bureaucracy coopted even the bureaucracy of the Jewish Councils to efficiently organize a system of mass death that was able to overcome all resistance.

Finally, in Part Four, "Responding to an Ethic: The Loss of Evil," Haas reviews the response of insiders and outsiders to the Holocaust, the failure of law to provide justice at Nuremberg. Then in the last fifteen pages he surveys the ethical responses of post-Holocaust Jewish theologians. It is in this last section that Haas draws a very

troubling conclusion, namely, that "the search for an absolute standard by which to indict the Holocaust ends in failure" (9).

The Holocaust, he tells us, is "not the result of absolute evil" but of an ethic that conceives of good and evil in different terms. ... That is why the horrors of Auschwitz could be carried on by otherwise good, solid, caring human beings" (170)."

The critique of an ethical system, Haas argues, can only come from outside the system, from those who are alienated from the system and experience themselves as outsiders, even though they may be socially located inside the system. Moreover, the existence of such critics is itself one of the products of the generis of any societal ethic.

Every such ethic is created out of theological, historical, social and economic trends. "Like any ethic, the Nazi ethic produced its few fanatic and self-righteous adherents, its mass of unreflective supporters, and a subclass of dedicated and deviant opponents. In this, Nazism was no different from any other ethical code. Each person would, over a lifetime, establish a certain relationship to the regnant ethic, a relationship that grew not out of philosophical analysis but out of that person's personality, character, and social situation. In other words, conformity or opposition to an ethic is rarely, if ever, a matter of philosophical analysis. It is almost always a matter of accident, of where one happens to find oneself along the way. That means that it is wrong to judge people as evil simply because they conformed to the Nazi ethic, or as saints simply because they ended up opponents or rescuers. Their activities one way or the other were generally the result of mixed and unreflective motives" (181).

This is quite an astonishing statement, and one that I find very troubling. Haas goes so far as to compare a mediocre Nazi bureaucrat in the German Foreign Office by the name of (naturally) Martin Luther with the French pastor, Andre Trocme, who led his village in the saving of some 5000 Jews. Luther advanced his career by currying the favor of the SS as they rose to power in order to bring about his own advancement in the Foreign Office. In order to *curry* this favor he went to the SS with a proposal to solve the problem of Jewish emigration by simply shooting them. Haas' conclusion is that it is wrong to see Trocme as better than Luther, each is simply a reflection of trends they had no control over — of the accidents of time and place they found themselves in. Thus Luther is not evil and Trocme is no saint, each simply reflects some random variable in the statistical distribution of responses to the Nazi ethic, responses that would have their analog in relation to any societal ethic we care to study. (189)

Thus we are told that when Trocme, took in his first "starving and barefooted woman in 1940" it was no more an act of courage than Luther's first step to curry favor with the SS." Both operated out of simple impulses that are at work in all of us. (189)" Only by hindsight do we consider one a hero and the other a villain. The truth, says Haas is that neither could conceive of acting differently than they did. Each did what their character shaped by social context and tradition required them to do.

Haas goes on to argue that the Nuremberg trials demonstrated that the human capacity to redefine good and evil showed itself to be "beyond the reach of any legal system" since the trials focused on individual responsibility and never addressed the



issue of the formation of an institutional context that legitimated genocidal behavior (210).

In the Epilogue Haas surveys the responses of Jewish theologians to the Holocaust - Rubenstein, Berkovitz, Fackenheim, Weisel — only to show that their responses too fall in line with the sociological patterns of response any ethic will generate. Finally, in a two page "Afterword" Haas tells us that he has tried to avoid two pitfalls of past treatments of the Holocaust: one the one hand trivializing the Holocaust by treating it as just another example of human inhumanity to humans and, on the other hand, of exaggerating the enormity and uniqueness of the Holocaust to the point where it cannot be compared to anything else in history.

We can learn nothing useful from either extreme. If we treat the Holocaust merely as the product of typical human failings of greed, jealousy, etc. we will miss the specificity of its forms of evil, rooted deeply in historical anti-Semitic stereotypes. If, on the other hand, we treat the Holocaust as absolutely unique and incomparable in its evil, there is no lesson we can take from studying its forms of evil and apply to our own time and place.

What is needed is a detailed study of how a societal ethic can sociologically legitimate human atrocity, one that takes account of the unique particulars of this history and yet can generalize so that we can actually learn something useful for our own time and place and its societal ethic. What is frightening is that "these people were not unintelligent, amoral, or insensitive. They acted consciously, conscientiously, and in good faith in pursuit of what they understood to be the good" (233). The lesson to be learned, we are told, is that events take on a life of their own which no one can imagine at the beginning and hence the Holocaust "became what it did not start out to be."

While I find Haas' attempt to give an account of the Holocaust that steers clear of a trivialized commonality on the one hand and an exaggerated uniqueness on the other, I find little help for the ethicist in his account. For while he gives us a detailed analysis of the particulars that made the Holocaust a reality and he does it in such a way to enable us to learn lessons that should be transferable to other situations (all of which I applaud), he does it at the cost of reducing the ethical life to a reflection of sociological trends which finally absolve everybody of responsibility, so that it seems to make no difference whether we choose to emulate the banal bureaucrat, Martin Luther, who seeks only his self-interested advance through the death of Jews or the selfless rescuer, Andre Trocme who risks his own life to save Jews. Haas is an ethical relativist and a sociological reductionist plain and simple: "Our own ethic is shaped by the social, economic and political grid from within which we make sense of the world" (233). It is hard to see how one can build a critical morality within such a deterministic worldview.

Everything in his book points to such a conclusion, and yet curiously Haas ends the book with a quote from Albert Speer, in which Speer says: "It is true that I did not know what was really beginning on November 9, 1938, and what ended in Auschwitz and Maidenak. But in the final analysis I myself determined the degree of my isolation, the extremity of my evasions, and the extent of my ignorance" (233). These final words,

with which the book ends, stand totally at odds with the entire thesis of the book. For the first time we *get* a hint that there is such a thing as individual responsibility for our actions, even though our lives are profoundly shaped by sociological influences. To read the book backwards from this final quotation is to engage in a deconstruction of its essential thesis.

Perhaps Haas deliberately put this statement at the end in order to suggest that we must not take the sociological perspective as absolute, that by its very nature it is an inadequate methodology for getting at individual freedom and responsibility and that therefore the sociological perspective must be supplemented by other perspectives. This, of course is the method Jacques Ellul uses in his analysis of technological determinism. For Ellul at the sociological level everything is determined, and yet at the level of concrete lived experience what the individual does remains decisive and can transform everything. But if this is Haas' strategy, the only evidence for it is the final quote from Speer.

Haas' treatment of the Holocaust reminds me a great deal of Richard Rubenstein's book *The Cunning of History* - which I consider perhaps the single most important book on ethics written since World War II. It is important however, because it outlines the major ethical issues which must be dealt with by Western civilization — indeed all civilization — with brutal honesty. It is a book, however, which offers not a single clue as how to constructively respond to such a world and neither does *Morality After Auschwitz*. Such books make an important contribution to contemporary ethics, but they are only one piece of the puzzle and their value is in the challenge they present to anyone who would attempt to do ethics after Auschwitz. After Rubenstein and Haas, all glib solutions will be seen for their shallowness.

And yet there is a grave danger in the kind of socio-historical determinism we seem to find in Haas' book. If taken literally it may in fact convince us that ethical reflection is pointless - that what we do is always merely a product of the accident of time and place. From my perspective, the limits of social analysis and all social determinism are amply evident in a fundamental observation of the social sciences, namely that no society has ever succeeded at totally socializing any of its members. We are all to some degree social deviants who are capable of calling into question "the way things are" and in that sense everyone of us has the capacity to call into question and transcend the cultural currents that attempt to shape us and in so doing assume responsibility for our actions. To reduce social deviance to statistical randomness and dismiss it as just one more outcome of social conditioning or accident of time and place is to obscure the very evidence that would demand that one reformulate one's theories so as to take into account the individual responsibility without which the moral life cannot make sense. My own position worked out in my two most recent books is that all genuine ethical criticism begins in experiences of alienation which enable us to call into question and transcend the social and political currents that shape our behavior.

In the essays that follow both Peter Haas and I, attempt to deal with ethical relativism, "after Auschwitz," in a techno-bureaucratic world. Here Haas tries to go beyond

his book and turn ethical relativism into a constructive option. While agreeing with him about the importance of ethical diversity and the importance of the Other, I suggest an alternative that I believe is a less reductionistic way of approaching these issues.

## Moral Relativity in the Technological Society

by Peter J. Haas

Jacques Ellul has done as much as any contemporary theologian to make us think about the moral implications of the modern, technological age. For Ellul, if I understand him correctly, it was not merely the vast new powers available to people that was cause for concern, but the whole new way that technologically-based, modern societies came to regard the world. Technology creates, as it were, its own reality with its own rules, rituals and imperatives; in short, its own ethic. Ellul's call for us was to move beyond the horizon of technology to a vision of the holy (by which he meant, in essence, Christianity) in order to secure (or retrieve) a vision of the human condition and of hope that both challenges and transcends the ethic of the technological. Over the past half century, we have come to know all too well the seductive power of technology to create its own ethic: whether in Nazi Germany, Stalinist Russia, or the situation in the Balkans. Ellul's insight into the potential wickedness of the modern world has been all too firmly confirmed.<sup>1</sup>

What remains unresolved so far is whether the second half of Ellul's formula can be so easily confirmed. That is, can a religion (say, Christianity) or religion in general offer us a way to resist the siren call of the ethic of the technological world? The answer I want to suggest in the following is that while we do need an ethic that can challenge that of the technological society, a simple appropriation of some traditional, logocentric religious view will not do. We can not successfully transcend the ethic of the technological by positing another monolithic albeit non-technological ethic. In this way we simply trade off one orthodoxy for another. Rather, the opposing ethic that we need to posit must take into account the truths about the structure of the universe that the modern age has revealed. That is, we need to incorporate the scientific and technological paradigms of our time into the counter-ethic if we hope to achieve a new synthesis. In essence, then, we have to rethink the whole notion of what constitutes an ethic. This will have to be an ethic that will take relativity and indeterminacy seriously. We can no more ignore that we live in an Einsteinian and Heisenburgian universe than Enlightenment theologians could forget that they were living in the wake of the Enlightenment.

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<sup>1</sup> I depend for my understanding of Ellul on Darrell Fasching, *The Thought of Jacques Ellul: A Systematic Exposition* (NY: Mellen, 1981).

In the following I want to move through three arguments in offering a suggestion as to what such a new metaethic might look like. First, I assert that any ethic that will capture the imagination of an age must finally be based on the currently regnant notion of the nature of physical reality. Second, I want to argue that the alternative ethics (such as that of the Nazis) that have emerged in the modern period have succeeded precisely because they have drawn on a more modern, more up-to-date theory of the nature of physical reality than had the inherited religious ethics. That is, I maintain that the Nazi worldview, for example, was able to define the moral agenda for a whole modern, technological society because it was able to present itself as in accordance with the latest scientific theories of the day and so more in tune with what was then regarded as really real than was true of traditional religious ethics. Finally, I want to launch a preliminary investigation of what a new religious ethic might look like, one that both transcends the pragmatism of a purely secular, technological ethic, but still draws on the post-modern understanding of the nature of the cosmos.

*Ethics and the Scientific Paradigm*

My first step is based on the assumption that morality and moral philosophy in any age are always based on, and draw from, a deeper understanding of the nature of reality. In short, the scientific view of what is and the moral demands of what ought to be are always linked. This is not to claim that one can adduce specific oughts from specific cases of what is. It is to say that at some point we must all feel that the moral life we are called to lead is consistent with what we understand to be the nature of reality. That is, at some level our ethics and our science must both live together in a coherent understanding of what is true. Part of my concern with Ellul is that by positing a holy out there that can act as a counterpose to technology, he is still assuming a world of objective reality, a world now denied by physics. To mount a successful challenge to technology, an entirely different stance, one consistent with a non-logocentric universe, will have to be formulated.

A striking example of how closely ethics and science have always been linked, at least in the West, is the work of Aristotle. Aristotle was both a scientist in that he developed a theory about how the physical universe operates, and a moral philosopher in that he articulated a basis for determining rationally what constitutes the right and the good. These two different areas of contemplation were of course not totally separate and distinct in his mind. In fact, Aristotle's ultimate enterprise was to arrive at an understanding in which what ought to be and what is are mutually supportive. His notion of the physical structure of the universe was that each element had its essential character and its rightful place in the scheme of things. This allowed him to account for why the universe seems to operate as it does. He could explain why stones fell and heated air rose: the one was seeking its natural position in the earth, the other as a mixture of fire and air was seeking its natural place in the air or the ultimate sphere of fire. In other words, each item in the material world has a certain basic form or essence that not only makes it what it is, but that also determines how it will behave

in the physical world. It does what it ought to do (unless blocked) because of what it is.

To be sure, it was a bit more complicated to apply this to human beings, who after all think about how to act. We do not act with the unreflective spontaneity of a rock, for example, or with the instinctive reaction to stimuli as animals often seem to. This, for Aristotle, is where science comes to the aid of ethics. If we know what we are, then we will by that very fact know also what we ought to do. By contemplating our essence as human beings we will be able to see our ultimate end or telos, and so have a vision of what we ought to be and so do.

Aristotle offers one striking example of how closely scientific notions of reality and ideas of what constitutes morality have been. To give but one more example, we can look at the so-called Copernican revolution in astronomy as a challenge not only to Aristotelian astronomy and physics, but also by that same token to Aristotelian ethics (and theology).<sup>2</sup> That is why these new ways of seeing the heavens were so threatening to the Church. If Aristotle were overthrown in the sciences, then his ethics were undermined as well. If his notions of telos and virtue could no longer explain the observed physical universe, then they could not be trusted to yield a reliable model for moral behavior either.

What Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo and others gave us was a universe in which motion was a function not of essence but of the interrelationship of opposing forces. This was given its paradigmatic articulation in the physics of Isaac Newton. But this new way of viewing and organizing physical data established a need to consider moral truths in the same way. At a deep level of conception, Newtonian physics and the new morality worked out by philosophers especially in Britain share similar basic convictions.<sup>3</sup> Both assume that no behavior on the part of an observed individual is determined by its essence in isolation. Both saw the individual working out its destiny in the context of its role as part of a larger aggregate. The motion of a ball in flight is at each instant a combination of diverse, albeit objective and quantifiable, forces (impetus, momentum, gravity) just as the act of an individual person can be understood as the result of a combination of forces acting upon him or her in the social realm. Democracy represents an expression of these forces averaged out in the social world just as the path of the ball does in the physical world. To be sure, there was seen to be a strict mathematical logic in the cosmos according to which the ball must act, just as there is a logic of human happiness or self-preservation in the social and political realm which determines basic human rights and social conventions. Thus the change in how people regarded human activity mirrors the change in how people regarded the functioning of the physical

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<sup>2</sup> See for example Anthony Alioto's *History of Western Science* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1987), pp. 191-204.

<sup>3</sup> These connections are drawn in Larry May, "Hobbes" in Robert Cavalier, ed., *Ethics in the History of Western Philosophy* (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1989), pp. 125-126 and David Fate Norton, "Hume" *Ibid.*, pp. 156-158.

world (and vice versa).<sup>4</sup> Moral philosophy came to look at behavior less as a matter of fulfilling a given telos and more as a matter of what was appropriate or one's duty in a particular situation.

I give this brief look at Western ethics and science to illustrate a point which I am going to take for granted from here on, namely that moral philosophy and the natural sciences always share at a deep level some deep conviction about the nature of reality. It is irrelevant to this argument whether the scientific view influences the philosophical, or vice versa. What is important to see is that they operate in tandem. What is and what ought to be are always linked at some conceptual level. This does not mean that one is derivable, or at least easily derivable from the other. It does mean that the way we look at the cosmos to get scientific answers is the same way we look at the universe to get moral answers.

#### *The Scientific Paradigm of the Nazi Ethic*

This brings me to the second part of my argument, namely that the modern technological world has developed both its own notion of the nature of physical reality and along with that a concomitant notion of what morality requires. Ellul was right to see that, although I remain unconvinced that he analyzed the problem correctly. I want to test his insights, as it were, by taking as a test case, the nature of what I am calling the Nazi ethic. I will show that it is linked to a certain postmodern scientific hypothesis and not to the nature of technology today. I will then be in a position to turn to my third point, an argument that a better ethic is available on the basis of more contemporary scientific paradigms and that such an ethic is possible in the technological world and does not require a leap out into a counter-science ethic posited by a static notion of the holy.

The entire Nazi enterprise was held together by an elaborate ideology that was itself based on the nineteenth century scientific study of race. The interest in racial studies grew out of a number of different intellectual trends in the nineteenth century, including the confrontation with colonial societies, the historical theories of the Hegelians, linguistic and philological studies, and the growth of the science of genetics. These areas of study coalesced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries into a multifaceted study of human genetics and race. In the context of the social dislocations caused by industrialization and the modern urban environment, these studies offered a coherent and scientific theory of how to manage social development. I want to describe briefly the major elements of this view and then show how it laid the foundation for the Nazi ethic of the 1930's.

As Hannah Arendt has pointed out, one of the great intellectual challenges of the nineteenth century was to come to an understanding of the variety of peoples and cultures that Europeans were encountering during their colonial expansion.<sup>5</sup> It became a matter of considerable interest to understand why such variety existed, why some

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<sup>4</sup> See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: Notre Dame press, 1984), pp. 235-237.

<sup>5</sup> "Imperialism" in her *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (NY: HBI, 1973).

social groups seemed to be trapped in simple, rural economies while others had forged ahead to create the elaborate industrial and urban societies of Europe. In the same vein it became a matter of speculation as to why some societies had developed rational religions based on the belief in one god while others seemed to still be practicing a mixture of magic, pagan polytheism and superstition. Under the influence of Hegelian thought, the common conviction emerged that the level of civilization reached by a particular population was a reflection of the population's innate abilities. That is, in every case a society was a perfect reflection of the inherent character of its people. From that idea it was but a short jump to the notion that the civilizing genius of a people or nation was genetic. At this point a second conviction came into play. This conviction grew out of both the philosophical construct of Hegel and the theories proposed by Charles Darwin to account for the diversity of life forms in the natural world. Hegel had proposed that the human insight into the world, the Spirit, grew progressively more insightful over time in a dialectic movement in which the inadequacies of each stage were taken up and resolved in the next epoch. We can trace the trajectory of this process in the progression of civilizations from age to age as each reaches new depths of self-awareness and understanding. This descriptive model of human history provided a framework for the creation of a social science. That is it allowed for the methodologically critical - that is, scientific — use of art, literature, religion and social structure to chart the ongoing progress in the human understanding of the ultimate. Historical, literary and aesthetic studies were no longer merely descriptive but could take their place in the larger scientific endeavor to chart the ever-deepening human enterprise to perceive the Truth.

The idea of the Hegelian dialectic was given concrete expression in many people's minds by the theories of Charles Darwin. Darwin's original purpose was simply to propose that the diversity of life forms found in the natural world were a result of spontaneous changes that gave certain forms of a species an advantage within a certain niche. Gradually that permutation would come to dominate in that niche and a new sub-species will have emerged. There was in this no sense that one subspecies was objectively better or worse than others, only more or less adapted to a particular environment. But in the popular mind this became assimilated to the Hegelian notion of evolution to yield the idea that life forms were constantly evolving not only into different forms, but ultimately to objectively better forms. These better, or objectively fitter forms, were destined by the very laws of nature to dominate all others and survive. In short, both the natural sciences and philosophy seemed to be pointing to the same powerful truth, namely that life evolved to ever fitter forms and that those populations at the forward edge of the process would naturally dominate and eventually drive out those less advanced. Or, to say the same thing from a different perspective, a population that appears endangered or is in decline is one that has been left behind in the grand march toward superior forms.

Once we have arrived at this point, it is easy to see that the science of genetics could become a major force in the nineteenth and early twentieth century attempts

in the West to achieve a scientific understanding of the engine driving human destiny. If human society and civilization were merely outward expressions of the innate character and civilizing genius of the population, and if these characteristics were genetically determined, and if such innate characteristics evolve over time to yield superior forms, and finally if the sign of this superiority is dominance, then genetics ultimately holds that key to the nature of human civilization. I submit that it was just such an understanding that supplied the popular culture with a seemingly scientific way of accounting for the world. It explained why some cultures dominated others, for example. It was simply the natural destiny of some to overtake others, just as close observation of the natural world would demonstrate.

There was another ramification of this as well, however, a ramification that was much more sinister. If genetic advance was reflected in a culture's dominance and well-being, then a culture's sickness and decline must also be a function of genetics, in this case genetic stagnation or even degeneration. It follows that if society is declining, if it is manifesting pathologies, then genetic science could provide an objective way of assessing the underlying cause and offer a methodology for engineering a recovery.<sup>6</sup>

At this point one only needs to think of the malaise that gripped German society in the wake of the First World War to understand the intellectual fascination with genetics in the form of racial science. We today have a perspective on the dissolution of Wilhelmine and Weimar Germany that was simply not available at the time. We can see the problems in terms of social structure, economics and so forth that those going through the wrenching changes of industrialization simply were in no position to do. We can hardly be surprised that the thinkers and shapers of society turned to what scientific models were available to them.

Racial science provided both a diagnosis, an explanation of what was happening, and also a remedy, a strategy to turn the crisis around. If the social pathologies confronting German society were seen as symptoms of an underlying genetic decline, then the rational, scientific response would be to manage a regeneration of the genetic pool. This would of course take the form of social policies designed 1). to identify the carriers of inferior genes: the congenitally diseased, the racially inferior, the disabled; and 2) to identify the carriers of the superior genes. The former would have to be weeded out of the population while the later would have to be nurtured. The racial policies of Nazi Germany can thus be seen as systematically growing out of a particular scientific view of the world.<sup>7</sup> Given the presupposition that genetic science, with its Hegelian and Darwinian components, offered a true insight into the dynamics of human cultural change, the ethic of a racial social policy makes a certain sense. To be sure, racial science of this type was based on a number of erroneous presuppositions, not to mention a massive misreading of Darwin. But nonetheless, the point remains that we can explain

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<sup>6</sup> Much of this is drawn from Daniel Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics* (NY: A Knopf, 1985).

<sup>7</sup> This is shown in detail by Robert Proctor, *Racial Hygiene: Medicine Under the Nazis* (NY: Cambridge UP, 1988). See also Paul Weindling, *Health, Race and German Politics Between Unification and Nazism 1870-1945* (NY: Cambridge UP, 1989).



the widespread support Nari racial policy had at least in its abstract expression by its grounding in what were regarded as established scientific principles.

*The Moral Paradigm of Scientific Relativity*

The questions we are now left with are 1). what scientific paradigm is available for the construction of a post-modern ethic; and 2). how is an ethic to be adduced from that paradigm. The first question is the easier one. The governing model of our time, clearly, is Einstein's Theory of Relativity. It is the first major advance since the work of Isaac Newton towards formulating a comprehensive theory that explains why the universe functions as it does. Not only has the Theory of Relativity revised our notions of time and space, but it has changed in the popular mind how we understand perceptions and so how we evaluate the status of our descriptions of everything from natural phenomena to cultural creations. The more difficult question is what kind of ethic can be constructed on this foundation.

In fact, we do not need to start out *de novo* in building such an ethic. The baric conviction of Relativity that there is no objective reality out there to be observed but only descriptions from certain human perspectives had already been an established part of Western thought by the time Einstein published his theory. It is what lay behind the nominalist/realist debates of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.<sup>8</sup> Immanuel Kant in the late eighteenth century used the difference between perception and reality as the very basis of his epistemology.<sup>9</sup> By the late nineteenth century, the very idea that there was a reality out there that the phenomenal world was reflecting or tending towards was demolished in the natural sciences by Charles Darwin and in moral philosophy by Friedrich Nietzsche. By the early twentieth century, when Einstein began publishing his speculations, structuralist and Semiotic studies were showing that human culture was nothing other than a set of signifiers which have no meaning outside their interpretation among a population. The adoption of Relativity as a basis for cultural studies and ethics is thus hardly without some precedents in Western thinking.

I now wish to turn to the second question, what the nature of such an ethic might be. The baric point to make is that while Relativity does eliminate all sense of a universal *telos* or of a single objective reality, it does not do away with all absolutes. Thus an ethic based on Relativity is not one in which everything goes or in which all viewpoints are equally valid. While an ethics of Relativity can be tolerant of many different types of perspective, it need not be equally tolerant of all of them. Let me explain.

According to the Theory of Relativity, it is not possible, for example, to claim that there is an absolute and objective speed of the moon. The speed of the moon, like any speed, is a matter of a relationship: how fast one thing is moving in contrast to

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<sup>8</sup> This argument can also be seen in Copernicus, who did not so much claim that the earth actually revolved around the sun as he claimed that by making this assumption he could simplify the mathematical description of the planets observed orbits. Galileo created a problem only when he claimed that Copernicus' hypothesis was not merely a matter of mathematical convenience, but was in fact an accurate description of reality. See Alioto, *Op. Cit.*, pp.146ff.

<sup>9</sup> Kant, of course, did finally think that there was a reality out there that was available to human

another. Thus the speed of the moon will be different if measured from the sun, for example, than if measured from the earth. It is part of the work of the scientist to become aware of his or her point of observation and take that into account. It is in fact now taken for granted that the scientist's choice of question will pre-determine (in a sense) the answer that will emerge. This is the point eventually enshrined in the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle.<sup>10</sup> According to this new physics, there can in fact be several simultaneous right answers to any question, even right answers that appear to be mutually exclusive. This is so because the answer is always a function of the experiment or rhetoric we set up.

My point here is that this epistemology does not claim that any and every answer is true by the mere fact of its existence. It is always possible to produce wrong answers because the experiment was poorly planned, because the instrumentation was not accurate or simply because the experimenter has mismeasured. Thus, while it is possible to measure the moon's speed from a variety of equally valid perspectives, it is also possible to pick an irrelevant perspective for what the scientist wants to know, or to have an appropriate perspective and measure the speed incorrectly. Thus the modern scientific paradigm, while allowing for several concurrently right answers to any question about the universe, also recognizes that there are wrong and dysfunctional answers as well.

There is a second ramification of the Theory of Relativity that I wish to explore here. From the claim that there is no absolute space or time it follows that everything has a location and a velocity only in terms of an Other. And it follows further, from Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, that if we destroy or factor out this Other, then some aspect of the thing we are studying is thereby also by nature eliminated. It is this feature of Relativity that has not yet been taken seriously in the creation of a new ethic. The paradigm of Relativity offers the possibility of constructing an ethic that is consistent both with the regnant view of physical reality and with the multicultural and pluralistic global community we are now inhabiting. In the next few paragraphs I want to think through at least the broad outlines of how the contents of such an ethic might be adduced.

The foundational principle of the new physics is that any measurement is a matter of relationship. My argument here is that on the basis of a Relativity based ethic we

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comprehension, albeit only through the power of pure reason. It is generally regarded to be Nietzsche who discarded entirely any need for logocentric presuppositions.

<sup>10</sup> The Uncertainty Principle states in its simplest form that one can not determine simultaneously both the location and the velocity of an electron. The reason is that both location and velocity of electrons are artificial human constructs placed on the electron by the nature of the measuring device. An experiment designed to adduce one of these descriptions can never have "access" to the other. The formulation of this principle ended a long debate that engulfed late nineteenth and early twentieth century physicists. On this see John Gibbin, *In Search of Schrodinger's Cat: Quantum Physics and Reality* (NY: Bantam, 1984), pp. 2-3. Einstein's argument for rejecting the existence of a truth independent of the experimenter is discussed in Gerald Holton, *Thematic Origins of Scientific Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1973), pp. 232ff.

need to make that same claim for moral imperatives. The scientific paradigm suggests that just as no scientific model or reality is self-standing and ontologically grounded, we should be able to concede that in the same way no ethical system is a self-sufficient construct that has an objective claim to ontological superiority. Each ethic is the result of a particular cultural and historical encounter with life, and that the ethic that emerges out of the encounter is, at least potentially, a valid reading from that perspective. This does not mean that anything goes or that any personal set of feelings has to be recognized as a complete and coequal ethic. There are, as in physics, appropriate and useful places from which to take measurements, there is a need to be consistent about the perspective if the data are to mean anything, and there is a need to take care that the measuring is done accurately. There is still room to reject a Nazi type ethic that is based on poor science. Yet given proper context, consistency and rigor, differences can still be mutually tolerated.

A further implication of basing an ethic on Relativity is that each individual and society manufactures its own self-identity overagainst some Other.<sup>11</sup> In a more logocentric universe, this leads to the implication either that if my perspective is right then that of the Other must be wrong, or that the Other represents the perfect ethic which I and everyone else must emulate. The end result is to commit one to eliminating, or at least superseding, the ethics that do not meet the ideal. What the paradigm of modern physics teaches us is that that is not the case. In fact, the Other does not exist except as a projection of ourselves and we in fact only take on definition in terms of the Other. That is, if we eliminate the Other (whether by merging with it or by eliminating it), we have in fact thereby eliminated ourselves as well. In short, for any perspective, the Other is both necessarily different, but also necessary. An ethic based on eliminating or superseding the other is by the very nature of things, self-contradictory and so self-destructive. From the vista opened up by Relativity, I submit, we can perceive a way of establishing a moral rhetoric that demands that we recognize and even support the Other while not at the same time abdicating our ability to recognize that certain ethical stances can still be wrong.

### *Conclusion*

It is not possible in this forum to develop fully the contents of such an ethic or to delineate how to know when the requirements of the perspective have been compromised so that the contents are incorrect. What I hope to have accomplished is to articulate a way of thinking about ethics that abandons logocentricity while still being consistent with the best of our scientific view of the structure of reality. It seems to me that placing relationship rather than being at the center of focus is the hallmark of postmodern scientific thought. It allows for greater latitude in recognizing the validity of various points of view and of the importance of these differences in maintaining a meaningful

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<sup>11</sup> This is the basis of Martin Buber's epistemology. I establish the nature of the "I" on the basis of the relationships established with the "Its" and the "thous" out there. By establishing those relationships, I am in fact giving content to the "I".

cosmos. By linking our understanding of good and evil, right and wrong, with this scientific paradigm, I believe we will be able to open ourselves up to the possibility of a new metaethic that will allow greater appreciation of the variety of ways people can choose to be ethical in the increasingly complex, pluralistic and technologically sophisticated post-Modern world we inhabit. The need is not to transcend this world, but to see in it the possibility of a new morality. In this way we might be able to develop as moral beings in the kind of world that so challenged Jacques Ellul.

## Beyond Absolutism and Relativism: The Utopian Promise of Babel

by Darrell Fasching

Adapted from *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia?*, SUNY Press, 1993

*Narrative Diversity and the Dignity of the Stranger*

The story of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9) is a story which seems uniquely suited to illuminating the ethical challenge of our time. According to that story the citizens of Babel sought to grasp transcendence by building a tower to heaven. Transcendence, they apparently believed, could be brought under human control through conformity to a common language. Transcendence was equated with the technical and social power which can be mar-tialed by a society unified in its language, meaning and values. By sharing a common story, they seem to believe, transcendence could be domesticated and made subservient to human desires. But God, seeing the idolatry in what the citizens of Babel had in mind, confused their tongues so that they no longer were able to understand each other. They became strangers to each other and so had to abandon the dream of technical control over their destiny. There is a great deal of Babel's spiritual pathology present in our own MAD apocalyptic world. We also are caught up in such technological fantasies. There is much in us that still longs to return to the imagined days before Babel's disintegration, when everyone in the public square had a sense of belonging to the same sacred society, speaking the same language and sharing the same values.

In our pluralistic world we long for the common morality of a sacred society and lament our fragmented ethical diversity and the confusion it seems to bring. We wish for everything to be once more clear and unambiguous. From such a perspective the actions of a God who would deliberately make a sacred community into a society of strangers seems at best perverse — a perverse judgment on human effort. But for a God who is infinite or Wholly Other, whose thoughts are not our thoughts and whose ways are not our ways, such an act might seem to be not a curse but a blessing. For it is through the stranger that the infinite enters the finite and closed world of a sacred

society, calling it into question and opening it up to its utopian possibilities. For those who have the ears to hear and the eyes to see, Babel may not be so much a curse as a gracious opportunity filled with utopian promise. If we are to realize this promise, however, we must be prepared to break with those fantasies of a linguistically and technologically unified world which typified Babel before its fall. We must shatter the linguistic imperialism of secularism and techno-bureaucratic rationality in order to make a place for human dignity and human rights — especially those of the stranger.

There is a significant difference in the way Alasdair MacIntyre and Stanley Hauerwas approach narrative ethics within our modern technological city of *Babel*, with its ethical pluralism and narrative diversity. For it seems to me that MacIntyre bewails this diversity and prepares for us for a new "dark ages" by settling into the one story which he wishes were universal, whereas Hauerwas does not retreat into the particularity of his Christian narrative tradition but rather embraces its particularity while insisting that other narrative traditions may have something to teach us as well. The difference in attitude to the narrative pluralism of our world can be traced to Hauerwas' strong emphasis on the Biblical ethic of welcoming the stranger. For how can we welcome strangers without being interested in their stories? To welcome strangers entails an ethical encounter in which we must inevitably be open to their stories and traditions apart from which they would not be who they are. To welcome the stranger inevitably involves us in a sympathetic passing over into the other's life and stories and a coming back into our own own life and stories enriched with new insight. To see life through a story which requires us to welcome the stranger is to be forced to recognize the dignity of the stranger who does not share our story. We are forced to recognize the humanity of the one who is wholly other — whose ways are not our ways and whose thoughts are not our thoughts. In our time, we must seek to build an ethical coalition for the defense of human dignity and human rights at the intersection of those narrative traditions that (like Judaism and Christianity) emphasize welcoming the stranger or the (like Buddhism) the outcaste.

To welcome the stranger requires seeing Babel not as a curse but rather as a blessing. Indeed, the story of Babel offers us a clue not only to the relation of transcendence to the stranger but also how that relation can alter the techno-bureaucratic ideology which threatens to submerge us in the suicidal abyss of the demonic.

Let us recall the story once more. According to the book of Genesis:

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. . . . Then they [the citizens of Babel] said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." The Lord came down to see the city and the tower which mortals had built. And the Lord said, "Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, that they may not understand one another's speech." So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they

left off building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth. (Genesis 11:1,4-9)

The story of Babel is especially interesting for what it suggests about the linkage of language, technology and the quest for self-transcendence. Technology is viewed as the mediator of the human quest for transcendence. That is, technology is thought to enable humans to reach heaven and be like God –as they imagine God, that is, in total control. And even as technology is viewed, within the story, as mediating transcendence, language is viewed as mediating technology. It is by virtue of sharing one language, one worldview, that this transcendence or total control is viewed as possible. God’s intervention, confusing their language so that the building project is interrupted, is usually interpreted as a curse or punishment for the sin of pride.

Perhaps that was the meaning of this ancient story before it was incorporated into the biblical narrative traditions. However, in the Torah the command to welcome the stranger occurs more often than any other command - some thirty six times.<sup>12</sup> In the light of this emphasis I think another conclusion must be drawn. God’s confusion of human language must be understood not as a punishment but as a blessing. Humans, unable to imagine the infinite as anything other than the infinitizing of their own finitude, seek to appropriate transcendence through the linguistic ideology of a single worldview as the precondition for total technical control of their lives. But rather than punishing them for seeking transcendence, God intervenes to redirect them toward authentic self-transcendence, which can occur only when they are strangers to be welcomed into one’s society. For strangers speaking different tongues, telling different stories and communicating different values are an invitation to self-transcendence, opening up our closed world to the infinite and the possibility of utopian transformation. In place of the totalitarian language of one world view, Babel offers us a plurality of languages and world views, each offering the possibility of a finite insight into the infinite — insights which might be mutually enriching. Such a plurality of insights is appropriate to our finite condition. What is inappropriate is the pretension to omniscience. Rather than making ethics impossible, because the definitive (omniscient) answer cannot be given, it renders ethics a human task of questioning and questing for insight and the sharing of that insight. Ethics, so conceived, is a common quest to understand what is truly good, in which the good manifests itself not so much through absolutely *right* answers as through a shared commitment to be *responsible* for each other. As such, Babel redefines our relation to technique. Rather than a managerial/public policy ideology of total control over society, it suggests the more modest goal of a society of pluralistic institutions each with a limited area of authority and each exercising responsible self-control. Babel replaces the closed totalitarian world of *sameness* (i.e., of the false infinite) with the finite and unfinished world of human finitude

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<sup>12</sup> Richard H. Schwartz, *Judaism and Global Survival*, (New York: Atara Publishing Co., 1987), p. 13.

and human diversity — a world which is utopian because it is unfinished. A world in which the finite, without ceasing to be finite, is open to the infinite and hence further transformation.

Like Jeffrey Stout, I would argue that,

our problems do not result from the confusion of tongues in a society that has fallen from the coherence and community of an earlier age. The plurality of moral languages in our society is closely related to the plurality of social practices and institutions we have reason to affirm. Our moral languages exhibit a division of conceptual labor, each doing its own kind of work. But they also sometimes get in each other's way. Some languages, in particular those of the marketplace and the bureaucracies, creep into areas of life where they can only do harm. They tend to engulf or corrupt habits of thought and patterns of interaction that we desperately need. Protecting them is a grave problem, worthy of the best social criticism and political experimentation we can muster.<sup>13</sup>

The problem then is not the pluralism of languages but the imperialism of some institutional languages, especially techno-bureaucratic and economic languages. For the imperialism of these languages tends to destroy the complex socio-linguistic ecology which sustains human dignity by reducing the individual to a component in a complex bureaucracy to be manipulated for the achievement of maximum efficiency at a minimum cost. The problem is, as Peter Berger suggests, that technical bureaucracy has replaced the sacred canopy as the organizing principle of modern social life since it is experienced as the power which transforms chaos into cosmos.

Both Ellul and Richard Rubenstein, suggest that the demonic power of a technological civilization lies in creating a bureaucratic society of total domination. Such a society is a total reversion to that mythic time before Babel when society was governed by one language and one technology which serves to absolutize its finite social order as sacred and unquestionable and seeks to eliminate all self-transcendence by substituting *sameness* for *diversity*. The question remains, however, whether a technological civilization must necessarily result in the bureaucratization of human life. Berger (Peter and Brigitte) and Kellner argue that while bureaucracy and technology are the primary social carriers of modernization, they are not the same, nor are they inextricably linked. Bureaucracy and technology are as old as urbanization itself. But the modern "technological phenomenon," as Jacques Ellul describes it, with its emphasis on efficiency and the managerial restructuring of society to promote maximum efficiency is a distinctively modern phenomenon. It is when technological efficiency becomes linked to the bureaucratic domination of life that its impact on society and personal life becomes totalitarian.

The heart of the problem lies in the transformation which occurs when modern technological consciousness is subsumed into bureaucratic consciousness and generalized to the whole of society. For there are inherent limits in technological consciousness

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<sup>13</sup> Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics After Babel* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), p. 7.

which are removed as it enters the bureaucratic environment. In areas of genuine technological production, the materials one is working with and the goals one is trying to realize are specific. They impose discipline, limits and measurable goals on the technological process. All of these are absent when technical attitudes are carried over into bureaucratic processes. "In political bureaucracy there is less pressure from the logic of technology and therefore more of a chance for the peculiar genius of bureaucracy to unfold."<sup>14</sup>

As bureaucracy overtakes technology and engulfs society, the means are no longer related to and disciplined by ends beyond themselves. The whole of society becomes divided into areas of bureaucratic expertise to be regulated by the appropriate experts according to established anonymous and impartial procedures. Organization and orderliness become ends in themselves.

Bureaucracy is not only orderly but orderly in an imperialistic mode. There is a bureaucratic demiurge who views the universe as dumb chaos waiting to be brought into the redeeming order of bureaucratic administration. . . . The engineer puts phenomena into little categorial boxes in order to take them apart further or to put them together in larger wholes. By contrast, the bureaucrat is typically satisfied once everything has been put in its proper box. Thus bureaucracy leads to a type of problem-solving different from that for technological production. It is less conducive to creative fantasy, and it is fixating rather than innovating. ... In the technological sphere, social organization is largely heteronomous, that is, it must be so shaped as to conform to the non-bureaucratic requirements of production. This imposes certain limits on organization. ... In the political sphere, which is the bureaucratic sphere par excellence, these limits are much less in evidence. Here, organization can be set up autonomously, that is, as following no logic but its own. . . . Paper does not resist the bureaucrat in the way that steel parts resist the engineer. Thus there is nothing that intrinsically prohibits the passport agency from deciding that ten rather than three bureaucrats must approve every passport applicant<sup>15</sup>

In a techno-bureaucrat society all of life is compartmentalized and individuals are expected to unquestioningly follow procedures without necessarily understanding the larger goals to which their actions contribute. For, on the one hand, the intelligibility of required procedures is opaque since the problem it solves is not a genuine technical problem. On the other hand, one is expected to abide by regulations and procedures which are "too technical" for the average person to understand, on the assumption that the appropriate experts understand and legitimate these ends, providing the reasons why things must be done in a certain way.

Albert Speer, reflecting on how he came to be involved in Hitler's Third Reich emphasizes just these tendencies of techno-bureaucratic order. Thus, he tells us:

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<sup>14</sup> Peter Berger, *The Homeless Mind*, by Peter Berger, Birgitte Berger and Hansfried Kellner (New York: Intage Books, Random House, 1973.), p. 42.

<sup>15</sup> Berger and Kellner, *The Homeless Mind*, pp. 49-50.



The ordinary party member was being taught that grand-policy was much too complex for him to judge it. Consequently, one felt one was being represented, never called upon to take personal responsibility. The whole structure of the system was aimed at preventing conflicts of conscience from even arising. ... Worse still was the restriction of responsibility to one's own field. Everyone kept to his own group - of architects, physicians,, jurists, technicians, soldiers, or farmers. The professional organizations to which everyone had to belong were called chambers ... and this term aptly described the way people were immured in isolated, closed-off areas of life. The longer Hitler's system lasted, the more people's minds moved within such isolated chambers ... What eventually developed was a society of totally isolated individuals...<sup>16</sup>

Such a techno-bureaucratic society forces a demonic doubling or splitting of the self. It forces individuals to generate a plurality of selves — a *persona* appropriate to each compartmentalized area of human life, selves which are, at best, a-moral, having surrendered the option of ethical reflection and judgment to the experts. These selves, denuded of everything which makes them truly individuals (i.e., their personal and communal histories and values) become finally dehumanized interchangeable and replaceable parts in a vast bureaucratic machine. Thus whereas technological production gives persons a sense of creativity and potency and even self-transcendence as one overcomes obstacles and realizes a goal, bureaucracy creates just the opposite, namely, a sense of impotency, helplessness and the necessity to conform to a reality so real, massive and all pervasive that "nothing can be changed." The result is a social structure which separates ends from means or the deriders from the actors, relegating all decisions to "higher levels." Such a social structure prepares the way for the demonic, preventing ethical questions from ever arising even as it creates bureaucratic individuals who feel no personal responsibility for their actions.

In such a techno-bureaucratic society, the presence of holy communities, who are in but not of the world, serve as a fence around human dignity. For these communities prevent the usurpation of human dignity by bureaucratic expediency, especially by forcing the naked self to recognize its essential interdependence with all other beings. Such communities undermine demonic forms of doubling by fostering a sense of self which breaks down the compartmentalized walls between its various role defined selves (all of whom speak only one language - "bureaucrateeze"), encouraging the reflective self to assume responsibility for all its selves.

Our capacity for ethics is rooted in our capacity to assume the place of the other who will be affected by our actions. This capacity is fostered by the experience of self-alienation which makes it possible for us to assume different roles in different social contexts. The capacity to assume diverse roles is precisely what enables us to identify with the stranger. The ethical dimension of every institutional role we assume is rooted in a feeling of obligation towards, the dignity of the persons whose needs we meet through that social context. However, the tendency of virtually every social

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<sup>16</sup> Albert Speer ^4Zbert Speer, *Inside the ThirdRdch*, (New York: Macmillan, 1970), p. 33.

institution is to consider its purposes as sacred or ultimate. So each demands a total unquestioning commitment of the self to its goals and values at the expense of all others. To acquiesce in that demand would require a demonic doubling.

By contrast, the holy community, when it is faithful to its calling, is not just one more institution competing for the loyalty of the self but the one community which raises the question of justice. It is the one community which raises those questions which force the reflecting self to weigh and balance all the demands placed upon it by its diverse roles so as to recognize and embrace that socio-ecological balance which will best allow it to respect the human dignity of others in every social context of its life. This it does by weighing and balancing the self's diverse roles so as to promote a complex moral balance in its social ecology which does justice to human dignity in all its social contexts.

Contrary to Alasdair MacIntyre's argument, human rights claims cannot simply be dismissed as fictions invented to counter bureaucratic imperialism. Rather, they are an expression of our deepest religious and ethical insights concerning the status of the stranger. Our problem is not, as MacIntyre appears to suggest, that we no longer *all* share the same story as in the days before Babel. A human rights ethic does not require narrative uniformity. It only requires that our diverse stories make a place for the stranger. Indeed, as I have been arguing, human rights ethics are the result not of narrative uniformity but narrative diversity. The diversity of Babel is not a curse but a promise. It is a promise which can be realized through a process which Jeffrey Stout calls moral *bricolage*. A *bricoleur* is one who creatively makes use of what ever is at hand. "All great works of creative ethical thought . . . involve moral *bricolage*. . . . Take Aquinas, . . . his real accomplishment was to bring together into a single whole a wide assortment of fragments — Platonic, Stoic, Pauline, Jewish, Islamic, Augustinian, and Aristotelian."<sup>17</sup> While I think there can be more theoretical clarity to this process of *bricolage* than Stout's pragmatism offers, I do not find myself in disagreement with his basic premise. When it comes to discussing ethics and human rights in the naked public square, he suggests, *bricolage* can produce a very creative and functional linguistic *creole*.

The secularization of public discourse - didn't occur in people's heads and hearts but rather into the linguistic transactions that took place, under the aegis of certain public institutions, between one person and another. What they had in their heads and hearts mattered. Luther's religious convictions about the nature of the secular order and Locke's religious convictions of conscience, as well as the convictions of eighteenth-century deists and nineteenth-century atheists, all contributed to the secularization of moral discourse. But we need also to keep in mind how heavily the need to persuade one's religious opponents without resort to war has contributed to the process of conceptual change. . . .

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<sup>17</sup> Stout, pp. 75-76.

Our secularized language of human rights seems in fact to have begun as what the linguists call *pidgin* - a sparse dialect used entirely for communicating with members of other groups, nobody's native tongue or first language of deliberation but a handy mode of discourse with strangers [emphasis added]. But what used to be a pidgin can undergo further development, catch on as a language to be learned in infancy, and function as a subtle medium for deliberation and discourse with friends and family. Linguists call such a language a *creole*. A creole can become over time, as rich a moral language as one could want - drawing vocabularies from diverse sources and weaving them together, if all goes well, into a tapestry well-suited to the needs of a time and place. Need we reduce our moral discourse to Esperanto or confine ourselves to the scant conceptual resources of a pidgin to make the language of human rights our own? Not if we can give it a place within a language sufficiently rich and coherent to meet our needs.<sup>18</sup>

The language and ethic of human rights which I have been envisioning approximates Stout's proposal. But the creole that I imagine would continue to be viable only if it acted as a bridge between particular traditions and their stories and not as a replacement for them. To Stout's credit he recognizes the moral discourse of the naked public square must have a place within it for religious dialects as well as secular. "If we want to understand our fellow citizens," he says (speaking for the "secularist" perspective), "— whether they be Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Jr., Jerry Falwell, the Roman Catholic Bishops, Mario Cuomo, or Elie Wiesel - we had better develop the means for understanding the moral languages, including the theological ones, in which they occasionally address us and in which their deliberations are couched."<sup>19</sup> One might add, that the reverse is true also. Those who speak out of religious narrative traditions need to be able to hear and understand those who speak out of secular stories as well. For this to happen, the religious fundamentalism which characterizes many religious communities and the secular fundamentalism that pervades the naked public square will both have to be desacralized and replaced with a secular holiness which welcomes strangers and the diversity of story and tradition they bring with them. The utopian promise of Babel lies neither in a secular uniformity nor a sacred uniformity but in the possibilities for self-transcendence which occur when we welcome strangers into the public square even though welcoming them is likely to change and transform us.

The kind of *creole* Stout seems to have in mind is well illustrated by the cross-cultural human rights ethic whose emergence is symbolized by the convergence between East and West which we find in Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. Their ethic of non-violence is the product of a long history of interaction between narrative traditions East and West (going back through Tolstoy to Jesus and the Buddha) which has resulted

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<sup>18</sup> Stout, pp. 80-81.

<sup>19</sup> Stout, p. 188.

in a powerful ethic of audacity on behalf of the stranger. Indeed, I believe the ethical *creole* which is emerging out of this multi-cultural and multi-religious narrative history is capable of embracing both religious and secular ethics to reveal the utopian promise of Babel in a unified yet pluralistic response to the silent voice which commands from Auschwitz and Hiroshima — Never Again.

*Secular Holiness in Defense of Human Dignity: The Commanding Voice From Auschwitz and the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights*

If the twentieth century has been the age of the genocidal *apocalypse* (i.e., revelation) of the demonic, it has also been the age of the birth of human rights. It was Emil Fackenheim (in *God's Presence in History*) who noted that the refusal of Jews to give up their Jewishness, despite the devastation of the Shoah, suggested that they had heard and responded to a silent yet commanding voice from Auschwitz, forbidding them to grant Hitler a posthumous victory. In claiming that Jews had heard such a command, Fackenheim was not so much advancing a theological hypothesis as he was making an empirical observation. He was simply articulating and making conscious what, in fact, had already happened. For the visceral response to the Shoah by Jews, both religious and non-religious, was to continue to affirm their Jewishness.

It is not implausible to suggest that the emergence of an ethic of human rights is a similar response to a silent yet commanding voice from Auschwitz - a voice directed, in this instance, to the whole human race. For the movement for human rights arose in response to the trauma of the Shoah after WWH and culminated in the formation of the United Nations in 1946 and the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. At the same time, the U.N. backed founding of the State of Israel. The Declaration recalls the "barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind," and affirms the unity of humanity across cultures. Consequently, this document stands against all mythologies which would diride humanity, racially or otherwise, into superior and inferior groups in order to claim the world and its resources for the superior ones, as both the German and Japanese mythologies of the WWII period sought to do. The unity and sanctity of the human community, it declares, may not be violated by any political order. Human dignity transcends all social and political orders. It is the true measure of a just society - the limit which no political authority may transgress.

The power of the ethical vision of human dignity and human rights expressed in the U.N. document lies in the fact that it too is rooted in a visceral response, one which cuts across cultures and creeds. Unlike the language of most academic reflection on ethics which remains technical and esoteric, human rights language is a language which has spontaneously taken root in cross-cultural public discourse. The language of human rights has become embedded in the language of politics and international relations. Even if in many cases the political use of this language is hypocritical, still that is *the homage which vice pays to virtue*, which means that this standard has taken root in public life and can be used as a measuring rod (canon) for social and political criticism. To a considerable degree the world has already embraced an ethic of human rights and now scholars are scurrying to see if it is a coherent and defensible ethic.

The emergence of a human rights ethic marks the emergence of an ethic of secular holiness. It parallels the convergence of the secular and the holy which Irving Greenberg, in his essay *The Third Great Cycle*, has noted in the history of Judaism. Greenberg breaks down the history of Judaism into three stages of secularization. These stages have implications for the gentile world as well. According to Greenberg, the first era of the Jewish covenant, the biblical, ended with the fall of the second temple which in turn led to the rabbinic era which lasted until the Shoah and the emergence of the modern state of Israel which inaugurated yet a third era. The trend in this unfolding pattern is one of the increasing hiddenness of God, says Greenberg, and of the increasing responsibility that human beings must bear for the covenant. In the first age, God intervened directly in history and bore the primary responsibility for the covenant. In the second age, God became more hidden. God went into exile and diaspora with God's people and placed more responsibility with the human side of the covenant, allowing the rabbis to determine the binding nature of covenant obligations. But now after the Shoah in which 80 % of the rabbis and Talmud scholars perished, the Talmudic age has come to an end. But even as the Shoah shattered faith, so the creation of the state of Israel stands on "a par with Exodus" as a miraculous event rekindling hope. Out of the contradiction of these two events, Shoah and Israel, neither of which is capable of canceling out the other, Greenberg argues, a new age of Judaism is being born. Living with these contradictory experiences, faith reasserts itself and yet "the smoke, of Auschwitz obscures the presence of God." In this new era God is not only more hidden but religious activity has become radically secular.

The old categories of secular and religious no longer work. If in the first era God was to be found in the temple in Jerusalem, and in the second era God was found in exile and diaspora with God's people, then in the third era God is found hidden everywhere beneath the secular. In this third era, the primary responsibility for keeping the covenant has fallen on the human side of the covenant. In this era, Greenberg argues, the covenant is no longer binding on Jews. After the Shoah God cannot with justice require any Jew to keep the covenant. The covenant has become a voluntary covenant. And yet Jews are choosing to keep it of their own free will but in a radical variety of ways. In direct continuity with the rabbinic principle of pluralism in interpretation but in contradiction of the principle of majority rule, the placing of the covenant more completely in human hands means there will be diversity both in the interpretation and application of the covenant. There will legitimately be a plurality of Jewish covenantal life-styles. It is binding on Jews to accept each other in these plural ways of keeping the covenant. For any one Jewish community to reject other Jews because of the choice of how they will keep the covenant would be a betrayal of those Jews, both secular and religious, who died in the camps. Such a betrayal only furthers the possibility of a posthumous victory for Hitler. Indeed, it is the more secular institutions of Judaism and their lay leadership, (e.g., the state of Israel and the United Jewish Appeal), not the ultra orthodox (who would refuse some Jews admission to Israel), who are championing the dignity of every Jew as created in the image of God, against all future Hitlers. These

secular institutions and lay leaders represent the emergence of a new era and a new ethic of secular holiness for Jews.

In *The Secular City*, Harvey Cox once argued that the modern secular age, far from leading necessarily to nihilism, leads instead to a new pragmatic consensus on human values as exemplified in the U.N. Declaration on Human Rights. I think Cox is right to point to the human rights movement as a significant development but I think he is wrong to see it as rooted in a purely pragmatic consensus. Human rights claims suggest that we have a human dignity which must not be violated even if this consensus should change. Human rights claims are rooted in a uniquely modern understanding of the human self as making a moral claim on us by its very existence. Human rights claims are rooted in the spontaneous recognition of the transcendent dignity of the human self. The U.N. Declaration on human rights represents nothing less than a response of the human community to human dignity as an experience of transcendence which evokes a new international covenant community-of-communities.

I believe the international movement to embrace and defend an ethic of human rights, inaugurated by the U.N. Declaration in response to the Shoah, represents the emergence of a new covenant with the whole of humanity — parallel to that of the renewed voluntary covenant of Judaism. The new Jewish covenant, as Greenberg interprets it, really has two levels. On the one hand, the vocation of witness as a light to the nations, of whether and how to be Jewish is now a matter of choice. But Jews do not have the option of not recognizing each others' diverse forms of Jewishness as authentic. The dignity of each Jew, as one created in the image of God, must be acknowledged. The new covenant with humanity represented by the U.N. Declaration of human rights parallels the Jewish covenant only at the second level. This covenant is not experienced as voluntary but as an unconditional non-negotiable demand. It is as if a silent yet commanding voice was heard from Auschwitz demanding that the human dignity of every stranger, beginning with the Jews, be recognized and affirmed as of infinite value.

This covenant is at once both holy and secular. It cuts across the sacred and the secular, winning adherents both religious and non-religious. It is unique in its ability to transcend the privatistic and relativistic attitudes of modern consciousness to elicit and create a public trans-cultural holy community-of-communities of all those *called out* to champion human dignity. It has created its own secular organizations to champion this dignity. Such organizations include the U.N. itself, especially its Commission on Human Rights and its various subcommissions, as well as the International Court of Justice and regional Conventions on Human Rights in Western Europe, America and Africa. Then there are the governmental offices of individual nations which monitor each other for rights violations and use this information to political advantage. (Motivations of self-interest aside, this political game does keep the pressure on to observe human rights.) Finally, there are non-governmental voluntary associations such as Amnesty International, the Anti-Slavery Society, and the International Committee of the Red Cross. Also in this category are religious communities (churches,

synagogues, etc.), labor organizations, professional associations, etc. This community of communities represents a parallel to the secular holiness of which Greenberg speaks with reference to Judaism, in which the measure of holiness is not belief but action on behalf of human dignity. At the time of the six day war, Greenberg argues, it was the atheist philosopher, Jean Paul Sartre, and not Pope Paul VI, who spoke out on behalf of Jewish lives and thus Sartre and not the Pope who is the truly holy man. Likewise it is the secular Israelis who are truly holy, for it is they who insist on welcoming all Jews to Israel, not the ultra-orthodox who would turn their backs on non-religious Jews. The test is the deed. Anyone who protects human dignity and human life is a witness to its infinite value, to our being created in the image of the God without image.

As a universal response to Auschwitz and Hiroshima, and all the atrocities of WWII, the human rights movement represents a renewal of God's original covenant with the whole human race, the covenant with Noah, signified by the placing of the rainbow in the sky. In that covenant, God promised: "I will never again curse the ground because of *humankind*... nor will I ever again destroy every living creature" (Genesis 8:21). But after Auschwitz and Hiroshima the responsibility for this covenant has shifted to the human side and it is the human race which must promise - "Never Again." Human rights is the fence around this new covenant, the fence which must be erected to protect the infinite dignity of every human being and the sanctity of all creation. An ethic of human dignity and human rights is the common response of Jews and gentiles to the silent yet commanding voice which came from Auschwitz and also from Hiroshima, the voice which commands - "Never Again."

Human rights is the name for a new covenant which has emerged through a wrestling with the stranger who comes from other cultures, other religions, other races. A human rights ethic is an ethic of audacity on behalf of the stranger. Its purpose is to protect the dignity of strangers no matter what race, religion or culture they come from. We must wrestle with the stranger as if with God - the God who remains hidden, who refuses to reveal his name, who remains transcendent yet immanent, *God with us*, the God who blesses us and offers us a new name and a new identity. The consensus which Cox speaks of is more than a rational consensus. It is a covenantal response to the hiddenness of transcendence beneath the countenance of the stranger, a response which calls forth a secular holiness. This new identity and new covenant can only be embraced by embracing the stranger, by welcoming the stranger and by the audacity to champion the dignity of the stranger against all the dark social, political and religious forces of dehumanization.

Although this new covenant can be understood as a renewal of the Noachite covenant, it is one deeply influenced by the Mosaic and Christological covenants of Jews and Christians. For these traditions introduced an understanding of humans as created in the image of the holy and then introduced the secularizing power of the holy into the world, fostering human freedom, dignity and interdependence. And as we pass over into other religions and other cultures, we shall find kindred spirits for

this new covenant of secular holiness among the members of the Buddhist sangha as well. If Auschwitz and Hiroshima are the expression of the dark and demonic side of urban secularization, the movement for human rights represents the positive side, the secularization of the ethical traditions previously carried only by holy communities. For the first time in history, the measure of human dignity is finding official embodiment in the secular political-institutional-cosmological order of society as the true measure of a just society.

### ***From an Ethic of Honor to an Ethic of Human Dignity, Rights and Liberation***

As Peter Berger has argued, there is a fundamental difference in the ethical sensibility of the modern individual as compared to the individual in a pre-modern society, "The [modern] age that saw the decline of honor also saw the rise of new moralities and of a new humanism, and most specifically of a historically unprecedented concern for the dignity and the rights of the individual."<sup>20</sup> The modern person, he argues, operates out of an ethic of dignity whereas the person from a pre-modern society is governed by a morality of honor. To fully understand the implications of, and reasons for, this shift we must understand the social and historical location of these contrasting ethics/moralities.

Honor and duty, says Berger, are concepts rooted in an understanding of self found in pre-modern hierarchical societies. These are precisely societies which understand both self and society as part of a sacred natural order. In such societies, the self is basically a clothed self. That is, the self is identified with or clothed in its social role which is given as its destiny at birth into a particular place in the hierarchical stratification of society. The sense of identity one has in such a society is basically collective. You would have the sense that your family and your clan reside within you, such that if you are insulted it is not just you but your whole family or clan who is insulted. Moreover, if you fail to live up to the obligations of your social status it is more than a personal failure. You bring dishonor on your whole family or clan. In both cases you may be expected to risk your life in order to reestablish this collective honor. An insult may require a duel or inter-tribal warfare. Individual failures entail a loss of face which may require reparations as drastic as suicide, as in the Japanese tradition of *harakiri*.

It is very difficult for a modern person to understand this ethic because it is rooted in a sense of human identity totally at odds with the modern sensibility. Whereas the traditional self is from birth clothed in a culturally defined human nature (i.e., a fixed set of social roles), the modern self takes off and puts on social roles or identities as if they were different suits of clothes. For the modern person, the self is never identified with its social role. The modern self is a naked self which identifies itself not with its

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<sup>20</sup> Peter Berger, "On the Obsolescence of the Concept of Honor," in *Revisions*, edited by Stanley Hauerwas and Alasdair MacIntyre, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1983, p.173.



roles but rather with its capacity to choose its roles. The modern self is an existential self, free to choose who to become through its choice of roles. Because the naked self does not identify with its social role, it does not experience insult as a threat to its honor anymore than it experiences failure as a loss of face or identity.

In a pre-modern society there is a hierarchical ordering of human selves in status and value. The hierarchical order is a normative order, reflecting the sacred order of the cosmos. Thus one's place in society determines not only who you are but what your obligations or duties are toward your peers as well as those above and below you in the hierarchy. Such a hierarchy implies levels of humanity. The operative value governing human relationships is not equality but rather "to each his due." Those in higher positions having been given more humanity also have greater obligations of duty than those who are lower in the hierarchy, having less humanity. A very clear example of such society would be the classic Brahmanic caste system in India or the classical familial-hierarchical ordering of human relations in neo-Confucian societies. In both, one of the greatest sins is to violate the sacred cosmic order of nature by the mixing of castes or roles, ignoring the proper ritual obligations of caste or social position. It is a great sin because it violates the sacred order which makes life possible, introducing disharmony into the universe and causing the disintegration of the cosmos into chaos. In all such societies myth and ritual serve to legitimate the sacred order of society, reinforcing the obligation of everyone to perform his or her sacred duty.

By contrast, the naked self transcends its social roles. It is not that such a self is ever found without some social role or other but rather that the modern self views itself as prior to its roles which are understood as diverse opportunities for self expression. As a result all human selves are essentially equal, no matter what their social status since one's humanity resides not in a role but in an essential nakedness shared with all other selves. "Modern man is Don Quixote on his deathbed, denuded of the multicolored banners that previously enveloped the self and revealed to be *nothing but a man*."<sup>21</sup> This is the essence of the modern understanding of human dignity which has replaced the notion of honor. "It is precisely this solitary self that modern consciousness has perceived as the bearer of human dignity and of inalienable human rights."<sup>22</sup> All selves have an equal human dignity and equal human rights because all selves are equally naked.

This understanding of self, while typical of modern society, says Berger, has its origins in such ancient precursors as the Hebrew Bible, Sophocles and Mencius.<sup>23</sup> Its modern manifestations appear in the

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<sup>21</sup> Berger, *Revisions*, p. 175.

<sup>22</sup> Berger, *Revisions*, p. 176.

<sup>23</sup> By the criteria I have established neither Sophocles nor Mencius would be as important for the emergence of human rights as Abraham or Job or Jeremiah, or Siddhartha for that matter. For the traditions of Sophocles and Mencius did not give rise to holy communities which represent a continuing social and historical witness to the emptiness or imagelessness of the self and hence its dignity and equality.

formulation of human rights, from the Preamble to the Declaration of Independence to the Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations. These rights always pertain to the individual 'irrespective of race, color or creed' - or, indeed, of sex, age, physical condition or any conceivable social status. There is an implicit sociology and an implicit anthropology here. The implicit sociology views all biological and historical differentiations among men as either downright unreal or essentially irrelevant. The implicit anthropology locates the real self over and beyond all these differentiations?<sup>24</sup>

The transition from an ethic of honor to an ethic of dignity, Berger suggests, can be viewed both positively and negatively. Conservatives view the decline of honor as a profound loss, while modernists see it as a "prelude to liberation." On the one hand, the naked self is in a situation of perpetual identity crisis, marked by excessive individualism and alienation from its social roles. On the other hand, this same deinstitutionalizing of the self makes possible "the specific modern discoveries of human dignity and human rights... The new recognition of individual responsibility for all actions, even those assigned to the individual with specific institutional roles, a recognition that attained the force of law at Nuremberg — all these and others, are moral achievements that would be unthinkable without the peculiar constellations of the modern world."<sup>25</sup>

Berger's distinction between honor and dignity makes it possible to understand how both the desacralizing power of the holy and the desacralizing power of urbanization converge with modern consciousness to form an ethic of human rights as an ethic of secular holiness. Such an ethic, understood with the proper qualifications, might bridge the gap between religious and secular ethics. For the naked self is a product of the history of secularization both as a result of urbanization and as a result of the emergence of holy communities. These two processes converge to remove the self from the sacred cosmic and hierarchical order of nature, where identity is fixed and given, in order to place this self in the new secular world of the naked public square.

The origins of human rights thought is controversial. I do not think it is either possible or desirable to trace a human rights ethic to a single source. Human rights emerge as a distinct theme of modern ethical consciousness as the result of the influences of a variety of sources both ancient and modern, both secular and religious. I would identify at least five such sources: 1.) urbanization, 2.) experiences of the holy, East and West, 3.) socio-historical consciousness of the limits of all socialization, 4.) the experience of doubt and the questions it generates and, 5.) the experience of indignation.

The modern naked self, which experiences itself as having an inherent human dignity no matter what its race, or religion, or social and economic class, must be seen as drawing on human experiences both universal and particular — as universal as civilization itself and as particular as individual narrative-communal traditions within civilization. The universal root is urbanization. (1) Urbanization is a secularizing process which

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<sup>24</sup> Berger, *Revisions*, p. 176.

<sup>25</sup> Berger, *Revisions*, p. 180.

alienates the self from the sacred mythological order of nature, stripping the self of its collective identity and leaving it naked in its new urban world. Urban individuation creates the burden of self-consciousness. The pluralistic and institutionally complex urban environment individuates human identity and fosters reflective self-consciousness. This process heightens our sense of human individuality and the unique value of every individual. However, it also heightens our sense of alienation and meaninglessness.

(2) In the ancient world, friendship between persons who were socially unequal was thought to be impossible, but it was viewed as a possibility within the holy communities of Buddhists and Jews, and later in Christianity. What these holy communities offered that was unavailable to either the early urbanized naked self (e.g., Gilgamesh) or the clothed self (the remythologized self as found in the sacred societies shaped by Taoism, Confucianism and Hinduism), was the development of a language of inwardness to articulate an experience of the holy which breaks with the cosmological imagination. This is a language for exploring the openness of the naked self to the infinite - a wholly other dimension of experience. In the traditions of the holy communities the naked self created by urban secularization is not clothed in some new cosmological myth but rather discovers its emptiness. The consciousness of the equality of selves within holy communities is rooted in an awareness that all selves share a fundamental capacity for openness to the infinite. The self is understood not as created in the image of nature (with a natural caste or class identity) but in the image of the God who is without image, or in the Buddhist case in the image of the ultimate emptiness of all things.

The holy is that which is set apart (*qadosh*). It is that which can neither be named nor imaged. Transcendence is unimaginable (i.e., un-image-able) and hence, like the stranger whose thoughts are not our thoughts and whose ways are not our ways, can never be fully integrated into the cosmological/social order. The self, stripped of its natural identity, turns inward to discover that its nakedness is not the equivalent of an eternal self. The finite self is not confined to the finite but open to the infinite. There is no floor of Tao or Brahman beneath the self, only an emptiness which is a radical openness. It is this type of experience which leads Buddhists to speak of the self as void or empty, and Jews and Christians to speak of the self as created in the image of a God who is without image.<sup>26</sup>

(3) In addition to urban alienation and the experiences of the holy, the modern naked self has roots in the emergence of modern socio-historical or technological consciousness.

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<sup>26</sup> Eventually, Christians adapted this Jewish insight to the gentile world by using the Greek language of metaphysics to speak of being created in the image of a Trinitarian God. Like a Buddhist koan, the doctrine of the trinity defied the imagination, even as the doctrine of the incarnation affirmed that the human self, undistorted by sin, is a perfect image of the God who cannot be imaged. This insight however stood in tension with the hierarchical structure of Greek metaphysical thinking. To the degree that this way of thought influenced how Christians thought about God, Christianity drifted back into a cosmicization of the social order. This tension can be seen in the difference between Origen and Augustine's accounts of the trinity. Origen's account is ambiguous. One side of his thought suggests that since the son emanates from the father, the son is less than the father, and likewise the spirit is less than the son. Augustine, on the other hand grasps that the trinity must not be thought of in terms of physi-

Much of the ethical power of the human rights movement comes from a secular experience of transcendence which, in some respects, parallels the religious insight into the emptiness and imagelessness of the self. That is, once modern socio-historical consciousness emerged with the appearance of the social sciences in the nineteenth century, the inalienable or transcendent quality of our humanity became visible not only to the religious eye but also to the secular eye. Once the distinction between the self and its social roles is made and the processes by which we become acculturated and socialized can be studied, it becomes manifestly apparent to us that no culture or society has ever succeeded in totally socializing the self. There always remains some part of the self (the self as chooser of its roles) which escapes being encapsulated by society and reduced to its social roles. As every parent knows from practical experience, no child can ever be totally socialized. There is always some part of the child which remains holy (that is, "set apart"). It is that aspect of the experience of self which makes every human being a perpetual alien or stranger, both to itself and its culture. And it is that experience of alienation which enables us to doubt, question and rebel.

The modern sense of human dignity is directly rooted in these experiences of the irreducible inalienable transcendence of the self to its social identity. Such experiences are now embedded in the urban consciousness of the naked self. Paralleling the experience of the holy, the modern naked (existential) self now experiences itself as radically other — as that which cannot be captured by the bureaucratic imagination and hence cannot be reduced to its social role. Every ideology begins by defining the human so as to separate the superior from the inferior, whether by race or sex or class, etc. Defining the human inevitably occurs only for the purpose of dehumanizing the stranger and the outcast. But the human cannot be defined. To put it another way, the human can be defined only by its undefinability. What gives us our inalienable dignity is our undefinability.

(4) Phenomenologically, the secular analog of the experiences of the holy occurs through the experience of doubt. Doubt and emptiness/imagelessness belong to the same category of experiences — the experiences of our radical openness to the infinite which creates the gap between the self as self-transcending subject and self as a cultural-institutional role. The abyss of the self, its emptiness, can never be filled or encapsulated by one's culture or society. That is why the self can never be totally socialized. Something of the self always escapes definition and encapsulation. The Upanishads ask, "How can the knower be known?," as a way of pointing out the impossibility of the reflecting self ever being encapsulated, even by its own reflection. The thinker always transcends that which is being thought about, especially when what is being thought is one's self. The mistake is to clothe the thinker in an eternal self. Augustine of Hippo came upon this same reflective paradox. Like the Buddha and other

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cal metaphors of "emanation" (e.g., such as the sun's rays) but in spiritual terms, whose metaphors are the relations of mind to itself (e.g., memory, intelligence and will). The result is that in the trinitarian God, all persons (divine and human) are equal. But even in Augustine this realization stands in tension with a hierarchical metaphysics of creation.

forest dwellers he turned inward, traveling through the "caverns" of memory of past life events (more than one life in the Buddha's case) and concluded upon exploring these caverns of his own inwardness that the mind is so vast it cannot contain itself and hence is un-image-able and radically open to the infinite as wholly other. Hence the mind discovers its own contingency, its own emptiness or openness to the infinite. In Augustine's case that lead him to the conclusion that God is not the mind but "the lord God of the mind" (*Confessions*, X.25),<sup>27</sup> even as the Buddha came to insist that the experience of Nirvana is not an experience of an eternal self but radically other than all self-namely *anatta* (no-self).<sup>28</sup> In both cases the self is left dangling over the abyss of the infinite.

Doubt emerges out of the experienced gap between the self and its sodal world. Doubt is the secular experience of transcendence, whose religious correlate is the experience of the holy as the experience of emptiness or imagelessness. Doubt and emptiness give birth to the utopian rebel who calls the sacred order of sodety into question in order to bring about anew order of things, open to the infinite. At the reflective level, the experience of doubt gives birth to the philosopher even as the experience of imagelessness gives birth to the prophet and the experience of emptiness to the sage.

(5) At the everyday level of common sense, emptiness gives birth to the unreflective rebel, who, although he or she can't say why, feels the need refuse the demand of the political, technological, economic or sodal order for total conformity. The rebel has an intuitive but uncondscious awareness of being open to the infinite and so will not be conformed to the finite. The rebel in the street is bom in response to the violation of human dignity - out of indignation - as an intuitive visceral awareness of the silent yet commanding voice which witnesses to the irredudble dignity which all selves have in common.

The movement for human rights is rooted experientially in both the secular and the religious forms of the experience of the holy as irredudble experiences of openness to the infinite. The secular and the holy are not alien to each other. On the contrary, they are dialectically united in their power to alienate the self from all sacred order in the name of a hidden transcendence we call human dignity. And the demand that the human dignity of all persons be respected and protected is in fact the basis for an ethic of secular holiness, an ethic which theists and a-theists (whether Buddhist or secular) ought to be able to construct cooperatively. For unlike the experience of the sacred which treats reason as the enemy of both religion and politics (demanding

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<sup>27</sup> *The Confessions*, p. 235.

<sup>28</sup> In so far as Christianity and (to a lesser degree) Judaism allowed itself to be seduced by the Greek metaphysical tradition it of course tended to reduce "God" to an "Eternal Being" which denies the essential biblical experience of God as temporal-historical and without image. We find this tension in Augustine. The conflict between "Being" and the "Infinite" represents the fundamental conflict between the cosmological imagination and the experience of the holy. In Christianity, only with the Protestant Reformation did the holiness of God break free of the metaphysical imagination of being and then only partially and with ambivalence.

instead an unquestioning obedience), the experiences of the holy gives rise to critical reason, manifest through both the experience of doubt and the experience of emptiness. Secular holiness unites religion and reason in the common task of creating a public world ordered to the "unseen measure" of human dignity.

In the ancient world there really is no such thing as social ethics in the modern managerial sense of transforming the artificial social structures of society. Whether the world was defined as one's natural fate, or the product of sin, or as a product of samsara/illusion, etc. - it was viewed as a world which could not be significantly altered by human intentions. It is only when the peculiarly modern notion of society as artificial and technological or managerial emerged that that social ethics was born. This understanding emerged in the 19th century, as a result of the secularizing power of Greek rationalism and, Jewish and Christian historical consciousness which had converged to finally secularize human existence and expose human beings to a newly invented critical social-scientific consciousness. This is the unique contribution of the West to the emergence of human rights. And this new socio-historical or technological-managerial consciousness radically alters the situation for all religious and philosophical traditions, both East and West, to develop a new dimension — social ethics as the ethics of human liberation.

The conjunction of experiences of the holy, secular rationality and modern socio-historical or technological consciousness with the experience of doubt is hermeneutically and socio-politically explosive. It forces human communities to move from the conviction of *the dignity of the self* to an affirmation of *human rights* and finally to audacious acts of *human liberation*. For example, in the first century, Paul could say that *in Christ their is neither male nor female*. Nevertheless, Pauline communities, and Christians in general, continued to subordinate women to men in hierarchical social roles. Why? Because the order of society was seen as an unchangeable sacred order and therefore the statement of equality was taken as an eschatological statement of spiritual equality to be realized in the flesh only at the end of time. Or again, the peasants took Luther's preaching about the freedom and dignity of the Christian to heart and were inspired to revolt against oppression. But Luther, still sharing the conviction that society is part of a sacred cosmic order, explained to them that in this world everyone must know and keep to their place, only in the world to come will they be actually equal. But today, when a believing community reads Paul's statement in the light of modern managerial-technological consciousness, that is, with the knowledge that the social order is not a sacred and unchangeable part of the order of nature but is secular and artificial or socially constructed, these members are suddenly confronted with a new level of moral obligation, the demand that society be transformed so as to allow for freedom and equality between the sexes and social classes here and now. The combination of consciousness of the holy and managerial-technological consciousness is at one and the same time both radically apocalyptic and utopian, for it leads to an ethic of human liberation which brings one's old world to an end in order to inaugurate a new creation.

# Book Reviews

## *Narrative Theology after Auschwitz: From Alienation to Ethics*

by Darrell J. Fasching, (Fortress Press, 1992). 198 pages.

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In one way, this book can be seen simply as one of a growing number of books by Christian thinkers who are taking the Holocaust seriously as a challenge to Christian theology. In this view, the general statements in the Prologue and Chapter One about why a rethinking of Christian theology is called for in the post-Shoah age will hardly be surprising. In another way, however, the book makes a unique and important contribution to the discussion. Fasching departs from the usual path followed by post-Shoah Christian theologians of responding to the Holocaust by re-formulating the Christian story so as to avoid supersessionism and Christian triumphalism. Rather, Fasching calls for Christians to take instead a stance that questions the finality of any telling of the Christian story. His, he says, is a theology of *Chutzpah* (audacity). It is only by constantly being willing to question the finality of any narrative that Christianity can keep itself open to accepting, rather than annihilating, the Other.

The author constructs his argument in five stages. The first, Chapter One, is simply concerned with establishing the need for a rethinking of the traditional Christian theological enterprise in light of the Holocaust. In essence, Fasching argues that the Holocaust has revealed to Christians a side to themselves that has always been there but was never really confronted: that side that was ready to exterminate Jews in the name of Jesus. With the implications of that stance now clearly acted out in history, there is a need to transcend the myth of Christian supersessionism and find room for a new self-understanding that sees Jews (and others) as partners rather than enemies. The expected move at this point would be to retrieve those parts of the New Testament and subsequent theological writings that allow the construction of a different Christian story. This is what we find in the Eckhardts, Paul van Buren and others. Fasching, however, makes another move entirely. He argues that the problem is not merely that the received narrative can no longer be tolerated, but rather the problem is the Christian propensity to accept *any* narrative as normative, that is as deserving unquestioned faith and obedience. What is needed is not a new narrative, but the articulation as a legitimate Christian posture of a stance that holds any narrative in suspicion. The

dialectics of a post-Shoah Christian faith must be that as soon as a story is accepted, it be questioned and transcended.

As a model for this type of faith, Fasching points to the story of Jacob's wrestling with the angel. In the end, Jacob refused to bow to the angel but continued his struggle until he had gained a new sense of self-understanding and of course a blessing. The Christian encounter with the story should be the same; not to accept it but to wrestle and move beyond it. It is this posture toward the divine that Fasching sees in Judaism in the concept of Chutzpah, the readiness always to question, and argue with, Gd. It is when one is ready to accept a story as absolutely true that such a thing as loyalty to the SS is possible. Fasching shows how this works by examining the writings of the pro-Nazi Protestant theologian Emmanuel Hirsch. Only by questioning the absolute truth of any narrative will we be able to avoid such blind loyalty.

There is another advantage to Chutzpah that is important to Fasching. It is that by questioning any story, we of necessity keep ourselves open to the new and the different. It is through this openness that we make room for the stranger among us. To make this argument, Fasching draws on Jacques Ellul's distinction between a sacred society and a holy society. A sacred society, on this view, is one that sees itself as reflecting Gd's word and so comes to see its opponents as enemies of the Divine. In contrast, the holy society recognizes the presence of Gd in all peoples and so is radically open to otherness. By seeing any story as only partial we can protect ourselves from considering ourselves uniquely sacred and so aware of the ever greater possibilities within the holy.

The psychology of transcending the sacred and entering the holy is explored in Chapter Three. Through an examination of Albert Speer on the one hand and Augustine on the other, Fasching teases out his point Speer fell victim to the Nazi myth because he simply had no story from which to question what the Nazi myth held out as the absolute truth. Once he accepted the Nazi version of reality as true, he had little moral choice but to accept its implications. Augustine, on the other hand, records his journey from story to story to story. According to Fasching, he avoided becoming the prisoner of any one story by being always able to see the inadequacies of each and so keeping himself open to new possibilities. It was Augustine's radical openness that led to his ultimate freedom and self-realization, just as it was Speer's willingness to accept and obey the given narrative that led to his moral fall.

The theoretical underpinnings of this are explored in Chapter Four. The explanatory model comes from Franklin Littell's study of Nazi doctors. Littell finally came to account for the brutal role that medical professionals came to play in murdering millions of people by developing the notion of doubling. By this Littell meant that medical professionals in essence compartmentalized their identities as healers and their role as members of the Nazi death machine. In practice this meant that the one side of the personality was able to deny the reality of what the other side was doing. The killing of Jews was not seen for the evil that it was, but rather was translated into a benign act that was simply the extension of the doctor's other self. In other words that overarching narrative of reality that these doctors had accepted became so inclusive



that it allowed them to deny the character of their own acts. This, Fasching argues, is the ultimate result of accepting fully and without question a story of reality.

Chapter Five brings us back to the start, the need for a new posture from which Christians may approach their own story without falling into the trap of superseserionism. Again drawing on Ellul, Fasching argues that the only way of preventing this is to remain open to the dialectic that challenges and then transcends the finality of any story. The attitude is that of Chutzpah. The radical other is the Holy, that which offers a vision of a world beyond the particularities of any sacred society. Only in this way can the stranger, the Other, find a place of security within the Christian story.

In the end, this is a much more creative and promising position to take toward the Christian story than that so often followed of creating a new story, and thereby creating the foundation of a new Orthodoxy. In many ways the current climate of Political Correctness illustrates just that danger. What began as a needed change to overthrow a ruling paradigm is in danger of becoming its own tool for controlling others. Fasching has thought through that problem and found a way of articulating a theology that has a built-in mechanism for challenging its own tendency toward orthodoxy. Fasching's radical rethinking of the whole basis of how the Christian story ought to be approached is foundational, it seems to me, for any post-Shoah Christian theology. It points to how radical in fact the challenge of Auschwitz, and modern technology, really is.

## ***The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia?***

Darrell J. Fasching. 1993. State University of New York Press. 366 pages.

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This is a sequel to his previous book entitled *Narrative Theology After Auschwitz: From Alienation to Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992). That book was a restructuring of the post-Holocaust Christian narrative tradition by drawing on the Jewish narrative tradition of chutzpah (arguing with God). It had limited scope and was an "experiment in the theology of culture"; now, Fasching has written a robust Tillichian-like theology of culture. The initial effort discerned the demonic theme of "killing in order to heal"; while the sequel incorporates this theme with the Janusfaced, globalized, technological mythos that emerged out of Hiroshima — i.e., technology can bring us apocalypse or utopia.

Fasching has ambitiously attempted "to do what narrative ethicists have said cannot be done; namely, construct a cross-cultural ethic of human dignity, human rights, and human liberation that is rooted in and respects the diversity of narrative traditions." This theology of culture, à la Tillich, draws mainly on Buddhism, Christian, and Jewish

narratives to counter the ethical challenge of post-modern secularization in a new and innovative way.

The book has two parts, with Part I: The Promise of Utopia and the Threat of Apocalypse containing three thirty-page chapters. It begins with the quest to find ethical norms in technological civilization (technopolis) by referring to the prescient "murder of God" passage in Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* published in 1882. The Nazis fulfilled this prophecy of a normless will to power as the *Ubennensch* — the super person (the master race) who would attempt to remake man in its image. This "killing in order to heal" as represented by Auschwitz became a global theme when MAD-ness, as mutually assured destruction represented by Hiroshima, ushered in the threat of apocalypse.

Ironically, for technopolis, this threat of apocalypse by means of technology is conjoined Janus-like with the promise of utopia by means of technology. This irony is examined with help from Harvey Cox, Richard Rubenstein, Jacques Ellul, Arthur Cohen, et al. Cox's utopianism and Rubenstein's apocalypticism serve to illustrate the poles of thought involved. A brilliant examination of the secular city (technopolis) is facilitated by the synthesis of insights from Ellul and Cohen. The author asserts that Ellul has uncovered "the sacred heart of a technical universe," and that Cohen has "linked both religion and urbanization to secularization and both to Auschwitz and Hiroshima." Fasching further explains: "Secularization is dehumanizing rather than liberating not because nothing is any longer sacred but precisely because the impersonal technical-bureaucratic order of technopolis is the new embodiment of sacral value."

Armed with this insight, chapter three relates the above "new embodiment of sacral value" to the human propensity for "doubling." Luther's two-kingdoms ethic and his understanding of faith as unquestioning obedience provide, according to Fasching, the psychological context wherein the radical doubling of Nazism occurred. Robert Lifton's study "The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide" is used to profile the "doubling" phenomenon in which one part of the self disavows another part and invokes the evil potential of that self.

With this preparation, Part II After Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Utopian Ethics for an Apocalyptic Age begins the construction of a theology of culture for a technological civilization. This is actually the construction of social ethics because it is out of religious narrative that social ethics arise. Tillich understood that our secular technological civilization (technopolis) privatizes traditional religious narrative and publicizes a new sacral religious narrative — one grounded not in nature, but in technology. Thus the contemporary ethical challenge after Auschwitz and Hiroshima is to critique this new sacral narrative which, although secular, holds religious dynamic.

Upon examination, the ethic of technopolis is seen to be grounded in a sacred order with efficiency and obedience as the primary values. Holy communities such as those in Buddhism, Christianity, and Judaism introduce a radical anthropological ethic of human dignity. The "NO!" spoken to the sacred order of technopolis is that humans

do not exist to serve technical and bureaucratic social order, but that order exists to serve free and creative humans in the name of human dignity.

Chapter five begins the construction of a utopian ethics for rehumanizing technopolis and is titled Utopian Ethics: From Human Dignity to Human Rights and Human Liberation. This fifty-page keynote chapter is rich in understanding and insights. Blood-written passages explain the Jewish narrative tradition of *chutzpah* (audacious faith): after Auschwitz, no one should offend God with cheap, unquestioning, faith. Psychologically, after Hiroshima and under the present MAD-ness policy, we are all survivors trying to cope with the localized past opening, and with the globalized potential apocalyptic opening to the Shoah — the desolation of the demonic abyss. To withhold despair, is to not be sensitive, to not be honest, to not be human. Thus, not only the Jew, but also the Buddhist, Christian, and even the a-theistic sacralizer of technological progress have been doubt-struck. The unquestioned belief in any kind of providence (even technological providence) has been made desolate by Auschwitz and Hiroshima.

Fasching continues the movement from human dignity to human rights to human liberation by declaring that universal outrage generated by the atrocity of Auschwitz and the inhumanity of Hiroshima is energizing an ethic of secular holiness in opposition to the ethic of secular sacredness within technopolis. The U.N. Declaration of Human Rights can be seen as indicative of a global movement toward human liberation and a coupling of secular cohorts of holiness with religious communities of holiness to champion human dignity. The reason for this coupling involves the post-modern naked self which has emerged in modernity. The naked self is so, in large part, due to the desolation of the Shoah and/or to the Damocles Sword of MAD-ness. Additionally, urban alienation has released many moderns from secular sacredness, as have the religious insights of the emptiness and imagelessness of the self, made in the image of the imageless God. (My own preference is to think of self-awareness and moral concern as bearing the essential image of God.) For humans everywhere who are championing human rights the author suggests this maxim: In a sense there is only one universal right — the right to have our human dignity respected.

Chapter Six, Beyond Technopolis: The Utopian Promise of Babel, begins the building of a social ethic which can cope with and enrich the "impoverishing vision of secular technobureau-cratic rationality" without identifying either with ethical relativism or ethical absolutism. The problem with the babel of modernity is not its narrative diversity, but rather that those of the marketplace and the bureaucracies have become imperialistic. This is so because these narratives are popularly perceived as bringing cosmos out of chaos in the absence of God. To explicate the above imperialism, Fasching examines MacIntyre's pessimistic prophesy of a new "dark ages"; then he constructs a promising ethical discourse of human rights with the help of Stout, Dunne, and Hauerwas — rights fitted for the naked public square.

The final chapter, A Utopian Vision: Narrative Ethics in a MAD World, examines the miked public square with its enforced absence of religious narrative and dangerous demonic potential. Fasching calls in powerful narrators such as Neuhaus, Novak,

Stackhouse, Ellul, Wiesel, et al. to transform the naked public square into an empty (i.e., open and truly diverse) public square where the ethical narratives promoting human rights and human liberation can be effectively heard. This utopian vision sees holy communities of faith and holy movements of secularity synergistically potent in promoting human dignity and thus "welcoming the stranger." The naked public square becomes, instead, a vibrant public square wherein the threat of apocalypse with its MAD-ness is eclipsed by the promise of utopia and its glad-ness. Therein, humans can safely and sanely pass over and come back among communities in a rich ecology of diverse narratives; and happily, they will be blessed with a common narrative of ethics about human dignity, rights, and liberation. The ethical challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima must be answered.

Darrell Fasching has admirably taken up the ethical challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima and has strengthened the human resolve of "NEVER AGAIN!" His clarity of organization and thought, reliance on Tillichian content and method, and inclusion of apt and respected scholarship make this book a staple in either a Theology of Culture or a Philosophy of Technology collection. Most importantly, the author's ultimate aim of fusing religious and secular ethics (so-called) for human survival makes this well-written book important reading for all.

## ***The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia?***

by Darrell J. Fasching, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993. 366 pp.  
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Darrell Fasching's new book—*The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia?*—is a sprawling, ambitious, unwieldy but profound piece of work in contemporary religious social ethics. It is a book that surely will (or should) establish Fasching as a major voice in contemporary theology.

The content of the book defies easy summarization. That this is the case is evidenced by as lofty an authority as the Library of Congress, which finds it necessary to categorize the subject of *Ethical Challenge* in the following way:

1. Religious ethics. 2. Human Rights-Religious Aspects. 3. Technology-Moral and ethical aspects. 4. Utopias-moral and ethical aspects. 5. Holocaust, Jewish-Moral and ethical aspects. 6. Nuclear war-fare-More and ethical aspects.

This vast list illustrates the breadth and complexity of Fasching's project in this book. My own summary of that project might best take a narrative form, which is particularly appropriate here, because Fasching considers himself a narrative theologian.

Darrell Fasching was born during World War II (1944). Anyone with the barest historical consciousness cannot read the date 1944 without thinking of the mountains

of Jewish and other corpses piled up at places like Auschwitz, Treblinka, Sobibor, and Belzec in 1944, to be "discovered" by the world a year later at the close of the war in Europe. Nor can such a person forget that during that next year the United States dropped atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killing several hundred thousand Japanese in momentary flashes of light and heat and death.

In his book *Theology After Auschwitz* (Fortress, 1992), Fasching reports that he is Lutheran by background and that he is married to a Jewish woman. Fasching understands that a Lutheran Christian (and not only a *Lutheran* Christian) after the Holocaust carries a considerable burden. And as one who is married to a Jewish woman Fasching has joined his life with the life of the Jewish people, again, after Auschwitz.

Thus Fasching's intellectual project is born in the matrix of the Holocaust and Hiroshima, mediated to him quite personally by the trajectory of his own life's narrative. He is offering a response to these signal events of our time, events that quite literally threaten an end to all human events and human time.

The attempt to respond to Auschwitz and Hiroshima is one of the major intellectual and moral projects of our era. It is a project that cuts across all academic disciplines and spills well beyond the boundaries of academia altogether. It is, in fact, one of the central projects in which I personally am engaged, along with Fasching and countless others.

Fasching approaches Auschwitz and Hiroshima from the perspective of "theology of culture." He is neither a Christian theologian nor does he write from a "confessional" perspective. Instead he is a university-trained and university-situated theologian, and he sees theology as an "academic discipline within the humanities" (p.3). Theology that is done in such a setting must be, in Fasching's view, theology of culture. By this he means what Paul Tillich meant: according to Fasching, "the identification and elucidation of the relationship between religion and culture in all its diversity" (p.4).

This is no merely descriptive project but instead a "total critique of culture" (p.4). Such a critique is always needed, but especially now, because in Fasching's view Auschwitz, Hiroshima, and the more recent "mutual assured destruction" are not merely political or military realities but are reflections of the demonic religio-cultural narrative that dominates our technological civilization. He calls this narrative the "Janus-faced myth of Apocalypse or Utopia" (p.1). In essence, technology has replaced either God or nature as the sacred center of contemporary civilization. We respond to this sacred reality with the combination of fascination (technology will create a utopia and thus technological "progress" is an unmitigated good) and dread (technology will bring apocalypse upon us and there's nothing we can do about it) that the sacred always produces. This cultural narrative has already contributed to genocide, atomic bombing, and the amazing paralysis of humankind during the Cold War in the face of nuclear annihilation. Fasching fears that unless it is overturned it will indeed lead to an apocalyptic nuclear "final solution"-omnicide, the death of all things.

Part I of *Ethical Challenge* undertakes the descriptive and critical task. Fasching wants to prove that this Apocalypse/Utopia myth is the central cultural narrative of

our time and that it already has contributed to Auschwitz and Hiroshima. Part II takes up his constructive project: having unmasked this demonic religio-cultural narrative, Fasching draws on Jewish, Christian, and Buddhist narrative traditions to construct "a cross-cultural ethic of human dignity, human rights, and human liberation." What these narrative strands have in common is an ethic of welcoming the stranger. For Fasching, no narrative can stand after Auschwitz and Hiroshima which does not demand that those who stand within it welcome and recognize the dignity and rights of the alien and the stranger.

To undertake this descriptive, critical, and constructive project Fasching brings together formidable intellectual resources. One sees the influence of comparative religion and history of religions (Mircea Eliade, for example). Relying heavily on Peter Berger, he makes use of the sociology of knowledge. He has read widely in Jewish and Buddhist theology, and works with a number of theological voices in those traditions as well as digging around in their sacred narratives. The work of post-Shoah Jewish theologians such as Elie Wiesel, Irving Greenberg, Emil Fackenheim, Arthur Cohen, and Richard Rubenstein receive especially close attention. The distinctive contribution of the Christian theologians of technology, apocalypse, utopia, and secularization (Jacques Ellul, Gabriel Vahanian, Paul Tillich, Harvey Cox) is fundamentally important. Narrative theology and ethics are essential to his method, and he works appreciatively yet critically with the likes of Alasdair MacIntyre and Stanley Hauerwas.

I do not feel fully competent to evaluate Fasching's methodological synthesis of all of these various strands of thought several of which I am only marginally familiar with. But in those areas I do know, for example post-Holocaust Jewish theology, it is very clear that Fasching has read both widely and well. I have no particular reason to doubt the competence of his handling of the other materials with which he deals, but will leave those areas to their specialists.

Beyond that my evaluation of the book begins with a thoroughgoing appreciation of his project itself. Fasching wants to respond to Auschwitz and Hiroshima. As a theologian of culture he does so both by way of critique of demonic cultural/religious narratives and by way of retrieving and synthesizing other human-dignity-affirming narratives. He believes that the former narratives have genuinely dealt death and the latter have and may genuinely deal life to human beings. Thus one critical way of responding to this catastrophe is to work *with* these narratives.

One could easily imagine the political scientist, the historian, or the sociologist dismissing the significance of these narratives for the Holocaust and Hiroshima; surely political, historical, and military factors should be seen as the cause of these events, not the "deep structure" of the western world's narratives. I did at times feel that Fasching's fascination with the theological/religious foundations of these catastrophes neglected these other very real dimensions. Surely, Fasching would agree, and would simply say that his project is the theology of culture rather than, say, a history of the Nazi movement. As a theologian/ethicist myself, I would defend both the reality and the significance of these foundational narratives.

At the constructive level, Fasching will surely be criticized for attempting to construct a cross-cultural, multi-narrative human dignity ethic. From a narrative perspective it can't be done, some will say. But Fasching wrestles with those questions directly. He believes that he can offer such a cross-cultural narrative ethic without succumbing to a thin, storyless, Enlightenment-style ethical universalism. I believe that he largely succeeds in this intellectual project, which is indeed a major accomplishment.

But now what? What particular community will embrace and incarnate this cross-cultural narrative and its ethic of human dignity? The problem with Fasching's methodology and its outcome is precisely that he does not write as one who stands within any particular story-formed community. He states explicitly that he is doing "alienated" or "decentered" theology (p.5); that is, he has left his Christian community and writes as a "free agent" (p.4), apart from any of the "holy communities" whose narratives he explores in the book. If he can be said to be a member of a community, it is that very small, specialized, and (frankly) largely culturally irrelevant community of theologians working in secular university settings.

It seems to me that Fasching's kind of narrative ethics is best described as meta-narrative ethics; he stands outside of all of these narratives (sacred or secular, religious or irreligious, modern or ancient, East or West) and examines their potential for moral productivity in a world such as this. This Olympian Freedom from a community's bonds give him the space to be relentlessly critical where criticism is needed, and to retrieve constructive narratives as freely as needed. But as a "free agent," a decentered theologian, he has no particular religious community to which he can return and in which he can put his quite profound insights into practice.

One of the problems inherent in membership in the community of university theologians is the kind of writing that such communities expect. Fasching wants to address an extremely serious cultural problem, one which pervades western civilization and could bring an end to it. But the language he uses to address this pervasive problem is the cumbersome, "academic," specialized and inaccessible language of the academy. The paradox is that Fasching obviously wants his work to make a real difference in the world, but the world cannot read it—only a small slice of academic theologians can. This is not a problem unique to Fasching's work, by any means, but it is one of the reasons why academic theology has so very little cultural impact.

A pet peeve of mine as an author and a reader is poor editing. Unfortunately, *Ethical Challenge* suffers from being a poorly edited book. I counted two dozen obvious spelling or grammatical errors, and I don't think I got them all. Again, this problem is not confined to this particular book, but is distressingly widespread.

Finally, I should also note the very considerable overlap in content between this book and his previous one, *Narrative Theology After Auschwitz*. This is not merely an overlap in concepts, but the straightforward use of large sections of material from *Narrative Theology* in *Ethical Challenge*. I don't know how SUNY Press and Fortress worked out the copyright problems, but I do know that two books should not overlap as much as these two did.

But enough criticism, Fasching's work may best be seen as a hugely important resource for those of us who seek to make a difference within our own "holy communities," whichever these might be. His hermeneutical test—does your narrative require of you that the stranger be welcomed?—is absolutely the right one. His moral passion is a good model, as is his "audacious" willingness to be relentlessly critical about holy narratives. I will return to *Ethical Challenge* many times in the years to come.

## **Advert for The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima Apocalypse or Utopia?**

*by Darrell J. Fasching*

A critique of technological civilization in the light of Auschwitz and Hiroshima using a narrative ethics approach. Although narrative ethicists have typically argued that it cannot be done, Fasching proposes a cross cultural ethic of human dignity, human rights and human liberation grounded in the convergence of diverse narratives of hospitality to the stranger and the outcast. On this basis he argues for an ethical coalition of Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, Gandhian Hinduism and Humanistic A-theism, to shape public policy in an apocalyptic nuclear era.

SUNY Press, (S00-666-2211)



**Issue #13 Jul 1994 — In Memory  
of Jacques Ellul, 1912–1994**

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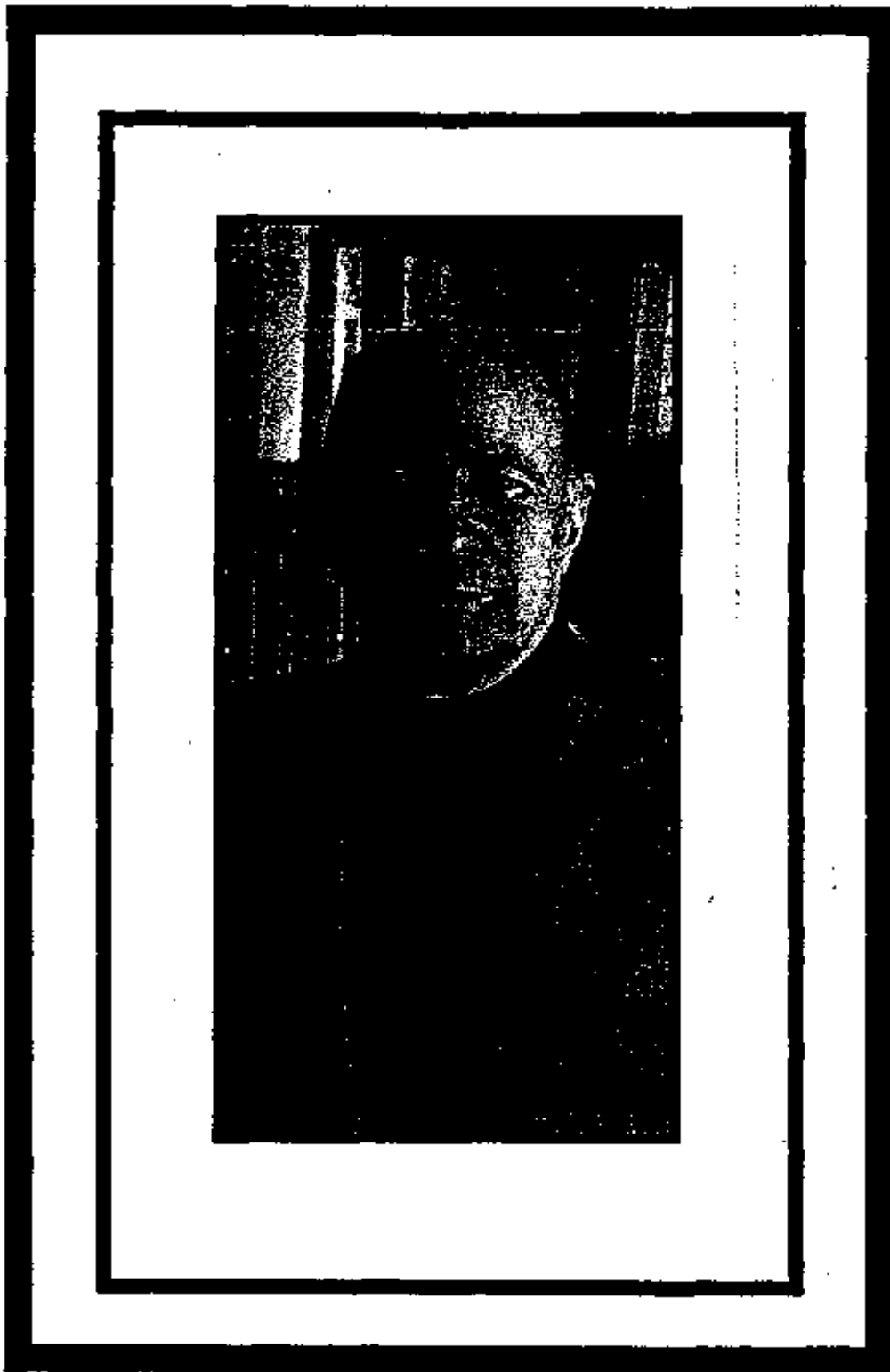
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Ivan Illich

## Editorial: Remembering Our Mentor and Friend, Jacques Ellul

This is an issue which I have put together with great sadness, for as many of you undoubtedly already know, Jacques Ellul died at the age of 82 on May 29th, 1994.

How does one measure a life such as his. It is immeasurable by anyone other than God. We can only respond to his life in terms of our gratitude for the insight and inspiration he has given us. From a scholars perspective it was a very productive life – over forty books and hundreds of articles. And what books and articles! The power and scope of his mind were staggering. He has framed the issues for a whole generation of scholars. He taught us how to think about the role of technology in our lives historically, sociologically and most importantly - theologically and ethically.



However, it was not just his mind that moved and inspired us, it was his life as well. His participation in the French resistance during WWII, his service as deputy mayor of Bordeaux, his service to the Reformed Church in France and the World Council of Churches, his tireless work on ecological issues and his work with juvenile delinquents — all these form an inspiring witness. Jacques Ellul was a man of faith. In him faith in Christ, the intellectual life and ethical commitment to his fellow human beings all merged in a singular witness that has touched and changed lives around the globe.

Jacques Ellul's death means that our lives are both poorer and yet richer. Poorer because he is no longer with us to lead the way. Richer because he left such a rich legacy and always encouraged us to think and act for ourselves, and therefore prepared us to carry on. In this special memorial issue I have asked a number of scholars from a variety of fields — communications, languages, philosophy, engineering, theology — to reflect on the significance of Ellul's life in whatever way they wished. Some have shared personal remembrances, others have spoken about how Ellul influenced their life, still others have chosen to reflect on his intellectual contributions. What emerges is a picture of the rich and varied ways Ellul has touched and transformed peoples lives.

Finally we are fortunate to have two pieces by Ellul himself. One is a sermon which Joyce Hanks secured for us some time ago, which I was holding for publication. The other is the comments Ellul made in response to the symposium held in his honor last November in Bordeaux. For this we owe thanks to Cari Mitcham. It seemed appropriate to begin and end this issue with these words from Jacques Ellul himself.

## **Bulletin Board**

### **L'Association Jacques Ellul**

During the past year, Ellul family members and colleagues have joined together for the purpose of preserving the collection of his writings and manuscripts, and making his work better known. The Association has now been legally registered in France, and will soon be ready to invite interested citizens of other countries to join. If you would like more information about the Association as it becomes available, please send your name and address to: Joyce M. Hanks, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Scranton, Scranton PA 18510-4646. If you wish to join please send her a check made payable to Joyce M. Hanks for \$15.00. Joyce is willing to register all American applicants and save us from the hassle of having to change our American dollars into French francs.

## **Donations needed to Create and English Language Version of Film on Ellul**

Serge Steyer, the director of the French film on Jacques Ellul entitled *Jacques Ellul l'homme entier* has also recently been in touch with Joyce Hanks. He would like very much to produce an English language version of the film. The problem as usual is funding. If you can help with this project you can also send your checks for this project to Joyce Hanks at the above address. Be sure to indicate the purpose of the check so Joyce can keep all of this straight.

## **Donations Needed to Purchase Ellul's House**

Just as we were going to press I received a letter from Joyce Hanks indicating that the *Association Jacques Ellul* is hoping to purchase the Ellul home and turn it into the headquarters for the *Association*. Anyone who is able to make a contribution should send a check to Joyce M. Hanks, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Scranton, Scranton PA 18510-4646. Make the check payable to Joyce and indicate its purpose and she will change the dollars into French Francs and see that they get to the proper person.

## **New Members of the Editorial Board of the Ellul Forum**

We have two new names to add to the editorial board of the Ellul Forum. Both are contributors to this issue. The first is David Lovekin, Professor of Philosophy at Hastings College. The second is Willem H. Vanderburg, Director of the Centre for Technology and Social Development, Department of Industrial Engineering at the University of Toronto. Each has agreed to serve as a guest editor for a future issue. Both have made significant contributions to scholarship on Ellul's work and we look forward to the contributions they will make to future issues.

# Forum: A Sermon by Jacques Ellul

## The Truth Will Set You Free

Confirmation Day Sermon, 31 May 1992 Reformed Church of West Bordeaux: Pessac-Merignac

If you make my word your home you will indeed be my disciples; you will come to know the truth, and the truth will set you free. (John 8:31-32, NJB)

Confronted with this saying of Jesus, we feel tempted to react just as the Jews did: "We have never been the slaves of anyone; what do you mean, 'You will be set free?'" (John 8:33). Why does Jesus speak to us about setting us free?

France is a free country; we have political freedom, and on the whole our standard of living is rather high. The overwhelming majority of French people have their basic needs taken care of. Nothing makes us "slaves," in the usual sense of the word.

But Jesus gives a terrible answer: "In reality you are slaves to sin." And in fact we know very well that all of us are sinners. But sin is not a "moral error," like disobeying the Ten Commandments. Sin is genuine corruption of a person's reality. Nothing in us remains intact, the way God intended it for us. However "good" we may be, we remain sinners, "slaves" in one way or another of what conditions our life.

Sin always stems from *covetousness*. Adam was the first to covet, when he wanted to "be like God" (Gen. 3:5, RSV). Today and always, we covet in the same way, wanting to be like God! As moderns we do not use the same vocabulary, but the underlying reason for our actions remains the same. This same desire motivates our "progress," our science, our techniques, and the way we glorify ourselves, especially in the media.

Primarily, wanting to be like God means finally managing to do without Him! This is exactly what Jesus means when he calls us slaves. We are slaves of society, of our social relationships, our work, and politics. In all these areas covetousness leads us by the nose, suggesting new things to strive for: things that will "make our life complete," as the ads tell us.

God created us free: Adam's power to disobey gives us proof of that. God wants humanity, his most beautiful creation, to be free. But God does not behave like a person operating a machine, or like a wizard. He does not transform us by means of some kind of miracle. God has infinite respect for us, his creation, and he does nothing

in our world unless we participate in it. He gives us the means to live, in truth and freedom. But we must use these "means."

There lies the trouble: we want to be free, but we want to become free on our own. Throughout history, including this last generation, we have experienced the results of human "will to freedom." Each time, we have replaced one kind of slavery with another. We are not capable of becoming free on our own, because we are inhabited by a spirit of power, a will to domination.

At this point Jesus' words relocate the question. No miraculous act can release us and make us free, changing our situation from that of slave to that of a free person. Only the "Truth" can accomplish this. But this truth is not philosophical or scientific; rather, it is a certain way of living. Instead of an intellectual matter, it is a question of life.

So how can we know this truth that will set us free? "Make my word your home" (John 8:31, NJB). Jesus' very way of expressing this makes an impression on us: he does not tell us merely to be faithful to some teaching, or even to follow his example. "Make my word your home": it is as if we had entered a new world, in which we must live, "settle in," adopt a new lifestyle, and take up residence. In other words, we must be so permeated by Jesus' word that we live *in* it! When we do that, we have made our home there, because we are in real communion with Jesus, and we become free with respect to the "world" (society, morality, the powers), just as he was.

We must never forget, however, that Jesus himself leads us out of the world, the universe of falsehood and covetousness. Only in this way can we receive the very freedom of God.

Freedom does not in any way constitute a guarantee of happiness! Freedom is not tranquility, comfort, or security. People seeking freedom have always made this mistake.

First of all, freedom signifies responsibility: it means we take on the direction of our own lives, deciding among the different alternatives before us. Free! Certainly we can be fully human only on this condition. But freedom also constitutes our duty to be human as God wants us to be, and this means finding ourselves in Adam's situation! We can say "yes" or "no." For this reason, we must connect freedom with Truth.

Truth shows us the right direction, the right way to live. From now on, freed from the world's conditioning, we can choose our path and accomplish the work of our life (since the life of each of us is actually something we "make"). But in order to do this, we need orientation, a means of guidance. This is the role of the Truth that is in the Word of Jesus Christ. Without this guide, our freedom becomes endless, aimless wandering. In other words, it turns into a new ideology that makes us slaves all over again!

Having seen the guidance, the opening Jesus offers for our lives, what can we conclude about ourselves? When I look at my life and the life of my Church, can I claim that we express this "Liberty in the Truth"? Is our way of life truly "free"? Does our way of thinking express Truth?

We must not let ourselves be content with Jesus' promise, "the truth will set you free." We must not just piously listen to this "word of God." *We must* live as truly free persons: "if the Son sets you free, you will indeed be free" (Jn. 8:36, NJB).

If we take this road, we will discover, as our experiences unfold, that we really do become free! We need only to make this decision. In each crisis, it is enough to know that God himself will free us. He has never let anyone fall who went forward on the basis of faith in his Word. Jesus himself is the Truth. We must live in this certainty and let our lives be inspired by this Word, which saves, frees, gives light, and shows the way: the way of our life, which is chosen, loved, and saved by God the Father who gave his Son so we could know the Truth, and at last live in freedom. Amen.

*(Translated by Joyce M. Hanks)*

## **Jacques Ellul, 1912–1994**

by Joyce Hanks, University of Pittsburgh

Jacques Ellul's death on 29 May 1994, although anticipated, in view of his protracted illness, came as a blow to those who knew him. His public lectures and other appearances have been considerably restricted in recent years, as his health declined. Nevertheless, in 1993 he was able to attend both the Bordeaux premiere of Serge Steyer's film entitled "Jacques Ellul, l'homme entier" and, last November, the first conference devoted to his thought, also held in Bordeaux. He addressed the conference in its closing session, reminiscing about his work, but primarily about his father's strong moral influence on his life.

Ellul's importance as an internationally recognized thinker never kept him from extending his help and friendship to those who asked for it. He regularly responded positively to requests for interviews, to letters filled with questions about his ideas and writings, and to local needs of all kinds. He was astonishingly trusting with his manuscripts, assuming younger scholars' need to consult them took precedence over his attempt to preserve them. It will now fall to Ellul's three surviving children, and to the Bordeaux-based "Association Jacques Ellul," to put his papers into some kind of order.

He was much more accessible and personable than a reader of his many scholarly books and articles might suppose. In view of the importance of his work and the excessive demands on his time, I always tried to avoid writing or telephoning him unless I had urgent questions regarding his bibliography—only to discover on more than one occasion that he had expressed concern to a mutual friend that he had not heard from me for some time. The year I lived in Bordeaux and interviewed him regularly, he often expressed some specific concern for me or one of my children, based on his keen observation of our adjustment to life in France. Just as freely, he shared his reactions to his own family's joys and troubles—the stimulus of having two of his



teen-aged grandchildren live and study with him, and the distress he experienced at the illness and death of his wife, Yvette.

In recent years, Ellul's articles and books sometimes took extremely unpopular stands, especially with respect to South Africa, AIDS, and Islam. Previously considered by many as *the* Protestant spokesman in France, he rapidly fell out of favor in many quarters, so that he began to find it difficult to publish in some periodicals. Since he was never one to give in to pressure stemming from current fads, he bore all of this patiently, but clearly it affected his spirits in the last years of his life.

My main impression of Ellul is that of a man of God, a servant of the Church. He contributed in every imaginable way to the French Reformed Church, both nationally and locally. He conceived of brilliant new ways of proclaiming the Christian message, and threw himself into that project at every opportunity, often surprising people who had never expected to find Christianity attractive. He seemed to offer answers-not easy answers, but well thought-out responses to the hard questions of life. We will miss him sorely.

## Jacques Ellul, Courage, and the Christian Imagination

by Stanley Hauerwas, Duke University

It is hard to believe that Jacques Ellul is dead. The energy and passion represented by such a life tempts us to believe he will always be "there." Of course he knew better as is clear in every sentence he wrote, but that does not mean we were prepared for his death. How do you prepare for the death of someone whose life and work has become essential for those of us committed to having the discourses of Christianity form the way we see and live in this world.

I was in seminary when I read *The Presence of a Kingdom*. I am sure I did not understand it then and I am not sure I "get it" now, but I understood enough to see here Christian language was working. I continued to read Ellul over the years, though I often disagreed with him, because I always knew that in reading him I would be reading an imagination formed by the courage of Christian convictions. For it was Ellul's great gift to help us see the "realities" of our world as illusion. He was able to do that, I believe, because he had not been trained to be a Christian theologian. It, therefore, never occurred to him that the problem might be that Christian convictions were incompatible with the world; rather he assumed the problem was that the world was incompatible with Christian convictions.

I remember struggling to understand his *The Technological Society*. I kept wondering what could lead one to write a book that described our being so captured by technique there was no way to free ourselves from it. For Ellul saw clearly that technology was not just the machine, but rather the machine embodied the modern presumption that

human life had no *telos*. In the absence of any *telos* efficiency becomes the iron law determining all life. I confess I dismissed the book for some time as a typical example of the French intellectual style of exaggeration and hyperbole. Yet the power of his analysis haunted me.

Later I realized that Ellul in *The Technological Society*, as well as many of his other more sociological works, was remythologizing the Christian faith. By remythologizing I mean he was reimagining the world through Christian discourse. His analysis of technology renames the character of our existence as sin helping us see that we are possessed by powers from which we cannot will ourselves free. Accordingly apocalyptic takes on fresh resonance as we see that only God can and has broken the iron necessities that come from our possession by the powers.

The only figure I can think comparable to Ellul's courageous imagination is that of his fellow Frenchman, Michel Foucault. They each looked on the world with a courageous imagination that allowed them to see the world as it is without flinching. The power of Foucault's work is undeniable, but it is equally the case that many of us had been well prepared to face the realities of which Foucault's work directed us by the courage of Ellul. Of course, what Ellul offers that Foucault cannot, is hope. Such hope is not based on false utopianism, but rather resides in the very intervention by Ellul's work through which we know God matters.

Ellul's life is that "inefficiency" that God creates to challenge the powers that would rule in the name of efficiency. That he is now gone could be a counsel of despair except that Ellul has taught us that the God that makes lives like his possible has not abandoned us. We are fortunate indeed to have lived when such a one as this graced our lives with such an uncompromising imagination.

## Thinking Globally, Acting Locally: In Memory of Jacques Ellul

by Bill Vanderburg, University of Toronto

Jacques Ellul had run his race and quietly, around 7:45 on the morning of May 19, his life on earth came to an end. He had responded as best he could to an encounter with God. Many of us have experienced something of that encounter through his work. Whatever we may still learn about that encounter will not change his witness, received by many as a precious gift. We extend our condolences to his children, Jean, Yves and Dominique and their families, and we thank them for their role in this gift.

In Jacques' memoir, I would like to share with you a meditation that I delivered in his presence the Sunday morning following the conference on his work held last November at the University of Bordeaux. It was entirely unplanned — it so happened that there was no service that morning because of a regional meeting. Following the death of his wife and lifelong companion, Yvette, Jacques Ellul had been lonely and

discouraged. His medical treatments did not help either, since they made him very tired. One Sunday afternoon, a friend found him particularly despondent following a Sunday morning service which had failed to lift his spirits. I read him a part of a letter in which I had explained the immense influence my four and a half years of study with him and our subsequent friendship continues to have on my life. I was deeply touched when I learned that my letter had helped to comfort and strengthen Jacques in an hour of need. I know he received similar letters from others to which he could no longer respond because of his failing health, but I would like you to know that such letters affirmed him greatly during the last few months of his life. So did the November conference, and I thank the *Association Jacques Ellul* for it.

Supporting and encouraging Jacques Ellul, therefore, was uppermost on our minds during our visit last November. Upon discovering there would not be any service the Sunday morning following the conference, we decided to organize one. I spent the next two nights preparing a meditation. I so much wanted to give something back to Jacques on what would be (to within a few days) the twentieth anniversary of when we first arrived in France to begin my 41/2 years of post-doctoral work with him. However, not having used my French regularly for the last fifteen years and not being able to read notes, I must confess I was a little uptight about the task. What follows is a brief summary of what I said that Sunday morning.

#### *A New Famine and Drought?*

A number of our conversations during the past few days have focussed on how to share our hope and build one another up. I was reminded time and time again of the text in Amos 8, vs. 11-13, which we have just read together. It seems that many of us coming from different nations, cultures and traditions experience our time as just such a famine and drought. It is particularly true for Sunday mornings, when we search for an affirmation of our hope and faith and frequently do not find it. We have a profound longing for some good news as we try to find our way in the world: making sense of it as best we can so as to live in it as free people as we were meant to do. It is because we have experienced good news that we know what we are looking for, but we rarely find it.

Of course, as people of our time, place and culture we are aware of the profound changes in which we are participating. During the last fifty years, our cultures have undergone far-reaching changes. It is a time in which old ways have been lost and new ways are being found. Such times of upheaval are very difficult for many people. Making sense of what goes on and meaningfully relating to it in the daily-life context is a difficult task. Institutions also have seen their foundations shaken and even destroyed. What is the response to this time of the God of Jews and Christians, who has entered into human history? I would like to reflect on these themes in the light of some Biblical passages.

#### *Individual Responses*

It is tempting to identify with the feelings of the prophet Elijah that we have just read about in I King 19 vs. 9-18. In our feelings of isolation and frustration about what

passes for Christianity in our world, it is essential to put things in perspective and take very seriously the assurances to the prophet that there are still 7,000 faithful people left in Israel. The number is highly symbolic: 7 refers to the reunification of God with his creation, which is taken 1,000 times. It reminds us of those hopeful texts in the Book of Revelation that we will come to in a moment, and it appears, therefore, that the message addressed to the prophet is not limited to that specific time or situation.

#### *Institutional Responses*

While many Christians today will individually acknowledge an intuition that somehow, somewhere, something is going profoundly amiss, our churches as institutions have quite a different response. There is nothing new here, unfortunately, and we have many examples in the Old and New Testaments. The response during Jesus' day is well known. However, the story of I Samuel 4, vs. 1-11, is perhaps closer to our times. Feeling besieged, the churches hold out a moderm ark, namely the Bible. They treat it as a sacred object, and confidently announce that Jesus is the answer while giving little evidence of knowing what the questions appear to be. There is no longer any question of walking with the Word as a lamp to illuminate our way. Instead, by staring at that light it is impossible to see what is going on in the world to find a way in it. As institutions stumble, some begin to feel hopelessly inadequate in the face of the issues, problems and sufferings in the world. Wishing to get more involved, they put the lamp down to free both hands for action. As they rush forward to respond to many needs, they soon move beyond the reach of *the* lamp, again to stumble when swallowed up by darkness. Neither of these two responses makes any sense, but they appear to dominate the scene. There is little in between these extremes in terms of walking with our given lamp as a light for our path.

#### *Signs of Grace*

There is little question that since the Second World War, Western Civilization began a whole new era. Such a transition is one in which one way of life makes way for another. Of course, what this new way of life will be like and what consequences it will have is not always clear to the people living through such a transition. Making sense of what goes on and meaningfully relating to it in a daily-life context is a difficult task. It may give some people a sense of being adrift, of not understanding what is happening to their lives and their communities. Why are their values and convictions not providing adequate guidance? How can civilization push itself to the edge of a nuclear or ecological disaster? What is happening to families and communities? For others, the new age is full of promise brought about by the emerging post-industrial-consumer-information society. Between these extremes of secular hope and pessimism, we find the over-whelming majority of people coping as best they can. For Christians living out their calling, not to be enslaved or possessed by anyone or any-thing but to live a life of freedom in hope, faith and love, adds a challenge.

God's response to the situation is one we know from the Book of Hope, the Book of Revelation. In terms of specifics, I would like to focus on Jacques Ellul's encounter with God. The fact that he came from outside the Christian community once again affirms

God's love for all humanity and probably says something about the condition of the churches as well. This encounter brought us a wonderful and urgently needed gift: a discernment of the spirit of our times. I know that for some of us, it was an experience of suddenly seeing the world and our life within it much more clearly - the experience of a sudden illumination that touched us very deeply. In my country, I recall how George Grant said as much when he was interviewed for my radio series on the life and work of Jacques Ellul for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Yesterday, at the end of the conference, Ivan Eich expressed it in a deeply moving way. I recall how, as an engineer struggling with the questions of the limits to growth and the environmental crisis, the reading of the first two chapters in *The Technological Society* touched the very core of my being. It struck me as an accurate description of how I thought and worked and how, therefore, I was a part of the things I was trying to change. It presented a comprehensive global view of what was happening in the world in a way that one no longer encounters in the university, which has become an intellectual Tower of Babel in which individual disciplines can no longer contribute to a genuine intellectual culture. At the same time, this global thinking helps us find our way in the world. I found that it became much easier to understand other people who respond very differently to what is going on in the world and their lives and to relate to them as fellow-sojourners. Rather than being judgmental of those who are different, it is a part of what Ellul during my interviews with him called, "thinking globally and acting locally."<sup>1</sup>

It is only global thinking that can illuminate what appears to be happening, namely the beginning of a new epoch in human history where we no longer live primarily within nature nor within societies. Our cultures are now permeated by a scientific-technical approach to life. As cultural beings, this begins to define our "old nature." We are well aware of what happens to everything touched by this scientific-technical approach to life: almost everyone now recognizes what it does to the natural ecology and its ability to support all life. It is also becoming clear that the same thing is happening to the social ecology of society. Within the Christian communities, we have far from escaped these developments. The application of a scientific-technical (that is, historical-critical) approach to understanding the Biblical message has left us with a lot of debris and very little good news. Our religious studies departments, seminaries, and worship sendees testify to this tragedy.

All of us in one way or another have worshipped the new way and fallen victim to its consequences. Rather than treating science and the technical way of life as human inventions good for certain things, useless for others and irrelevant to still others, we have through the usual religious processes mystified and sacralized them with terrible consequences for the world. In a specific historical instance, we are seeing how the

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<sup>1</sup> To my knowledge, the expression "thinking globally, acting locally" was introduced into North America via the CBC radio program on Jacques Ellul. He used it to sum up his life and work. Subsequently, this expression has been used by many for different purposes. American readers may wish to know the radio program was printed as *Perspectives on Our Age* by Seabury as if it were a book written by Ellul, by leaving out some parts. The Canadian CBC edition is complete.

components of human history described in the second part of the Book of Revelation act themselves out in our times, and at the same time how this land of global thinking in faith confronts us with the message of hope in the Book of Revelation. I have selected three passages in particular for our consideration this morning: Revelation 6, vs. 9-11, 12-17, and Revelation 7, vs. 1-17, which we have read together. I extensively drew on Jacques Ellul's commentary on these passages, but placed them in the context of our need to "think globally and act locally" with our hope and faith. These passages give an account of how the leaven in the dough causes it to rise in the reconciliation between God and His creation. They provide us with hope in this time of abandonment. We affirmed our hope in discerning what is happening before our very eyes, namely the reconciliation between God and all humanity in this century and for all time. In our prayer we gave thanks for the many watchers on the towers, who had helped us and continue to help us discern the new developments coming across the horizon of human experience.

On Sunday afternoon, my wife and I met with Jacques Ellul in his living room, as we had done so many times before. We spoke about many things, including the experience of death; and reaffirmed in the faith, we parted not to meet again, at least not on this earth.

One short epilogue: following Jacques' passing, I have a profound feeling of abandonment, of being separated from someone who more than anyone else has marked my life, but it is much more than a personal matter. To whom would we go as a Christian community (fragmented and scattered as it is) for discernment on important issues, who has shown as much clarity of discernment, of vision and hope in this century as Jacques Ellul? We must continue to run our races for which Jacques Ellul has helped equip us. We will miss this great watcher on the tower, waiting for a new dawn of complete and total reconciliation.

## My Journey with Ellul

by David Gill, *North Park College, Chicago.*

My relationship with Jacques Ellul had two phases. From 1971 to 1981 it was a relationship of correspondence by letter; from 1982 to 1991 it was a relationship of personal conversations.

In late 1971 I read (and reviewed) my first book by Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City for Right On*, a monthly "radical Christian" journal in Berkeley, California, that later evolved into *Radix Magazine*. There were very few Christian perspectives on the city at that time so I was pleased to find Ellul's book. I thought it was interesting but nothing sensational. However, I noted a list of several other Ellul titles on the dust jacket and, in preparation for the 1972 presidential campaign, I read *The Political Illusion, The Politics of God and the Politics of Man, Presence of the Kingdom*,

and *False Presence of the Kingdom*. As I read these books and then attended the Democratic Convention in Miami I was "hooked" for good. His descriptions of modern politics and statecraft were played out before my very eyes. I found Ellul's discussions of both politics and Christianity powerful, illuminating, and brilliant. It was an intense, passionate, spiritual and intellectual awakening for me.

In late July of 1972 I decided to send a letter and copies of my articles and reviews to Ellul at the University of Bordeaux. I was surprised to get a personal reply from him in September 1972. He was very kind and encouraging about my articles and gave me helpful responses to a few questions I had asked.

For the next ten years I corresponded with Professor Ellul two or three times per year. I collected and read everything of his that I could get my hands on. A French-language bookstore in Los Angeles helped me acquire many of his French volumes. From 1973 to 1977 I was a Ph.D. student in Religion/Social Ethics at the University of Southern California. From my initial interview onward, my USC professors supported my project of studying Ellul's theological ethics, his intellectual sources (the Bible, Weber, Marx, Kierkegaard, Barth) and his counterparts (in ethics, in the sociology of politics and technology). In the fall of 1976 Lewis Smedes invited me to teach a course on Ellul's thought at Fuller Seminary, my first effort along those lines. While I lived in southern California I got to know Vemard Eller at La Verne University. We met several times to discuss our mutual interests in Ellul's ideas.

From 1977 to 1982 I was back in Berkeley, leading a project to establish a graduate-level study center and think tank on the relation of Christian faith and biblical ethical perspectives to modern life and work. Ellul's ideas and counsel were certainly important to me as I worked on this project.

All this time, of course, I had wanted to go to Bordeaux in person and meet with Ellul. But my wife and I had two small children and not one cent extra in our budget. I was able to carry out my research and writing in North America by aggressively collecting Ellul's writings in French as well as in English translation and by writing to him for clarification and further detail.

Finally, however, I took my wife and children to Europe for two months in the summer of 1982. I'll never forget the excitement I felt as we drove into Bordeaux and then a few days later visited the Elluls at their home in Pessac. Joyce Hanks and my wife Lucia helped with my almost nonexistent spoken French as I interviewed Ellul (later published in *Christianity Today* and *Radix Magazine*). I also persuaded Joyce that we should invite the Elluls for Sunday dinner after hearing him preach at the Reformed Church in the Chartrons neighborhood. Ellul brought along a couple of excellent bottles of Bordeaux and we had an afternoon full of good food, fellowship, and conversation—made the more memorable by the experience of riding in Madame Ellul's car. She is on my top five list of "wild drivers I have ridden with"!

That visit in 1982 laid the groundwork for my twelve months in Bordeaux on my sabbatical from June 1984 to June 1985. After two months of intensive work on my French I began meeting with Ellul for an hour or two on Friday afternoons at his

home. Allowing for vacations, travel, etc., I probably averaged meeting with him two or three times per month for nine months. I also attended his monthly studies on Ecclesiastes at his church, heard him preach a couple times, and accompanied him to a weekend GBU (InterVarsity) retreat.

Basically we did three things in our meetings: (1) we discussed his work, sometimes arguing vigorously about the theology of work, eschatology, politics, etc., and often exploring intellectual terrain we occupied in common; (2) Ellul read and critiqued my writing and ideas—about Christian ethics, higher education, the church, etc., and (3) I prepared for him bibliographical introductions to the work of James Gustafson, Stanley Hauerwas, John Howard Yoder, and other Americans. I asked him if I could do anything to assist him while in Bordeaux; he replied that he had difficulty sorting through the immense volume of American publications in ethics to see what was worth his special attention as he prepared his own books on ethics.

I have met many famous intellectuals but I have never met anyone as learned as Ellul. I locked horns with him many times (work and calling, universalism, individualism, etc.) and always found deeper layers of Ellulian research and knowledge as I pressed him on his case. He sometimes seems hasty and simplistic in his written statements; in person it was clear that his views were carefully, appropriately nuanced and reflected a vast research.

Ellul's personal character affected me as much as his intellectual brilliance. Unlike the self-important, sneering buffoons I met at Oxford, my Bordeaux mentor was relaxed, genuine, warm and kind. He was as good at relations with my children and with blue collar workers as he was in the pulpit, lecture hall or in debate. His marriage to Yvette and their warm hospitality were great and inspiring gifts to those who benefitted from them.

On one of my finer days in Bordeaux, my landlord, Henri Cerezuelle, who had been a long time friend of Ellul, drove me south into the foothills of the Pyrenees for a wonderful afternoon with Bernard Charbonneau, Ellul's best friend, often cited in his writings.

I (like some others) tried very hard to persuade Ellul to visit the USA. He said he would come, then backed out two or three times. His excuses were that his heart condition wouldn't allow him to fly, taking a boat was too long, and he didn't speak English (true). I told him we would bring along an entourage including his cardiologist, wife, and however many friends and translators he wished. I described to him Helmut Thielicke's tour and his method of successfully grappling with the English problem. But I think he really was afraid to fly (did he ever in his life?) and felt that his work in Bordeaux was a better use of his time—I also tried to persuade Bill Moyers and PBS to do a first rate interview series on Ellul—but didn't get very far. Thankfully we do have the Dutch and French video interviews to show our American friends.

I returned to Bordeaux for four weeks in the summer of 1988 and one week in the summer of 1991. On both occasions it was a great joy to be with Ellul again but painful to see his health and then (especially after Yvette's death in 1991) his spirit failing.



Our correspondence continued until 1991 but after that date he wasn't able to respond to my occasional letters any more.

It is ironic that just as C.S. Lewis' death on November 22, 1963, was overshadowed by that of John F. Kennedy, so was Jacques Ellul's death on May 19, 1994 by that of Jacqueline Kennedy. (I'm not suggesting a conspiracy!) For me, May 19 has always been significant because it was the birthday of Malcolm X, the African American social prophet who woke me up to the depths of America's sin of racism. And now it also marks the end of the life of another one of the twentieth century's most important prophetic voices. When I heard Daniel Cerezuella's voice on my phone with the news on the morning of May 19, I felt a great emptiness sweep over me. The world was emptier. We lost a great man. But what a privilege it has been to have learned from him and to have known him.

## **Merci, mon ami!**

by Vernard Eller, University of La Verne

My name is Vernard Eller; and I am most grateful for the invitation to talk about Jacques Ellul. As a writer of books, my first *magnum opus* was Kierkegaard (my doctoral dissertation). Two decades later, my last *magnum opus* was the most Ellulian thing I have written. But the dedication page of this last one read:

In appreciation of  
*JACQUES ELLUL*

who has led me not only into Christian Anarchy but into much more of God's truth as well.

*Merci, mon ami!*

And those are the sentiments that will last as long as I do-or as long as the book itself does.

Long before Ellul and I had any knowledge of each other, we had in common a strong commitment to Kierkegaard, as our immediate Christian predecessor. In time, then, Ellul expressed deep appreciation for both my Kierkegaard *magnum opus* and my Ellul one. Yet it was the very *personal* character of that appreciation which so impressed me. Ellul voluntarily undertook efforts (futile) to get my Kierkegaard book published in French. And regarding the book itself, he picked upon and gave meaning to a detail no one else even noticed. That volume was dedicated to my two sons-with the prayer that the boys would grow up to demonstrate the same quality of Christian faith as was exemplified by their namesakes: Alexander Mack (the Brethren founder) in the one case; and Enten Eller (Kierkegaard's book title) in the second. Yet in a longhand note to me, Jacques Ellul found that prayer to be most significant. Yes, of course I consider all the thoughts, teachings, and writings of Jacques Ellul to be of critical importance. Yet it is the man himself I truly love and value.

When I finished college and got started on graduate studies, my one goal and dream in life was that I might become a teacher and professor like my dad—though, in my case, as professor of Bible at my alma mater, the little Brethren school in California. I did have degrees in English literature and knew that *writing* was my first love (although that simply as *hobby*). Never in my wildest dreams would I have foreseen my writings drawing such public notice and acclaim that they put me into personal contact with a recognized genius and intellectual giant the likes of Jacques Ellul. That I was destined to become a personal friend of Ellul's—that I consider to be a sheer miracle of God and one of his totally unmerited gifts.

My first notice of Ellul's name (let alone his thought) came with his article, "Between Chaos and Paralysis," in the 06/05/68 *Christian Century*. I immediately sensed his affinity with my own bibli-cal/Kierkegaardian/radical-discipleship stance. So I went after Ellul's books, beginning (I think) with *The Meaning of the City*. I soon learned that Will Campbell and Jim Holloway (with their quarterly journal, *Katalagette*) had the best US connection with Ellul himself. I got in touch with them—and was soon invited to do a 1971 KAT article that would bring together the thought of Ellul, Kierkegaard, the Blumhardts, and Malcolm Muggeridge. Holloway sent that KAT issue to Ellul—and Ellul responded to Holloway (not to me). He was very pleased with the article, complaining only that I had "placed him too high." (This was Ellul's regular complaint. For the truth is that he was always a very unassuming, truly humble man.)

Holloway passed Ellul's letter on to me; and I took it as an opportunity to write to the man himself. Thus began a correspondence that ran *spasmodically* for more than twenty years—averaging probably not even one exchange per year. I, of course, read all Ellul's books as they came out (in English). I sent him as many of my books as I thought would interest him. He was always extravagant in his praise—even crediting me with helping clarify his thought at points. On a scale of 1 to 10, if, intellectually, Ellul were rated a 10, I probably wouldn't make it out of zero. Yet Ellul always treated me as a scholarly peer—and more importantly, as a Christian friend and brother.

Actually, Ellul and I did pull off one joint venture, which may have won us the largest one-time hearing either of us ever received.

At the time, I was doing pretty well at landing articles in *The Christian Century*, so I submitted one entitled *How Jacques Ellul Reads the Bible*. It was accepted. You understand that Ellul and I never actually met each other; his English and my French wouldn't have made for much comprehensibility in any case. But the cover page of the November 29, 1972, issue of the *Century* looked like this: Apart from the *Century* masthead and dateline, there was only a photo of Jacques Ellul and the story title: *How Jacques Ellul Reads The Bible: Vemard Eller*.

That in itself would have been blessing beyond measure; but there is more. This *Century* issue happened to coincide in point of time with the monstrously large Quadrennial Assembly of the National Council of Churches of Christ in America. So in addition to its regular subscriber's list, free copies of the Ellul/ Eller *Century* were everywhere at hand (and underfoot) throughout that convention.

It probably wound up with us both being "placed too high." So, to Jacques Ellul, I end as I began: *Merci, mon ami!*

## Ellul's Prophetic Witness to the Academic Community

Clifford G. Christians, University of Illinois-Urbana

For over two decades, I have engaged Ellul's work intellectually. On the occasion of his death, allow me a highly personal account of the way his work has inspired my own journey.

One of my professors at the University of Illinois introduced me to Jacques Ellul in 1970. He assigned *Propaganda* and it captivated my attention immediately. At that point in my doctoral studies Ellul had been the only Christian scholar to be taken seriously in our department. From those days until now, Ellul has been more than an academic mentor to me. Here was a believer with a worldwide reputation who had not cheapened his religious commitment. His career and lifestyle as an academic have served for me as a model for integrating faith and learning.

Since his career revolved around a secular university, as mine does, Ellul's prophetic witness has enabled me to pursue my own calling more fruitfully. I have known the stories of the Old Testament prophets since childhood. Amos fascinated me particularly, called away as he was from his farming to preach against the wealth and indifference of Israel. However, it has never been obvious in my mind how these examples can be translated into the modern university setting. Ellul opened the prophetic door for me through his own Amos-like ministry to contemporary culture. He provided at least a glimmer of hope that the Christian mind of the 20th century can dominate the discussion about technology today in the same manner Kari Marx commandeered the 19th century agenda over industrialism. Sophisticated technology at present is unleashing novel and dangerous situations of unprecedented magnitude. Ellul's prophetic witness encouraged me in believing that we need not stand by immobilized.

As an antidote to the normlessness and cynicism of a university campus, Ellul inspired me to maintain an explicit faith without being naive. I have not forgotten that it was Aldous Huxley who introduced Ellul to America. Huxley had read *The Technological Society* in French and considered it more penetrating than his own *Brave New World*. And Huxley stood amazed at Ellul's faith which prevented him from becoming a bitter atheist as he was. As a sign of hope in this sense, Ellul sent us outside the tiny oasis which Bible-believing academics often rest content. In many ways, what C. S. Lewis accomplished in literature, Ellul did in the social sciences. He encouraged us to stretch beyond the minimal, beyond the modules and homilies, to a bold vision co-extensive with the abundance of contemporary power.

Moreover, Ellul was a testimony to the inevitability of suffering in academic life. No one can be a watchman on the walls without ridicule and attack. Ellul paid dearly for his distinctiveness. Alongside those who recognized his stunning insights and credentials were the hosts who incessantly denounced him. The political activists turned on him when he opposed violent means. Marxist intellectuals claimed his views were too diluted and apparently preferred more strident ideological commitments. Social scientists insisted on so-called neutrality and dismissed his impassioned work as moralizing. Even within the Christian community he was misunderstood as too scriptural by some and not biblical enough by others. A few found him too confrontational and others too individualistic. Among Christians who also wish to establish a correspondence between faith and the world, Ellul's notion of counterpoint was sometimes misdirected. Through it all, Ellul reminded me that genuine Christian scholarship entails suffering. While distinctiveness is necessary to accomplish anything theoretically interesting, such forthright stands can never escape abuse. Though suffering can be ameliorated to some degree and may not be as intense for all, Ellul showed the nobility of a steadfast willingness to pay the price.

For those of us in an academic world, Ellul made it clear that the important battles are fought over content. Certainly a life of integrity is critical. Keeping one's promises, honesty with the data, respect for students, and other such virtues are necessary givens for a Christian testimony. Active involvement in social causes, and freedom from the demons of money and careerism *arcsine qua non*. Christian institutions warrant support also, and time devoted to them can sometimes indicate that the university does not own my soul. But Ellul contended that all these are insufficient. While failure in any of the above undoubtedly weakens or besmirches our impact, they together are not a substitute for an integration of faith and learning. The issue in the secular arena is whether a biblical foundation makes any difference in the way we think, in our grappling with the latest headlines, in shaping our disciplines. If, in other words, Christians and nonChristians end up with the same conclusions on crucial issues, and if economic and political beliefs seem finally to carry the greatest weight, then the Christian worldview is unnecessary baggage. Regarding issues that matter, if the orientation is the same for all, then Christianity is clearly a paradigm which may have successfully anchored reality in the pre-scientific era but no longer has any legitimate claims on our allegiance.

Harry Blamires in *The Christian Mind* expresses the same concern. He laments that there is no clearly formulated Christian mind on the vital issues of the day. Such an identifiable perspective may be developing over civil rights and nuclear war and perhaps over abortion, but Blamires argues that even on those matters too much ambiguity and lack of unity still exist. To his way of thinking, in no instance really is there a powerful stream of Christian thinking which cannot be ignored. And Ellul shared an identical conviction about the urgent need for toughminded struggles against the modern mind — in his case over the nature and role of technology in our culture. Some of us are convinced that the Bible communicates to all of life and not just

regarding the soul. We refuse dichotomies between prayer and action, salvation and culture, word and deed. In this sense, scriptural truth is a white light which shines through the prism of space and time into a spectrum of colors, and it does not merely illuminate a narrow road leading to heaven. To us, Ellul has been a signpost that a holistic approach can be made meaningful even in an increasingly post-Christian era.

He brought the revolutionary motif up from a footnote in order to develop an approach that was radical enough to make major transformations as necessary in the status quo. Such prophetic appeals have consistently come out on the short end; they have been relegated to the final chapter or emerged as an afterthought when all the other intellectual work has been safely gathered in. Ellul made the urgency of revolt and resistance compelling, moving them solidly within the circumference of social responsibility itself. He was too uncritically Barthian at this point for my own taste, presuming Barth's dualism between *Historic* and *Geschichte*. Based on that dialectic, Barth denies meaning and value to time and space, a perspective which entails a gulf between secular and sacred histories. On this view, the latter culminates in an eschatological climax at the final judgment. And given this construct, the apocalyptic end-time moment anchored both freedom and revelation for Ellul. However, despite the limitations of this formulation, Ellul challenged me with an analysis which confronts our technological era without a hint of compromise, while simultaneously protecting the clear otherness of the solution. His achievement was to eradicate all middle-level compromises within the historical process.

Ellul heard the plea of James Houston in "The Judgment of the Nations" for a new sense of mission in the Christian community:

[We must learn] to use the whole range of our professional skills to speak prophetically about our time. We need deeper analyses of the pathology of scientific, technological, social and political evils in our contemporary world, in light of the eternal realities...A new missionary enterprise is involved: to go virtually into every professional area of life, just as in the past we have emphasized the geographical penetration of our world with the gospel. (*Prophecy in the Making*, ed. C. F. H. Henry, pp. 360-61)

Meanwhile the church has been giving pride of place to laity who serve internally, who contribute to its ongoing administration. Those on the church board or teachers in religious education are prized as involved lay persons. However, if Houston is right, the "worldly laity" are the urgent need at present. While churches may be devising strategies for communicating to the reachable, the alienated still remain virtually untouchable. Though the church has released incredible resources of late to train the internal laity, virtually no leadership or help emerges whatsoever about penetrating the professions and institutions of our time. Thus Ellul ranked in my mind as a strategic case of effective lay power, whose books and life were teaching instruments not only for educators, but for the worldly laity in the human community at large.

Ellul reminded me that the pivotal role of conscience must be recaptured in moral agency. Freud stifled our appreciation of the conscience, reducing it as he did to a

nagging voice and repressive intruder yielding unnecessary guilt. Jacques Ellul knew better, using his prophetic voice to ignite the human conscience. Clinical appeals to reason and analysis are insufficient; on his view we ought not merely face social and cultural dilemmas with a calculator. Ellul's work surged forth like a mighty stream from a deeply touched conscience of his own seeking to inform and activate the consciences of others. I saw in his demeanor an insatiable thirst, a relentless yearning for justice and meaning that has marked prophetic agents over the centuries. From him I renewed my own concern for a vital prophetic witness against the human propensity to serve the interests of power. As his numbers increase, inspired by his legacy, perhaps our technological activity can be freed at last from its anti-normative direction.

## In Memorium for Jacques Ellul

by David Lovekin, Hastings College

I first learned of Jacques Ellul in the spring of 1969, a time when many Americans were discovering Ellul's work. I read *The Technological Society*, (1964) his "call to the sleeper to awake." American philosophy at that time was very much guided by Brizo, goddess of sleep, a condition which today has even deepened under the unwavering hegemony of analytical philosophy with its logic chopping and concept shifting –the *la technique* of philosophical wisdom or of Heideggerian-like nihilism, the posture of spirit tired of making sense. For a time it appeared that phenomenology would provide respite, but that was shortly to be harnessed by conceptual batteries and wires that abandoned the concerns of the *lebenswelt* that had fascinated such thinkers as Merleau-Ponty.

I took seriously what Ellul was to state later in much clearer terms in *The Technological System* (1980):

Man's central, his—I might say-metaphysical problem is no longer the existence of God and his own existence in terms of that sacred mystery. The problem is now the conflict between that absolute rationality (*rationalite absoiue*) and what has hitherto constituted his person. That is the pivot of all present-day reflection, and, for a long time, it will remain the only philosophical issue. (74)

Although he claimed not to be a philosopher, Ellul understood that a metaphysical realm beyond the here and now was obviated by the reduction of the real to the absolutely rational in the pursuit of evanescent efficiency with a mathematics-like methodology. Philosophy went the way of all disciplines. Philosophy seemed unconcerned or unable to take its own condition into account, to wonder why the concept and reason had come to hold such power and force, to see this incarnation of philosophy as a manifestation of the very business it was philosophy's traditional duty to examine: the *polis* in whatever form it might take.

Philosophers had become checkers and baggers in the supermarket of technique, pricing and inventorying items and then wrapping them but never calling them to

question; or they became the homeless outside the market in the clearing of technique waiting for visits from *Dasein* in a shopping cart. Elul's work was to my mind philosophical in the classical sense; uncovering the presuppositions of what currently passed for knowledge and locating this knowledge against the backdrop of the whole; and then relating the limits of knowledge, some form of otherness, to the known. Elul sought freedom for consciousness and human awareness to become aware of itself, to take shape against what it was not, against its loss. Elul examined the force and power of technical consciousness from a standpoint outside of it, employing the history of law, biblical exegesis, and social analysis with an imaginative totalizing vision. Technique was grasped as it appeared in time, as it took on the character of the sacred, and as technological society usurped traditional human culture produced against the backdrop of otherness. Technology became the sacralization of the familiar.

Typically the enormous scope of Ellul's work was beyond his readers wanting to reduce him to a pessimistic Christian luddite. But Elul clearly understood that to come not to praise technology would be taken as its condemnation. Like nineteenth century Kierkegaard, he ranged the contemporary social world witnessing the idolatry of "absolute rationality;" like eighteenth century Giambattista Vico, he understood the debilitating power of the "intelligible universal," Vico's term for what clearly is Elul's technical phenomenon, and of its disempowering effect on metaphorical and symbolic language revealed in culture and human law, and like twentieth century philosopher Ernst Cassirer, Elul saw the human spirit alive in symbolic construction but endangered by monological technique. Elul, like the above thinkers, stood outside of fad and fashion and offered the voice of the other to keep open the dialectic of human possibility.

## Anarchy and Holiness

by Gabriel Vahanian, Universite des Sciences Humaines, Strasbourg

Hailed as "Mr. Protestant", Jacques Ellul appears on the American scene a few decades ago and, obviously, for the general reader, he still admires Barth.

It is not with Barth, however, that he shares the distinction of having probed the emergence of technology and its impact on the nature and destiny of the human person. It is with Tillich. To be sure, he differs from Tillich, too. In particular, with respect to the relation between religion and culture, they even seem to stand at opposite ends of the spectrum. Describing religion as the substance of culture and, conversely, culture as the form of religion, is not the kind of path Ellul follows. Like Barth, he distinguishes religion from faith<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, religion can also be an expression of the sacred. It belongs then to the same realm as culture; perhaps, it belongs to what we call civilization or, more precisely, to that of which technology would be the ultimate negation, if

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<sup>2</sup> *La Subversion du christianisme*, p. 66

we must give credence to Ellul's contention that there can be no technological civilization.<sup>3</sup> When, however, he also contends that civilization itself is inextricably bound up with the sacred, we begin to wonder. Before long, one question leads to another: How Protestant is Mr. Protestant?

To what extent is Ellul's implicit, dichotomous, understanding *ci faith* and culture congruous with classical Protestant openness to secularity? Is it not in contradiction with the idea suggested by Troeltsch that Protestantism is that form of Christianity which, rather than adopting, adapts to given historical circumstances and patterns itself after the emerging cultural mind-set? And do we still, with Ellul, stand in the tradition of Reformation, which Karl Holl depicts as consisting in the secularization of religion and the spiritualisation of culture? Or is Ellul more a sociologist than a theologian? Or, for that matter, is he too French a theologian? And if so, how could his thought be freed from its shackles, fettered as it is by the dialectic of the sacred and profane which still pervades a Catholic culture? How could it, genuinely, adhere to the iconoclastic dialectic he seems to wish and call for yet does not really spell out, namely that of anarchy and holiness?

*Modernity: from the Reformation to the Death of God*

Indeed, in spite of all appearances and a litany of common places with which the Reformation is laden, there is an aspect of it which needs to be stressed. It has to do with the fact that, then, Christianity is about to face Modernity and does so, not so much by allegedly returning to the sources, as by developing a theology staked off a new conception of the world. On the whole, Christianity continues to fertilize Western culture, providing it with a sense of destiny, both individually and socially. Whether intellectually, spiritually, or ethically, the Christian faith still informs and belongs to the cultural mind-set.

At most, albeit with a touch of irreverent humor, one might somewhat wryly relish the thought that, with the Reformation, Christianity undergoes sort of a religious lifting. As a result, the world itself will look quite a different place. Not enough, however, to be spared from the growing gap between religion and culture or to resist their cleavage once it is set in motion. No sooner has Modernity begun its course and been identified as a challenge to established customs than it gives the impression of being programmed to break up with the Christian tradition. It will. But when it does –if it actually does - it will break up with the latter only because of its own premisses: they are rooted in the Christian understanding of the world.

Odd as it is, Modernity only reaps what it did not sow. It gamers an heritage actually neglected by Christianity while the church remains locked up in a religious tradition fast becoming fossilized. It rests on a misunderstanding.

As for the church, by splitting science and faith, it does in fact overlook the real theological questions. They are raised by the very scientists it impugns. But if theirs is

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<sup>3</sup> In a similar vein, Barth contended in the late forties that there could be no humanism outside of the Christ-event.



a lucid struggle against the tyranny of outmoded presuppositions, its outcome surely is not less doubtful or reprehensible in its assumptions. For winning the day, scientism equally rests on dubious foundations. Prematurely blowing its horn, it deludes itself on a pyrrhic victory won from a religious tradition now seemingly fitted with savings of leveled-down transcendence.

True enough, both sides misconstrue transcendence. They think it stands or falls with supernatural dualism. But, in biblical thought, God is a God who creates and becomes incarnate and is all in all. He dwells among men. Immanence is not shunned by his transcendence, on the contrary. Given the iconoclastic bent of this biblical notion of God, immanence can even be said to come *before* transcendence. Accordingly, a demise of the supernatural understanding of the world is no surprise. It was inevitable. But it does not necessarily entail the demise of transcendence, much less of faith. It even radicalizes faith in God as Ellul would suggest through his rather peculiar notion of the silent God.

Indeed, ours is a time of disenchantment. In the wake of Max Weber, God's silence notwithstanding, Ellul continues to think of the *world* as being disenchanted. He does not want to realize that this disenchantment affects science or philosophy much less than the very Christian tradition on which they were weaned. It affects the world much less than it does Christianity. After all, if it was the world that was disenchanted, we should have by now found enchantment elsewhere, perhaps even in the classic posture of contempt for this world. On the contrary, it becomes more and more evident that Christianity alone does not and cannot by itself suffice to enchant the world. Just as one knows a tree by its fruits, so also does one know a religion by the world it bears and begets. Christianity seems instead bent on reneging the world it has borne. Searching for its own identity and, more or less disavowing the world it has brought forth, it is focussed on a quest of origins. Challenged by what is demanded of it, it recoils into what it demanded in another world. It is oblivious of the fact that it would know whence it comes if, as was still the case with the Reformation, it knew whither it goes. It seeks to reconstruct its past, instead of submitting to the permanent deconstruction of it as demanded by its own future. Admittedly, the issues with which Christianity is henceforth confronted are not quite the same as those of the sixteenth century. They will grow worse still in our time, when religion needs more than a lifting.

#### *The Cultural Impact of Technology*

As innovative as the Reformation was, it was not at odds with the world; it shook up the church, not its cultural or, for that matter, religious underpinnings. It does not amount to what is called today a "cultural revolution." In particular, it does not presuppose, nor does it demand, a total reappraisal of the cultural, even of the religious infrastructure of the Christian tradition. By contrast, ours is a situation for which it is not the world but religion which is shorn of its supernatural dimension - at once a fact, which must be dealt with, not by the world, but by the Christian faith, and a task,

to which Christianity continues to remain reticent.<sup>4</sup> Theological bridgeheads have not only been rare, they have been frowned upon if not repelled. Christian *aggiornamento* has long since petered out, whether within or without the institutions; besides, it was promoted by a halfhearted Roman Catholic Church.

At best, the mountain has given birth to a mouse. The ecumenical movement has given way to a spiritual flea market and, more often than not, has resulted in the churches taking stock of their differences. Beset by cultural pluralism, those same churches claim to cope with it simply by bracketing their respective theology. Inevitably, either they are led to compose and compromise with the prevailing ambient secularism or they are forced to retreat into a new type of orthodoxy, when they do not fall into the trap of fundamentalism or resort to an outright ritualization of the Christian tradition. Because the churches have become disenchanted and have nothing to say, they think Christianity's sickness unto death can be cured homeopathically: for lack of a daring faith, halleluias have replaced the sermon and mantric formulas have practically eclipsed theological reflection. By adding a sacerdotal touch to the minister's doctoral gown, the Presbyterian Church retreats from its historic adherence to, and its no less iconoclastic profession of, universal priesthood—surely a misnomer if there ever was one. Universal priesthood makes no sense unless the Christian message is liberated from the shackles of ecclesiastical bondage. A church that does not preach what it practices is not a church that practices what it preaches. Like the ostrich, it buries its head in the sand. As a result, its predicament is far more grievous today than it was in the sixteenth century. Never before was the church faced with as decisive a dilemma. And unless or until the church understands that theological reflection is the concern of the layman, the rank and file will find no alternative to the melting pot of technological society. And yet what is technology if not, to begin with, an alternative to technology?

Pointing a finger at it because it has allegedly become a menace is pointless. It makes no sense. To the degree that technology has been a promise, it has been a menace—always. Ignoring this amounts to compromising with it and, for a believer, that means nothing short of compromising one's faith: Ellul—and this is not the least of his merits—will never swerve from this line of thought. For him, the technological phenomenon is no mere mundane matter, if only because the Christian tradition cannot entirely be exonerated of its inception and development. And, therefore, except at the risk of serving two masters, no believer can be sheltered from its demands. Not only must it be coped with, it also lies, surreptitiously or otherwise, at the heart of every crisis affecting the Christian faith today.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Again, I wonder if this reticence is not what Ellul is addressing and seeks to justify when he speaks of our time as being a time of dereliction (Cf. *L'esperance oubliée*).

<sup>5</sup> That is the reason why, to my mind, Ellul has always claimed he was not opposed to technology and is misunderstood by those of his disciples, who, being believers, do not realize that the technological question is for him a religious question or by those who simply overlook the fact that for him technology is not criticizable for being technological but for being ideological.

### *The Religious Impact of Technology*

In this connection, one need only consider any of the major debates of the last fifty years or so. From Bultmann's proposal for demythologizing the Gospel to the death of God by way of the political conscientization of the church as an attempt to make up for traditional, otherworldly salvation, none leaves Ellul indifferent. Indifferent to them or unaffected by them have been and still are only those of his disciples who, for being religious, have not plumbed the depth of Ellul's analysis of the technological question as being, on its own grounds, a religious question.

Of course, even Barth never saw it in that light. But he dominated the theological field. By contrast with Tillich and Brunner or, for that matter, by contrast with even Bultmann, he does not approach the technological question. While in France Brunner was silenced before he had a chance of being heard, Bultmann was practically put on the French Protestant index and Tillich remained unknown.

Ellul does not waver. Faithful to Barth, he will never grow into an unconditional Barthian. Assessing Barth's involvement with East/West politics after World War II, he hands down a rather drastic judgment: Barth does not understand politics. And when he subsequently expounds his notion of universal salvation, one wonders if he felt that Barth did not understand religion, either. More significantly, given the importance he attaches to this plea, one even wonders if it simply is Ellul's way of putting into question the very notion of salvation or, perhaps, of demythologizing this rather basic tenet of the Christian tradition.

Not that he warms up to Bultmann's method. Holding the view that technology is our new myth, Ellul is, from the start, of the opinion that, if anything must be demythologized, it is our present world rather than that of the Bible. It is not the past that needs to be demythologized, but the present. Not the New Testament, but the self-infatuating discourse of technology. Not the Word of God, but the word of man. Ellul does not warm up to Bultmann's method. He restates it in his own terms, i.e., those of the technological system. For whatever reason, their disagreement is ultimately quite superficial. Nor am I surprised that, like Bultmann, Ellul is often charged with locking up the believer in a subjective faith - a charge, one must add, often made by precisely those for whom, when Modernity rests its case, there is no subject left that is not besides the subject, no selfhood of the self that is not eclipsed by itself. Ellul speaks a different language. He debunks our present myths from another vantage point. But his verdict is substantially the same: We think we are self-possessed when in fact we are lured into self-oblivion by reason of this very myth — or is it a technology? - of self-possession.

### *Political Illusion and Technological Bluff*

Be that as it may, ours are the myths that roughly belong to two families or two types of ideology that mingle their respective goals: on the one hand, a political ideology (which Ellul lays bare and qualifies as the *political illusion* ) and, on the other hand, an ideology of total technology (sometimes identified with utopia until Ellul, correcting his aim, defines it less in terms of utopia than in those of a huge bluff, the

*technological bluff*). Not less significantly, they feed one another and lure us away from ourselves - not into a new world or a new Jerusalem but into another Babylonian captivity. For him, those are obviously the major myths that need to be demythologized: they prevent us from taking stock of what precisely is at stake in and through the technological phenomenon. In other words, it is not the technological phenomenon so much as the myth that surrounds it that Ellul objects to. At most, like politics, technology disappoints him.

It disappoints him, not because it eliminates, but because it assimilates the human person. Instead of being of use to her, it uses her. It begins as a tool and ends up turning whomever uses it into its own tool. Being above and beyond nature, it fits us with something like a second nature. But, like nature, it demands total surrender. Obedience to it therefore postulates its being sacralized, even while nature, subjected to some kind of open sky mining ground, is artificialized together with all that biologically or otherwise belongs to it. And, unlike Tillich, Ellul consequently maintains that technology is not neutral.

He is categorical: any suggestion that technology is neutral amounts to affirming that it is good.<sup>6</sup> Ellul adheres to that view relentlessly. But he never implies that technology has trapped us in a situation out of which there is no exit. His analysis of the technological phenomenon never yields any ground for developing a doctrine pegged on some kind of materialistic reductionism. He loves nature, but never denies that natural man is sinful man. He denounces technology, but only because, like nature, so to speak, it attracts the sacred. And no social network of cohesion has ever been devised that did not appeal to the sacred. Whether through nature or technology, we are beguiled if not enslaved to the sacred. And yet, just as no believer can worship God without being an iconoclast, somehow the human being remains an anarchist. And I think it is in this light that, for example, one must read the rather ambiguous statement with which Ellul concludes *le Systeme techniden*: "L'homme qui aujourd'hui se sert de la technique est de ce fait meme celui qui la sert. Et reciproquement seul l'homme qui sert la technique est vraiment apte & se servir d'elle."<sup>7</sup>

If I quote him in French it is because one cannot read the last sentence without wondering what exactly is meant. What does Ellul mean when he states that only she who is used by technology is yet *truly able* to use it? He readily says that each of his undertakings has been a failure. We are useless servants, and yet we must try and serve God as best we can. And when he says that we are truly able to use technology, does he perchance have in mind anything like what I do when I suggest that a poet is precisely that person who, because she submits to language, is truly able to master it? Moreover, it bears pointing out, Ellul also hints that the person who is truly able

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Presence au monde moderne*, Roulet (C.P.E.), Geneve 1948, p. 95.

<sup>7</sup> *Le Systeme techniden*, Calmann-Levy, Paris 1977 (Ellul's italics): Whoever uses technology is by the same token used by it. Conversely, only he or she who is used by technology is *truly able* to use it (italics mine).

to use technology is not, as was the custom of saying, "man in general". That person is the person who was never before so subjected to it as she is *today*.

At this point, we have to back up and retrace our steps.

### *Anarchy and the Political Illusion*

A tool extends the human. Today technology alters it. Just as we have gone from tool to technology, so also we have moved from our natural to an increasingly technological milieu. We have moved away from the rich symbolism of nature, and *its* tools, to a world of artifacts for which a symbol is merely a symbol, a cipher, a sign. Which also reminds me that Ellul never missed the chance of bemoaning this shift from the elegance and nobility of the tool to the cold, calculating rationality of methods of systems that form an ensemble we call technology. And, in the wake of it, jobs, he points out, have replaced the vocational notion of work. It's as if we did not even need to be eliminated by technology. It has assimilated us. Has it, however, turned us into simulacra of ourselves? Ellul thinks so. Could he be wrong?

Whether technology is neutral or not, so much more significant is the consideration of another aspect of the problem. Consistent with himself, Ellul tends to neglect it. I think it deserves a review. I refer to an idea which is implicit in many of his statements regarding the use of technology. Namely: that, from technology at first a mere instrument for humans, we have reached the point where being human now depends on being an instrument of technology. And, of course, it all depends on what is meant by *instrument*.

Does it necessarily imply that the human being is shorn of its transcendental dimension? Does a person speak because she has a mouth? Or does she have a mouth because she speaks? And can God only be spoken as a being above all beings, as the Most High? Can he not be spoken of as the depth or the ground and the power of being as Tillich does? Too quickly, it seems to me, Ellul links his analysis of a robotized society resulting from technological efficiency with the so-called death of God. He construes the death of God as the ultimate expression of God's superfluousness and his metaphysical demise. And inevitably he ties it to his notion of a technological society as the ultimate negation of human freedom or the final theater of human dereliction. In such a society, man or woman can only be *de trop*.

But we should not be misled by Ellul's apparent naiveté. His point is well taken. By contrast with so many authors, he does not consider technology as the challenge of all times. Linking together the erosion of transcendence and the rise of technology, he shows that, instead of being challenged by technology, we hasten to succumb to it. It also gives him a further opportunity for showing that he is not opposed to technology as such.<sup>8</sup> He is repulsed by the fact that, instead of overcoming ourselves even through it,

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<sup>8</sup> In *Ze Bluff technologique*, Hachette, Paris 1988, p. 9, he says that one can be against technology no more than against an avalanche.

we are resigned to it. Time and again, he states that we claim to have been liberated from the constraints of nature and yet have rushed headlong into subservience to technology. Why? Because we cannot refrain from sacralizing it. "It is not technology that enslaves us, but the sacred which is transferred to it."<sup>9</sup>

### *Holiness vs Technology and the Sacred*

Having, so to speak, explained the spread of political illusion through a failure of the ethic of anarchy, Ellul now seems to view the sacralization of technology as the twin failure of an ethic of holiness: an ethic through which presumably the world is desacralized *and* claimed for God and his glorification.<sup>10</sup> Holiness and sacredness must not be confused. While according to Biblical religion the former is iconoclastic, the latter is not. Which explains why, Ellul points out, in spite of the desacralizing impact of the Christian tradition, "everything is as if men and women could not live in a desacralized universe."<sup>11</sup> Nor does he shrink from viewing this kind of situation as the most monumental failure of Christianity. In spite of the stand he takes regarding the death of God controversy, he further considers this failure as "one of the most blatant proofs of the sacred as being inherent to human existence, of the constancy of this active (I don't mean objective) force that leads man ever so often to reconstitute a sacred universe without which, apparently, he could not put up with a universe of his own doing. Only the sacred (and not the Christian venture) reassures him and gives him the feeling of both a stable universe and the enduring, objective, meaningfulness of his life."<sup>12</sup> Rather obviously, nothing is spared from the clutch of the sacred, not even modern Western society.<sup>13</sup> Is then Ellul an unrepentant pessimist? Not at all. He is disappointed by the church - not by the Christian message. Nor would he expect it to be otherwise!

Society thus is driven by the sacred, and only by the sacred. Not by Christianity. Nor, perhaps, by technology: remember, it is not technology but the sacred, once transferred upon it, that enslaves us.<sup>14</sup> And it enslaves us all the more because it can then appear in the form of utopia —that)inzzZsoZutiontowhich,accordingtoEllul, totalitarianism aspires and it alone can aspire, especially today, when technology combines both myth and the sacred under the aegis of a cold, calculating, rational efficiency.

But must it? And if it must, what is the point of Ellul's dialectic of anarchy and holiness?

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<sup>9</sup> *Les nouveaux possedes*, p. 259.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Darrell J. Fasching, *The Thought of Jacques Ellul*, The Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston (NY) 1981.

<sup>11</sup> *La Subversion du christianisme*, p. 67-Cf. also p. 181: "H es parfaitement intolerable pour l\*homme de vivre dans un univers religieusement desert, dans un monde desacralise."

<sup>12</sup> *La Subversion du christianisme*, p. 83.

<sup>13</sup> *La Subversion du christianisme*, p. 68.

<sup>14</sup> *Les nouveaux possedes*, p. 259.

Be that as it may, he reminds us that not even God is worshipped without becoming an idol. Human nature, being as fascinated with the sacred as it inclined to evil, will always settle for the commodities of comfortable if idolatrous life. That is, it will always fall short of the destiny to which it is called and belongs in spite of its origins. It is fulfilled by overcoming itself. It is sinful, though not by itself but before God. And sinfulness can be overcome and erased only by God's justifying and sanctifying grace - not through sacralizing institutions, but through holiness of life or its (metaphorical) antonym: anarchy; which Ellul considers as the most complete and serious form of socialism. Though he opposes anarchy and utopia, I think he persists in doing so only because of reasons pertaining to semantics or because he simply wishes not to confuse it with the kingdom of God. This would exemplify the worst of political illusions, just as, in his assessment of total technology, he is careful not to confuse the sacred - as a social phenomenon — with faith as distinguished from religion. And if, from this perspective, there is no human freedom except in and through faith in God, then human liberation belongs less to the political or economic than to the spiritual order. Ellul, it must be admitted, is closer to Luther's two kingdoms than to Calvin's ecclesial revolution, or his eschatic conception of the *life, or die true country*.

*By way of concluding this footnote*

Whether Ellul's thought is consistent or full of contradictions, it surely does not seek to square the circle. Ellul himself puts it in this way: "I remained unable to eliminate Marx, unable to eliminate the biblical revelation, and unable to merge the two. For me, it was impossible to put them together. So I began to be torn between the two, and I have remained so all my life. The development of my thinking can be explained starting with this contradiction."<sup>15</sup> I have perhaps been insinuating that Ellul was a disappointed man. If so, I have been wrong: he is disillusioned, even torn apart. And therefore open to this world so loved by God that he gives his only begotten Son.

## Jacques Ellul — The Little Giant

by Darrell J. Fasching

As I write this on July 20th, 1994, America is celebrating the 25th anniversary of the landing of the first man on the moon on this date in 1969. Watching television clips of those events vividly brought back to me the context in which I first encountered the writings of Jacques Ellul. 1969 was the year I entered graduate school at Syracuse University. As I drove across the country from Minneapolis, the first moon landing was barely a month behind us. And yet it was not the moon that was on my mind but the earth, for the end of the 60's and the early 70's were apocalyptic times. Protest against the war in Vietnam was closing universities everywhere, our cities were literally burning from outbreaks of racial conflict and predictions of ecological collapse from

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<sup>15</sup> *In Season, Out of Season*, p. 16.

overpopulation and pollution were daily events. Again and again the question was being asked ~ Why is it we can put a man on the moon but we can't solve our social and environmental problems here on earth?

It was a year or two later that I first encountered the writings of Jacques Ellul in a seminar on theology and technology, taught by Gabriel Vahanian. In that context I read *The Technological Society* for the first time. What a different perspective Ellul brought to the issues. Up until then my perspective had been largely shaped by Harvey Cox's optimistic book, *The Secular City*. That book was published in 1965, the year that the first human being walked in space. From 1965 to 1969, when we put a man on the moon, it seemed as if our technological prowess would enable us to accomplish anything we set out to do. Cox's book fit the temper of the times, assuring us that our modern technology was the product of secularizing, liberating and humanizing impact of the Gospel upon the human city.

Coming from that perspective, reading *The Technological Society* was like taking a cold shower and sobering up. But Ellul's analysis struck a chord, not only with me, but with many children of the "60s" who felt trapped in a system unable to critique itself and insistent on carrying on "business as usual" while more and more of our generation were being sent home in body bags from a war without a purpose that technology was supposed to win for us.

Vietnam, became for many of us a symbol of everything that was wrong with "the system." Ellul's writings served to "raise our consciousness," helping us to understand what the "system" was, how it worked and how it might be subverted. The system, we were told, was technical and bureaucratic, autonomous and all encompassing, held together by media propaganda and the political illusion.

Ellul's insights were both convincing and frustrating. They explained why nothing seemed to be changing even as many engaged in intensive political and social action. At that time, it seemed that Ellul had two audiences. Alienated social activists who read his sociology and didn't even know he was a theologian and also a growing following among Christians, largely evangelical, who were to his biblical commentaries as ways of critiquing the idolatry of contemporary society. It took a while for people to put the two sides of Ellul together and see the whole man and the whole message.

With the passing of the Vietnam war, political activism receded. It is hard to psychologically sustain such activism when you don't have the drama of nightly television newsclips to psyche you up and tie you into the cosmic drama of your struggle. The realists drawn to Ellul's sociology found little to keep them going. But those who grasped the theological side of his message were able to accept that the presence of the kingdom had to be manifested through a church that was not driven by media attention but by an apocalyptic hope that totally breaks with "the system" - a church prepared to assume what Ellul called an "incognito" or "hidden presence" in the world, patiently subverting and desacralizing the social structures of "the system" at the local level where we actually live rather than being seduced by the grand gestures of the illusory world created by the media. Ellul's advice was: think globally but act locally.



You need to understand “the system” holistically but than attack at its weakest point, which is precisely that point at which “the system” intersects with your own life.

It is my conviction that of all of Ellul’s work, there are three books that are absolutely essential for understanding his message: *The Technological Society*, *The New Demons* and *Apocalypse: The Book, of Revelation*. The first is purely sociological. The third is purely scriptural and theological. It is the second, *The New Demons*, which provides the link that ties them together. It was only after I read *The New Demons* (*Les Nouveaux Possibles*) that I really understood *The Technological Society* for the first time. I had completely missed the significance of Ellul’s constant references to the sacred in that book until I read *The New Demons*.

*The New Demons* is the Rosetta Stone of Ellul’s work. There Ellul violated his rule of keeping his sociological and his theological work separate. The book was primarily a work on the sociology of religion but its novel and brilliant thesis was that in our time and place in history, the sociology of religion and the sociology of technology have one and the same subject matter because the sacred has migrated from nature to technology. There it became clear, that for Ellul, it is the sacred that is the problem, not technology as such.

At the end of his sociological analysis Ellul tacked on a postscript to the book — a “Coda for Christians” in which he argued that the theology of the secular city was ironically the byproduct of the sacralization of our technological world. In such a world Christians were called not to praise technology but desacralize it in the name of the holiness of God, the way Christians had once desacralized nature in the name of the holy.

In *Apocalypse, the Book of Revelation* Ellul then spelled out the scriptural basis for his analysis, showing that it is possible for Christians to be optimistic about the future of the city but not for any of the reasons Cox’s *The Secular City* advanced. Quite the opposite. To my mind, Ellul’s exegesis of the Book of Revelation is his most powerful exegetical work. If he had written nothing else, that alone would be enough to give him a place in the history of Christian theology. In one single work of scriptural exegesis he moved Christian faith beyond the quest for salvation and into the life of sanctification. With his scripturally based understanding of universal salvation, Ellul demythologized the Christian obsession with personal salvation and shifted the focus to the Christian vocation to sanctify the world. With universal salvation a given, the focus is shifted to our ethical responsibility as Christians to be a “leaven” or “saving remnant,” whose task is to undermine the demonic power of the sacred so that human life might be possible. While there can never be a “secular city” in history, the ethical task of Christians is the never ending task of secularizing the city so that human freedom might be possible, the freedom which enables all human beings (not just Christians) to assume their vocation as children of God. That understanding of the Gospel has deeply influenced my own work. For that I owe Jacques Ellul a great debt.

I would like to end this reflection on a personal note. I met Jacques Ellul only once, when I went to Bordeaux in 1988 to deliver a paper on his ethics at an international

conference of the Society for the Philosophy of Technology which gave special recognition to his work. When I met him for the first time, I was struck by how short he was (scarcely over five feet I would guess). In my mind he was a giant. I told him this and we made a joke together about him being a “small giant” (*un petit geant*) I was immediately struck by his marvelous sense of humor, the twinkle in his eye and the gentle graciousness of the man. Later I visited him in his home, where I met his wife Yvette and his dog. (That he was a dog lover immediately endeared him to me—he shared my prejudices in this regard). Their hospitality was gracious, overflowing. I came away from that meeting with the strong impression that he and his wife created between them a single powerful but gently humanizing presence. The only adequate word for it in my vocabulary is “holiness.” I came away convinced that I had met someone whose life and teaching were one. Such a thing is a rare event and it may be Ellul’s greatest gift to me — one for which I will always be grateful.

## An Address to “Master Jacques”

by Ivan Illich

(Speech by Ivan Illich, given at Bordeaux, France, November 13, 1993. Translation from the French by Hoinacki, June 27, 1994; changes inserted by Ivan, June 27, Octopec)

It is an honor and great joy for me to be invited by Daniel Cerezuelle to participate in this act of homage.

Professor Ellul - I would much prefer to say, “Master Jacques” ... I have been moved by your comparison of a master with an ox which, in pulling the plow, opens a furrow. I have striven to follow you in a filial spirit, making all the false steps which that implies. I hope you accept my harvest and can recognize some flowers among what might seem a mixture of noxious weeds.

I can thus express my gratitude to a master to whom I owe an orientation which has derisively affected my pilgrimage for forty years. In this sense, my debt is unquestionable, and I was recently able to verify this in a very specific way.

To prepare my presentation for this meeting, I wanted to read about twenty of Ellul’s books, those which had heretofore escaped me. My student and friend Jose Maria Sbert made his library available to me, and there I discovered at least half of them; further, he had copiously annotated some volumes, even to the point of underlining whole paragraphs. After spending a few evenings immersed in this treasure, I was astounded by the freshness and vivacity with which, over the years, Ellul continually recaptures the fundamental intuitions of his earliest work, always clarifying them more. His tenacity, humility and magnanimity in the face of criticism make him an example one must bow to.

The present scholarly meeting at Bordeaux furnishes us with a unique opportunity to acknowledge the unity of his thought. Some of us have read him as a great commentator on the Bible, others, as a philosopher of technology. But few have seen him as the man who simultaneously challenges the reflection of both the philosopher and the believer. He reminds the philosopher of technology, who studies patent, observable phenomena, to be aware of the possibility that his subject may be too terrible to be grasped by reason alone. And he leads the believer to deepen his Biblical faith and eschatological hope in the face of two uncomfortable and disturbing truths, pointing out that each has the character of "extreme historical strangeness":

-First, it is impossible to compare modern technique and its malevolent consequences with the material culture of any other society whatever;

-Second, it is necessary to see that this "historical extravagance" is the result of a subversion of the Gospel - its transformation into an ideology called Christianity.

His work, from the first essays on the history of institutions and propaganda to the studies of a poetically-infused exegesis which crowns it, convinced me of this: The unique character of the time in which we live cannot be studied rationally if one does not understand that this age is the result of a *corruptio optimi quae est pessima*. This is why the regime of *la technique*, under which both the Mexican peasant and I live, forces one to confront three troubling issues:

-This regime has given birth to a society, a civilization, a culture which, taken together, are the clear inverse of what we read in the Bible, of what is indisputably found in the text of the Torah, the Prophets, Jesus and Paul."

-It is not possible to account for this regime if one does not understand its genesis as growing out of Christianity. Its principal traits owe their existence to the subversion which I have just mentioned. Among the distinctive and derisive characteristics of our age, many are incomprehensible if one does not recognize a pattern: An Evangelical invitation to each person has been twisted historically into an institutionalized, standardized and managed social objective.

-Finally, one cannot correctly analyze this "regime of technique" with the usual concepts which suffice for the study of other societies. A new set of analytic concepts is necessary to discuss the *heds* (the state) and *prods* of the epoch in which we live under the aegis of *la technique*.

In a direct and clarifying manner, Elul has made us face this triple aspect of a "completely unique historical extravagance." Whatever word one uses for it - culture, society, world - our actual human condition is a strange outgrowth of Christianity. All the constitutive elements are perversions of it. Since, in a sense, they owe their existence to Revelation, one can say that they are the complementary inverse, the negation of divine gifts. And, on account of what Elul recognizes as their historical strangeness, they are often refractory to philosophical or ethical critiques.

This is clearly seen when we wish to raise ethical questions. Manifestly, the moral term, "evil," is not applicable to documented events such as the Shoah, Hiroshima or the current attempts at artificial reproduction of human-like creatures.

These repugnant, abominable, horrifying enterprises cannot be debated. One cannot make them grammatical subjects. For enquiry about such things, whether they are feasible or not, just or unjust, good or evil, legitimizes the status of inexpressible horror.

Those are extreme examples. Reading Elul makes one understand that the immersion of drily life in a *milieu technique* places one no less beyond good and evil.

Let us look at one example: the technology that pulls the soil out from under everyone's feet. The world has become inaccessible if access signifies the result of pedestrian action: transport monopolizes locomotion in such a way that feet, given us for a pilgrimage on earth, atrophy into appendages of the accelerator and brake.

Among the hundreds of seemingly trivial examples of the mind's "humiliation by technique," I will rite the one in which I find a kind of humor. My church loudly denounces preservatives which frustrate the natural functioning of one organ, but she cannot envisage the equally powerful frustration of another, that seen in the analogy between rubbers and tires! By applying Ellul's concept of *la technique* to both, thus seeing that both must be declared *contra naturam*, my church could take the lead in the resistance to Moloch - all the way to martyrdom. I am ashamed of a Pope who limits his strong condemnation of technical perversion to the privacy of the bed, but refuses to preach the relevance of the natural law to Mercedes and jets. As Elul has often made clear, if the subversion itself is not rationally comprehensible, the general blindness to it is certainly not less.

All these horrors, major and "minor," derive their ontological status from the fact that they are exactly the subversions of what Elul calls "X" and what I would openly name, "divine grace."

When a half century ago Elul first published his prophetic analyses, it was altogether erident that the rational integration of Elul the "Calvinist" and Elul the sociologist was beyond the comprehension of a majority of his colleagues. But at least many now understand that his profound rootedness in frith enables him to confront the darkneses which the rootless prefer to gloss over.

Already in his study of propaganda he made us see that modem men are so terrorized by reality that they surrender themselves to atrocious debaucheries of images and representations in ordernot to see. They manipulate media to simulate an even more sombre pseudo-world, using this to construct a protective veil against the darkneses of the real world in which they find themselves. Over the years, this absence of reality has become even more stupefying. This situation — the obscurity engendered by the media—has been well studied by my friend, Didier Piveteau, who proclaims himself Elul's student.

More and more, people live their lives as in a nightmare: They feel themselves ensnared in unspeakable horrors, with no means to wake up to the light of the real. As in certain nightmares, the terror transcends the expressible. Ellul's recognition of the established status of "globalizing" technique allowed him to foresee in the 1950s what today is palpable but now irremediable. What surrounds us today is implicit

in his analysis of *la technique*. Before this assembly, made up of attentive readers of Ellul, and at the conclusion of two days' intense exchanges, it would be absurd for me to elucidate this notion, original and of capital importance in his work. I prefer to narrate some circumstances in which the notion has furnished a derisive help to one Ellul reader - and, if he accepts me as such, his student.

*La technique* entered my existence in 1965 in Santa Barbara, the day when, at Robert Hutchins's Center, John Wilkinson gave me a copy of *The Technological Society* which he had just translated, following up on the strong recommendation of Aldous Huxley. Since then, the questions raised by the concept of *la technique* have constantly reoriented the examination of my relations to objects and to others.

I have adopted this Ellulian concept because it permits one to identify - in education, transport, modern medical and scientific activities — the threshold at which these projects absorb, conceptually and physically, the client into the tool; the threshold where the products of consumption change into things which themselves consume; the threshold where the milieu of technique transforms into numbers those who are entrapped in it; the threshold where technology is derisively transformed into Moloch, the system.

During ten good years after my meeting with Professor Ellul, I concentrated my study principally on that which *la technique* does: what it does to the environment, to social structures, to cultures, to religions. I have also studied the symbolic character or, if you prefer, the "perverse sacramentality" of institutions purveying education, transport, housing, health care and employment. I have no regrets. The serial consequences of domination by *la technique*, making institutions counterproductive, must be understood if one wishes to measure the effects on the specific *herds* (state) and *praxis* defining the experience of modernity today. It is necessary to face the horrors, in spite of the certain knowledge that seeing is beyond the power of our senses. I have successively analyzed the hidden functions of highly accelerated transport, communication channels, prolonged educational treatment, and human garaging. I have been astounded by their symbolic power. That has given me empirical proof that the Ellulian category of *la technique*, which I had originally employed as an analytic tool, also defines a reality engendered by the pursuit of an "ideology of Christian derivation."

Research on the symbolic function of technique in our time, begun by Ellul, continues to provide clarifying observations. Here I am reminded particularly of his reflections on magic and religion. Among modern thinkers, Jacques Ellul has always been one of a select few who understand that the place of the sacred is now occupied not by this or that artifact, but by *la technique*, the black box we worship.

My disembodiment seen, for example, in the loss of my feet, is more directly the result of this worship than ecological damage. Therefore, to understand society today, it seems more important to begin with an examination of the effects of *la technique* on my flesh and senses than to study current and future damages to the environment.

I have, then, attempted to explore the seductive power that the intensive dedication of modern enterprises to *la technique* exercises over my mode of perception. In fact, not

a year passes, during the quarter century since Wilkinson gave me Ellul's book, that I do not detect a hitherto unperceived propensity to deny the reality of living in service to the Techno-Moloch. Existence in a society which has become a system finds the senses useless precisely because of the very instruments designed for their extension. One is prevented from touching and embracing reality. Further, one is programmed for interactive communication, one's whole being is sucked into the system. It is this radical subversion of sensation which humiliates and then replaces perception.

We submit ourselves to atrocious debaucheries of image and sound consumption in order to anesthetize the pain resulting from having lost reality. To grasp this humiliation of sight, smell, touch, and not just hearing, it was necessary for me to study the history of the bodily acts of perception. Not only Biblical certitudes, but also medieval and classical truths concerning sensible perceptions have been subverted to the point where an exegesis of ancient texts must surmount both conceptual and physiological obstacles. Allow me to give an example, albeit extreme.

To tear out one's eye when it gives scandal is an evangelical mandate. And this is an action which always inspired horror. It was comprehensible, however, in a scope regime where the eyes emitted a visual cone which, like a luminous organ, seized and embraced reality. But such animated eyes no longer exist - except metaphorically. We no longer see, enveloping reality by means of a cone of rays emitted by our pupil. The regime of seeing through which we perceive today turns the act of sight into a form of registration, very much like a camcorder. Eyes which no longer ravish reality are hardly worth tearing out.

Such iconophagic - image-devouring - eyes are worthless:

-to found hope on Biblical reading;

—to apprehend the horrors of the technological bubble which separates me from reality;

-finally, to find joy in the only mirror in which I can discover myself, the pupil of the other.

The subversion of the word by the conquering eye has a long history, a part of the history of technique in the world of Christianity. In the Middle Ages, this overthrow took the form of replacing the book written to be heard — reading was done aloud — by a text which addressed itself to the silent look. Parallel to this technogenic inversion of sensory priorities, the chapel - the place for devout reading, was separated from the aula — the place for scholastic reading. This portentous division marked the end of a millennium of *lectio divina*, the principal way reading was experienced.

And, concomitant with this architectural separation of the place of prayer from the place of study, the first—to my knowledge - institution of higher studies, the university, appeared. Here, the cultivation of abstract thought totally eclipsed the culture of the senses. This is not so much a disjunction between *fidens quaerens intellectum* (theology), and *intellectusquaerensfidem* (philosophy), as between asceticism and logical analysis. This latter separation permitted the emergence of a civilization in which Ellul has so much difficulty making himself understood. From him who follows the

furrow he traces, he expects –as he has written - a devotion to virtue which would give one the courage and strength to pursue the analysis of reality in conditions which he has called "desperate," a situation which makes one feel hopelessly impotent.

Therefore, it appears to me that we cannot neglect the disciplined recovery (what is called "ascesis") of a sensual praxis in a society of technogenic mirages. This preservation of fire senses, this promptitude to obey experience, the chaste look which the Rule of St. Benedict opposes to the *cupiditas oculorum*, seems to me to be the fundamental condition for renouncing that technique which sets up a definitive obstacle to friendship.

## **Ellul's Response to the Symposium in his Honor at the University of Bordeaux, November 1993**

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends:

Doubtless, I need to say first that I am full of gratitude toward the organizers of this colloquium, and toward those who worked so hard to make it possible, and I have to say that I am surprised whenever such signs of esteem and honor are conveyed to me. I never felt I was creating an important body of work. I have always imagined myself the way Bossuet did: *Bos suetus aratro* ("The ox takes to the plow"). Beyond any play on words, at least this much is true: I lived like the ox, worried only to plow a straight furrow. Although finally guided by others (without invoking He who "in the end" guides the plow) I want on the human level, in any case, to mention all those without whose help I would not have achieved anything: that is, my friends. I am a man of friendship. And without them I would not have known what to do. They have oriented me on every one of my paths.

I have to mention Bernard Charbonneau, of whom I can say that he taught me how to "think." But he also taught me to see the reality of society, instead of looking only into my books. He taught me to consider actively the social fact, "what is really happening" — to analyze, to criticize, to understand it.

In addition, there was the witness to Christian faith of Jacques Boso. Not that I was converted to Christian faith by his testimony, but after my conversion, he showed me what the Christian intellectual can be and taught me the meaning of theology.

Finally I want to mention my friend Henri Pouyanne, who made me leave the intellectual sphere in order to grasp the importance of life, for each of us, and who made me grasp that each life is essential, so that I had to be close to each "neighbor" with humility! My formation thus sketched, my task was to plow a straight furrow as straight as possible - nothing more.

I had to plow a part of the political or social world, perhaps in order to make room for ways other than the traditional ones in the world in which I lived.

This is how I worked, without genius but with perseverance, without a transcending inspiration, but out of the conviction that my task was to unveil the realities to that man and of that time, which nobody seemed to take into account and which appeared to me to be derisive.

These diverse orientations explain as well why my work was located in two domains, which led to the two domains of my books, sociology and theology.

What is their relation?

First a scrupulous distinction: I have always tried to prevent "my" theology from influencing my sociological research (Calvinism) and my comprehension of the world from distorting my reading of the Bible. These were two domains, two methods, two distinct interests. Only after the separation, one begins to perceive relationship.

First, the evangelical proclamation is addressed to this individual human being, living in this society, and not to some unimportant whoever - a "targeted" message. But also it is an expression of respect for the other and for the message. It follows that the key element is this: the sociological state of the world in which we live is rather desperate, so that it is difficult for modern people, deprived of hope and given over to immediate pleasure and unconscious fear of tomorrow, to proclaim the hope of faith in Christ and in the possibility for true love.

This is one major purpose that has oriented my whole life.

Thus I accomplished my task without excessively doubting myself, and without participating in the vanity of success, a game of honors and of fashions! Some considered arrogance, other disdain what was really a form of indifference toward all questions of success.

With or without success, I had to do a certain work — I just had to do what I had to do, and I did it. That is all there was to it.

I nevertheless had a point of reference, and did not proceed in a haphazard manner. The straightness of this furrow consisted in two imperatives (which, incidentally, may appear contradictory). One was the foundation derived from Christian faith, from revelation, received and meditated in the Bible. This does not need further explanation.

Then there was the value derived from my father and realized through a rigorous education: that is, honor. For him, an agnostic, honor was the code of his whole life. But does one still know what that is?

Honor, this *passé* aspiration I was raised with, included four rules: never lie to others, never lie to yourself, be merciful toward the weak, and never yield to the mighty.

As a result, I had "to navigate" between Christian revelation and these four imperatives.

It was within this framework and according to these orientations that my work proceeded. After all, "I could not do otherwise." You see that my personal contribution is weak, and that the homage paid to me must be passed on to my friends and to my parents. I was nothing more than the bond that connected the elements, and that is precisely why I receive with gratitude, for all of them, what you said and achieved today. With sincere gratitude and recognition, thank you.



*(Translated by Achim Koddermann and Carl Mitcham.)*

**Issue #14 Jan 1995 — Frederick  
Ferré on Science, Technology, and  
Religion**

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## From the Editor

I am very happy to be able to finally put this issue on Frederick Ferre's approach to "Liberating Science, Technology and Religion" to press. It was delayed six months by the death of Jacques Ellul and the need to put together a special memorial issue. It is very appropriate to follow that issue with this one, for Frederick Ferre is surely a kindred spirit with Ellul. Ferre is Research Professor of Philosophy and co-founder of the graduate Faculty of Environmental Ethics at the University of Georgia. His work on science, technology and religion spans more than three decades and includes his *Philosophy of Technology* (Prentice Hall, 1988) as well as his recent *Hellfire and Lightning Rods*. He is currently at work on a trilogy of books on philosophy and value: *Being and Value*, *Knowing and Value*, *Living and Value*. Ferre's work seeks to liberate science, technology and religion from inappropriate paradigms so that they, in turn, can be truly liberating and humanizing forces for our future. His work deserves careful reading and critical attention. This issue of the *Forum* is meant to contribute to that task.

I introduce the *Forum* with a review of Ferre's book, *Hellfire and Lightning Rods: Liberating Science, Technology and Religion*. Then chapter three from Ferre's book, "New Metaphors for Technology," is reprinted here with the kind permission of Orbis Books. This is followed by a critical response to Ferre's essay by Robert Fortner. Ferre is then given the opportunity to respond and bring the dialogue to completion.

In addition to our *Forum* theme for this issue we also have a guest essay by Pieter Tijmes, a member of our editorial board and European circulation manager for the *Forum*. Tijmes reflects on Ellul's view of technical autonomy in light of current post-modern thought. We also have a dialogue section in which David Lovekin responds to the review by Timothy Casey of his book on Ellul, *Technique, Discourse and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul*, which appeared in Issue #10. My apologies to David Lovekin. This should have been published two issues ago, but space considerations made that difficult. In the Dialogue section Peter Haas also responds to my book *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia?* Haas' criticisms are provocative and naturally led to my attempt to answer them in the piece that follows his.

Finally, we have two books reviewed in our book review section. The first is *Conversations with Jacques Ellul (Entretiens avec Jacques Ellul)* by Patrick Chastenet. Chastenet, who was Ellul's research assistant for years, offers us valuable insights into Ellul's life and thought as Joyce Hanks indicates in her review. The second review is

of *The American Hour* by the the Oxford scholar, Os Guinness. This is done for us very ably by Donald Evans, the Director of the Ellul Institute in Riverside California.

*Darrell J. Fasching*

**Editor**

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About the Ellul Forum

## **The One Best Way of Technology?**

by Pieter Tijmes

It sounds reasonable that if technology is autonomous, it cannot be politically steered and that if it is steerable, it cannot be autonomous. Not everybody has the same feelings for the concept of the "autonomy" of technology. It is often used as an alarming and disturbing concept. In that case the autonomy of technology refers to a societal development independent of desiderata external to technology. That is, the internal desiderata of technology such as rationality, efficiency, efficacy, represent a normativeness of its own that casts off other norms, for example those of politics, ethics, religion. Technological developments are thus considered as an "irresistible" force not to be controlled by men. Human choices and societal values cannot give any direction to it. That means that technology is autonomous in the sense that it generates

a lot of options without being asked. The functionality of these options compared to the available and already realized possibilities is the decisive factor for the realization of the new options. These technological possibilities are not an expression of human needs, rather they are realized in order to evoke human desires. Nobody knows at this moment which products will appear within ten years on the market as the so-called fulfillment of our wishes. The most vigorous argument in favor of the new product is that the available product is inferior to the technical specifications of the new one, as an investigation of the marketing of HDTV compared to the normal TV illustrates.

This train of thought is sharply contrasted with the idea that society is malleable by the human subject and human action. Ellul deplors the situation in which the subject does not play any role and the technological imperative replaces the ethical imperative. Post modernist thinkers e.g. Axelos, Vatimo, etc., may agree with Ellul's analysis in the sense that the human subject does not give a substantial direction to the technological developments, but their appreciation is different. This has led to the so-called postmodern reconsideration of the human subject. The subject does not hold the autonomous position, giving direction and sense to history, that the enlightenment attributed to it. It is only one element in the technological network. Technology has become the subject of history. It takes the place of the human subject. It is obvious that these postmodernist representatives cannot be accused of pessimism. In contrast with Ellul they emphasize an affirmative and liberating attitude towards technique; planetary technology is to be accepted and to be affirmed without reserve. The world is to be considered as play from this technological perspective. The idea that man is not responsible for it is understood as liberating.

In the above it is a matter of two different attitudes towards technology, on the one hand an alarming and distressing appreciation (Ellul), and on the other hand a post-modern and optimistic one. Neither of them provides a basis for policy. In both cases steering by politics is not opportune. Ellul rebels against this and the representatives of postmodernism I mentioned are completely satisfied with it.

In both, Ellul and postmodernism as well, one is confronted with the idea that everything is a product of human hands, whereas the grasp on the whole has been withdrawn from human beings. This is not an outright new view of history. Marx expresses similar thoughts as follows: "In the social production of their life men enter into definitive relations," and he calls these relations "indispensable and independent of their will." The same thought is to be found in Adam Smith, when he holds the conviction that steering of society was a prerogative for the invisible hand of the Almighty. A ruler who takes the direction that the society and its international environment are moving in may have the illusion that he actually rules. However, determining the direction and following the direction already in motion are obviously not the same.

I like to defend the view that the agreement on the role of the individual in the historical and societal process - argued by Ellul in the wake of Marx and Adam Smith - depends upon the distance one is prepared to take with regard to technological and societal developments. The greater the distance, the more plausible their point of view

is. At a great distance one only has an eye for the *collective* social reality developing independently of the *individual* reality. Personal decisions do not appear within this (Durkheimian) way of looking by Ellul. The distance and the perspective one chooses determine what one sees and discerns. At a distance technological development may be presented as the "one best way." To put it another way: Ellul, Marx and Smith look at society from an outsider's perspective. Seen from this perspective there is an order on the level of the whole of society. The insider's perspective, that is the perspective of an actor within the society, discerns other phenomena and sees a different order.

It is social-constructivist research that takes a closer look and has, as consequence, obviously an eye for the personal and societal struggle that lies at the basis of the definitive direction of technological development. That research confines itself to the context of the developmental process of technical artifacts and shows that as long as the power struggle for the technical design has not been decided, the technological process may take - so to say - any direction. In short, there is no "one best way" of technology, if a closer look is given to it. This does not mean that determinism has been overcome, because the social-constructivist analyses articulate just the contingency of the developments and not their steerability. In the nineteenth century there were many designs of bicycles. Which kind of bicycle was emerging and which models of bicycles were pushed to the margin of history, was not to be decided in advance either on rational and technical or on social and cultural criteria. Many factors played their role chaotically and unexpectedly. According to the social-constructivist analysis the genealogy of the bicycle brings an unpredictable and uncontrollable process into the open. Drawing attention to the relevant social groups essential for the outcome of the technical process does not mean the rescue of human freedom from the technical autonomy. In this social-constructivist understanding, determinism of the technical is only exchanged for a broader set of determinant factors (i.e., of the technical, the social, the cultural, etc).

Ellul of course would not be impressed by this relatively new approach towards technological developments and in any case he would not accept it as a critique of his view on technical autonomy. He would comment that this new approach cannot claim that the outcome of the technical developments is a result of three or more equal factors - technical, social, cultural, etc., because in our time the technical has shaped the social and cultural. That means that requirements external to technique may only be *conceptually* separated. Technical values such as rationality, efficiency, efficacy have become our definitive cultural values.

What conclusions can we draw? The options — whether technical developments are either autonomous or steerable — are not adequate, (a) Developments are not autonomous to the extent they are socially and culturally embedded. Technique "in vitro" does not exist (b) However, the alternative view that "technique is steerable" does not gain the upper hand either. There is of course no denying the fact that specific technical developments are to be initiated: one can produce atomic bombs, launch moon projects, start AIDS-research, make new varieties of plants, animals, maybe of

man. One can do a lot One can also stimulate existing developments or steer away from them, but the outcome and effects of initiations and stimulations are not predictable - technically, socially or culturally. Indeed, one can do a lot, but one is not in a position to play the invisible hand of the Almighty. That observation was a good theological insight on the part of Adam Smith — one worth remembering whenever we engage in technological planning.

# Forum Intro: Essay Review

## Hellfire and Lightning Rods: Liberating Science, Technology and Religion

by Frederick Ferre. Orbis Books, 1993, 223 pages.

Reviewed by Darrell J. Fasching, University of South Florida

Frederick Ferre's *Hellfire and Lightning Rods* is an important contribution to reflection upon religion, ethics and public policy in a technological civilization. Since this is the primary area of my own concerns, I read it with keen attention and considerable profit. The title is based on a story that Ferre tells of his father, as a young boy, hearing a sermon. It seems fire preacher castigated his flock, made up of mostly farmers, for placing lightning rods on their barns. Their sin, apparently, was attempting to use technology to deflect the just wrath of God. Ferre takes this as a picturesque introduction to the conflict between religion and scientific technology.

We live in a time of critical transition, says Ferre — a time of “worlds coming to an end and new worlds being born.” With the advent of nuclear power and nuclear weapons, to pick the most dramatic example, the stakes involved in the conflict between the two different epistemic and valuational worldviews of science and religion have gotten much higher than they were in the days of Ferre's father's childhood. Even setting nuclear issues aside, time has run out on the modern world. Ferre argues that neither science nor religion have fully faced up to the coming transition to a post-modern world. The stakes are high because the mythos of modern technology promotes unlimited growth while the exponential growth of the population of the earth and its consumption of our limited resources is enough to guarantee that a post-modern world will impose limits upon us and require a world in homeostatic balance. The task Ferre sets himself is to suggest how the transition from a world of unlimited growth to a world of homeostatic balance can be brought about. To this end he surveys the realms of both religion and science and identifies the resources of each that might be of assistance.

Ferre begins his book with an introductory chapter that explains the inevitability of having to make the transition to a post-modern world of limits. The remaining fifteen chapters are then organized in five parts dealing with (1) Technology and Religion, (2) Science and Ultimate Belief, (3) Myths and Modernity, (4) Toward a Multi-Mythic Organicism and (5) Organicism in Religion.

One of the strengths of Ferre's analysis is that he sees the conflict between science and religion, not as a conflict between the secular and the sacred but between two



sacred worldviews each of which has historically exhibited both strengths and weaknesses. Religion, he reminds us, is a way of valuing which shapes every aspect of life and expresses itself in stories and images which profoundly shape our sense of reality and our actions.

When the world of modern science, the world of Newton and Galileo, overtook the Medieval Christian organic worldview, it replaced it with a mechanistic worldview, replacing at the same time the ideal of absolute dependence upon God with the ideal of mastery of the world. This new worldview, which brought with it its own cosmic myths and stories, was treated with the same sacred seriousness as its predecessor. It also brought with it its own ritualistic ethical imperatives of impersonal objectivity, mastery and an eschatological hope for unlimited growth. But in a post-modern world of limited resources such myths and values can only lead to apocalyptic consequences.

In a post-modern world our faith in modern science and technology is called into question. A technology of ever-increasing production cannot save us. There are limits to growth. If we are to have a future both religion and science as sacred worldviews are going to have to undergo critique — mutual critique. There are elements of both traditional science and religion that are dysfunctional in a post-modern world and there are other elements that offer us hope. The materialistic and mechanistic reductionism of modern science which views the world with a disembodied objectivity that devalues life, both biological and human, is being replaced with a new model of science embodied in ecology. If the former could find no place for the human in its mechanistic world picture (e.g., the mind-body problem), the latter places the scientist and all human beings (indeed all beings) directly in world of mutual interdependence and teleological processes — a world which is truly an organic living body. If the mythological and metaphorical world of science must undergo a profound transition as we move into a post-modern world, so must religion, especially monotheistic religion. Its view of an all powerful, masculine, eternal and unchanging deity must give way to a more organic Whiteheadian or process view of God as embodied in the World (our mother earth) in a dialectical process of mutuality whereby God not only transforms the world but is transformed by it

Thus both science and religion must move toward a mutual transformation which will lead to a world that values a holistic ecological sense of global mutuality in which unlimited growth is replaced by a homeostatic creativity that respects the limits of our biological or bodily condition.

If there is to be a mutual interaction between science and religion that shapes a new post-modern world then religion must play an important role in shaping public policy. Religion does this, Ferre argues, by shaping the public mythos or metaphorical world picture that shapes our sense of reality and inspires our actions. Thus Ferre seeks to Christianize technology. If giving drink to the thirsty, he argues, is a Christian act then so is providing the technology to purify a city's water system. What Christianity can provide is a "compassionate holism" to guide our selection and use of technique.

One of the strengths of Ferry's position lies in the fact that he does not ignore the fundamental pluralism of a post-modern world. Ours is not a time, he argues, that is likely to be transformed by a single synthetic vision or mythos. Christianity will not be in a position to transform the world all by itself. It will provide only one of many myths that will affect the shape of a post-modern world. Therefore, Ferre argues for a "multi-mythic organicism" — a kind of coalition of religious worldviews that promote an organic holism rooted in a respect for the ecological limits that sustain life on this planet. Ferre focuses mainly on Christianity and Judaism as central traditions for any transformation of Western consciousness but he recognizes that a larger dialogue must take place that includes Islam and the religions of Asia as well. Everyone of these traditions, before it was overpowered by the modern mythos of the world machine, offered humanity an organic worldview and a sense of living within a world of sacred limits. In a post-modern world the recovery of these diverse organic visions will play a significant role in shaping a mythos and ethos, and hence the public policy, that will bring into being a global civilization of mutuality and interdependence.

This is what is required if we are to avoid an apocalyptic future. And yet Ferre is not overly optimistic. The churches, the synagogues and other religious communities of others around the world need to be agents of social change. Indeed they are admirably in a position to be just that, for they reach people across all boundaries of race and social status and move people to action by touching the deepest mythological levels of action and motivation. Unfortunately, says Ferre, our religious institutions are seldom truly engines of social change, they are far too conservative. They are largely held captive by the modern mythos and its values which makes religious people as much a part of the problem as they are part of the solution. Like Ellul, Ferre does not think we can socially engineer such transformations without destroying their authenticity. Such transformations must be true responses to our deepest religious experiences of transcendence. In the end, Ferre concludes only a miracle can bring about the needed transformation. On the one hand, this might seem unlikely, but on the other hand, religious life is rooted in miracles and profound religious transformations can occur just when you least expect them. And when (or should we say "if") that transformation comes, Ferre is convinced it will be ecological, feminist and liberative in its multi-mythic organic synergism.

Ferre's book is important and suggestive. It is important because it insightfully lays out the ways in which religion and scientific technology converge and diverge at the locus of the sacred and its mythic metaphors, and shows how the two can and should mutually transform each other. It is suggestive in its identification of the most promising point of convergence in the science of ecology with Whiteheadian process theism. Yet the suggestiveness of Ferre's book is also frustrating. At several points in the book he proposes possibilities without really making a case for them or exploring them in any depth. The shift from traditional theism to process theism is a case in point. For those who might not be familiar with process thought not enough is really said to make the suggestion plausible. The relationship between religions in

multi-mythic organicism is also left tantalizingly vague. For a book about a global crisis not much is said about religions other than Judaism and Christianity. Given Ferre's ecological-process theism orientation, an exciting case could have been made for process theology as the hermeneutic link between Western theism and Asian religions, especially Buddhism.

For Ellul scholars there is one criticism of Ferre's book that cannot be avoided. Ferre critiques Ellul with an old and familiar accusation that Ellul is an unredeemed pessimist who can see no positive role for technology from a biblical perspective. Thus Ferri argues: "There is one serious defect in Ellul's position from a Christian standpoint. There is no final word of good news, no balancing affirmation of redemption to match the stern warnings of judgment and sin... Ellul leaves us with despair, but that despair is not biblical" (52). A decade or two ago this argument would not have been surprising. It was in fact commonplace. But it is inexcusable now. For since then a lot of work has been done on Ellul that shows decisively that this is a misunderstanding of Ellul's position, although one that Ellul's hyperbolic style often invited. In fact, when Ferre advocates hope but warns that we should beware of false hope that leads to passive inaction (121-122) he is articulating a position that is identical to Ellul's.

Finally, Ferre argues for post-modern holistic organic metaphors over and against modern mechanistic world metaphors. The former, he argues, will provide the mythic-metaphorical foundation for public policy and a new world order that promotes mutuality, equality and interdependence. However, he makes this claim without seriously dealing with the propensity of organic metaphors to reinforce hierarchical inequality. I would venture to guess that throughout history organic thinking's primary function has been to mythologically reinforce social hierarchical stratification.

The "body" as a metaphor for the universe was used in ancient Hinduism to justify the caste system in India and the myth of the body was used in the deutero-Pauline letters of the Christian New Testament to justify the subordination of women to men (even as the body is ruled by the head). Organic thinking need not lead to such hierarchical thinking, as Paul's authentic letters indicate with their emphasis on many different but equal parts forming one body. For Paul, Christ is the body, not the head of the body. Nevertheless, if organic metaphors are to shape the narrative imagination that will govern public policy some differentiation of organic metaphors needs to be made and an account given of how we can tap these metaphors in traditional religions without reinforcing hierarchical inequalities. Finally, let me conclude by saying that none of these criticisms in anyway takes away from the significant contribution Ferre has made in this book. They only leave us waiting for the next installment in the productive career of an important scholar.

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# Forum: Metaphors and Technology

## New Metaphors for Technology

by Frederick Ferre, University of Georgia

(Chapter three of *Hell Fire and Lightning Rods*, reprinted with permission from Orbis Press)

What's in an image? A lot! That blunt reply is one of my main theses, as will become obvious through the remainder of this book. As we now circle deeper into an examination of the technological phenomenon, considering especially how practical technologies relate to the spiritual dimensions of life, it will help to consider a variety of alternate metaphors through which we may view our topic.

### Technology as Mirror of Humanity

No human societies, however ancient or primitive, have existed without implements, techniques, or artifacts of some kind. At a minimum, every society shows through its technologies (whether these be hand axes or blowguns, dugout canoes or pottery vessels) what it *knows how* to do. Such knowledge does not, of course, entail any theoretical knowledge explaining why the techniques work. Practical knowledge without theory may be honed to a fine edge simply by trial and error, apprenticeship, and imitation. Fortunate discoveries of successful methods—how to obtain temperatures hot enough to fire pottery, what proportions of materials to use for desirable results, and the like—were preserved by oral tradition for millennia before the invention of writing. Such genuine practical knowledge preceded accounts of *why* these methods should be successful. Sometimes theories were generated, as in alchemy, to account for the powers of known techniques, but always, until recent years, technological knowledge led the way.

Even at the dawn of modern science, practical knowledge of glass working led the way to Galileo's telescope and Torricelli's barometer. Today, multiplied by many orders of magnitude, science would be literally unthinkable without its vast embodiment in the instrumentation provided by those who know how.

But priorities in leadership respecting practical and theoretical knowledge are now radically reversed for those who live in the modern era. Today *theoretical* knowledge suggests and shapes our practical surroundings. It was only after Heinrich Rudolf Hertz had conceptualized the electromagnetic wave, for example, that the successful

technologies of radio and television could follow. It was only after the famous linkage of matter and energy by Albert Einstein's " $e=mc^2$ " that the awesome practical possibilities of nuclear power could be pursued.

Technology has always reflected the character of the human knowledge of its era. Now the materialized products of our civilization's knowledge surround us, wrapping us in a technosphere born of the late marriage of theoretical with practical intelligence. But the situation is further complicated by the fact that in many ways practical intelligence, though not in the lead in the old way, still presses ahead of theory. Today the vast bulk even of "pure" science is big, expensive science, wholly dependent for its existence on the largesse of those in government, in industry, and also in education—who may care more for practical fruit than for theoretical flowers. This is not always bad. Result-oriented research into the cure of disease or into better ways of feeding the hungry, for example, is not wicked. But it reminds us that to recognize technology as reflection of human knowledge is, even today, not to find the image of pure theory alone.

This is to say, of course, that technology reflects human values. When we look at our artifacts, we see implicit in them our hopes and fears, goals and aversions. If a culture fears bad weather, these negative evaluations will be seen in its housing and clothing technologies. If a culture values meat eating, its weapons and traps will reflect its preferences.

By the same token, the technologies of an era will reflect what is taken as licit, i.e., not taboo in the working value-system of the human agents whose knowledge and values are being brought to bear on daily life. A vegetarian society will manifest a different food technology from a society specializing in animal husbandry or the hunt. A society taking for granted the legitimacy of judicial torture or the agonizing execution of witches will apply its knowledge to the refinement of deliberately pain-producing instruments and devices that would be unthinkable in other value contexts.

Perhaps it will be granted now that the collective technologies of an age reflect the dominant values and knowledge of the time. This need not in any way imply unanimity in valuing or uniform distribution in knowledge. On the contrary, the technologies of whips and chains in a slave society will be valued far differently by masters than by their slaves. Value conflicts in human societies are commonplace, and conflicts over technological embodiments of values must be expected. Likewise, knowledge is by no means uniformly distributed in many societies. The function of medieval guilds, for example, was to perpetuate *and guard* the practical secrets of a craft. Deliberate monopolization of knowledge or restrictions of access to it is a frequent feature in human societies, including our own.

Recognizing such knowledge restrictions and value conflicts helps to interpret much debate over technologies in our own time. Sometimes the case against one or another technology—or "technology in general," whatever that could mean—is put as though technology were something alien, inhuman, demonic. But this cannot possibly be the case, since all technologies are reflections of human knowledge and values. The charge that technology is "inhuman," if intended literally, rests on a conceptual confusion.

It might more properly be said that the technology under attack is perceived as reflecting values that are keenly disapproved of, or as reflecting knowledge of which the protester has been kept in alienating ignorance, or both. It might further mean that the protester has a view of "the human" that is too restricted and idealized. One often finds the concept used normatively to rule out, e.g., torture and destruction, heedlessness, suicidal mania, or the like, as "inhuman." Indeed there is much in our technologies that is *inhumane*; there is much that is foolish, self-destructive, tragic. But to this extent we see reflected, there in our technologies, inhumane, foolish, self-destructive, tragic aspects of the human creature. Our knowledge, lofty and admirable though it is, is yet imperfect. Our values, sometimes noble, are often short-sighted or worse. In our technology we see reflected the heights and the depths of what we are.

## Technology as Lens of Humanity

A mirror is one metaphor for technology. A lens is another. A mirror is meant to reflect accurately, both blemishes and beauty. A lens, in contrast, can both magnify for vision and function as burning glass for power. So technology can bring aspects of our knowledge and values into clarifying focus and can turn them into effective instruments for deliberate social change.

Picking up the lens metaphor for modern technology, we may see features of our current knowledge and values as never before.

Modern science is the leading supplier of the theoretical knowledge that has led the development of technology in our civilization for approximately two centuries. It is not surprising, therefore, that our current technologies hold a magnifying glass to the qualities of that knowledge. We see, for example, modern technologies as specialized, devoted to solving specific aims and goals. Generating electricity is one such goal. Cleaning grime out of clothes is another. Providing rapid, comfortable private transportation is still another. We are used to technologies that aim at a few clearly defined effects. This focuses the fact that the methods of reasoning, the qualities of thought that have gone into the development of such technologies are themselves *specialized*, *linear*, and *specific*. Modern science adopted from Descartes one of his most important rules: to conquer each problem separately by concentrating on solving each component part. This preference for the precision of specialization and analysis has consequently permeated our culture and its artifacts. But, magnified by the lens of contemporary technology, it is evident that just such "rifle-barrel vision" has resulted in technologies that, in producing their intended results, produce other, objectionable results as well. Enormously effective electric power plants, if coal fired, pollute the atmosphere, but if nuclear, threaten the environment with immensely dangerous wastes over immensely long time frames. Chemically engineered detergents clean our collars wonderfully well, but (to our culpable surprise) over-fertilize our water systems to the point of eutrophication and environmental death. Private automobiles, brilliantly designed for comfort and speed, clog our cities, overwhelm our landscape with their required pavement, and

contribute to the death of forests and lakes through acid rain. Through the magnifying lens of contemporary technology's ambivalent successes—a train of specific triumphs purchased at the cost of disastrous "side effects," which our favored ways of thinking did not encourage us to anticipate—we recognize the latent defects in linear, specialized modes of knowledge.

Many important values of modern society are also sharply focused when seen through the lens of our technology. We see, for example, large segments of modern technological society in quest of quantified efficiencies: factories measured in numbers of units produced, in "bottom lines" of profits and endless growth. Behind much of technology's built-in drive for quantity we find, not surprisingly, the preference for the numerable over the qualitative at the root of modern scientific thought itself. Concerned by the quantitative goals of much dominant technology, however, poets and others have long warned of the dangers in downgrading imponderable considerations, moral and aesthetic, and of taking "more" as equivalent to "better." Likewise, we can vividly see in our powerful technologies, which attack the earth and nonhuman species as mere resources for our human comfort and exploitation, the anthropocentric bias that has led us to claim complete dominion over the world of nature. Our dominant values, like our characteristic modes of thinking, are brought to sharp and challenging focus by a thoughtful look through the lens technology provides.

If a lens can focus fight for illumination, it can also focus for energy. Philosophers who, through contemplating technology, have raised to new clarity pervasive modes of knowledge and habits of valuing are in a position not only to criticize but also to offer alternatives for constructive social change.

What would a mode of knowing be like that looked for understanding not primarily through dividing and conquering its questions but through setting them in fuller context? Can the science underlying our future technologies be simultaneously rigorous and holistic? The science of ecology may be a hopeful model. In order to understand its proper subject matter, living organisms and their complex interactions within complete environments, scientific ecology, while using analytical tools, must stress the primacy of wider and wider patterns. Technologies reflecting such scientific knowledge would avoid the rifle-barrel vision that ignores "side effects" as though unanticipated negative effects were not all along part of the full range of effects to be considered.

Since ecology deals with the health of ecosystems, it cannot avoid qualitative considerations, inasmuch as health itself is a normative concept. Quantity plays its due part, but always a subordinate part, in such norm-guided thinking. Technologies designed with a stress on quality above quantity would reflect a greater readiness to seek optimum rather than maximum results; they would lead to balance and sustainability.

Finally, scientific ecology includes the human race as one important species in the global biosphere, as one among many. Technologies reflecting such ecological knowledge and values could not be engineered in heedlessness of the other inhabitants of the globe. Our alienated modern civilization would evolve, through such thinking and valuing, into a civilization more intent on designing artifacts that express respect for



nature's wisdom and for including non-human interests as important practical goals. Such a civilization, holding before itself the mirror of new technologies that reflect such postmodern forms of knowledge and values, would behold a more beautiful human face than ours today.

## Technology as Incarnate Knowledge

The metaphor of "incarnation," drawn from religion, may show still more aspects of technology. For example, the technologies of a culture embody—incarnate—the state of *knowledge* within that culture. This need not be theoretical knowledge, on my understanding of "technology," since I grant the term to all practical implementations of intelligence, no matter how rudimentary or merely traditional in character.

Intelligence, however, must be an ingredient in anything properly classified as technological. This requirement rules out purely instinctive practical constructions—e.g., bee hives, birds' nests, and the like—that are imprinted or "hard-wired" into behavioral patterns regardless of changing circumstances. Still, intelligence need not be *theoretical* to be genuinely intelligent, i.e., to make appropriate responses to environmental circumstances by taking account of ideal possibilities and implementing them.

Characteristically, intelligence mediates behavior through *methods*, which are themselves nothing but sets of formal possibilities for disciplined action under specifiable circumstances; but a method, as a set of ideas for behaving, can be learned either by direct imitation or from theoretical principles. This merely means that some technologies may be transmitted by rote, rule of thumb, or apprenticeship (in a word, by *tradition*), while others may be transmitted by insight into broader abstractions from which specific methods may be deduced (in a word, by *theory*). In both cases, such technologies embody a kind of knowledge, whether it be "knowing how" or "knowing that." I do not, of course, suggest that "knowledge" of this sort entails *truth*, since effective methods may well be deduced from false theories. But in this historically relativized sense, the technologies of an era or a culture clearly embody its state of knowledge.

## Technology as Incarnate Values

Second, the technologies of a culture embody its *values*. As we saw above, these need not be the "official" values of the culture, as expressed in ethical codes or religious *mythos*. But at a minimum, one can see from the methods and artifacts in use what sorts of means are not taboo, what sorts of ends are considered licit. One finds embodied in technology, in other words, the implemented values of a culture—the ones that override when all is said and done.

There is, of course, no technology without values. Knowledge alone, unharnessed to human valuing, would not result in technology any more than valuing alone, lacking the requisite knowledge, could find effective embodiment. Both are necessary conditions of the technological phenomenon. It would not be wrong, and it might be revealing, to

say that technology is the offspring in *praxis* of the mating of knowledge with value, of epistemology with axiology.

In our own culture, the epistemological base of technology has for the past two centuries been increasingly pervaded with theoretical intelligence, as modern science has fulfilled the Baconian dream of translating knowledge into a torrent of "helps" for the human condition. As this new knowledge has provided us with power to do hitherto undreamed of things, our actual values have been revealed in proportion to the vast expansion of possible actions open for our value-laden choices. The overriding, governing values that have emerged incarnate in our artifacts—in our assembly lines, our weapons, our means of transportation and amusement, and in all the other implementations of the modern industrial world—are often in tension with our traditional accounts of what our supreme values are supposed to be.

This clash between overriding value-systems is what gives the incarnational approach to technology in fact its powerful religious dimension.' Religion is above all a domain of intense and comprehensive values. It expresses what is taken to be most worthy of worship, what is sacred. It is a community's way of organizing, expressing, relating, and reinforcing its most intense and comprehensive valuations. Thus, if in our culture the principal source for technological knowledge is science, and if our actual practices and institutions embody our society's basic values, then the technologies that surround us are nothing less than incarnations of characteristically modern science and religion.

## Technology as "All Too Human"

One advantage of such an incarnational metaphor for technology is its total elimination of the false dichotomy between the technical and the human that plagues much popular and academic thinking. At one level this dichotomy shows itself in the pigeon-holing of issues as either "scientific and technological," on the one hand, or as "humanistic," on the other. In many universities, there is hardly any communication across these invisible but impenetrable boundaries. On my own campus, the problem is vividly incarnated in brick and stone. The sciences are housed in ugly, efficient buildings on top of one treeless hill, while the humanities enjoy beautiful, if decaying, buildings on an ancient, shaded hilltop—with the football stadium wedged menacingly in the gulch between. The few faculty who want to fraternize with their opposite numbers must pay twice the normal fees for parking, though (if not afraid of walking) they can meet on neutral ground for lunch.

At another level this imagined dichotomy manifests itself in the confused sense that technology and science are somehow autonomous, inhuman, or anti-human forces. The image of the machine out of control, the robots ruling their designers, the dominance of tools over their makers, is a familiar (and in many ways compelling) one. Charlie Chaplin's frantic struggles to keep up with the production line and his entrapment in the feeding machine in *Modern Times*, along with the countless other variations on this

theme, from Fritz Lang's ravenous Moloch-engine in *Metropolis* to Stanley Kubrick's paranoid HAI., in *2001*, are all part of the cultural *mythos*.

The incarnational metaphor for technology need not obscure what these images suggest, that our technologies are fearsomely potent and can go wildly out of control. It merely makes it harder to say or think that technologies—even when raging loose and feeding on their designers—are in any way "alien" to the human. What we see when we see Chaplin trapped in the feeding machine, for example, is a victim in the clutches of incarnated human values yearning after maximized profits by eliminating the "inefficiencies" of the lunch hour. When the machine sputters and spills the soup, what we see are incarnate limitations of the current state of knowledge. The machine is finally rejected ("not practical"), not because of the greedy goals it incarnates, but because of its cognitive defects. What we see, to take another example, when we see the monstrous power plant in *Metropolis* devouring its workers, is the readiness of the rulers above to exploit without compunction the labor force below.

If technology is the incarnate blending of fundamental knowledge with fundamental values—the joint implementation of whatever is current science with whatever is functioning religion—then our appraisals of the goods and bads of technology will at root be appraisals not of something alien but of human virtue and vice. Science itself, after all, is fully a human activity. It is properly included among the liberal arts. Its intellectual roots are deep in the philosophical quest for understanding the universe. Its theories and models are in dynamic mutual relationship with metaphysical ideas and cultural presumptions; it is shot through with value considerations, from the accepted norms of good thinking to the approval of peer reviewers. If scientific values tend systematically to ignore the values of tenderness, love, or concern for the objects of investigation, then we discover that human beings do not always value as fully as they should. If scientific thinking tends characteristically to lose sight of important complexities by reducing frames of discourse, or to sunder vital relationships in the process of analysis, then we realize that human beings do not always think as well as they should. Similarly, if technologies distort human existence or exacerbate economic injustice by forcing obedience to unfeeling rhythms or by centralizing control over the goods of life, we learn how selfish, short-sighted, cruel, or heedless we human beings can be. And if our technologies destroy us in the end, we shall prove how foolish a creature was *Homo sapiens*.

The incarnational metaphor for technology would gently draw us to see that we should not blame alien forces for our ills, but look instead to ourselves. We find out who we are, in part, by the technologies that we allow and applaud.

But doom and blame need not be our last words. On the contrary, if all the artifacts around us could be re-seen, re-felt, re-thought as the embodiment of someone's intelligence and someone's values, the world would not only begin to look different to us, it might become more plastic to our considered hopes. What would a world be like in which the dominant methods and typical artifacts incarnate the values (say) of Christian charity or Jewish observance or Islamic faithfulness or Hindu inclusiveness

or Buddhist moderation or Taoist equilibrium? What sorts of things would we need to know in order really to incarnate such fundamental values in our implements? What sorts of artifacts would be unthinkable in such a world? What sorts would beg for invention and implementation?

There is no need to be utopian, however, to recognize the advantages of the incarnational metaphor for technology. Its main benefit is to shift the emphasis away from the external hardware and toward the central significance of our technologies. As an image to assist criticism and assessment, it offers a way across the fact-value, science-humanities, technical-personal abyss. As a guide to a postmod-em-but still an inevitably technological-future, it may help us to concentrate more intelligent attention on clarifying those ideals that genuinely deserve incarnation.

# Forum Response

## Response to Frederick Ferre's "New Metaphors for Technology,"

by Robert S. Fortner, Calvin College

Perhaps the principal advantage of an incarnational image of technology is that it forces us to take account of the human condition. Ferre argues that the incarnational metaphor eliminates "the false dichotomy between the technical and the human that plagues much popular and academic thinking." However, I think the advantage of such a metaphor is not what it eliminates but what it affirms: the Janus-like aspect of the human condition. The human condition, as I see it, is one that itself is both good and evil. On the one hand, human beings are wonderfully creative: they mimic God's creative act itself, discovering, inventing, applying, and using technology to better the physical conditions of humankind. On the other hand they also demonstrate demonic qualities: denying, obfuscating, rationalizing, misappropriating and misusing technology, often thereby worsening humankind's lot.

From this perspective, which I assume Ferre shares at least to a degree, an incarnational metaphor for technology forces us to see technology for what it is—both benefactor andcrippier of the environment, health, human relationships, material well-being, and ethical sensibility. To the extent that human beings carry good and evil within them, whatever they create can be expected to exhibit such qualities. So Ferre is right in asserting that a false dichotomy may be thus exposed. I suspect, however, that this exposure will come more obviously from baring the human being for what s/he is and arguing from there. Anything such flawed creatures create, not only technologically, but philosophically, politically, economically, culturally, and morally, will likewise be defective. After all, the human being is responsible for spoiling the creation by choosing to defy God's clear instructions.

It is not the overall theme of Ferre's essay, then, that I find troubling. Rather it is his method of proof, particularly the implications of his treatment of culture and value. He argues that "technology reflects human values. When we look at our artifacts, we see implicit in them our hopes and fears, goals and aversions. If a culture fears bad weather, these negative evaluations will be seen in its housing and clothing technologies. If a culture values meat eating, its weapons and traps will reflect its preferences." The argument that proceeds from this is analogic. "By the same token," he says, the technologies of an era will reflect what is taken as licit, i.e., not taboo in

the working value-system of the human agents whose knowledge and values are being brought to bear on daily life.”

The difficulties here are three-fold. The first is the overly-restrictive view of culture and the assumptions about cultural creation. Culture is not a tangible being or material object that fears or values. It is not something-as Ferrd’s examples suggest—that technologists or politicians create so that weapons or traps, housing or clothing, can reflect that creative act. He is more on target when he says that what is licit is that which is not taboo (defining what is by what it is not), but even this has limited utility. Cultures are more complex and unruly creations where millions of people are making choices about what to wear, eat, observe or listen to, how to treat one another, how to express themselves in the arts, how much to pay for the art created, what sort of religions to create or maintain, how to raise children, fund education, or practice politics. All participate in cultural creation, maintenance or decay.

Modern cultures are cauldrons of nearly endless possibility ; they are full of contradictions. I increasingly see cars in Michigan with dual bumper stickers: “Choose Life” and the logo of the National Rifle Association. I cannot put these two commitments together. Do we save the unborn urban fetus, I’ve asked myself, so he can be gunned down in the streets when he’s fourteen? How is it possible that the very people who demand that the Supreme Court decision guaranteeing abortion under the “most basic right” of privacy be overturned— thus nullifying a declared civil liberty—can, on the same bumper, support an organization that itself demands absolute protection of another civil liberty—the right to bear arms—despite the fact that the Supreme Court has declared that the fourth amendment has no application beyond the right of the states to control a militia? How can a life that is so important before birth have so little value afterwards? Why should urban youths have the right to bear assault weapons to gun down those who were “saved” in the womb? This is but one cultural contradiction in our society, but both positions are equally “licit,” as is the right to hold positions that others (in this case, me) find utter nonsense.

In reality modern culture disallows little, makes few activities illicit. There are extenuating circumstances that excuse murder, rape, burglary, or other heinous crimes. The debate about the sociological reasons for this—and the application of law to those of different races or financial capability—continues. As we are politically pluralistic we are culturally pluralistic: the society we have constructed is one dependent on the operations of a political process dependent on public and expert opinion, economic interests, and partisan compromise or obstruction. To anchor one’s argument on such a fragile foundation thus seems *to me* rather too ambitious.

The second problem is a confusion between the *human* and the *humane*. Ferre tells us that it “cannot possibly be the case” that technology is “something alien, inhuman, demonic” because “all technologies are reflections of human knowledge and values.” Technology cannot be *inhuman* because it is so reflective of humankind. He admits, however, that technology may be *inhumane*: “foolish, self-destructive, tragic” just as there is much about human creatures that is likewise “inhumane, foolish, self-

destructive, tragic . . . .” Again, I want to admit that this may be true, but I dare not. Whether we like to admit it or not, human beings do commit *inhuman* acts. Hitler’s annihilation of Jews, gypsies, Slovaks, and dissident Christians was not merely *inhumane*, it was also *inhuman*. I think Fend has confused ends with means. It seems to me that genocide—whether practiced by the Nazis, Stalin, the Khmer Rouge, Somali warlords, Serbs, or Hutus—is inhuman. So is slavery, infanticide, cannibalism, or ritual sacrifices. These are ends: all deny humankind’s most basic and necessarily inviolate ontological status as creatures made in the image of God.

We also know that some acts are more inhumane than others: when executions are performed, those that increase human suffering are more inhumane than those that do not. When wars are conducted using poison gas, napalm, flesh-shredding anti-personnel devices, or other indiscriminate weapons, we judge them more harshly than when more “precise” or “clean” weapons are used. There are international conventions aimed at controlling many indiscriminate weapons. The use of torture or imprisonment to stamp out insurrection or political dissent is likewise inhumane and emerges from the dark side of human nature.

I’ll admit that I struggle with this distinction when I teach ethics. My students, I think, are actually better (or quicker, at least) at seeing the inhumane than they are the inhuman. They can imagine the pain inflicted by practices that damage the body or the mind. They have more trouble with acts that deny the inviolability of the soul, or, to put it differently, that wound or deny God by degrading those made to reflect his image. That is not to say that students deny the evil of Nazism, but that, short of such obvious manifestations of inhumanity, they can’t see how they could be judged inhuman. Cruelty they recognize (they see the methods), but denial of ontological status through racism or sexism (gentler versions of “master race” theology) are more elusive.

Based on my own understanding of this distinction, however, I would quarrel with Fore’s claim that humankind could not possibly create something inhuman. I think we do it all too frequently. We are all too prone to turn our backs on the “good” creation and embrace fire demonic. Thus we can certainly create what is alien, inhuman, and demonic: whether law, attitude, or technology.

My third objection has to do with Ferre’s use of religion. This comes in his section on “Technology as Incarnate Values.” I’d like to unpack this section rather more carefully than the others to which I have objected. He begins with the statement that technology need not embody the “official” values of *a* culture, “as expressed in ethical codes or religious *mythos*.” But this is a tautological argument. Ferre claims that technology must be seen as an embodiment of cultural values (as quoted earlier). But here he does not demand that the values so embodied are “official.” This leaves us with no grounds to deny the embodiment since it can always neatly be argued that disagreements about whether a technology emerges from a culture’s values are merely differences in emphasis or degree. One person sees instrumental values where another would demand demonstration of the power of those values in the culture. Since all cultures are (as

argued earlier) complex and pluralistic, this provides us with little assistance. If we cannot demand that technology emerge from a culture's "official" values to accept it as a legitimate manifestation of that culture's commitments, then any technology can emerge from any culture at any time and no one would have the right to question its legitimacy or "licitness."

But this is not all. Technology, Ferri then continues, embodies a culture's "implemented values," those "that override when all is said and done." This actually complicates the tautology. Now whatever values a technology embodies functionally override whatever "official" values the culture may espouse. The "official" values thus recede in significance, allowing the technologist to ignore or trample them underfoot in the name of more important implemented values. If nuclear power facilities provide an illusion of economic value, despite their potential threat to the environment or their real costs of construction, maintenance, decommissioning, and storage of spent fuel, and the society allows itself to be deluded by illusion, or remains ignorant of the true economic and environmental costs, then illusion makes whatever the "real" or official values of the culture are counterfeit. Objecting to such a circumstance would be nonsense, since implemented values override even the official, widely-accepted, sanctioned cultural values of the society. Discourses on values in such situations are exercises in futility: the issues are too illusive for reasoned conversation.

And there is yet a third dimension to this exercise. Ferri tells us that "It would not be wrong, and it might be revealing, to say that technology is the offspring in *praxis* of the mating of knowledge with value, of epistemology with axiology." Since, as he again reiterates earlier in this paragraph, "there is... no technology without values," we are now even another step removed from understanding what those implemented values are. We cannot demand that technology represent the official values of a culture; neither can we demand that whatever values it does embody be clear in its operation—because these values may be camouflaged by their mating with knowledge. DNA tests are required to determine technology's parentage.

Despite the complexity introduced here in the effort to establish technology as incarnational, and the increasingly tenuous connections demanded between technology and what it incarnates, Ferri leaves us with a final demand in this section: "the technologies that surround us are nothing less than incarnations of characteristically modern science and religion." This seems to me an entirely too facile use of "religion."

People do not practice their religions identically. The varieties of religious experience in the Protestant tradition alone are staggering.

Some within this tradition are technological triumphalists: the purpose of any technology is to spread the Gospel and hasten the second coming. Others are technological quasi-luddites, such as the Amish. Still others are suspicious about the role of technology threatening the autonomy of religious life. Many in the "third way" churches (Mennonites, Brethren, Quakers) take this position. Calvinists affirm technology as a manifestation of God's goodness, but question its application by humans all too prone to deny God in their prideful quest for power, privilege, and wealth. Still others are



dualists. There is simply too rich a set of responses within even this sector of "religion" to speak of a single set of characteristics that are incarnated in technology.

Finally, insofar as this section is concerned, I wish to address the implications of that final statement. Although Ferre has told us that technology embodies values, and that these values are not necessarily the official values of a culture, but are the offspring of epistemology and axiology, he would now claim that they are incarnations of "characteristically modern science and religion." Whatever values technology embodies, in other words, must be seen as incarnations of the values of our science and religion. It matters not what the official values of science or religion are, those embodied by technology override them, are the true incarnations of their values.

This, it seems to me, cedes to technology rather too much. Whatever is incarnate in our technology becomes, under this claim, what we worship. We may claim to worship God, Yahweh, Buddha, or Allah, to follow their commands or think using the worldview of their scriptures, but it is in technology that we see what is truly worthy of our attention. It is in technology that we recognize what we value, it is in technology that we demonstrate our commitments and construct our idols. In the end, I suppose we incarnate ourselves in technology and thus worship our own being. Religion is false consciousness.

I think this is where Ferre's analysis takes us, although I know he does not see it that way. His own claims are more modest: the incarnational metaphor "merely makes it harder to say or think that technologies—even when raging loose and feeding on their designers—are in any way 'alien' to the human." I would argue that it makes it impossible and must thus be rejected, for humans can and have acted in ways alien to their own humanness.

I began this essay saying that I found the incarnational metaphor Ferre constructs a useful one. Yet I have taken issue with it at every turn. What, then, is our difference? I think it is our respective starting points. I see humankind as a creature designed to act in particular ways: a creature grateful to its creator for life and worshipful of all that the creator made. Each of us then carries what Solzhenitsyn said is a heart cleft into good and evil portions, a heart created good but darkened and atrophied by human choice. So, while I agree that technology incarnates what we are, I disagree that we are, *ipso facto*, unable to claim technology to be alien or inhuman. Humankind, in my mind, is perfectly capable of producing both the inhuman and the inhumane. In so doing it may even create artifacts that are alien to all that it claims and truly believes—it values. Human beings can be committed to, and act on, contradictions. They can construct technologies that would destroy them, perhaps the ultimate denial of God's intentions for them. They can degrade one another, hate one another, and do despicable evil to one another. And at every turn, with every new act of degradation, hatred, genocide, or technological "advance," they take one step further away from God.

As I read Ferre I find him wanting to maintain a consistency in his evaluation of humankind that I do not find compelling given our sordid history. I wish he were right that we were incapable of producing what is alien to our being, of making what

is inhuman. And, while I certainly am no Luddite, I do think Mary Shelley's vision of what we are capable of—either individually or collectively—is perhaps more true than we would like to believe. Frankenstein perhaps is possible, despite our recognition that creating such a monster might violate every reasonable expression of human value, religious sentiment, or even scientific ethic. I do not think we should lose sight of that possibility even in arguing for a new metaphor to understand technology.

## Language and Technology: A Reply to Robert S. Fortner

by Frederick Ferre

I appreciate Robert Fortner's expression of sympathetic understanding for the overall themes in my "New Metaphors for Technology." As he summarizes his main point of agreement it is indeed central: he shares my sense of the interweaving of good and evil in the character of whatever we flawed human creatures create.

The three difficulties he then thoughtfully expounds are important but less central. In fact I suspect that we agree even more than he realizes. Some of the apparent problems he raises are, I believe, more due to differences in our use of language than to our sense of the realities that challenge us.

His first difficulty rests what he detects as my seeming to treat culture as a too-simple "something." This surprises me, since I went to some lengths stating my view that the values and knowledge (thus the technologies) found within cultures are by no means simple or harmonious. For example, I contrast the values of the slave class within a slave culture with the master class, and point to the different valuations of whip and thumbscrew technologies by these respective groups within a single social order.

I hope I do not reify "culture" as a too-simple phenomenon when I write about "a vegetarian society" or "a society taking for granted the legitimacy of judicial torture." If I seem to, I can assure Fortner that this was just a way of speaking—exactly in the spirit of his way of speaking about "us" (humankind) at the end of his discussion. I realize (and my examples of conflict within a culture should make this clear) that such ways of speaking do not preclude variety within the class drawn together by a common noun. There doubtless will be meat-eaters in vegetarian societies, just as there are devoted vegetarians in our dominantly meat-eating culture. But one can still use the noun "culture" modified by largely justified adjectives. Our own culture is remarkably pluralistic (as Fortner rightly points out); but this is something that can be said truthfully *about our culture*. Further, enculturation is an important phenomenon. As those who have tried to reform the "institutional press," for example, of any fraternity-dominated college campus will know, values are not delivered at the retail level alone. Individuals participate, as Fortner says, "in cultural creation, maintenance, or decay"; but, no less importantly, cultures—complex as they are—shape individuals too.

Fortner's second difficulty rests on my recommendation, which follows from the "mirror" metaphor, that we should see technology as a reflection of the "human," for

better or for worse. He prefers a different use of the word "human" in which a normative commitment prevents the very worst we do from being called "human" behavior at all. I recognize his preference, which is more intelligible and more frequent than his students seem to think. It is quite possible to define the "human" in this normative way, giving it what is sometimes called a "persuasive definition"; it may even make one feel better about being human oneself if one can take the worst atrocities of our species and thrust them outside the pale of human conduct

I prefer the other usage of "human"-language. Fortner's normative definition rests uneasily on an elaborate theory of ontological status. It requires, among other things, a distinction between "true" humanity and "actual" humanity that many find foggy. Even if one agrees theologically with the ontological status implied, including the elusive "Image of God" doctrine, it becomes difficult and arbitrary to draw the line between acts that are "merely" *inhumane* and those that slide over into the supposedly *inhuman*. Where does the "awful" become the "super-awful"? I suspect there is no genuine line at all, but only a vague but strongly felt sliding scale of horror, depending on many (culturally conditioned) factors.

I prefer a no-nonsense empirical approach in which even the most awful horrors, if done by humans, are indicators of what depths humans can sink to. Certainly one popular use of words is to call these acts "inhuman"; but if Fortner really understands some objective distinction separating such a linguistic policy from the alternative practice that condemns these same acts as unspeakably cruel, debased, and horrifyingly "inhumane," he has not communicated it in his remarks.

Finally, Fortner's third difficulty rests on different linguistic recommendations for using the words "values" and "religion." He bristles at my statement that "technology need not embody the 'official' values of a culture." But what I mean is nothing strange and certainly nothing tautological.

The "official" values of a culture are expressed through the recognized religions and moral codes of that culture. How often clergy of those recognized religions decry the fact that the behavior of their congregants fails to embody the values supported in the faith whose creeds they mouth! Even Deacons may not be turning the other cheek; even Elders may not be selling all and giving to the poor, even Sunday School teachers may not be forgiving "seventy times seven." The point is: to clarify one's real or effective values one should look to one's actual expenditures of time and effort and money.

That is the simple point I am making here. In a culture that calls itself Christian, even the Christians may not be heeding the call to "behold the lilies of the field," but rather heeding the imperatives of the automobile to pave those fields for highways and parking lots (around churches!). This does not mean that their actual, effective values in rejecting alternatives to the automobile culture should escape critique. On the contrary. To clarify the real values incarnated in a technology is to raise them to the level of awareness where effective ethical and religious critique becomes possible.

As to the meaning of "religion," I confess that we probably really do differ on the use of this term. I have defined the word so often in my writings over the last thirty years

that I did not in this little chapter define it again but simply used it in the sense of "most intense and comprehensive valuing" that I have defended for so long. On my definition there is nothing shocking about a religious position's involving "false consciousness." There are many expressions of religion, not all of them good, kind, enlightened, or pure. Idolatry is a religious phenomenon steeped in false consciousness. The alternative to acknowledging this is to define "religion" in a normative way that assures the exclusion of whatever we do not like. On my understanding of "religion," we can confront, in the name of religion, what is false in *bad* religions without denying that they are *truly* religions. Again, as in the case of "human," I find myself preferring a no-nonsense, take-the-bitter-with-the-sweet use of language over the employment of persuasive definitions that in the short run flatter the definiendum but make subsequent distinctions of thought harder to sustain.

The disagreements between my critic and myself are as I see it mainly differences of preference over the use of key terms. Even his concluding invocation of Frankenstein seems to fit this pattern. I wholly agree that "Frankenstein"-technology happens. What we need to remember is that the name "Frankenstein" refers to the good *Doctor* Frankenstein, not to his monster. Well meaning Frankensteins have populated our world with offspring they subsequently would like to disown, like Mary Shelley's horrified Doctor. Their monstrous products go on to have a dynamic of their own, as I pointed out by my own examples of technology gone wildly out of control. But this does not mean that even these horrors are other than human products. Thus my suggested metaphors will help if they can save us from falling into defensive attitudes of denial toward our terrible mistakes, from rejecting our responsibility to try to repair the damage, and from soothing our human self-love by putting the blame "elsewhere."

# Forum Dialogue

## A Response to Timothy Casey's Review of: Technique, Discourse and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul

by David Lovekin

In my book, *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 1991), I advance my interpretation of Ellul in ways that reflect my readings of Cassirer and Hegel, with Vico's influence acknowledged in the preface and present as inspiration.. I do not argue these interpretations. I do not set Cassirer, Hegel, and Ellul against each other to determine a winner. Comparison studies of other figures with Ellul such as Marx, Kierkegaard, Barth, and Mumford were available. I presented an Ellul hitherto unnoticed, an Ellul who could be read philosophically and independently from his theological involvements. Typically, Ellul's readers founder over theological issues. I present a philosophical reading that does not exclude theology but which takes up larger concerns. I see Ellul, Cassirer, and Hegel as fellow travelers, as philosophers of culture.

My preface begins with the following questions: "(1) In what sense does Ellul have a philosophy of technology? (2) What does Ellul mean by technology? (3) What is Ellul's answer to the problems posed by technique in the contemporary age?"(12).

My "Introduction" displays Ellul's philosophical owl ranging over the twilight of a Cartesian world overtaken by conceptual processes and procedures, a world that Descartes could only have imagined but a world much extended from methods seeking the clear and distinct. In the *Discourse on Method* Descartes announced that he would set aside the fables and histories of the past, exotic and distracting stories, for example, like those of a Don Quixote whose world was turned upside down by books, in a search for a less extravagant truth that could be written in the language of Lower Brittany, by which I assume he meant a language replete of metaphor. Descartes imagined that if the city of knowledge could be tom down and rebuilt using the plumb line of reason, a city built on the edifice of certainty would arise. Descartes wished to banish the "*mauvais genie*," the "evil genius," and to move the mind face to face with truth itself, to move judgment together with perception in a communication perfectly adequate to the task.

Ellul's genius sees technique as this manifestation of Cartesian intention in the development of symbols and technical phenomena. Descartes hoped to collapse the distance between mind and its object with a language drawn along mathematical lines in accordance with the Aristotelian laws of thought, where A could not be both A and not A at the same time. Descartes, from his window in the *Meditations*, looked out on the street below and saw men passing by and then realized that he had not seen them but that he had made a judgement They could be hats and cloaks covering automata, he reasoned. Were they men or not men?(21) This is the kind of gap between sensation and reason, between the mind and the body that Descartes wished to close with a clear and distinctly centered methodology.

A similar gap yawns between technical intention and the world, Ellul realizes. For example, in the task of chopping trees with an axe, one is limited by one's bodily abilities, by the hardness of the wood, and by a variety of diversionary thoughts that might take the tool-user from the task at hand, from what Ellul calls the technical operation. The technical phenomenon appears, an epistemologically-laden idea, with consciousness and judgment, with the concern to *apply* a mathematics-like method to accomplish a task to achieve absolute efficiency. The chain saw or the bulldozer, a more extreme application, may be the result Like Cartesian intention, the concern is to produce identities without differences, to produce the "one best way" of accomplishing the task. With the bulldozer all humans can cut the forest in the same way because it is the device that does the cutting; the human becomes a disembodied intention or, more accurately, the bulldozer is the embodiment of that intention.

Of course, the "one best way," the absolutely efficient, never comes, but the intention to rationalize all processes, all mind-body interactions, is unceasing. Difference, otherness of all kinds, is the obstacle in the march toward the truth. I then indicate that Hegel's notion of a bad infinity, of a *Schlecht-Unendliche*, characterizes technical intention as Ellul understands it A bad infinity is an infinity that is present only as the next moment that never comes or present in the denial of the totality of finitude, i.e. in the claim that the infinite is not any finite thing, a claim that is at bottom skeptical. Thus, a bad infinity leads to the necessary linking of all things in a system of purely internal relations established in the face of utter meaninglessness, the second sense of the bad infinity. Ellul wants an infinite that is both present and absent in all relations(24-25).

Then, in chapter one, "Ellul and the Critics," I show that Ellul's readers do not understand these aspects of technical intention that underlie his social analyses. And, further, they do not connect this sense of technical logic to his biblical exegeses. A theory of the symbol is required.

Descartes did not haphazardly single out myths and fables in his attempts to unify science, philosophy, and theology. The fable, the parable, the myth, do not obey an Aristotelian logic. Ellul understands the implications of technical, Cartesian logic for Biblical literature, for symbols that address the Wholly Other. For technical logic God could not be "three in one," the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost Such paradox

is necessary, for Ellul: God is both inside and outside of His creation, which occurred once perfectly and yet continually occurs, truths guaranteed to drive the Cartesian mind mad. The symbol is the form of discourse that enables and even requires these paradoxes to occur the symbol, the metaphor, establishes relations of identity in difference, where difference remains. God is understood in all things and yet as apart from all things: both of these senses are required by God as a symbol. Technique must challenge such a God to make meaning absolutely immanent, to make technique the sacred itself.

Ellul distinguishes between *Le Vrai*, the True, and *Le Reel*, the Real, to clarify his understanding of the symbol, which is also expressed in the relationship between the image and the word. The True is the domain that surrounds—the domain of the Wholly Other—and gives meaning to the Real, to the immanent, to that which is beforeone. The True is what the metaphor seeks. The metaphor, what Ellul calls the word, is the symbol in which two seemingly contradictory meanings may repose, like the notion of a loving and a judging God. The Real is the realm of the image, the clear and distinct (48-49). Technical logic attempts to reduce the word to the image; to reduce the ambiguous and uncertain to the clear and distinct; to reduce the spontaneous and bodily technical operation to the conceptual technical phenomenon.

In chapter two, "Ellul and the Problem of a Philosophy of Technology," I work around the metaphor of Kleist's *Über das Marionettentheater* (1908), about which Ellul and Cassirer had decided views (68-81.) Although they are not reading each other, a specific problem is in the European air, which will of course translate into two world wars of immense proportion: the problem is of the relationship between human culture, symbolic creation, moral responsibility, and the world and cosmological order. Although Ellul wants to deny the perspective of Absolute Idealism, a boring reading of Hegelian philosophy, he is no realist either and is often appreciative of Hegel's notion of the dialectic. Neither the world (after the Fall) nor the human self are simply givens. The human is involved in a process of self creation and world creation at once through symbolic processes. The symbol is an extension from the human just as the human is an extension of the symbol Both are and are not each other, an essential dialectical tension which cannot be collapsed, as in fact technique seeks to do. The infinite, the goal of the symbol always exceeds the grasp although consciousness may forget this. *Lethotechny*, a forgetting that results from the proliferation of technical phenomena, sets in (98).

In the modern age, in the technological city built to the specification of the plumb line of reason, we, like puppets, hang from the device. I show, then, how the *Philosophie der Technik* tradition begun in the writings of neo-Hegelian Ernst Kapp (1977) and extended by the work of Ernst Cassirer brackets and frames an Ellul hitherto unread.

On my reading of Ellul, the mind never fully makes the world, which it amplifies and enlarges; the mind's making requires the givenness of the object of the other. For example, thinking about dogs is not the same thing as thinking dogs, what the

Aristotelian god would do. And yet technique forgets its limitations in relation to an Wholly Other. In the wake of this forgetting the "system" of technique ensues.

A clear image of the technical system, which I discussed in great detail in chapter five, "The Technological Phenomenon and the Technological System," could be found in attempts at disease control in Borneo in 1973, attempts which increasingly abound. Insecticides were used to control malaria. These insecticides accumulated in cockroaches that became resistant to the insecticides. Geckoes that fed on these insects became slothful and fell prey to cats, which died of this indirect poisoning. Rats multiplied and threatened a plague. The army parachuted in cats. The logic of technique is the logic of the Borneo cat toss, where the othernesses of nature are taken up by the technical system, which, as a form of consciousness becomes unconscious. Technique sets out to conquer disease, for example, and then must contend with the disease it has created or the disease that it has directed. The irony that empowers Ellul's account rests ultimately in the reality that is not made but which nonetheless makes its appearance in the process of making, like Peirce's category of *secondness*, which might reinstate memory, the humanities' hope in response to technique.

The symbol that Ellul understands respects and requires otherness. Cervantes needed his audience. The dog needs a name. The certain, what Ellul calls the realm of the image, is always *there*, by definition. The certain as a reference is always needed. Technique, however, denies the importance of the outside element, the perspective that surrounds and locates. In its march toward certainty, *cliché* is produced, the discourse of technique that I examine in my last chapter. The word *cliché* originally referred to the eighteenth century printer's dab and also was related to "cliquer," to the sound produced. Thus the word *cliché* was originally a metaphor (207). Words in the technical society go the way of tools, the technical operation that is subsumed in conceptualization. The meanings of words became merely other words, a situation that made deconstructionism possible, and ironically, some of its critics. Frederic Jameson attacked deconstructionism in *The Prison House of Language* (Princeton Univ. Press, 1972). The epigram was attributed to Nietzsche: "We have to cease to think if we refuse to do it in the prison-house of language..." (208-209). Jameson, whom I telephoned, was at first unsure where he had found the quote; later he said that he had found it in "some essay of Erich Heller's." I tracked the essay to Heller's "Wittgenstein and Nietzsche" (*The Artists's Journey into the Interior*, New York & London: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1976, p. 219) in which he offered a poetic translation of a line in Nietzsche's *Der Wille zur Macht*. "*Zwange*" was used to mean "constraint," which Heller turned into "prisonhouse." The question is not whether or not the translation is good; the question is: what has happened to the original?

Granted, the human is never before the "original" in any absolute sense. The word is never fully adequate, a notion that runs through the writings of Cassirer, Hegel, Ellul, and Vico. The notion of the original is, nonetheless, fire spirit's goal. I knew my book would never fully realize Ellul's thought, but I was interested in his reaction to an earlier draft of the work. Here is a translation of Ellul's letter of March 22, 1987:



Pardon my writing to you in my own hand and in French. I received your book in good time. I haven't read it all, because I have little worktime available, but everything I read appeared to me quite excellent and the plan you have chosen is quite interesting. Of course there remain many things in my biography you could not know. But everything that you said is exact and well-put in relation to my books. I greatly appreciated your chapter-The Cliche as Consciousness.

I do not claim on the principle of authority to have presented the true Ellul, but I do believe I have offered an interesting Ellul; apparently Ellul agrees. Clearly, Ellul puts his case in a thoroughly Christian context; I do not. Clearly Ellul's emphasis is not philosophical not avowedly in the *Kulturphilosophie* tradition. But, what could be wrong in giving such a reading if it worked, if it opened Ellul up to a greater readership, and if it was done with respect?

My reading has not pleased reviewer Timothy Casey in *The Ellul Forum*, 10,1993,13-14. Casey acknowledged my book to be "provocative" (13) but then he appears to have dismissed it because the book was devoid of fully developed argument,(14), because it was written in what he called a dense style that "...seems to revel in inconsistency and ambiguity"(14), and because I did not maintain a critical distance on Ellul's thought(14). I am apparently trapped with Ellul in a kind of Cartesianism that sets subject over against object (13-14). Further, I have put religion aside: "Lovekin's secularism is particularly disturbing since he provides no philosophical counterpart to Christianity that can underpin an authentic transcendence of the technological society or provide a significant Wholly Other that can serve as the *telos* of the transcendence"(14).

Mr. Casey is disturbed, "maddened" even (14), by my decision to treat the critics as I did—not to argue with them but to show that their positions were not mine, to show that they neglected the whole of Ellul's thought. He objected, apparently, to my decision to briefly present my own view of Ellul, which I then balance against these other readings. My tone was defensive, he' said (14); and I only gave a "perfunctory" criticism of Ellul's thought in my last chapter. And in the chapter "Ellul and the Problem of a Philosophy of Technology," Casey wrote:"...Lovekin omits any reference to Marx, Heidegger or Lewis Mumford, key figures in anybody's history of the philosophy of technology"(14).

I find Mr. Casey's remarks interesting on a number of counts. He wanted me to argue, to write a book with a history of the philosophy of technology that "anybody" would write, the kind of book I stated clearly that I would not write. I added "perfunctory" criticisms of Ellul's work in my last chapter to show how easy they were to make (Lovekin, 213-214). Analysis is much easier than synthesis. He disliked my stylistic decision to put my view against the critics, which I did to show the importance of my view, to show that it was not "everybody's" -view. And, in the bargain, he upbraided me as a "shrewd"(14), "devotee,"(14), *ad hominem* if I have ever heard such. He called me "secular" as wdl(14) without explaining how this fit with my apparent posture of devotee.

He argued that I gave little attention to the Cartesianism in Ellul's, Hegel's, and Cassirer's thought, although he allowed that I was right to point "to Descartes' elevation of method as the herald of the technical phenomenon" (14). He, nonetheless, rankled at my lack of argument and at my "ambiguities." So, I was both Cartesian and not Cartesian enough; I was shrewd and secular but also a devotee. I think my worst crime for Casey was, however, that I did not write the book that he had wished me to write. My reading was not his.

Here is Casey's example of my "ambiguous" style: "*La technique* is a mentality within society; it is the attitude of society toward technique" (Lovekin, 68; Casey, 14). This sentence, broken from context, required the reader to follow a fairly difficult point technique is a mentality within society that, at the point of technical "autonomy," threatens to become the society itself. When technical mentality becomes autonomous, it is no longer conscious of itself as a form of consciousness. Technique is, from the Ellulian standpoint, a part of society, but from technique's perspective, that part becomes the whole, is the whole. I tried to avoid the fallacies of composition and division; the part must not be the whole and the whole must not be the part. Technique becomes the sacred when it becomes the necessary. One symptom of technical autonomy is the desire always for a solution or the suggestion that the Wholly Other could ever be put to page, what Casey seems to desire from me.

Casey has confused the book he would write with the one I have written. He reads Ellul, Cassirer, and Hegel as Cartesians, and I do not. Granted, all three do not have a full-blown theory of the imagination, which may be required to avoid many of Descartes' problems. But these thinkers did not regard the concept to be finally adequate to the task of constructing a human world. None of these thinkers want the dialectic between image and word (in whatever terms these notions were conceived) to stop. Thus, Casey's claim: "It is hard, then, to accept the Ellulian subordination of the visual image in favor of the word" (14) is wrong. Ellul intends no such subordination, as my reading showed. Casey stated: "In Lovekin's depiction, Ellul is clearly a philosopher of an old fashioned sort." (13). Whether "old fashioned" is a pejorative, another *ad hominem*, is not my concern, which is that Casey has missed the novelty of my reading of Ellul with a reading of Cassirer and Hegel that is not common garden variety.

Casey wrote: "From a contemporary philosophical vantage-point Ellul seems not so much representative of Western metaphysics as entrapped in it. What is more, this metaphysics is of a particularly modern vintage—Cartesian, to be exact. In describing technique as a mentality or form of consciousness, Ellul takes over the ontology of the self as *subject* and the thing as *object*, quite unintentionally reinforcing the anthropocentrism that lies at the very center of the modern technological assault on nature" (13.) Does Casey mean to suggest that there is a solution to the mind-body problem? Is he saying that because Ellul locates technical mentality in the duality of mind and body that Ellul is a Cartesian? Does being a dualist make one a Cartesian? Ultimately, Descartes' problem may be in wanting to rid himself of dualism or in his not seeing his dualism in holistic enough terms, in not seeing the powers of reason over and against

the powers of the imagination. Descartes seems to have required the "evil genius," (that is itself not a clear and distinct idea) to move from doubt to certainty.

Casey claimed, further: "Lovekin keeps Ellul's Christianity at arm's length and respectfully refuses to grant it philosophical status (14). This is wrong. I wished to allow the separation of religion and philosophy and believed it was possible to give a philosophical account of what Ellul puts in religious terms, an approach Ellul himself uses in *The Technological Society*. Casey said that I gave religion a back seat; I say I have given it another seat, the seat of the other, which can be couched in philosophical terms.

My concern was to present an Ellul other readers had not read. In relation to these stated goals, Casey seems to grant that I succeed: "Lovekin makes a persuasive case for the philosophical cast of Ellul's critique of technology, inviting his readers to see and judge Ellul on strictly philosophical terms"(13). Are these goals not enough?

Mr. Casey may soon be writing his book, blowing up his own dog, providing the many details that I and others could have added but did not, which is as it should be, why we write, and why we look for readers sympathetic to our stated tasks. Reading and writing is a masquerade that requires complicity, the appearance of the true other, which is no mere negative—a fluorescent whine — but opposition in which the true is backlighted, revealed both as what is and what is not

## **A Response to Darrell Fasching's The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia?**

by Peter J. Haas, Vanderbilt University

Human beings, Professor Fasching notes at one point in this book, are not just storytellers, they are story dwellers. By this he means that stories bring into consciousness our ideas of the world and our place in it. In so doing, they give structure to our vision of the future and how we will get there. In light of the atrocities of Auschwitz and Hiroshima, Fasching argues in *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima* (SUNY, 1993), we need to change our foundational stories. The old stories, with their old ethic will lead only to destruction. This is so because such narratives do more than offer a self-definition; they also tell us who stands outside the community and how we are to treat those others.

In *Narrative Theology After Auschwitz*, as well as *The Ethical Challenge*, Fasching argues that the events of Auschwitz and Hiroshima force us in the West to face the symbolic universe that has led to such atrocities being committed against the other. His thesis is that we can prevent further atrocities of this kind, and possibly our own destruction along the way, only by constructing a new narrative that will evaluate

human rights, and specifically human dignity, to the ultimate level. We simply have too much power, and are too aware of human frailty, to continue unchanged.

The argument, as will be clear to readers of this newsletter, is based on a fundamental distinction made by Jacques Ellul between what he called "sacred" and what he called "holy". Both terms, for Ellul, refer to an ultimate reality that transcends our everyday existence. The "sacred" defines a specific community and describes the ultimate locus of purity, goodness and righteousness for that particular group. In general we think of the sacred as related to religious communities, but it can apply in Ellul's sense, to secular communities as well. As I understand it, a sacred narrative is any narrative that legitimizes the status quo of a group in ultimate terms and defines the final goal that all true members of that group wish, or should wish, to achieve. The problem is that the sacred legitimizes and sacralizes only its own community. By its very nature, it must define the other as outside the true community and so, at least potentially, as dangerous. In opposition to this, Ellul proposes what he calls the "holy," that is, that posture or narrative which constantly brings into question the present order and its existing structures. The holy defies the claim of absolute truth or absolute virtue. Thus while the sacred wants to establish the given structure as ultimate, the holy always wants to open new doors and reveal new possibilities.

How does this help us deal with the ethical challenge of twentieth century atrocities? The crux for Fasching, as we noted, is treatment of the stranger. Sacred narratives look at outsiders as parasites or demons, as people that need to be eliminated to pave the way to utopia. The post-Auschwitz and post-Hiroshima ethic must be a "holy" narrative that demands acceptance of the stranger, that is, of the other.

To be sure, this analysis of the (post-) modern situation makes a good deal of intuitive sense. There is little room for doubt that the Nazis demonized the Jews, that the Americans demonized the "Japs," that the Serbs, Croats and Muslims in the former Yugoslavia are busy demonizing each other. It is also clear, I am willing to concede, that unless the various peoples of the earth learn to accept the other we will produce more final solutions and so less futures. On the other hand, it appears to me that the strategy proposed here by Professor Fasching to deal with that is not as straightforward as it at first seems.

To begin with, I think there is a legitimate question about whether narrative is really the foundation of morality. Semioticians argue, quite persuasively for some, that stories, narratives, myths and the like are themselves already built on a prior substratum of convictions.

That is, we begin at base level with certain fundamental notions about good and bad, say, and then narrativize or put these into discourse so as to bring them into the individual conscious and then public realms. So on this view changing the narrative level is starting too high up the semiotic chain. If we hope to change an ethic, we must address ourselves first to the much deeper basic convictions and inchoate beliefs that provide structure to the logically subsequent act of narrative construction. The narrative that discursivizes these will then, on this theory, change on its own accord. I

understand that this is far from a settled matter, but the claim that one can change an ethic by working on the narrative level alone is not, I suggest, immediately self-evident

There is a second problem. It is that the notion that to be a good person one must accept the outsider is itself a particular narrative of certain liberal Western communities. Insofar as we succeed in making that narrative part of the narrative of others are we not by that very act (imperialistically) tinkering with or "improving" their narrative and so diminishing their otherness? Or to put matters slightly differently, ought I to accept an "other" who is other because he or she dwells within a narrative that demonizes, say, African-Americans? My point is that it would appear that the holy also has its binary opposite, just as does the sacred. In this case, one fundamental "other" for the holy is the sacred, that is, those narratives and their communities who refuse to acknowledge the holy. We can of course build a wonderful new holy narrative that includes Christian and Jew, Occidental and Oriental, believer and avowed secularist. But what do we do with those who refuse to participate in the bringing of this wonderful (to us) apocalypse and instead insist on constructing their own sacred (and nationalistic) utopias? Is our narrative to become a "super-narrative" by which other narratives are to be judged? That is, are we to be allowed to suppress their narratives and stop their Auschwitzes because of the demands of our narrative? If the answer is yes, as it seems to be, then I am not sure we have yet addressed adequately the full challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima. We may be setting up, albeit in disguise, little more than another sacred structure.

## Response to Peter Haas

by Darrell J. Fasching

I appreciate Peter Haas' comments on my book *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia?* (SUNY, 1993). We share a common commitment to trying to understand how ethics ought to be done, if it can be done, after Auschwitz

Peter Haas raises two salient objections to my argument in *The Ethical Challenge*.

The first objection is that narrative is not the really the foundation of morality and therefore striving to bring about a change at the narrative level starts at too superficial a level. Instead, he urges, we ought follow the lead of certain semioticians who suggest that narratives are rooted in more fundamental convictions or notions of good and evil which we then give expression to in narrative. Let me say that while I do not appeal to semiotic theory to make my case, I do not find myself in basic disagreement with Professor Haas' point. The only problem I have with it is that it is not a refutation of any position that I actually hold.

My argument in *The Ethical Challenge* is more complex than Professor Haas has suggested. In his own critique he recounts my argument that there are two types of

narrative, the sacred and the holy. He also notes that I hold that sacred narratives sacralize their own community and demonize the other while holy narratives counter such tendencies by sanctifying the other, that is by welcoming the stranger. In the biblical traditions, for example, to welcome the stranger is to welcome God or the messiah or at least a messenger of God (i.e., an angel). In observing this, Haas correctly notes that I argue that ethics must be rooted in narratives of hospitality to the stranger but he curiously fails to grasp the connection I make between religious experience, forms of community and narrative.

In fact, my argument is that narratives are rooted in more fundamental attitudes and that these attitudes are themselves shaped by religious experiences of either the sacred or the holy. Moreover, these experiences produce different kinds of social organizations. The sacred producing hierarchical and exclusionary societies, the holy producing iconoclastic subcultures within such sacred societies whose ethical function is to call them into question by welcoming the stranger and protecting the dignity of the stranger.

Hence, I do not place all the weight on narratives alone but rather take a sociology of knowledge perspective. There are no such things as free-floating narratives. Every narrative is embodied in a community structured for action in the world by its experiences of the sacred and/or the holy (all traditions are shaped by both at one time or another). Chapter seven of *The Ethical Challenge* contains an extended discussion of the relationship between social structures, religious experiences and the narrative imagination. Here I compare the church, the synagogue and the sangha, their internal relations to authority and their external relations to the authorities of the larger sacred society. I argue that while Eastern notions of dignity can be found in the sangha traditions, Western notions of human dignity and human rights are rooted in the legal and social process of incorporation which has created self-governing communities that protect human dignity from the encroachments of the state, and that the roots of incorporation go back to the special legal status granted to Judaism and the synagogue tradition by the Romans.

I end the chapter by arguing that a public policy ethic of human rights and human liberation requires critiquing the sacred stories and social structures of every society whose narrative imagination is shaped by the sacred instead of the holy. Here I show that the Book of Revelation has been interpreted by people like Hal Lindsey to demonize the enemy during the period of cold war nuclear policy and yet others like Jacques Ellul interpret *the same story* to teach just the opposite, namely salvation for the whole human race or God's universal hospitality. My final conclusion is that it is not the story in itself that is decisive (both use the same story) but the form of religious experience that shapes the narrative imagination of the one who interprets the story (e.g., Lindsey's sacral reading as opposed to Ellul's reading shaped by the experience of the holy).

Peter Haas' second objection likewise misses the point of my argument. In essence Haas argues that my characterization of holy narratives does not really escape the

dualism of the sacred which demonizes the other because, by embracing the narratives of the holy, which include the other I am forced to reject those who embrace sacred narratives that reject the other, and hence I am back in the dualistic worldview I sought to escape or transcend.

Again Haas misses the complexity of my argument. In chapter five I argued that the possibility of a new cross-cultural ethic of human dignity, human rights and human liberation had been demonstrated by the lives of Tolstoy, Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. — each of which profoundly influenced the ethical commitments of the next without any of them abandoning their own religious and cultural heritage. Gandhi remained a Hindu despite Tolstoy's influence and King remained a Christian despite Gandhi's profound influence on him. Yet the religious life of each was profoundly changed by that of the other, giving birth to a cross-cultural ethic of non-violent civil disobedience against all sacred societies through movements of liberation which seek to protect the dignity of those who were treated as strangers within such sacred orders.

The point is, that what we learn from the non-violent ethics of Gandhi and King is that you can oppose unjust sacred dualistic orders without falling into demonizing narratives. So Peter Haas's argument that "the holy also has its binary opposite, just as does the sacred" fails to convince me. It fails because even though an ethic of the holy does recognize some others as enemies it refuses to demonize such others. On the contrary, an ethic rooted in the holy requires that one love one's enemies and so does not fall back into the pattern of the sacred.

Finally, let me say that I have little patience for the argument that narratives of hospitality and human dignity (for after all, to offer hospitality to the stranger is to recognize the dignity of precisely the one who does not share my story) are exclusively Western and a form of liberal Western imperialism through which we are trying to impose our morality on other societies. First of all, in *The Ethical Challenge*, I show that Buddhism is the bearer of the tradition of hospitality to the stranger and human dignity in Asia (i.e., welcoming the outcast) in much the same way that Judaism is in the West. But secondly, wherever you go around the world it is not the persecuted and oppressed who are saying that the ethics of human dignity and human rights are a form of cultural imperialism. On the contrary, this is an argument you find promoted by those in power who are doing the persecuting and oppressing. I see no reason why I should be co-opted by that shoddy little game into legitimating the suffering imposed on my brothers and sisters in every culture around the world. Our ethical task is to unmask the bad faith of all such ideologies that legitimate violence under the guise of cultural diversity.

# Book Reviews

## *Entretiens avec Jacques Ellul*

by Patrick Chastenet. Paris: La Table Ronde, 1994. 209 pages.

Incisive interviews stretching over thirteen years join together to form this book, offering a vivid portrait of Jacques Ellul. Patrick Chastenet has done us another favor. Following his *Lire Ellul* (which gives the author's name as Patrick Troude-Chastenet; Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux<sup>1</sup>; reviewed by Gabriel Vahanian in issue #11 of *The Ellul Forum*, July 1993), and *Sur Jacques Ellul* (*L'Esprit du Temps*, 1994; to be reviewed in a forthcoming issue of *the Forum*), he has published this third Ellul volume, the title of which translates to *Interviews with Jacques Ellul* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1994; 209 pp.).

Readers will find an amazing variety of information in Chastenet's book. Ellul answers questions about everything from the way he organized his ten-hour work days (as efficiently as possible, but always so as to be available to people in urgent need of him) to his views on organ transplants (essentially against). He offers details of his friendship with Bernard Charbonneau, his role in the Personalist movement, his wife Yvette's contribution to his life and work, and his participation in the Spanish Civil War and the French Resistance.

Many readers have come to know Ellul through the other books based on interviews with him—*Perspectives on Our Age*, edited by William H. Vanderburg (trans. Joachim Neugroschel; Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corp., 1981), and *In Season Out of Season*, based on interviews by Madeleine Garrigou-Lagrange (trans. Lani K. Niles; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982; Fr.ed. 1981). Chastenet's work brings the reader up to date, to the end of Ellul's life, filling in some crucial blanks.

Chastenet now teaches at the two schools where he worked for years as Ellul's assistant: the University of Bordeaux and the Institute of Political Studies. Their long-term collaboration furnished Chastenet with detailed insight into Ellul's thought, particularly as it bears on politics. He knows when to request more information from Ellul, and how to underscore unresolved conflicts or areas of tension.

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<sup>1</sup> *Gilson on Trademarks* 1:03[4] (“The trademark owner ordinarily makes every effort to convert its mark into a motivating symbol and advertising tool that communicates the desirability of its product. Trademarks function through advertising to create a market for products, and consumers are induced to try a product through the created appeal of the advertised mark”); *McCarthy on Trademarks* 3:12 (Advertising); Restatement (Third), Unfair Competition, § 9, comment c (1995).



Like most series of interviews, this one at first appears to lack organization. Eventually a pattern becomes clear: the early chapters present influences on Ellul (in Chastenet's words; the interviews themselves begin in Chapter II), and his most closely held views and principles. Chapters IV through IX concentrate on biographical questions, in roughly chronological order. And the remaining chapters (X through XVI) explore Ellul's work, with an emphasis on science and art in Chapters XV and XVI. The book lacks chapter titles, but most chapters are preceded by an outline of their contents.

The usual influences on Ellul (Karl Marx, Soren Kierkegaard, Karl Barth, Charbonneau) are joined here by Alexis de Toqueville (who perhaps had a greater impact on Charbonneau than on Ellul), Walther Rathenau, and Oswald Spengler. Ellul explains his rejection of Martin Heidegger and other less well-known thinkers of the thirties. He openly avows his debt to his wife, who he says "humanized" him, teaching him to be open and receptive to other people.

Aside from insights into his life (his discovery of the Bible as a child, an unforgettable portrait of his mother-in-law, his preference for listening to Bach as he wrote on technique, and to Mozart when writing theology), the reader will find substantive contributions to Ellul's thought in this volume. He denies, for instance, any manichean tendencies, spells out what he believed to be a window of opportunity for controlling certain aspects of technique through micro computers, and emphasizes the importance of poetry in his life. Ellul's apparent approval of the transcripts of all but the last two of his interviews, and Chastenet's interviews with Charbonneau, add to the solidity of the book's contents.

Chastenet often transcribes Ellul's laughter for us, in addition to his words. On one memorable occasion, as the interviewer launches the first of a series of specific questions concerning Ellul's voting habits, his interview is thrown completely off track when Ellul informs him that he has never voted in his life!

Encountering Ellul in these pages resembles being struck by one's first reading of *The Presence of the Kingdom*. His views hang together extraordinarily well, and have considerable impact. This book provides a thoroughly useful guide to Ellul's life and thought, but also proves wonderfully readable. Readers new to Ellul will feel they get to know him well through the spontaneous, conversational style. Those who never met the man will find him thoroughly human and approachable as he reacts to events that took place after he wrote *The Technological Bluff* (trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990; Fr. ed. 1988).

Many questions about Ellul will puzzle us for some time to come, and perhaps permanently. Chastenet's book resolves many of our questions, and deserves an English translation as soon as possible. That edition should add a much-needed table of contents, chapter titles, an index, and a revised bibliography.

# *The American Hour: A Time of Reckoning and the Once and Future Role of Faith,*

by Os Guinness, New York: The Free Press, 1993. 458 pages, Index.

Reviewed by Donald Evans, Director of "The Ellul Institute, Riverside California.

The Inland Educational Foundation of California recently sponsored a three-day Chautauqua-style presentation on the theme "Democracy in America" in which scholars portrayed the life and works of historically significant voices. One of these was Alexis de Tocqueville who was brought to life by David Ly tel, a senior policy analyst at the White House Office of Science and Technology. The keenest analyses of America's democratic character rely on foreign eyes, whether those of de Tocqueville, Lord Bryce, or G. K. Chesterton. Perhaps just such a thought prompted H. L. Mencken to write, "Most of the men I respect are foreigners."

One is tempted to add to the short list of foreign social critics the name of Jacques Ellul, except for the fact that Ellul has never visited the United States. On the other hand, American culture has visited him and invaded Fiance where it has been studied and met with strong resistance as evidenced by the hard line taken by the government against the American entertainment industry in the recent GATT negotiations. Furthermore, Ellul has written extensively on the subject of freedom, which American democratic theory rightly holds so dear.<sup>2</sup> He typically argues that only Christians can introduce freedom into a technical civilization such as that of the USA.<sup>3</sup>

Ellul, the sociologist, is relevant to any discussion of democracy. Indeed, as Mark Noll remarks, "It is becoming increasingly difficult for historians of religion to maintain their prejudices against sociologists." Such prejudices are especially difficult to sustain in view of the popularity and brilliant analysis of *Habits of the Heart* by five scholars of whom three are sociologists.<sup>4</sup> In an earlier book Guinness has one of devil's minions contend, "Christians have no feel for the social dimension of faith, and no tool to analyze culture from the vantage point of ordinary experience...The majority of Christians avoid the social sciences like the plague, quite convinced that these disciplines are dangerously subversive, unsettling both to faith and morals. The present standing of the social science, the murkiness of its jargon and the open skepticism of its early days all contribute to this...After all, wasn't Marx a sociologist?"<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Jacques Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom*, trans, and edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976. Ellul's *The Subversion of Christianity* and *The New Demons* also make good companion reading with *The American Hour*.

<sup>3</sup> See Darrell J. Fasching's review of *Un Chretien pour Israel* in *The Ellul Studies Forum*, No. 4 (November 1989), 2-3.

<sup>4</sup> RobertN. Bellah, *et. al.*, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1986. Even here it is interesting to note that "habits of the heart" is a Tocquevillian expression for the mix of traits essential to our national character.

<sup>5</sup> Os Guinness, *The Gravedigger File: Papers on the Subversion of the Modern Church*, Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983.

Guinness analyzes America with the eyes of a British sociologist. Readers may be familiar with one or more of his books, *The Dust of Death*, *In Two Minds*, or *Living With Our Deepest Differences*. Born in China but raised and educated in England, he is a graduate of the Universities of London and Oxford, gaining his D. Phil, from the latter. Since 1984 the writer has lived in the United States. He held the post of executive director of the Williamsburg Charter Foundation and was a drafter of the Williamsburg Charter.

This modern-day de Tocqueville is concerned about our troubled times, for he believes they are not rightly understood. He writes to help Americans understand their moment in history. The idea for such an undertaking came to him at Oxford where clouds parted and his argument came in a way he could not shake. His friends upon reading a first draft ten years ago thought he was hysterical, so he set the manuscript aside for six years. The appearance at this time of his idea, that America's hour is upon her, is born not of hysteria but of a deep conviction.

A critical key to appreciating his argument is to know that he writes for a secular audience. Thus, *The American Hour* is void of religious clichés and jargon and in their place is the language of modern sociology and historical faith. His vision is of the constructive role of religion in American life. This Oxonian scholar seeks to convince others by writing as if his readers were founding fathers instead of following fundamentalists. The archbishop of New York comments that the book is "laced with pungent aphorisms that rarely become clichés...the entire text is worth careful study, but for those in a hurry, his aphorisms provide shortcuts to complex analyses of American culture."<sup>6</sup>

Guinness divides his argument in three segments with a question for each. How can the American democratic revolution be sustained? Where did the current crisis originate? What is the role of faith in the crisis? The three pivotal years in this century are 1917, 1945, and 1989. The latter being the year of the century, because the collapse of worldwide communism vindicates American democracy. The other two years and the periods following them are important to the political and economic order of things. America is however a cultural as well as a political and economic order. Does this cultural order nourish and promote freedom? According to Guinness, former beliefs, values, and ideas that once held Americans together are no longer binding. We are faced with a crisis of cultural authority that is religious and civic.

The crisis originated in the years since 1945. The '50s were years of build-up to the radical revolution of the '60s with its cultural rupture. The '70s were a decade of consolidation as the ethos of the '60s entered the main stream of America's consciousness. The next ten years saw cultural excesses and contradictions. The river of ideas that filled framers of this nation are now only a stream. The body of beliefs that motivated the Protestant Reformation are today weakened. Civic republicanism has practically

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<sup>6</sup> John Cardinal O'Connor, "Are We Headed for the Devil?," *The Wall Street Journal*, May 7, 1993, A12.

faded from the scene. The Enlightenment with its high view of man and reason is in as much trouble as the other two beliefs.

The American experiment is revolution. Winning it two hundred years ago; ordering it during the next hundred years or so; and sustaining it during the twentieth century. The question is how to sustain it, given that our former habits of the heart are disappearing in an increasingly diverse culture. The '90s are years for recognizing the crisis and dealing with sustainment issues. Among the issues, by whose values should America be ordered? What is the proper role of faith and faiths in political life?

Guinness sees four broad outcomes for faith. First, pluralistic faiths may be irrelevant. They would neither nourish culture nor be democratic. Or, faiths would matter but not in any significant ways. Third, they would be harmful and produce an "apple pie authoritarianism." Finally, faith communities could spark a spiritual revival and an American renaissance. In contrast, Ellul paints a dimmer picture for democracy. Authoritarian democracies are already upon us. Increasing technologies, propaganda, psychological techniques, and the systematization of all institutions attack the man of faith and democracy simultaneously. While Guinness says little about the nature of faith communities, Ellul is specific. Among their attributes, he says they should be "totally independent of the state, yet capable of opposing it, able to reject its pressures as well as its controls, and even its gifts."<sup>7</sup> Of the two prophetic voices, Ellul's reaches the heart without illusions.

In any event, faith for Guinness is crucial for the strength and continuity of the American experiment. In the final chapter, "The Eagle and the Sun," Guinness invokes a metaphor of the American eagle:

The bird that carries the bolts of Jupiter is not an owl or a bat that could navigate in the skeptics' darkness of a universe without center or meaning. It is not a carrion, whose sole orientation is toward its prey. No, the American symbol carries a truth kept alive even in an ancient fable. It signals the highest classical understanding of the required source of a nation's *gravitas*. Above all, it points beyond itself toward the biblical insistence on the empty nothingness of idols and on the gloiy (or weight) of God as the only "real reality" in all the universe.<sup>8</sup>

He then concludes with a Chesterton quotation from *What I Saw in America*, "...it was far back in the land of legends, where instincts find their true images, that the city went forth that freedom is an eagle, whose glory is gazing at the sun."<sup>9</sup> A master of quoteshmanship, Guinness like de Tocqueville is also a social critic who has plucked the tail feathers of the American eagle and observed the lightness of faith at the heart of America's experiment in democratic freedom. The poet Goethe understood the sociologist Guinness when the German penned, "Each one sees what he carries in his heart"

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<sup>7</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Political Illusion*, trans. by Konrad Kellen, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967, p. 222. See especially the last two chapters, "Depolitization and Tensions" and "Man and Democracy."

<sup>8</sup> p. 411.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

One does need to fly above it all in order to gain perspective, but poetic flights of faith and fancy aside, sooner or later it is necessary to come down-to-earth and carry out a program of action. Having given us an insightful analysis of our plight and convinced us that America faces a time of reckoning, Guinness offers little advice on how to put his conclusions into practice. Up there we can fly on the wings of his words, but down here we look for advice as to how to work out the pragmatic theme of our American character. Down here we face cultural forces that Guinness mentions only in passing, e.g., mass media, violence, domination by technique, multinational economies, and huge bureaucracies. In fairness to him note should be made that he is doing the practical thing through his work on the Williamsburg Charter Foundation, and his other books indicate his awareness of these cultural forces. What Os Guinness writes he writes well. Let's leave it to other authors and non-writers to bring his ideas to life.

I found my copy of *The American Hour* in a used bookstore in Georgetown, D.C. The cracking sound of turning pages convinced me that it had never been read. This seemed strange because of the handwritten inscription on the fly page that read, "To Irving Kristol and Gertrude Himmelfarb: With deep gratitude and appreciation for the wisdom and courage of all your public contributions. Os Guinness. 25 X 92." One would have to know more about the book's provenance before concluding that it had been placed on a stack for discard by two of our nation's critical thinkers. No matter, wise readers will appreciate the latest Os Guinness book, if a copy should providentially find its way into their hands.<sup>10</sup>

## Bulletin Board

### L'Association Jacques Ellul

During the past year, Ellul family members and colleagues have joined together for the purpose of preserving the collection of his writings and manuscripts, and making his work better known. The Association has now been legally registered in France, and welcomes new members. If you wish to join please send a check made payable to Joyce M. Hanks for \$ 15.00. Joyce is willing to register all American applicants and save us from the hassle of having to change our American dollars into French francs. Please send your check along with your name, address and phone number to: Joyce M Hanks, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Scranton, Scranton PA 18510-4646.

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<sup>10</sup> Audio tapes of Os Guinness speaking on *The American Hour* at a Christian College Coalition conference are available from the Thomas F. Staley Foundation, Larchmont, New York. Also, the National Association of Evangelicals has published the introduction from Guinness' book, "The Crisis of the Mandate of Heaven," in the form of two Occasional Papers.

## Meeting of the Jacques Ellul Association Held in Bordeaux

The Bordeaux-based Association Jacques Ellul met for its annual meeting on 19 November 1994. Deliberations included plans for the possible future disposition of Ellul's residence, which may be purchased from his heirs as a combination research center and gathering place. The Association will name a member to the Editorial Advisory Board of *The Ellul Forum*. Association members also had the opportunity to hear Bernard Rordorf speak on "The Silence of God and the Thought of Jacques Ellul."

E-mail Your Comments to The Ellul Forum

If you have suggestions for future issues or reactions to past issues or just questions you would like answered you can now reach the editor of *The Ellul Forum*, Darrell J. Fasching on e-mail. Send your comments to: fasching @luna.cas.usf.edu.

## Retrospective on Jacques Ellul at Annual SPT Meeting in April

David Lovekin reports that The Society for the Philosophy of Technology will include a session entitled: "Retrospective on Jacques Ellul: 1912-1994" at its annual meeting in April. The session is tentatively scheduled for the afternoon of April 27th. There will be three papers presented: *Ellul as a Philosopher* by Donald Phillip Veneue (Emory); *Ellul as Prophet* by Erik Nardenbaug (Georgia State); *Ellul as Philosopher of the Symbol* by David Lovekin (Hastings College). Michael Zimmerman (Tulane), will be the respondent

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and Technology**

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## About This Issue

The main theme of this issue is Women and Technology. My apologies for the lateness of this issue. Because of health problems, the author of our theme article for this issue, Susan Kray, from the Department of Communication at Indiana State University, was unable to provide the essay for publication in July of 1995. Consequently this July issue is finally being released along with our January 1996 issue. I wish thank Dr. Kray for her perseverance and our subscribers for their patience. Her essay on "Women and Technology: A(nother) Crisis of Representation" is iconoclasitic and thought-provoking. I think you will find that this issue was worth waiting for.

In addition to our theme essay, we have another Forum essay, contributed by Daryl J. Wennemann, from the University of Scranton, on Ellul's use of the term "Technique". Dr. Wennemann draws on the work of Rudolf Otto to argue persuasively that for Ellul, "Technique," like "the sacred," is not a concept but an "ideogram." Finally, you will find in our book review section, reviews of two recent books that deal with women and technology.



*Darrell J. Fasching, Editor*

## **The Coming of *The Coming of the Millennium***

Darrell Fasching's new book, *The Coming of the Millennium: Good News for the Whole Human Race* will be published by Trinity Press International this spring. The book dedication reads: "In memory of Jacques Ellul, 1912 - 1994, who taught me to understand that "evangelical theology" means good news for the whole human race." The book is an ethical critique of the tradition of evangelism of the passing millennium which focused on "conquering the world for Christ" — and was prone to violence, especially through the abuse of apocalyptic thought by figures such as Hal Lindsey. It argues that Ellul's understanding of the gospel as a message of universal salvation provides a non-violent alternative for the coming millennium — one in which evangelism is the proclamation of the good news of God's hospitality to the whole human race. It is a message for a new millennium of pluralistic global interdependence in a technological civilization. The book is scheduled for release in April of 1996.

# Forum: Women and Technology

## Women and Technology: A(nother) Crisis of Representation

by Susan Kray Department of Communication, Indiana State University

A major debate in America over the last several decades has centered on how different women really are or should be from men (MacKinnon 1987; Tavris 1992), particularly with regard to work. The debate, by its very existence, implicitly defines men as the norm and women as deviant. We ask what protections, restrictions, or special training should or should not apply to women, the different ones. We do not commonly ponder how men deviate from a normative female standard and then ask what protections, restrictions, or special training should apply to men.

It is interesting that feminists generally build on precisely this framework. Many make feminism the politics of difference—from men. Their inquiries are suffused with a politics of identity, as, indeed, are men's studies of the relationship between men and technology (Wylie 1991:21). Many feminists, seeking to understand women's nature, as distinguished from men's, focus on women's supposed commitment to nurturing and to the organic world, as distinguished from men's supposed commitment to power and technology. Many people, in whichever camp, see men as "task-oriented," while women are "people-oriented." Others deny that women are really different in any innate way—not that men are really different. Some contend that women are innately different but that this difference is all to the good; we are good deviants, so to speak.

One result is that as Carol Tavris (1992:57-92) points out Carol Gilligan's (1982) work on differences in the moral reasoning of men and women has found a home with two very different groups in the struggle over the workplace. Those wanting to limit women's opportunities take Gilligan's research as proof that women care more about people's feelings than about getting a job done. On the other hand, many women, feminist and otherwise, take Gilligan's work as proof that women are morally superior to men, one implication being that women are more fit for work that affects people. Interestingly, we > may add that Gilligan herself stands squarely in the traditional masculine-oriented framework that sets men as a standard. In calling her book *In A Different Voice*, she did not mean that men were different. The "different" voice for which she argues belongs to women.

Clearly, people disagree on what the differences are between women and men with respect to technology, but difference apparently we must have. The differences, more-

over, must be hierarchical. Writing about science and technology, Haraway (1991:80) observes that "...the creation of difference...plagues 'Western' knowledge; it is the patriarchal voice in the production of discourse that can name only by subordinating within legitimate lineages." Again, women are the ones who are different. Again, technology and work are a primary locus of difference. So is science.

Feminist theorists have pointed out that in Western cultures, male scientists and technologists have identified women and femaleness with Nature, as opposed to the masculinity of culture, technology, and science. Natural philosophers and scientists have represented the male mind as a masculine force "penetrating" Nature's (female) secrets. On the other hand, authors of Western novels and producers of Western movies have typically represented the American frontier as a place where the male hero is close to nature, to savagery, and to simple technologies, while (white) women represent civilization (Fiedler 1982/1966). Men's work is having adventures in the wilderness; women's work is maintaining the routines that support civilization. One might fairly conclude that difference, not its details, is the name of the game.

## How It All Started-Maybe

When feminists talk about technology, they often conform in astonishing degree to the traditional views of popular culture, social science, and Bible-oriented religions (see Genesis 4:21,22). All of these have claimed at one time or another that culture began when men started using their male intellects to work difficult substances— wood, stone, bone, and metal—into great inventions. Recalcitrant materials constitute an important part of the story, underlying as they do a key part of the myth, namely the determination and inventiveness of Man that made culture possible. Man is a tool-making, weaponthrowing, task-oriented, problem-solving, technologically active creature. Men are the human race's chief designers, makers, distributors, and users of tools.

It is a commonplace observation that in fact women provide the emotional and household environment in which men can make all that happen. Women are also responsible for providing counterbalances and supplements. To rationality, they have a duty to oppose tenderness and intuition. To balance men's commercial and professional orientations, women have a duty to sustain domesticity.

A surprising number of women, including many feminists, agree with an equally surprising number of men that men are by nature (or by inevitable result of their early socialization) in charge of destructive technologies and of going forth into the world to build, destroy, *kill*, invade, enslave, and run impersonal, cruel bureaucracies undergirded by an unfeeling obsession with men's own rational processes. Women are by nature (or by inevitable result of their apparently universal socialization as child-care workers) in charge of staying home doing the low-tech work that sustains life, intimacy, honesty, and households. Men's roles as killers and bureaucrats dovetail nicely

with their seemingly greater technological aptitude. Women's task of generating human warmth dovetails nicely with their supposed refusal to be fascinated by technology.

This view of male and female human nature is summarized, with remarkable fidelity to many scholarly accounts, in the movie *2001: A Space Odyssey* (directed by Stanley Kubrick in 1968). In the opening sequence, aptly titled "The Dawn of Man," a population of males invents the first weapon. Wielding a leg bone from an animal skeleton and vocalizing enthusiastically, they discover how to kill a tapir, portrayed as an innocuous, good-natured, non-vocal herbivore. Next, they bludgeon other anthropoids. Then they evolve into ill-tempered, vocal, male carnivores. At the end of the sequence, one of their furry, male descendants commits the first murder. Then, executing a clumsy dance of anthropoid triumph, he throws into the air the murder weapon, a bone that mutates on screen into an orbiting space station.

Progress is the ape-man's ultimate product, once he gets his weapon-using, meat-eating, neighbor-murdering start. Aggression, hunting, technology, vocalizing, space-bound science, work, and war are thus woven into one masculine narrative.

Where is Woman while Man is evolving? In the "Dawn of Man" sequence of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, we glimpse females only once, lying silent (and non-vocal, like the tapirs) on their backs inside a cave cuddling their young. Progress is not their most important product. They are, in fact plausible progenitors for the woman in the second sequence, in the orbiting space station. Uniformed and silent she serves lunch to a traveling man.

Man the Hunter, so dramatically portrayed in "The Dawn of Man," was a scholars' invention (Haraway 1991:86). As such, it met the need of physical anthropologists to explain why early hominid remains were found with small brain cases and no tools amidst piles of cracked animal bones (Willoughby 1991). How could such beings give rise to us, a technological species? To save the evolutionary narrative and the received wisdom that Man is best defined as the tool-using animal par excellence, the technological animal, Raymond Dart postulated that hunting was a uniquely social activity that launched our apparently dullard, undersized, non-technological hominid ancestors on the evolutionary path that led to the invention of technology, speech, and the development of human intellect.

C.K. Brain (1981) later determined that carnivores, not hominids, had broken these bones, but Man the Hunter had already launched an apparently immortal career. He is still assumed as a factor in many accounts of human nature. The maleness of the Hunter slipped into the narrative as an unexamined, and logically unnecessary, assumption, but logical or not, it has remained ever since, in both scholarly and popular versions. It is consistent, after all, with our cultural expectations. Man the Hunter has therefore had both academic and popular advocates.

"The 'man the hunter' hypothesis of the 1960s" was, according to Haraway (1991:86), the "best known product of practice in the [anthropologist Sherwood] Washburn [academic] patriline." This hypothesis, "pre-eminently about male ways of life as the motors

of the human past and future, was grounded in psychiatry, primatology, and ethnographies of "modern hunter-gatherers" (1991:90).

Meanwhile, Robert Ardrey's *African Genesis* (1963), based on the same model, was setting the tone for popular understanding of human origins (Willoughby 1991:284) in the killer hominid household and its hunting-camp technology. Ardrey is explicit and emphatic: his version of our "original nature" and "our ancestral killer ape" define the future of the human race. Humans did not invent weapons; rather, we inherited them from our ape ancestors in a process that shaped human evolution for all time. The weapon "had fathered man" (1963:29) in the primal, manly process of death-dealing that constrains us and all our posterity. Notice that tools are implicitly defined as weapons of attack and the weapon is gendered, as are the process (fathering) and its human product (man). And since "No child of ours, born in the middle twentieth century, can differ at birth in significant measure from the earliest of *Homo sapiens*" (1963:12), therefore, we can never truly transcend that early, violent start. Hence, "The problem of man's original nature imposes itself on any human solution" (1963:13).

In Haraway's words (1991:39), "The past sets the rules for possible futures in the...sense of showing us a biology created in conditions supposedly favouring aggressive male roles [and] female dependence." Even among people who are not sure the human species evolved from a predecessor species, Ardrey's scenario of Man the born killer has become naturalized as inescapable evidence about the real nature of human nature.

The story was modified in 1976, when anthropologists Tanner and Zihlman added prehistoric female gathering to prehistoric male hunting, giving the technological human race mothers as well as fathers. They saw women's as well as men's technology as a primary engine of human evolution, attributing "the transition from a primate ancestry to the emergent human species" to "connections among savanna living, technology, diet, social organization, and selective processes" (1976:586). Speaking of food production and the change from hunter-gatherer modes to farming, Bolen (1991:403a) claims that

Engendering prehistory creates gendered social interaction which provides a strong basis for [understanding] cultural transformation [and] leads to arguments that women and their activities create or define the Neolithic.

Constructing alternative scenarios and reasoning from ethnographic and primatological work (some of the latter showing that females are heavier consumers of meat and insects than are males [Zihlman 1991:6-7]), anthropologists have largely abandoned the Man-as-Hunter model of human origins, but the hairy, hoary old Hunter with his killing technology still lurks in popular culture. For example, the Men's Movement attempts to ground modern men's self-respect and spiritual fulfillment in an innate, ineradicable male identification with hunting, wilderness, aggressiveness, and technologies of death. With little argument or explanation, Man the Hunter becomes Man the Warrior. One recent Men's Movement event (Indianapolis, October 1995) teaches men how to be men through "The New Warrior Training Adventure." Civil War reenactments supported

by masses of equipment available through specialized catalogs continue to be popular in the South and elsewhere.

The corollary to nearly every manifestation of Man the Hunter/Man the Warrior, whether scholarly or popular, is that women constitute a non-hunter, non-warrior support team. Both traditional and feminist thinkers seem committed to playing down the capacity of women to fight and kill. Prehistoric Woman hangs around base camp tending tots and cooking food in clay pots. Contemporary women are invited, along with children, to witness the New Warrior Graduation Celebration at a midwestern church. A skilled horsewoman and writer on Civil War topics is denied participation in an Alabama reenactment of the War between the States (Wise, personal communication, 1993), because "no women fought in that war," despite clear evidence that women did fight in that war. Women and girls of the Italian resistance in World War II were

...successful precisely because girls were under less suspicion...it wasn't regarded as probable or possible that a woman could shoot... Naturally the Germans didn't think that a woman could have carried a bomb, so this became the women's task...But in many instances women were not given arms because men believed that they were more emotional and less capable of making decisions (Saywell, 1986:82).

Advocates of Man the Hunter fail to describe women as descendants of killer apes who therefore possess a primal need to kill. One would be hard put to find Warrior Woman Weekends or even egalitarian we-were-all-primal-killer events both for men and women. Women, it seems, fail to find spiritual fulfillment by getting out there in the woods to get in touch with their hunter or warrior past. They are not descendants of their fathers or the ape-weapon that fathered them.

Feminist theorists have pointed out that cultures tend to treat the women's side of things in terms of "lack" or absence. Where women and men differ, one asks what is missing in the women. Feminist scholars themselves have inadvertently followed this same habit of asking what women lack. Faced with the need to rewrite a biased male narrative about the relationship of the human species to its technologies, feminists have, by and large, not written women into the scenarios of killing and weaponry, but have rather omitted killing and weaponry in descriptions of women's lives and to downplay women's contributions to complex technologies. Aggression and the killer instinct are treated as missing in women. Feminists have also tended to follow the traditional conflation of tools with weaponry. If women do not fight and kill, they do not use complex technologies, either.

Although Tanner and Zihlman and others (see Dahlberg, 1981) challenge the notion of Man the Hunter and offer a counterbalancing view of prehistoric Woman as a Forager, they draw few conclusions about implications for modern life, other than the familiar notion of women feeding their families. For all the emphasis on the aggression-ridden consequences of Man's Hunter/Warrior origins, the image of Woman the Forager is innocent of any such associations. Nothing she did is invoked to explain any of humankind's vile practices. Even though humanity's main activity has been getting food

(Dahlberg 1981) and even though women are thought to have provided some eighty per cent, perhaps, of that food, their methods and tools have no bearing on anything objectionable in human life today.

One does not, for example, invoke the image of Woman the Forager to explain human communities' habit of overrunning other communities' habitations and collecting their worldly goods. One does not hear suggestions that Woman, the ancestral Forager, could ultimately be behind the current Serb expropriation of Bosnian Muslim property or, fifty years ago, in the wake of Nazi deportations, Gentiles' appropriations of the homes and property of their abducted Jewish neighbors. Women have, indeed, participated directly in slaughter and plunder throughout history (a recent example is the Rwandan massacres), but this kind of hands-on work experience is seldom inscribed in Woman the Forager's resume. For feminists, as for traditional male thinkers, when it comes to evil-doing, we are, it seems, the descendants of our fathers only and not of our mothers.

Whether Ardrey's chain of events, in which the "weapon fathered Man," ever occurred may well be irrelevant. Biologists, after all, insist on the plasticity of human nature. One would infer that even *if we were* descended from genocidal maniacs, we might theoretically craft gentle communities whose worst adversarial tactics might stop, say, at name-calling. However, if we are not genetically constrained by hunter, killer-ape origins, we are certainly limited by popular beliefs about our origins.

These beliefs entail important political consequences. To pick but one example: How can one expect American men to turn in their guns when every man in the country is descended from killer apes and has a primal, ineradicable drive to hunt? We might argue, therefore, that scholars would do better to critique these myths than to promulgate them. As Whelan (1991:358) points out,

It is important to problematize the origins of gender systems [because of] the ideological power that reconstructions of the past have for the present (Haraway 1986; Fedigan 1986). The popular reduction of "gender" to a universal division of labor where men hunt and women gather and give birth has tremendous ideological power in the present. Reconstructing the gender of our distant hominid ancestors so that it mirrors current gender roles and relations is a means of justifying present social and economic conditions.

Yet, entire areas of relevant scholarship, including archaeology, the "science of technology" (Leone 1973:125-150), are, as of 1995, still mired in confusion about male and female human nature. For many scholars, as for artists and for popular culture, man's weapon-ridden past and its modern technological results define who humans are in the universe, not only as products of evolution but as spiritual beings in a cosmos with meaning.

As Noble (1993) describes the development of these ideas, Western philosophical and clerical (church) culture gave rise to a notion of the transcendent male intellectual enterprise. This notion was directly inherited by Western science and then adapted for technological enterprises. For example, space-era mythology is entranced with rockets and space stations, developed first by the Nazi war-machine, then, after the World War

II, by its personnel imported to USSR and America. Aerospace mythology, Noble correctly points out, repeatedly praises "man's vision" and "his indomitable human spirit," using a vocabulary of transcendence to describe the almost entirely male province of aerospace technology.

Moreover, we may note, men's favorite widgets tend to have moving parts. Bows and arrows, pulleys, wheels, cranks, potters' wheels, looms, sports cars, atom bombs, and hypertext give rise to physics lessons and philosophy. These disciplines are among the most "transcendent" of Western Man's self-defining enterprises and both, by the way, remain largely male preserves. Women, on the other hand, seem everywhere and at all times to work with the simpler technologies and more malleable materials. If men's technology transcends tire human condition, women's undergirds it Women's technologies do not define a transcendent human spirit in the universe. At most they define women in work places, especially the home.

## **Women and Public and Private Space**

The contrast between indoors and outdoors or between private space and public space seems to be an inextricable part of the theoretical package. While men's inventions enlivened the march of centuries, guess who lurked in caves, tents, and houses, rendering support services? Women, house bound in their private spaces, do not hammer resistant materials into great inventions. Instead, they have whiled away the millennia indoors, cooking, cleaning, spinning, and cradle-rocking, repetitively hand-processing "materials that are soft and pliable" (Rice 1991:436), such as food, textiles, and hand-worked clay vessels. Anthropologists, until recently, and archeologists even today, have thought along the same lines as the historians whom Berenice Carroll (1976:xi) critiqued nearly two decades ago. For many scholars, it seems, women live in the conceptual Land That Time Forgot

[Most women throughout history]...are conceived to have lived out their lives in a limited number of stereotypic roles, essentially changeless over time and therefore irrelevant to the "intellectually interesting" questions of historical change.

Certainly, some feminist scholars have challenged the myths that seem to place women under eternal, universal house arrest in "private space." AsConkey and Spector point out (1984:3),

...feminist anthropology quickly came to question the assumption of a distinct 'private\* or domestic sphere, which informed much early research (i.e. as that which had been left out of account by an androcentric focus on the public domain). In a compelling auto-critique, Rosaldo (1980) shows how a sharp distinction of public from private embodies the highly artificial, and local, precepts of 19th century Victorian patriarchal culture."

In fact, if spaces supposed to be domestic, private, and female have any boundaries at all, these often turn out to be vague and permeable. Hauptman (pers. comm. 1992), referring to tire rural, extended households of Babylonia and Israel described



in the Talmud, points out that there was no such thing as purely "private" space; the homestead was "permeable", with crafts people, peddlers, travelers, servants, friends, and family members continually coming and going. The same might be said of the self-sufficient households of the ante-bellum American South (Fox-Genovese, 1988).

The spaces of modern life, on the other hand, tend to increasing privatization and commercialization for both women and men. In another context, Ellul (1964:321) implicitly attacked the dichotomy between male public space and female private space when he observed that technical civilization encapsulates "man" in tiny, private, unhealthy cells removed from nature. "Man" is imprisoned in "a twelve-by-twelve closet opening out on an anonymous world of city streets." This is a very different picture from the traditional differentiation of "public" man from "private" woman. Indeed, the thirty years since Ellul made that observation have seen men crowded out of the public sphere by the very factors he identified in 1964: "labor... [that] stretch[es the worker] to the limit of his resistance, like a steel cable which may break at any moment" (1964:320). Such work leaves a man little energy, volition, or time for public life. Women, in turn, have been pushed by economic necessity out of the home into the same realm of wage-earning work that both encapsulates men and stretches them to their limits.

Many middle-class women who once had the luxury of staying home to care for their families, if they chose, have now had to join the wage-earning work force, just as many working-class women always have had to do, like it or not. However, working among strangers outside the home does not make women public beings. As with men, that work enforces the very conditions that deprive women of opportunity to participate in public life.

Instead, women, it is now said, carry a double burden—some might call it triple—of housework, dependent care, and wage-earning work. Wives have more work hours and fewer leisure hours than do husbands. Women are also said to earn about seventy cents for every dollar that men make. To put that another way, we might say that women have to work longer and harder than men, often with more rudimentary technologies, to earn the same pay—and fewer toys.

Moreover, with the "downsizing" of work forces, fewer women are doing more of the work. A recent news segment claims that wage-earning women, because they are overworked in their jobs, are bearing an increasing number of premature babies. One poignant result is that pediatric nurses work such long, strenuous shifts taking care of other women's newborns that their own pregnancies, increasingly, terminate early under the stress. Meanwhile, in the words of spokesmen of a non-profit public-policy organization called "Redefining Progress,"

...a monetized service sector takes [the] place [of declining families and communities]...Parenting becomes child care, visits on the porch become psychiatry and VCRs, the watchful eyes of neighbors become alarm systems and police officers, the kitchen table becomes MacDonaldis...(Cobb, Halstead, and Rowe, 1995:67).

They might add that women's unpaid work in personal relationships with children and other family members, as it is monetized, is perforce technologized, as cost-effective solutions substitute for the costly presence of adult women in the home. A certain amount of child care, even, is accomplished by machinery (notably television, computers, and electronic games) that fixes children's attention on itself and keeps them relatively immobilized. A similar observation might be made of "elder care." Every place becomes the workplace; no place is truly "public" and private life shrinks to almost nothing.

With women as well as men under so many pressures in both the private and the public spheres, they are pushed into the interstices of their own lives at work and at home. The public arena, now professionalized and filtered through technological media, resounds with complaints about the "breakdown of the family" on the one hand and the breakdown of work life on the other, as jobs are consolidated or exported, but the paid professionals in charge of public life rarely link the two breakdowns. Surely women spend less time in their unpaid workplaces at home precisely because they are shouldering larger burdens in paid workplaces. And through it all, the scholarly myth of private, female, nurturing, low-tech space still underlies much of scholarly thinking about gender and technology.

What is even more amazing is that there are very few critiques of the myths prevalent in the "science of technology," archaeology, that science in which are rooted many of our self-concepts as a species. What one does find is a body of generalized feminist critiques of archaeological practice.

## Women and The "Science of Technology"

Archeology, as we have seen, has been aptly termed "the science of technology" (Leone 1973). Archaeology, more than any other traditional branch of social science inquiry, is compelled, by the nature of its evidence, to focus largely on technology. It "uses material culture as its data" (Bolen 1991:403a). Objects that survive the millennia and come into the hands of archaeologists are almost always made of durable substances, such as stone, clay, or bronze. Specific technologies, involving stone tools, and later metal, were required to work them into artifacts. Many early tools and utensils, themselves made of the hardest available materials, have survived to be looked at, x-rayed, and tested for residues of flesh, food, and fiber. Examples include arrow heads, mortars and pestles, metates (grinding stones—the "Stone Age Cuisinart," in Rice's<sup>1</sup> formulation), olive presses, fired pottery, loom weights, and kilns.

The catch, and the open secret that few talk about, is that nobody has direct evidence as to who made ancient tools or weapons, or used or distributed them. Pre-historic tools do not come marked with demographic data about these people. Nobody knows their gender, age, health, or other demographic parameters.

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<sup>1</sup> E.g., Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*. Trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerd-

However, despite the ambiguity of the evidence and despite the evolution of feminist perspectives in a number of scholarly disciplines, archaeologists still attempt to root the whole system of gender-allocated technologies in the same supposedly immutable core of human nature that popular culture affirms. The archaeological literature has barely begun to problematize gender (Conkey and Spector 1984; Walde and Willows 1991; Gero and Conkey 1991, Brown 1993). It is quite common for archaeologists to assume that early humanity divided technological work the same way popular culture says we do. Where the evidence is missing, feminist analysis has shown, archaeologists often fill in the blanks by drawing on our common cultural imagination.

Archaeologists, by working with these traditional concepts, legitimate them. When these concepts then filter back into popular culture, they arrive emblazoned with scientific credentials. That is, intentionally or not, archaeology and the related disciplines have "substantiated a set of culture-specific beliefs about the meaning of masculine and feminine, about the capabilities of men and women, about their power relations, and about their appropriate roles in society" (Conkey and Spector 1984:1).

Archaeology, the discipline entrusted with explicating the ancient past, has resisted, probably more than any other social science, meeting the feminist challenge. As a discipline, it offers an object lesson to any who think feminist theory has a manifest destiny to permeate all the social sciences and humanities.

It is interesting to trace the precise mechanisms through which these "scientists of technology" validate tradition and thereby lend themselves to political agendas and even party politics (one thinks particularly of "family values" and concepts of women's vs. men's work). One way to use the imagined past to define tire present and the future is to naively conflate past and present. Archaeologists today are in the same situation in which Carroll found historians, contemplating timeless, theoretically uninteresting women. Of course, archaeologists generally try to avoid projecting modern practices, of say, present-day nomads or subsistence fanners, back into the past. They know that a modern Bedouin is not an ancient Israelite. There is one glaring exception to this circumspection, however: "Although archaeologists are generally cautious about simplistic ethnographic analogies, this has not been true with regard to the subject of gender" (Conkey and Spector, 1984:3).

The violations of scientific procedure are so persistent and so blatant that to this point, most of the discussions about gender in the archaeological literature seem to consist of feminists' comments on the lack of discussion. Nineteen eight-four was a little late for an entire discipline to be new to the theorization of gender, but that is when Conkey and Spector called for examining "the way archeologists perpetuate gender stereotypes" (p. 28) in a thirty-eight-page article soberly titled "Archeology and the Study of Gender." It seems that as of 1984, the entire discipline was in bad epistemological trouble.

We know of no archaeological work in which an author explicitly claims that we can know about gender in the past as observed through the archaeological record who

then proceeds to demonstrate that knowledge or to describe how we can know...[but] the archaeological literature...is permeated with assumptions, assertions, and statements of "fact" about gender (1984:2).

Seven years after Conkey and Spector's challenge—seven lean years by the look of it—archaeologist Wylie (1991a), still wondering when it's all going to happen, gives her article the rather plaintive, questioning title: "Gender Theory and the Archeological Record: Why Is There No Archeology of Gender?" Another article of hers the same year features a section with the equally plaintive title, "Why Not Before Now?: Critical Analysis" (1991b). In case archeologists were not getting the point, Wylie registered the complaint that

Unacknowledged and unsubstantiated, indeed, manifestly untenable assumptions about gender-assumptions which presume the universality of the sexual division of labour, gender dimorphism, and commodification of sexuality typical in our own contexts—compromise the credibility of otherwise good archeology. (Wylie 1991 b:18).

Archeology harbors these epistemological ills, acknowledges their existence, then as Eisner (1991:352) points out, does business as usual. In academe as elsewhere, people may acknowledge a problem, yet make no progress toward solving it. Instead, the discussion of non-progress begins ever anew, only to flag anew. Eisner cautions that,

Archeological literature traditionally contains the bias that males were the major protagonists in humanity's past, with women having a secondary or incidental role. While many prehistorians would have little trouble with this contention, their interest tends to fade after agreeing that such a bias exists...the identification and correction of biases in the data is [neglected]

Two years later, nothing seems to have changed. We have still another article with yet another plaintive, questioning title: Brown's (1993) "Feminist Research in Archaeology: What Does It Mean? Why Is It Taking So Long?" Nor is the outlook promising as of 1996. "About half my students are women," according to Syro-Palestinian archaeologist William G. Dever, "but they are doing exactly the same kind of work the men are doing." And that work is characterized neither by bias-consciousness nor by theorizations of gender.

Three common archaeological practices demonstrate the lack of a scientific method in investigating gender and technology. First is the conflation of past with present, already discussed. Second is the practice of guessing, on the basis of paintings and sculptures, who did what kind of technological work, using what tools. Critiques of this method have been few and relatively recent. Speaking of a "dig" investigating Neolithic Europe, Hodder, in 1991, argues against his own prior conclusions and the assumptions behind them:

The data did not warrant detailed discussion of the actual roles of men and women. While women associated symbolically with houses, hearths and pottery, it remained possible that men played a dominant role in houses, in cooking, and in making and

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mans, 1990), ch. 18, "Advertising." See p. 349.

using pottery. Similarly the symbolic association between men and hunting does not mean that in practice women did not hunt (p. 11).

Even if a culture has left us a painting or a sculpture of someone in the act of hunting or weaving or cooking, we are not on sure ground. As Hodder (1991:13) reasonably reminds us, artists tend to show men doing the things the culture expects men to do, and women doing things women are expected to do.

"Cultural representations of gender rarely accurately represent male-female relations, men's and women's activities, or men's and women's contributions in any given society."

A third methodological problem is "the tendency to combine gender with technology" (Rice 1991:440). For example, some assume, instead of proving, that the scheme sometimes found in which "females define a household mode of production and males with potter's wheels and kilns define workshops" can be generalized across all cultures. A fourth methodological problem is that when archaeologists find objects buried near skeletons, they often simply guess who used which tools or utensils. In other words, if a woman is buried with a soup spoon, one would infer that her job in life was to cook soup. There are three catches here. One is that skeletons cannot always be sex-typed. Another is that goods are often assigned gender associations through a series of questionable assumptions or circular reasoning, or both. A third is that the concept of "job" or "occupation" may be improperly projected onto other cultures.

Of course, in the best case, we can learn from bones about the sex of an individual and "(N)utrition, movement and load-bearing in locomotion, pregnancy and lactation in females, injury, and disease" (Morbeck 1991:40). Having determined whether the body belonged to a man or a woman, we might then draw inferences about the objects associated with the skeleton. Here is a man with a sword; he must have been a soldier. Here is a woman with a cooking pot; she must have been a housewife. But alas! assigning sex to skeletal remains may be difficult or impossible because

The most reliable skeletal features in modern humans that distinguish females from males are in the pelvis (St. Hoyme and Iscan 1989). However, although sex characters usually are evident, average species-typical features can be obscured and sex of individuals misidentified. Baskerville (1989), for example, shows that undernutrition and depressed growth rates produce similar pelvic shape in females and males... The difficulties of separating the products of growth and maturation (modeling) and remodeling in adults as related to hormones, including estrogen, and the biomechanics of movement and load-bearing suggest that we still must be careful in our storytelling about explanations of pelvic variation in humans and inferred life history characters (Morbeck 1991:40).

Moreover, in over-excavated and often looted sites such as ancient Israel, it is rare to find a complete skeleton, largely because, for years, archaeologists, both professional and amateur, "tossed bones aside" as uninteresting (Dever, pers. comm. 1995). However, ambiguous physiological evidence does not stop the determined archeologist. In reviewing excavation reports on a fourth century Roman burial site in Belgium, Eisner (1991:352-7) discovered that the researchers had made several unwarranted assump-

tions. First, they assumed that grave goods associated with certain Roman skeletons represented gendered technologies. Second, they assumed that the associations were evidence as to the work (or recreations) in which the buried person had engaged during life. Third, they assumed that the technologies could tell them about the sex of the skeleton *and* that the skeletons could tell them about the gender-associations of the technologies! Eisner charges that in such studies,

The females will often be considered those with finer, smaller bones, determining factors which are obviously relative. In burials which cannot be sexed from skeletal remains, and where gender-defined grave goods are associated with the bodies, archaeologists may resort to sexing on the basis of types of goods.

This means, of course that the very parameter needing investigation—whether an object is indeed gender-specific—is assumed, while researchers use supposedly masculine or feminine artifacts as independent variables. The inquiry is defined out of existence. Eisner found that the report had judged skeletons to be female if they were discovered near jewelry, combs, hairpins, and dice, while male skeletons were thought to be those buried with knives, buckles, clasps and tools. However, 'there is no reason,' Eisner points out, "why males could not have used...combs, rings, and gaming pieces. Women could have used many of the iron *uteqsils* which were reputedly part of the male goods" (Eisner 1991:354).

In fact, through statistical analysis, she determined that the graves in question belonged, indeed, to two categories, but these were not male and female. Rather they were military (males only) vs. non-military (males and females), with allegedly "female" objects in several "male" graves. The archaeologists who did the study, however, had followed common practices of explaining away the evidence. They had suggested, for example, that knives or belt buckles buried with females represented gifts from males, or perhaps family heirlooms. A properly theorized archeology of gender and technology will, clearly, not be a simple achievement

Things are even more complicated than these critiques imply. Even if we could somehow discover what some man or some woman was doing in real life, if we could, say, use science-fictional devices to snap pictures of a prehistoric killer with her hand still on the dagger or a potter with her hand on the half-formed pot, we still would not understand the relation of that action to people's work lives. Rice (1991:440b) suggests that the concept of an "occupation" may itself reflect an attempt "to squeeze occupational organizations of traditional societies into modern European *frameworks*," forcing an identification of each person with precisely one occupation, highlighting activities that are part of the money economy, and diminishing or entirely missing "the role of women in economic activity of any sort" (1991:440a).

Zihlman (1991:6) warns against taking "an isolated behavior...out of its context" In studying living populations of human beings or closely related animals, physical anthropologists investigate not merely the fact that somebody sometimes does something, but also how often, with what level of skill, and with what relation to other elements of social life. Zihlman draws on studies about non-human primates (chimpanzees) and

women gatherers to find that in the observed populations, females use tools more often in food-gathering than do males, may spend more of their time acquiring and eating food than do males (due to the demands of pregnancy and lactation), are "active in foraging, collecting, processing and distributing food to other group members" (citing Lee, 1968-1969) and "live and work in a context with reproductive, social and ritualistic functions...[with] multidimensional lives...integrated into a wider society." Nor can we take one gender out of its context

True gender-conscious analysis considers the relations and inter-relations of females and males and the recognized genders of a society, commanding more than simply envisioning women within prehistoric contexts.

[Such analysis] relies on social organization as a primary motivating factor in past culture systems. It incorporates gender as an active agency contributing to the production of the archaeological record, as gender relations are involved in and constitute all aspects of human society as we understand it (Bolen 1991:400).

However, even if we could observe and quantify behavior in its social world, we would still not know what it meant How did the activity fit into the conceptual world and the emotional environment in which it took place? Even if we refer to indisputably female activities such as gestating, bearing, and nursing, we still do not know what they meant, nor can we trace changes in meaning, especially for preliterate societies.

Information may be hard to get and harder to interpret even when people are available for interview and observation; "anthropological writings are themselves interpretations, and second and third order ones to boot..They are, thus, fictions" (Geertz 1973:15). Even ethnographers' accounts of personal conversations and contacts "raise serious problems of verification" (p. 16). We cannot interview citizens of tribes and empires long gone, let alone find informants with whom to verify our interpretations. Inventories of women's supposed artifacts, activities, or "work areas" such as many archaeologists have offered are products of speculation. It can hardly be emphasized too much that without an appropriate theoretical framework, one has no real access to the study of gender, past or present In fact, one task of such theory is to tell us that there are many things we will never know about the past The principal lesson a properly gendered theory brings us is probably restraint

At the very least without a sound theoretical base, we constantly risk falling into the cultural projections and assumptions that have encumbered past attempts. Another risk is that one may fall prey to a whole new batch of projections and assumptions. I certainly do not advertise feminist theory as a sure and certain guide to Truth. Jobling (1991:243), indeed, complains with some justification that,

Feminists have...not, for the most part, exploited the social sciences in an inadequate way, and have tended to replace one set of anachronisms with another. The term patriarchy is used loosely, out of its anthropological context. Twentieth-century assumptions and concerns are illegitimately projected into the past, as when large family size is taken necessarily to indicate the oppression of women.

Some of these anachronistic interpretations might well work against such feminist aims as, to pick an example not quite at random, the liberation of womankind. For instance, Maurer (1991:414) finds that feminist scholarly practice sometimes leads to the kind of descriptions one might find paralyzing. His complaint is worth quoting at length:

Gender, originally problematized as a cultural construct, becomes "naturalized." This [process] results in a sort of academic fatalism—studies of gender invariably toll into studies of gender hierarchy and gender oppression, even where such oppression may not exist. As numerous feminist scholars have pointed out, one of the major problems with this formulation is its ahistoricism, its amaterialism, its ethnocentrism and its over-generalized universalism (e.g. Yanagisako and Collier 1987). The resulting tendency to universalize the "nature" of gender hierarchy [leads to] the creation of analytic dichotomies used to "explain" this oppression, dichotomies which are usually more culture-bound than the original assumptions regarding gender itself.

The image of the low-tech woman working in "private space" is one universalized aspect of "gender hierarchy" that most of us have accepted as natural. It is so naturalized that many scholars, feminist or otherwise, rather than challenging it, have simply turned their energies to devising explanations for it. These explanations are, indeed, often "more culture-bound"—and more depressing—than the original assumptions about public and private space or women's and men's work.

## **The Struggle for New Stories about Technological Woman**

Ethnographers have observed that throughout much of the world today women perform by hand the same tasks for which men employ mechanized processes. Women shape pottery by hand, but men take charge of potter's wheels (Rice 1991:439). Similarly, women spin, using small, hand-held spindles, whereas men weave, operating looms. Why is this? Brown (1970:1074, cited with apparent agreement by Rice [1991:436]), implicitly accepting the accuracy of the model of the high-tech man, low-tech woman, explains that women have to combine all their activities with child care. They need "tasks that are repetitive, not dangerous, can be interrupted and resumed, do not require intense concentration, and do not require the participant to be far from home" (Brown 1970:1074). The "explanation," in other words, is that women need boring work in one spot

Behind this explanation lurk several assumptions: The care of helpless young children belongs to women, all women. This care is the principal and defining feature of all women's work, to which all their other work must be subordinated. The locus of this universally female work is necessarily, unquestionably in the family home.

This formulation constitutes an implicit endorsement of the notion of (female) private space vs. (male) public space. It does not really explain why women could not use potters' wheels at home, as many craft potters do in our own culture today. Nothing is said about cultures in which both parents go to work in fields, factories, marketplaces



or elsewhere, taking children with them or leaving them with grandparents or other male and female household members. Brown's simple account fails to address the diversity of human experience. It lumps together the work of millions of women of diverse ages, cultures, marital conditions, and millennia into one static, monolithic model. We recall Carroll's charge that historians describe women as everywhere unchanging and "irrelevant to the intellectually interesting questions of historical change."

Pacy (1983:100-101) and Rice (1991:442) see the same differences Brown sees between men's and women's work, but account for those differences through another culture-bound model (bound, that is, to our own culture). They emphasize male initiative rather than female constraints. Men are dynamic, rationally self-interested actors who appropriate women's tasks when new technology renders these interesting and profitable:

There is a broad negative correlation between women and tools of economic efficiency and/or power, whether these tools are the potter's wheel, the plow, the machete, the vote, or salary equality. When such tools are invented or adopted into a traditionally female activity, the activity shifts into the hands of males.

Women thereby become less productive as their jobs are taken over, or as they are denied access to the more efficient and productive technology (Rice 1991:442). To sum it up crudely, them as has gets; them as gets, produces. Rice draws on the sociology of technological diffusion, citing "the general tendency for innovations to be introduced to males, or for males to have more external social and economic contacts." Pacey ventures a more psychological explanation, one which invokes men's feelings as well as their rational-self-interest

The reason men are attracted to mechanized jobs may be to do with the higher productivity and earnings associated with them, but seems also to be partly due to the way machines convey prestige. The modern male takes pride in being mechanically minded (Pacey 1983:100-101).

The result is familiar. Men do the high tech work, women do the rest. Very often, then, women may simply be left with tasks not affected by technological innovation (Pacey 1983:100).

All this well may be, but it explains little. Pacey speaks to men's feelings and states of mind, but leaves us wondering why women would not be equally "attracted" to mechanized jobs, and to "higher productivity and earnings," not to mention prestige and pride, these quiddities being in notoriously short supply, especially for women. Are not women motivated by rational self-interest? Instead, Pacey opposes an active, free-roving man to a helpless, implicitly stationary woman whom man and technology leave behind. We might call this the Technologically Jilted Woman model of diffusion and appropriation. We are reminded of Maurer's warning about "a sort of academic fatalism [whereby] studies of gender invariably fall into studies of gender hierarchy and gender oppression."

Nevertheless, both Rice's and Pacey's formulations have the virtue of being consistent with diffusion studies (Rogers 1983). Technology diffuses first, and sometimes

only, to those in the community who have decision-making power, who have the opportunity to observe and try new things, and who can afford to take risks. For Pacey and Rice, these people would certainly be the men.

In summary, for Brown, women are naturally low-tech, given the lives they lead. For Pacey and Rice, the assumption is that women, like men, need the more complex, profitable technologies, but either men get to it first and hog it all or men see women benefiting from a technology and simply take it away from them. Women "are left" with "low" technology.

## Stories Women Tell About Technology

What, if anything, do scholars' models of male-appropriated technology tell us about the ways in which women experience and judge technology? Do women commonly see the world of technology as a lost paradise of productivity, profitability, prestige, and pride that ambitious men have wrenched from their unwilling grasp?

Not necessarily. A technophobic strand of feminist thinking maintains, to oversimplify, that technology is one of Man's viler inventions, unworthy of Woman. Through technology, man exploits, abuses, and ultimately will destroy humanity's habitat. Woman, supposedly, should be doing better. There is ample evidence that some women, at least, think of technology as not so much confiscated from them as rejected by them.

Indeed, we lack traditions of women's wonderful technologies on which to base a female self-concept as tool-using, technology-innovating humans. It hardly occurs to us that women have any technology to steal. Despite a perennial search for new premises and images, popular culture, mass media, and literature rarely depict women or girls as inventors or manipulators of interesting, complex technology. Not even science fiction, a genre devoted to technology, does so. On the other hand, it is evident that not all women would welcome such depictions.

As we have seen, male-oriented scholarship imagines a paleontological and archaeological past that would confirm its imagined, male-oriented present. Men provide human culture with active, inquiring, experimenting minds—with scholars, in fact. Therefore early men provided humans with technology—with culture, in fact. Female scholarship is locked in struggle with this somewhat self-congratulatory male imagination. Some feminist thinkers offer to substitute a self-congratulatory female image. They, no less than traditional male-oriented thinkers, tell stories about destructive Technological Man and Technologically Innocent Care-giving Woman.

These stories, by whomever told, fit nicely into another of our cultural stories, that Man goes to War to Protect Woman. Man as Weapons Technologist then, enables Woman to be a non-technological care-giver who sustains intimacy, care, truth, and love. For many feminists, an antipathy toward technology also relates closely to the notion that rationality and even linear story-telling are pernicious male inventions designed to defeat womanly feeling, "women's ways of knowing," and basic human

morality. Women may take comfort from the thought that although they have little power, at least they are morally superior to men. Women have no responsibility for the viler deeds of mankind. Carol Tavris (1992:66-7) exposes the danger of this thinking:

By focusing on the men in power who make war (and the men in armies who fight), we overlook the women who support and endorse war, making it possible. By focusing on male violence, we overlook the men who promote pacifism and negotiation. By regarding aggressiveness as an entrenched and exclusively male quality, and pacifism as an inherent feminist quality, we overlook the ways in which societies in turmoil create dangerous, violent men, and we conveniently forget that most of the greatest pacifists and reformers in history have been men.

In fact, Claudia Koontz (1987) and Katherine M. Blewett (1991) show that Nazi and Klan women, respectively, wrought as much destruction as their situations allowed, in addition to supporting the efforts of their men by welcoming them home to well-run households. For example, Klan women of Indiana in the 1920s organized and conducted boycotts ("Buy 100% American!") that drove black, Catholic, and Jewish victims out of business and out of town.

Under the circumstances, then, it may be rather self-serving for women to join with men in depicting history's female characters as private creatures who lurk gently in the background, rendering positive support to the family and community, venturing forth only in non-speaking walk-on parts, technologically backward and reluctant, while men alone shape history and fill the battlegrounds with corpses. However, self-serving images inevitably take on lives of their own and become counter-productive.

*Archivists Note:* The text body footnotes are missing from the PDF, so I'll just include them here until this can be error corrected.<sup>23456</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Genesis 4:21,22, in which the origins of technology are framed in genealogical metaphors, in terms of masculine inventors: "...Jubal...was the ancestor of all who play the lyre and the pipe...Tubalcain... forged all implements of copper and iron." Although Tavris (1992) points out that many feminists and others have in recent years defined men in terms of their supposed lack of nurturing qualities.

<sup>3</sup> I have also seen, in popular culture, rather joking references to "Woman the Forager's "comedic descendent," Woman as Shopper".

<sup>4</sup> According to David F. Noble, speaking in February 1993 to the Southern Humanities Council in Huntsville, Alabama.

<sup>5</sup> Grave goods are objects found in ancient graves and usually presumed to have belonged to the interred during her or his lifetime.

<sup>6</sup> She cites the amazement of seventeenth century Spanish historian Lopez de Cogolludo (1957: 14-15) that "there are many Indians who work at four or six trades where a Spaniard would have but one."

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## **The Symbolic Function of 'Technique' As Ideogram In Ellul's Thought**

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### **Abstract**

In this essay I compare Ellul's use of the term 'technique' to Rudolf Otto's use of the term 'Holy'. Otto argues that the idea of the holy is an ideogram that has a symbolic function that goes beyond the representative function of a mere concept. This is necessary owing to the non-rational character of the holy as well as the fact that the holy contains a unity of opposites that is not subject to conceptualization. I argue that Ellul's depiction of technique exhibits similar characteristics. Thus, his use of the term 'technique' may also be understood as having the symbolic function of an ideogram.

### **Introductio-Apologia**

There are a number of points of method in Jacques Ellul's thought that remain obscure. What is especially peculiar is that this seems to have been partly his intention. Ellul has pointed to the provocative character of his writings. In an interview with Madeleine Garrigou-Lagrange, Ellul revealed that an important goal he set for himself was to spark the initiative of his readership to find their own explanations regarding the method he employed. "I've never given an explanatory guide to my writing. I waited for readers to take the initiative and find their own explanations."<sup>7</sup> This essay is just such an attempt to find my own explanation for Ellul's use of the term 'Technique'. Despite the fact that Ellul attempted to define the term in a precise way, I believe that a considerable degree of clarification is still possible.

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<sup>7</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Out of Season, An Introduction to the Thought of Jacques Ellul*, Based

Here I intend to take the initiative in order to provide an explanation that Ellul himself might not have recognized. In comparing Ellul's use of the term 'Technique' with Rudolf Otto's use of the term 'holy' I may very well be creating what Martin Marty called "a creative misuse"<sup>8</sup> of Ellul's thought. But in taking the risk of misrepresenting Ellul's thought in this way, we also risk the possibility of gaining new knowledge that may aid us in coming to terms with the technological world we inhabit

## Otto and The Idea of The Holy

An important focus of Rudolf Otto's treatment of the idea of the holy is that the phenomenon he wished to study has a basis in the non-rational elements of human religious experience. This posed a serious problem for Otto in providing an adequate way to conceptualize such an important dimension of human experience. Approaching the problem from a Kantian perspective, Otto thought in terms of a schema of the non-rational that would exhibit an a-priori structure of the non-rational aspects of human experience. Owing to the non-rational element within the holy, Otto argued that it is not possible to represent the holy in a simple concept. In treating the biblical depiction of the wrath of God, for example, Otto declares, "It will be again at once apparent that in the use of this word we are not concerned with a genuine intellectual 'concept', but only with a sort of illustrative substitute for a concept"<sup>9</sup> He goes on to assert that the term 'wrath' is the ideogram of the majesty and energy of the numen, the object of a numinous experience. The wrath of God is awe-inspiring which, in itself, is a non-rational state in response to the reality of the divine orge.

An ideogram is thus an ideational substitute for a concept that is capable of grasping the non-rational character of the *experience* of the holy as it is manifested in the wrath of God. According to Otto's conception, an ideogram is able to symbolize the complex experience (or perhaps the experience-complex) he denotes "the numinous state of mind", which contains a deep existential significance. And, of course, Otto holds that the numinous state of mind provides access to the holy object itself as its intentional correlate.

Otto's approach is interesting because he seems to have carried out a sort of phenomenology of the holy. The complexity of the experience is such, according to Otto, that a mere concept of the holy could not grasp the reality as it is experienced in its concreteness. For the holy contains within itself opposing characteristics. It is both fascinating and terrifying. As Otto puts it,

We have been attempting to unfold the implications of that aspect of the *mysterium tremendum* indicated by the adjective, and the result so far may be summarized in two

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on Interviews by Madeleine Garrigou-Lan-grange, Harper & Row, 1982, p. 73.

<sup>8</sup> Martin E. Marty, "Creative Misuses of Jacques Ellul", in *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays*, edited by Clifford G. Christians and Jay M. Van Hook, University of Illinois Press, 1981, pp. 3-13.

<sup>9</sup> Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, translated by John W. Harvey, Oxford University Press, 1958, pp. 18-19.

words, constituting, as before, what may be called an 'ideogram', rather than a concept proper, viz. 'absolute unapproachability'.<sup>10</sup>

Otto argues that the ideogram of the divine mysterium is an analogical notion derived from the natural experience of mystery.<sup>11</sup> As such, it cannot exhaust the meaning of the numinous. The very notion of mystery itself seems to place the mysterium tremendum beyond human comprehension. The "wholly other" lies beyond the categories of human comprehension. But, interestingly, Otto also suggests that it is the very mysterium character of the divine that attracts us. Otto provides an excellent summary statement of this peculiar situation,

The daemonic-divine object may appear to the mind an object of horror and dread, but at the same time it is no less something that allures with a potent charm, and the creature, who trembles before it, utterly cowed and cast down, has always at the same time the impulse to turn to it, nay even to make it somehow his own. The 'mystery' is for him not merely something to be wondered at but something that entrances him; and beside that in it which bewilders and confounds, he feels a something that captivates and transports him with a strange ravishment, rising often enough to the pitch of dizzy intoxication; it is the Dionysiac-element in the numen.<sup>12</sup>

In the end, Otto holds that it is necessary to bring the non-rational experience of the holy into the light of clear concepts. But there is a degree to which this does violence to the experience. The symbolic function of an ideogram is to find a middle ground between the sheer non-rational experience and the rational concept.

But it is quite otherwise with religious 'bliss' and its essentially numinous aspect, the *fasdnans*. Not the most concentrated attention can elucidate the object to which this state of mind refers, bringing it out of the impenetrable obscurity of feeling into the domain of the conceptual understanding. It remains purely a felt experience, only to be indicated symbolically by 'ideograms'.<sup>13</sup>

## Ellul's Phenomenology of Technique

In the translator's introduction to the revised American edition of *The Technological Society*, John Wilkinson depicts Ellul's study of technique as being a phenomenology of the technological society. In his view, "*The Technological Society* is not a 'phenomenology of mind' but rather a 'phenomenology of the technical state of mind.'"<sup>14</sup>

A peculiar difficulty associated with such a phenomenology is that it must be able to grasp the irrational or non-rational aspects of the technical milieu as well as the rational ones. The experience of those who inhabit the technological society is neces-

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.p. 19.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p. 26.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p. 31.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. pp. 58-59.

<sup>14</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, translated from the French by John Wilkinson, with an introduction by Robert K. Merton, Vintage Books, 1964, p. xiii.



sarily complex and varied in content And this is what Ellul wished to grasp, i.e., the experiential effects of the technical milieu in its concreteness. This is the only access we have to the technological system as an objective reality. In this regard, Ellul notes,

We are touching on a trait that I consider important: I never write ideas. I have always attempted to transmit exactly what I have experienced, in objectifying it. I have always thought on the experiential level.<sup>15</sup>

Here Ellul evinces the influence of Marx on his thought It must be remembered how Marx distrusted the influence of ideologies to affect our ability to experience reality within an alienated condition. One of the important functions of scientific theory for Marx was to break through the veil of false consciousness produced by the social environment This entailed avoiding a science of ideas that might exhibit a high degree of coherence but misses the concrete factors of lived experience. As Ellul points out,

Marx always vigorously denied that theory could be reduced to ideas. Theory is a strictly scientific construction. Never is it the same as more or less precise or coherent ideas. Theory must be revised by practice. Ideas have no importance for Maor.<sup>16</sup>

This attitude is confirmed in Ellul's work *The Technological System*. In this work Ellul treats the concept of technique in a chapter devoted to the problem of defining the object of his study, now the technological system. While it is necessary to develop a certain conceptualization of technique, Ellul is quick to point out that he is not simply studying the concept His is not a simple conceptual analysis of technique. By itself the concept is inadequate to grasp the totality of the technological system in its dynamic development This is perhaps what distinguishes *The Technological Society* from *The Technological System*. The first study represents what August Comte called social statics. Its object is the technological phenomenon. The second study represents what Comte called social dynamics. Its object is the technological system Much includes the dynamic flow of change within the technical system.

Now, in both cases Ellul is careful not to focus on the mere concept as a sort of abstract model that can be studied apart from the irrational or aleatory factors that impinge upon its operation. The pure rationality of technique is matched in Ellul's analysis by the many irrationalities that arise in the concrete setting of technique. As Ellul asserts,

How can we deal with technology as though it had a kind of existence in itself? How can we analyze a technological system as a sort of clock running all by itself? Technology exists only because there are human beings participating in it, making it function, inventing, choosing. To claim we can examine technology without regarding the chance

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<sup>15</sup> Jacques Ellul, *In Season, Out of Season*, p. 189.

<sup>16</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Jesus & Marx, from Gospel to Ideology*, translated by Joyce Main Hanks, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988, p. 132.

elements, the irregularities produced by man, means proceeding to an illegitimate and, moreover, impossible abstraction<sup>17</sup>

Within the dialectical whole making up Ellul's thought it is possible to say that technique has a bi-polar structure that can be characterized as rational\inational. This can be seen in a very recent work, *The Technological Bluff*. Owing to the specifically human contribution to the makeup of technique, there is an irresolvable irrationality within the technical system.

In other words, except in algebra there is no such thing as purely rational human thinking. Even our most rigorous thinking is inevitably intermingled with opinions and sympathies and feelings. How often our reasoning and knowledge reflect the causes we advocate! Our thinking is never pure. That of computers is always pure unless it is programmed to take into account a specific feature. Yet even though its thinking is rational, there is often an irrational factor in the way that one poses a problem (to the computer!) or in the choice of the problem that one poses.<sup>18</sup>

In a sense, the rationality of technique is surrounded by irrationalities. This is the source of the conflict to which Ellul continually points.<sup>19</sup> Technique tends to absorb these irrationalities. Perhaps this is its achilles heel. After all, the human factor is not just a foreign element in the structure of technique. It comes from us. It is a human product

In *The Technological Society*, Ellul actually depicts technique as a monster having sinews made of human flesh. "In this chapter we have sketched the psychology of the tyrant Now we must study his biology: the circulatory apparatus, the state; the digestive apparatus, the economy; the cellular tissue, man."<sup>20</sup> As such, there is a non-rational or perhaps even irrational element within the technological corpus. Ellul holds out the possibility that this non-rational element could act as a sort of virus infecting technique, undermining its pure rationality. But technique also has the ability to develop antibodies. In order to maintain its health technique must incorporate the

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<sup>17</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System*, Seabury, 1980, p. 84.

<sup>18</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990, p. 164.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Jacques ellul, *The Technological System*, Seabur, 1980, p. 74.

The Computer faces us squarely with the contradiction already announced hroughout the technological movement and brought to its complete rigor — between the rational (problems posed because of the computer and the answers given) and the irrational (human attitudes and tendencies). The computer glaringly exposes anything irrational in a human decision, showing that a choice considered reasonable is actually emotional. It does not follow this is translation into an absolute rationality, but plainly, this conflict introduces man into a cultural universe that is different from anything he has ever known before. Man's central, his — I might say — metaphysical problem is no longer the existence of God and his own existence in terms of that sacred mystery. The problem is now the conflict beteen absolute rationality and what has hitherto consitituted his person. That is the pivot of all present-day reflection, and, for a long time, it will remain the only philosophical issue. In this way the computer is nothing but, an notheing more than, [technique]. Yet it performs what was virtually the action of the technological whole, it brings it to its are perfection; it makes it obvious.

<sup>20</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, p. 147.

irrational elements into its system, assimilating everything to its standard of rationality. Thus, compensations arise in the areas of entertainment, politics, religion, etc.

For our purposes it is only necessary to point out that the bi-polar structure of technique is resistant to simple conceptualization. It can, however be symbolized in such a way as to make it accessible to human experience. Otto pointed out, in this regard, that to understand conceptually and to know are two different things.<sup>21</sup> My suggestion is that Ellul's notion of technique has the symbolic function of an ideogram in that it schematizes what is really a deeply imbedded experience for persons inhabiting a technological environment

David Lovekin's study of technological consciousness confirms this to a certain degree. Lovekin argues that Ellul's theory of technique is a symbolic construction that opposes the reality of technique.<sup>22</sup> This symbolic function is essential, in Ellul's view, for gaining mastery over the objective environment. As Ellul states,

By the symbolic transformation of reality man, on the one hand, establishes a mediation between reality and himself, and on the other, becomes adept at manipulating reality by manipulating symbols. In other words, he creates the possibility of acquiring a non-material grasp on reality, without which he would be completely unprovided for...The stick used by man ceases to be merely a piece of wood and becomes, for example, a bludgeon. The function of symbolization precedes the fabrication of the tool and that is what makes it possible to develop the conception of a tool or of a weapon.<sup>23</sup>

One of the most serious dangers posed by technique is that it tends to subvert this symbolic function by producing its own symbolic universe. Without knowing it, we become enmeshed in a battle against shadows. Much, in itself, maintains the technological system. The struggle for freedom in a technological society is thus to a great extent a struggle to regain the upper hand, so to speak, by developing appropriate symbols so that we might exercise some control over the technological apparatus. Here Karl Mannheim's insight into the positive role of the irrational is pertinent

We must, moreover, realize, that the irrational is not always harmful but that, on the contrary, it is among the most valuable powers in man's possession when it acts as a driving force towards rational and objective ends or when it creates cultural values through sublimation, or when, as pure elan, it heightens the joy of living without breaking up the social order by lack of planning. In fact, even a correctly organized mass society takes into account all these possibilities for the molding of impulses. It must, indeed, create an outlet for an abreaction of impulses since the matter-of-factness of everyday life which is due to widespread rationalization means a constant repression of impulses. It is in these offices that the function of "sports" and "celebrations" in mass society as well as that of the more cultural aims of the society is to be found. All the

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<sup>21</sup> Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, translated by John W. Harvey, Oxford University Press, 1958, p. 135.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. David Lovekin, *Jacques Ellul's Philosophy of Technological Consciousness*.

<sup>23</sup> Jacques Ellul, "Symbolic Function, Technology and Society," *Journal of Social and Biological Structures*, 1207-218(1978), p. 208.

great civilizations in history have hitherto been able to use sublimations to canalize and give form to irrational psychic energies.<sup>24</sup>

## Calling Technique's Bluff

In his work, *The New Demons*, Ellul describes how technique actually takes on a sacred aura, giving it the status of an untouchable standard. Ellul considers it to be a deep human need to sacralize those aspects of our environment that appear to be ultimate. As a new artificial environment, technique has the power to desacralize our first natural environment, making it an object of manipulation and control. By a sort of dialectical reversal, whatever has the power to desacralize one realm of human experience becomes the new sacred. The modern sacred is complex in its structure. The sacred of respect is matched by a sacred of transgression.

I shall set forth as a proposition that the modern sacred is ordered around two axes, each involving two poles, one pole being respect and order, and the other transgression. The first axis is that of 'technique/sex', the second is the 'nation/revolutionary axis. Those are the four factors (I say exclusively of every other) of our modern society.<sup>25</sup>

The sacred quality of technique is essential to the assimilation of the human element into the technical system. The power of technique is such that it repels human beings on a deep psychological level. But the power of the sacred is such that it also attracts at the same time. Ellul saw this very early in his study of technique.

Nothing belongs any longer to the realm of the gods or the supernatural. The individual who lives in the technical milieu knows very well that there is nothing spiritual anywhere. But man cannot live without the sacred. He therefore transfers his sense of the sacred to the very thing which has destroyed its former object: to technique itself. In the world in which we live, technique has become the essential mystery, taking widely diverse forms according to place and race. Those who have preserved some of the notions of magic both admire and fear technique. Radio presents an inexplicable mystery, an obvious and recurrent miracle. It is no less astonishing than the highest manifestations of magic once were, and it is worshipped as an idol would have been worshipped, with the same simplicity and fear.<sup>26</sup>

The tension involved in this complex reaction has the effect of paralyzing persons within a technological milieu. The resulting paralysis in the face of the simultaneous attraction/repulsion of technique is perhaps the most important factor in the system's self-constitution. An important purpose in Ellul's study of the sacred character of modern technique is to desacralize the technological mystification. This is a condition for the liberation of the person from technological determination.

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<sup>24</sup> Karl Mannheim, "The Crisis in Valuation," in *The Technological Threat*, ed. Jack D. Douglas, Prentice Hall, 1971, pp. 62-63.

<sup>25</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The New Demons*, Seabury, 1975, p. 70.

<sup>26</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, p. 143.

Reinserted into a sacred, a prisoner of his myths, he is completely alienated in his neoreligions-this brave 'modern man.' Every religion is both necessary and alienating. To smash these idols, to desacralize these mysteries, to assert the falseness of these religions is to undertake the one, finally indispensable liberation of the person in our times.<sup>27</sup>

Now, my argument is that in his study of technique Ellul must be able to penetrate the ambiguous structure of the sacred. A simple concept of technique is not possible, owing to the fact that concepts are always exclusive of their contraries. Thus, a concept of technique could not carry the burden of representing both the rational and irrational character of technique as an object of sacred awe.<sup>28</sup> As an ideogram, the term 'technique' must be able to do more than represent its object. It must be able to mediate a complex experience including opposite qualities of attraction and repulsion.

This method of symbolizing technique gives Ellul a purchase on technique so that he can effectively call technique's bluff. This is the purpose of Ellul's recent work, *The Technological Bluff*. Ellul's concern in this study is to point to the many lacunae in the technological system and the ways in which technical discourse covers them up. The many ambiguities, the uncertainty, lack of balance, and unpredictability of technique all constitute, in Ellul's view, a huge wager that the people of the twentieth century have unconsciously placed on technique. Indeed, American readers may not be generally aware that this was the original French title of *The Technological Society*. Ellul's great 1954 study of technique was titled, *La Technique ou l'enjeu du siècle. Technique or the Gamble of the Century*.

Ellul's message is that we have staked our lives on the efficacy of technique. Is it any surprise that within such a life or death game modern people feel the need to insure everything? The perspective of faith that Ellul places in opposition to technique would suggest that human life, and perhaps the whole natural creation, is not a game but a gift.

In our time, the life of freedom and the responsibility that goes with it begins by calling technique's bluff. Then, perhaps, the next century may not be seduced into playing the same game.

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<sup>27</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The New Demons*, p. 228.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. David Lovekin, "Technology and the Denial of Mystery", p. 75. "For Ellul, mystery is that which cannot be spelled out in contradictory terms; mystery is that which transcends and gives meaning to the [here] and now." (spelled "hear" in the original)

# Book Reviews

## *Gender on the Line: Women, The Telephone, and Community Ufe*

by Lana Rakow (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

Reviewed by Jonathon Stone

University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign

Among the older generation in a small Swedish community in northeastern Minnesota, it is still common to find men who will refuse to answer the phone when at home. As my friend Judy Andersen tells it, these people grew up with an understanding of the telephone as a woman's *space*, and this continues to shape telephony in their community. Some men will even have their wives call the hardware store to ask about tractor parts rather than do it themselves. In small communities across the nation, one can find similar stones.

Lana Rakow's already classic *Gender on the Line* chronicles the social practice of telephony in another small midwestern town which she calls Prospect Through ethnography and historiography, Rakow develops a nuanced account of the telephone in Prospect's community life and in tire social production of gender. *Gender on the Line* is one of a very few full-length cultural studies of the telephone. The first half of tire book focuses on a history of Prospect and its telephone company. The second half consists of extensive interviews with six women of Prospect, each representing a different part of the community and a different experience of the telephone. Prospect is remarkable for both maintaining an independent phone company into the 1980s and for that company being owned and run by a woman until 1983. By studying the telephone in a small community, Rakow is able to consider the telephone in the context of the relationships of the people it connects. Thus, *Gender on die Line's* richness of ethnographic detail and local focus make it a central text among critical studies of the telephone. But the cutting edge of Rakow's analysis Ues in its feminist orientation: she argues that the telephone is central in producing the gendered division of labor within the community. At the same time, the telephone is itself a gendered social practice.

The title *Gender on the Line* is meant as a double entendre, and also points to two interrelated themes of Rakow's book. First and foremost, Rakow treats gender not as a fixed category but as a *problem*. Since gender is socially produced and reproduced, it is prone to contestation and crisis. Thus, the telephone is a key to understanding the production and reproduction of gender relations in Prospect Second, in the best

tradition of feminist scholarship, Rakow shows how telephony is a gendered set of social practices. Gendered meanings are at the very center of the telephone's social life, thus, an understanding of gender is crucial to a substantive theory of the telephone. This is a useful corrective to scholarship on the telephone that treats it either as a neutral instrument suspended outside of a gendered social world (the instrumentalist view) or as a total, ungendered mediation of social life (the substantivist view). Her critique of Stephen Kem is perhaps most apt in this respect

Because the telephone *can* transcend space and time and bypass social hierarchies, these writers [such as Kem] have made the mistake of assuming that technical possibility translated into social practice. To test this assumption, we must ask who has been able to use the telephone for these purposes, and what the consequences have been for those who have not been able to do so.

By demystifying the telephone and Growing it to be enmeshed in the social world of gender, she simultaneously forecloses the possibility of universalisms like Kem's and constitutes a major theme of her own analysis. Rather than transcending space and time, the telephone is part of negotiating women's relationships to different places and restrictions on movement. In Chapter 3, "The Telephone and Women's Place" Rakow offers several accounts of this process: women who have moved for their husbands' careers use the phone to maintain relationships with distant friends and family; women who have less access to transportation use the phone to coordinate activity and get the most out of every trip; women whose obligations to their children restrict their mobility use the phone to maintain social relationships outside the household; other women use the phone to help ameliorate fears about being home alone. Thus, the telephone is a key to understanding the spatial organization of gender.

This theme blends with Rakow's recuperation of women's talk and her discussion of their use of the telephone. Throughout the book, Rakow critiques perspectives that trivialize women's talk on the phone, and instead shows how it is central to maintaining community and family life. In Chapter 2, Rakow characterizes women's talk as "visiting," the exchanging of information about personal relationships, events in one's life, and one's family. Since women spend more time at home, the telephone provides an opportunity to "get out" and talk with people more often. It also offers an opportunity for interpersonal intimacy that is unavailable at the local coffee table or in other semi-public contexts. The theme of women's talk also pervades the interviews. Most interviewees cast their talk in terms of relationships: Nettie disapproves of "idle talk" but uses the phone for community work and care-giving; Ethel, an elderly woman who can't get out as much as she used to, uses the phone to keep up with old friends and to maintain social contact in the community; conversely, Carolyn, who moved to Prospect recently, uses the phone to maintain relationships outside the community; Gayle used the phone as an escape when she was a housewife, and teenagers Kristin and Amy use the phone to provide some connection with the outside world to alleviate fears of being home alone at night. In each of these cases, the phone becomes a central part of women's lives and a central aspect of the gendered division of community life

— compensating for distance or isolation, but in the same stroke preserving the social organization of gender by making it easier to live with.

As Rakow offers in her introduction, *Gender on the Line* uses the telephone as a way of mapping gender relations in Prospect. This remains a central tension in her study, and points to a larger issue: how to develop a substantive theory of technology in the context of a larger social analysis. Unavoidably, Rakow shifts between instrumental and substantive discussions of the telephone. In the former, the telephone is simply a conduit for existing social relations external to it; in the latter, she considers telephony itself as a social practice and telephone and meanings around it as artifacts of social life. To a certain degree, this shifting is a matter of focus and balance, but it also points to some more confounding questions for social theory: How do we discuss technology when it's not the sole or central focus of critical analysis (as in Rakow's case)? How do we account for gender in a substantive theory of technology? Clearly, gender plays a tremendous role in the production of technology and technology plays a major role in the production of gender, but neither construct is entirely determined by the other.

Beyond these basic questions, Rakow's analysis has additional implications for feminist theory. Carol Stable has effectively shown the problems of falling into "technophilia" (celebration of technology) or "technophobia" (dismissal of technology) in feminist theory, and Rakow's analysis avoids both traps. She treats technology itself as a site of contestation, thus avoiding the kind of essentialism involved in more technophobic feminism that posits technology as a purely male domain, while also keeping in mind the larger context of patriarchy that conditions any woman's use of technology. In this way, Rakow is able to move beyond the debates in feminist theory around essentialism and anti-essentialism, and her work is consonant with other areas of feminist scholarship moving beyond these binaries. While I doubt very much that Rakow would associate herself with the work on gender "performativity" inspired by Judith Butler, *Gender on the Line* offers a cogent, coherent account of gender produced and performed. Like Butler, Rakow interprets the thesis that gender is socially produced as a call to studying its production, rather than treating gender as a fixed and stable category. In short, Rakow's work can be read in the context of current debates of feminist theory although she herself does not foreground these debates. While there currently exists little dialogue between high theoretical ruminations on Butler's concept of performativity and more empirical ethnographic work like Rakow's, as readers, we should make those connections across the traditional theory/research divide in feminist scholarship.

Concerning the study of technology, Rakow's analysis raises serious questions about the possibility of considering a single technology in isolation from a substantive perspective. For instance, how did the influx of domestic communications technologies like the radio, phonograph and television (in addition to the telephone) affect domestic gender relations in places like Prospect? Consider Raymond Williams' famous concept of mobile privatization—the tendency for a society to become more spatially diffused and mobile through increased development and dependence on communications and trans-



portation technologies. The social history of the telephone is key to understanding mobile privatization, but we can't consider the telephone separately from the other elements of mobile privatization affecting communities like Prospect: the growth of highways and private automobile ownership and the decline of public transportation; the nationalization of food, drug, and clothing retail and the concurrent rise of malls and supermarkets, decline of downtowns, and flight of capital from local circuits of exchange (e.g. X the growth of mass media such as phonography, radio, television and film replacing community festivals and traveling shows; the rise of subdivisions and diffused models of urban planning; the growth of a feminized labor force in the "service" industries; and so forth. While Rakow acknowledges the importance of these issues, they are beyond the scope of her study — yet they demand further attention.

*Gender on the Line* is thus an important work both for its own nuanced analysis and for the field of questions it raises. Beyond the obvious "directions for further research" implied by her work — such as studies of women and the telephone in urban or suburban environments, or the gendered use of communications in work environments — Rakow's book speaks to a whole range of other issues. *Gender on the Line* can be read in a context of common concern between feminist theory and ethnography; and it has quickly become required reading for anyone seriously interested in critical scholarship on the telephone, or more generally, on gender and technology.

*Archivists Note:* The text body footnotes are missing from the PDF, so I'll just include them here until this can be error corrected.<sup>12345</sup>

## ***Feminism Confronts Technology***

by Judy Wajcman (University Park, P.A.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 184pp.

Reviewed by Jacqueline Ciaccis

University of Illinois

Men's monopoly over technology has created several political power struggles. Stereotypes and the de-valuing of women's contributions to science perpetuate the patriarchal dominance of technology in today's world. Judy Wajcman in *Feminism Confronts Technology* addresses the fairly new field in feminist scholarship which centers on the debate over gender and technology. Wajcman questions the influence

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Lubar's *Infoculture* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1993) and Claude S. Fischer's *Men and Women Calling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992) offer useful social accounts of the telephone. While both cite Rakow's work as foundational, neither takes gender as a central concern.

<sup>2</sup> Rakow, p. 4

<sup>3</sup> See Carol Stable, *Feminism and the Technological Fix* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> Performativity is an issue throughout Butler's work, but is first advanced after a critique of Gayle Rubin's sex/gender dichotomy in *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> See Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (New York: Schocken, 1973).

of technology on today's women. She examines several technical spheres from a broad cultural standpoint in which technology is seen as a social construct Wajcman begins her book with an historical look at science and the emergence of power driven technologies. She continues from there to show how the technological society has depowered women by overlooking and devaluing the feminine while lauding the masculine.

Wajcman makes her task manageable by limiting her defense to specific technologies. She prefaces her work by stating that she does not "deal with the technologies of surveillance and political control, nor with energy technology. Various aspects of information and communication technologies have also been excluded" (ix). Instead, she devotes a chapter each to some of the most politically hot technologies that highlight women's struggles: the technology of production, reproductive technology, domestic technology, and the built environment

The publications of feminist scientists and their assertions of the historical and sociological relationships between gender and science create the foundation for a unique analysis of women's relationship with technology. Further, the connection between technology and gender is enhanced by presenting scientific knowledge as equivalent to patriarchal knowledge. What makes the argument work is Wajcman's choice to go beyond an essentialist assertion that a feminine value — based science should replace the present masculine one. She recognizes that such replacement theories will not solve the problems of inequality present in today's technological society. Since Wajcman's task is a cultural one, she demands that we simultaneously look for a new set of societal *values* to focus on.

The first thing that must be said is that the values being ascribed to women originate in the historical subordination of women. The belief in the unchanging nature of women and their association with procreation, nurturance, warmth and creativity, lies at the very heart of traditional and oppressive conceptions of womanhood. Women value nurturance, warmth and security or at least we believe we ought to, precisely because of not in spite of, the meanings culture and social relations of a world where men are more powerful than women (p.9).

The first sphere Wajcman enters is that of production and paid work, the existing sexual divisions of labor are examined from a technological standpoint Looking at office automation and other new technologies, for example, it becomes clear that the new "liberating" technological advances are simply fresh ways to make the way women's employ ability is repressed while new health and safety concerns emerge.

Chapter three is cleverly titled "Reproductive Technology: Delivered Into Men's hands." The strength of the argument in this chapter is in the historical critique of scientific and medical knowledge as gendered. Further, the age-worn view of the body as machine and the physician as technician is challenged.

Nowhere is the relationship between gender and technology more vigorously contested than in the sphere of human biological reproduction ... Central to this analysis and of increasing relevance today is the perception that the processes of pregnancy

and childbirth are directed and controlled by ever more sophisticated, and intrusive technologies. Implicitly in this view is a concept of reproduction as a natural process, inherent in women alone, and a theory of technology as patriarchal, enabling the male domination of women and nature (p. 54).

Domestic issues are often at the forefront of feminist arguments. The same follows for Wajcman who shows how domestic technologies oppress rather than liberate the home lives of women. The first myth she dispels is that industrialization improved the lives of housewives. The proof is similar to that of the paid work place: even though the tasks performed became less physically demanding, mechanization created a whole new set of demeaning choices to replace the ones eliminated. For example, the office worker's typewriter may have been replaced by a word processor but the para-professional status remained. At home simple household tasks such as cleaning were replaced by domestic errands such as shopping and other consumption based tasks. Therefore, even though the domestic environment itself became more manageable, the duties of the housewife expanded beyond the walls of the home.

The house itself is a built reflection of culture. Historically, each??? creates surroundings that are related to one another in a way that perpetuates certain sex-stereotypes. The new feminist focus today goes beyond domestic work spaces. "Architecture and urban planning have orchestrated the separation between women and men, private and public, home and paid employment, consumption and production, reproduction and production, suburb and city" (p. 110).

The element of control threads its way through all of the areas of the environment we build. Appropriately then, Michel Foucault's discussion of Bentham's panopticon creates a startling but relevant image for the reader.

Wajcman shows that like the panopticon the structure of the building ensures that control is largely achieved through self-discipline. That women are bound by certain forms in the public and private sphere is obvious. Personal observations of office size proved for men vs. women is one such example. Homes built rationally for efficiency rather than creatively for security is another. To employ technological means in our environment is impossible if patriarchal attitudes continue to dominate all areas of life. Without a change in attitude the route to architectural change that liberates and frees the life of women is forever blocked.

Although Arnold Pacy's *The Culture of Technology* is mentioned only briefly, his influence is seen throughout Wajcman's book. Culture is offal the concern of feminist politics, and both Wajcman and Pacy are concerned with several areas of oppression. The struggle over the definition of technology in order to see its non-neutral dimensions are beginning to come to light Both Wajcman and Pacy do not limit technology to objects or artifacts. Instead they see the technological enterprise as a human activity with cultural dimensions. And only when we grasp this broader definition can beliefs about expertise and the definitive bounds we form for our societal existence be changed to allow for equal empowerment As for future technologies, the way to change our

current means of developing and utilizing technologies requires a change in values along with a change in technologies themselves.

Technology is value laden. Beliefs about progress, resources and expertise keep feminine values from being successful and valued. Beyond a call for new values must come an awareness that with modernization, new does not necessarily mean improved. If we hope to find a way to de-gender technology, the underlying masculine drive for power and expertise must allow for the feminine needs for harmony and creativity to balance out the one-sided assumptions that traditionally have formed our technological world.

Wajcman helps us see that gender is indeed one of many areas where accepted oppressive technologies and the monopolies that sustain them are present. Looking at our technological environment, and changing our values to increase the involvement of the oppressed, brings us to a more enlightened society where we may hope to move forward into a more balanced technological era.

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of Jacques Ellul**

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## About This Issue

by David W. Gill, Guest Editor

This issue of *The Ellul Forum* is about Jacques Ellul's ethics. Ellul has written often enough, and especially in *To Will and To Do: An Ethical Research for Christians* (ET: Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1969), that morality (and ethics—he does not make any consistent distinction between the terms) is "of the order of the fall" and "of the order of necessity." In terms of his biblical theology, human morality and ethics are our replacement for the living guidance of God intended in the creation. Separated and alienated from God, who is the Good, we fill the vacuum not just with idols but with morality.

All too commonly, Ellul argues, Christian morality and ethics has been shaped by the morality and ethics of the world—even if expressed with pious religious language. A Christian ethic is, thus, impossible, if by "ethic" we mean what commonly goes by that

term (a set of moral values, rules, principles, virtues, etc., which defines what is good and right). Having then swept away all systems of ethics, Ellul wishes to raise anew the most basic question of a Christian ethic: how ought we to live out our relationship to God in a world antagonistic to his character and purposes?

In his programmatic early work *The Presence of the Kingdom* (ET: Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1951; the following quotations are from pp. 20-22), Ellul says "the problem that confronts us is that of the Christian ethic". This ethic "has nothing in common with what is generally called 'morality,' and still less with the Christian 'virtues' in the traditional sense... It is never a series of rules, or principles, or slogans ..." But a valid Christian ethic will show us how our "direct relation with the act of God in Jesus Christ" can'take "concrete form and become a vital element in daily life." Such an ethic is necessary as "a guide, an indication given to faith, a real assistance to the brethren." It is possible to define "the ethical demands of God" in terms of "its outline, and its conditions, and study some of its elements for purposes of illustration." There are, after all, "consequences of faith which can be objectively indicated."

The status of Ellul's Christian ethic is clear it is temporary in that "it needs to be continually revised, re-examined, and re-shaped by the combined effort of the Church asawhole." *Uis indicative* rather than imperative in that it assists but does not resolve or replace the living "fight of faith, which every Christian must wage." It is apologetic in that its purpose is not to justify our behavior but to lead those who observe us to see through and beyond our actions to Jesus Christ and to glorify God.

Ellul's plan was to elaborate such a Christian ethic in relation to the Pauline virtues offaith, hope, and love. *Hepub<sup>hed</sup>HopeinTime of Abandonment* (ET: New York: Seabury, *VH3*), *LivingFaith* (ET: SanFrancisco: Harper&Row, 1983), and several essays on love to lay the foundation. *The Ethics of Freedom* (ET: Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1976) outlined a Christian ethic corresponding to hope. *The Ethics of Holiness* (still unpublished in French or English) will outline a Christian ethic corresponding to faith. An "ethics of relationship" was never written but was going to be an outline of a Christian ethic corresponding to love.

For one who can be quoted as saying that a Christian ethic is "impressible," Ellul has produced a surprisingly voluminous ethical corpus. And yet for someone who wrote that a valid Christian ethic will be a "real assistance to the brethren," Ellul has frustrated a lot of his readers by leaving them as uncertain as ever about how to act in faith, hope, and love in the presence of particular quandaries. In my own view,

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Ellul is a greater "prophet" than "teacher" in ethics. That is, his insights brilliantly illuminate ethics in general, and Christian ethics in particular. His work helps me much in the same way that that of Soren Kierkegaard does.

Nevertheless, one can and must go further than Ellul (indeed, he often urged just this). In my view, the role of the church as a community of moral discernment, formation, and action needs fuller development. A fuller account of character and virtue needs to be built on Ellul's rather existential treatment of faith, hope, and love. And a fuller account of biblical and Christian ethical teaching can be developed without lapsing into the abstract, philosophical principle trap so vigorously rejected by Ellul.

A complete and adequate assessment of Ellul's ethics remains to be carried out—and will be substantially aided by the eventual publication of *The Ethics of Holiness*. My own book (originally a Ph.D. dissertation in 1979), *The Word of God in the Ethics of Jacques Ellul* (Metuchen NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1984) was a preliminary assessment as of the late Seventies, but much more study needs to be done. The four essays which follow are simply four "soundings" in his ethics.

Marva Dawn (theologian and author with *Christians Equipping for Ministry*, Vancouver, Washington) discusses how the biblical concept of the "powers" undergirds Ellul's approach to ethics. In a nice phrase she calls Ellul's work a "fore-ethics." John Howard Yoder (Professor of Theology at the University of Notre Dame) is critical of Ellul's apparent failure to provide a workable casuistry in his ethics. He finds Ellul's ethical analysis of violence unsatisfactory. Daniel Cerezuella (sociologist and philosopher of technology with the *Association Jacques Ellul* in Bordeaux) provides an account of Ellul as an ethical activist in the campaign to prevent the destruction of the Aquitaine Coast by developers. Ken Morris (who studied Ellul's work in graduate programs at New College Berkeley and Duke University and who is now preparing to practice law after studies at the University of California's Boalt Hall Law School) reflects on the ways Ellul's insights illuminate the ethics of the legal profession in the U.S.

## Bordeaux Update

In the July 1994 issue of *The Ellul Forum* a modest appeal was made for funds to assist in the purchase of Jacques and Yvette Ellul's house near the University of Bordeaux for a headquarters for the *Association Jacques Ellul*. David Gill spent all of July 1995 in Bordeaux investigating possibilities for North American support of and participation in such a project. This included lengthy discussions with Jean Ellul, Daniel Cerezuella, Jean-Francois and Burney Medard, Patrick Troude-Chastenet, Didier Nordon, and other representatives of the Association, the Ellul family, and the University. With Jean Ellul he toured the whole house and property and had a good look at Ellul's books and manuscripts.

Out of these discussions a relatively detailed proposal emerged for raising a million dollars over the next five years in order to purchase the house and develop a "Jacques Ellul Center for Sociological and Theological Studies." This proposal was reviewed by forty scholars, writers, and business people in France and North America, all of whom have indicated strong appreciation of the work of Ellul. The responses to this proposal were then reviewed by Joyce Hanks, Darrell Fasching, Carl Mitcham, and David Gill.



in Philadelphia, November 17, 1995— and by Daniel Cerezuelle and members of the Association Jacques Ellul in Bordeaux at the same time.

While our consensus on both sides of the Atlantic was that the project is eminently worthy it became clear that this group of forty could not muster the finances or time necessary to move forward with the plan. The house is now on the general real estate market in Bordeaux and, unless a major benefactor comes forward in the very near future, we are regretfully giving up on this ambitious project.

## **Donations for the Ellul Publications Project**

While the "big plan" to purchase Ellul's house for a study center appears to have failed, there remains the challenge of *organizing* and safely storing Jacques Ellul's papers and manuscripts. *The Association Jacques Ellul* in Bordeaux is moving ahead with this task, exploring options with both the University of Bordeaux and the Bordeaux and Pessac city libraries. Hundreds of audio tapes of Ellul's biblical studies and dozens of video tapes are in the hands of Association members and it is hoped that eventually a broader audience may profit from them.

In addition, Ellul's autobiographical manuscript (two volumes), his *Ethics of Holiness* (two volumes), and possibly another book or two, remain in the handwritten form Ellul prepared. As many of you know, Ellul's handwriting is very difficult to read! Before any progress can be made toward the editing and publication of remaining works by Jacques Ellul these manuscripts must be converted into typescripts. A secretary familiar with Ellul's handwriting is available to be hired to carry out this important task—but there is no money to pay her!

During the next six months you are invited to make a donation (tax-deductible in the U.S.) to assist the *Association Jacques Ellul* in preserving and transcribing Ellul's manuscripts. We already have five pledges of \$500 and we are hoping that all of those who value Ellul's legacy will join in our effort. Make your checks payable to "The Ellul Forum" (and designate your donation for the "Ellul Publications Fund") and send them to Prof. Darrell Fasching, Dept. of Religious Studies, University of South Florida., Tampa FL 33620. We will forward your donations to France and the work can begin.

## **Upcoming Programs on Jacques Ellul and Ian Barbour**

The Second Jacques Ellul Symposium will be held at the National Association for Science, Technology and Society meeting to be held, Feb 8-11 at the Crystal Gateway Marriott Hotel in Arlington Virginia. The Ellul session will feature a keynote address by Jerry Mander on "Television and the Global Homogenization of Consciousness: Cultural, Political & Social Consequences." Panelists responding are: Dick Stivers, Namir Khan, and Bill Vanderburg.

The session on "The Life and Work of Ian Barbour, Theologian and Philosopher" will feature a presentation by Barbour with responses from James Nash and Leonard

Waks. Moderator, Richard Dietrich, guest editor for the next issue of the Forum, will organize the material from this session for presentation in the July 96 issue which will be dedicated Ian Barbour's work.

## **The Coming of the Millennium**

Trinity Press International will be publishing a new book by Darrell Fasching entitled: *The Coming of the Millennium: Good News for the Whole Human Race*. The book dedication reads: "In memory of Jacques Ellul, 19— to 1994, who taught me that evangelical theology means good news for the whole human race." The book is an ethical critique of the tradition of evangelism as "conquering the world for Christ" and of the abuse of apocalyptic thought by figures such as Hal Lindsey. It argues that the central message of the gospels is God's hospitality to the whole human race - a message desperately needed as we enter a new millennium of pluralistic global interdependence in a technological civilization. The book is scheduled for release in April.

# Forum: The Ethics of Jacques Ellul

## The Concept of "the Powers" as the Basis for Ellul's Fore-ethics

by Marva J. Dawn

Jacques Ellul does and does not do ethics. His use of the biblical concept of the "principalities and powers" undergirds both his refusal to construct an ethical system and his suggestion of an ethics that takes seriously structural and cultural good and evil. Ellul's work is better described as a "fore-ethics," a preparation for ethics that is rooted in a profound awareness of structural realities, but which usually fails to give concrete ethical guidance or systematic ethical development

Ellul was one of the first to apply the concept of "the principalities and powers" to domains other than the state. In a series of three articles in the journal *Foi et Vie*, in 1946 and 1947, Ellul warned that it was necessary to pay attention to the "structures" of our society and itemized "la technique, la production, l'etat, la ville, la guerre, and la sterilisation" as those requiring further study.<sup>1</sup> The third article focused especially on political realism, which Ellul called "une puissance corruptrice enorme," and offered suggestions for a different realism as the Christian response to the powers.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout his works in *sociologie*, Scripture, and ethics, Ellul unfolded an extensive analysis of the nature of the powers.<sup>3</sup> However, because his programatic essays of 1946-47 have not been translated into English and most of his other works fall into distinctive tracks of social criticism or theology, few of his readers are aware of the broad-ranging significance of the concept of "the powers" in Ellul's thinking. My doctoral dissertation demonstrated, using these first articles in *For et Vie* and the various passages on the powers in his later works, that the concept of the "principalities and

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<sup>1</sup> "Chronique des problemes de civilisation: en guise divertissement," *For et Vie* 44.6 (Sept/Oct 1946): 680; "Problemes de civilisation: on demande un nouveau Karl Marx," *Foi et Vie* 45.3 (Mai/Juin 1947): 374.

<sup>2</sup> "Problemes de civilisation: Lerealisme politique," *Foi et Vie* 45.7 (Nov/Dec 1947): 714,720-34. I am currently preparing translations of this article (and the two listed in the previous note) for publication by William B. Eerdmans.

<sup>3</sup> I prefer to retain the French term *sociologie* to suggest that Ellul's social analyses bear little relation to the statistically-oriented "sociology" common in North America.

powers” acts as an important bridge between Ellul’s two major research tracks and is a significant key for interpreting his work.<sup>4</sup>

## The Setting of the Stage

The first major connection of the ”powers” idea and Ellul’s foundations for Christian ethics appears in *The Presence of the Kingdom* (1948).<sup>5</sup> Ellul roots his methods in the dialectical nature of reality, described by the image of the ”two cities” to which Christians belong. They live in a constant inner tension; the world and the kingdom of God can never coincide, but neither must be abandoned (46). As Christians plunge into social and political problems to modify the opposition between God’s order and the world’s disorder, their action should take these three forms: (1) an assessment (with revelation as its starting point) of social and political conditions, (2) efforts to incarnate the will of God in actual institutions, and (3) a ceaseless watching so that God’s order of preservation (beyond whose limits lurks danger to society) is maintained (47-8). Ellul warns that it is an error to think that these actions will progressively bring in God’s kingdom or that they are permanent; nevertheless, these are necessarily revolutionary acts which must be guided by the Holy Spirit (48-9).

Next, Ellul defines Christian ethics by rejecting the notion of moral principles and focusing instead on the person of Christ, ”the principle of everything.” Living eschatologically is the opposite of an ethic (as conventionally understood) because it does not spring from a cause, but moves toward an end (52). Such an ”ethic” entails a freedom characterized by a life and death struggle against the powers (78). Ellul rejects any sort of ”technics” as means of action since the Christian life ”moves in the opposite direction of the triumphant path traced by modern technics” (79).

Thus, Ellul’s lifelong battle against the powers’ functioning in the modern world is intertwined with his resistance to ”systems” in Christian ethics. He objects that purely materialistic or rationalistic intellectual methods prevent us from understanding the powers. ”Only the intervention of the Holy Spirit can transform our intelligence, in such a way that it will not be swallowed up by our systems, and that it will be sufficiently penetrating” (124).

Ellul challenges the church to battle the powers — not by developing economic or political theories, but through the creation of a new style of life. He complains that there is no longer a distinctive Christian lifestyle in which everything, to the smallest detail, is questioned from the perspective of God’s glory (145-48). For spiritual and material reasons, the quest for such a lifestyle in combat with the powers must be a corporate search (149).

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<sup>4</sup> Marva J. Dawn, ”The Concept of ’the Principalities and Powers’ in the ”Works of Jacques Ellul” Ph.D. dissertation (University of Notre Dame, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom* (French edition 1948; English translation by Olive Wyon; New York: Seabury Press, 1967). Page numbers cited in the text refer to the 1967 edition.

Specifically, Ellul calls Christian intellectuals to awareness, including "the duty of understanding the world and oneself,... a fierce and passionate destruction of myths," a genuine realism, and the need to understand reality on the human (and not abstract) level (118-19). Ellul criticizes statistical methods and media information, which produce only an illusory knowledge of the world (120-1). He advocates searching behind all forms of propaganda to study present problems as profoundly as possible, to understand the structure or framework of our civilization as the expression of its spiritual reality. Such awareness leads to a requisite " 'engagement' (or act of resolute commitment)" in which the intellectual recognizes that he or she is subject to the same powers (121-22).

Finally, Ellul explicitly declares that he does not intend to give solutions, but "to open the way for a work of the renewed Church." *The Presence of the Kingdom* serves as "a prologue to more extended study which would examine the problem of our present civilization from every aspect"—a task undertaken in Ellul's subsequent sociological works. He expresses his wish that "fellow-Christians are stirred by the present study to feel the urgency and the depth of these questions" (137). His writings are to be "understood as a call to arms, showing what enemy we have to confront, what warfare we have to wage, what weapons we have to use" (141). All Ellul's works should be read in light of this foundational theme of exposing the enemy, viz., the principalities and powers.

#### The Powers We Confront

Ellul's concept of the powers was modified as well as elaborated over the years in his various biblical and ethical studies. His first thorough explication occurs in *The Ethics of Freedom*, where, rejecting the extreme options of "demons" and of "simply a figure of speech," he places himself somewhere between these middle possibilities of interpretation for the biblical language of principalities and powers:

Are they less precise powers (thrones and dominions) which still have an existence, reality, and, as one might say, objectivity of their own? Or do we simply have a disposition of man which constitutes this or that human factor a power by exalting it as such...? In this case the powers are not objective realities which influence man from without. They exist only as the determination of man which allows them to exist in their subjugating otherness and transcendence.<sup>6</sup>

Then, in one of the most personal passages on the subject, Ellul describes this connection between the powers and social realities:

Political power has many dimensions, e.g., social, economic, psychological, ethical, psycho-analytical, and legal. But when we have scrutinized them all, we have still not apprehended its reality. I am not speaking hastily or lightly here but as one who has passed most of his life in confrontation with their question and in their power. We cannot say with Marx that the power is an ideological superstructure, for it is always

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<sup>6</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom* translated and edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 151-52. Page references in the text of following discussion refer to this edition.

there. The disproportion noted above leads me to the unavoidable conclusion that another power intervenes and indwells and uses political power, thus giving it a range and force that it does not have in itself. The same is true of money... [and] technology (153-4)-

This consciousness of powers and their presence in social realities undergirds all of Ellul's critical social assessments, though he couches his perceptions in such terms as "necessity" to refrain from bringing traditional religious references into the academic milieu of *sociologie*. His insistence that he speaks out of a lifelong confrontation with the question of the powers highlights the notion as a critically important key for interpreting his work.

Ellul describes the powers as "secular and in every sense human, relative, and secondary" (284), taking many forms (455). Their ambiguity is underscored by the recognition that "work, occupation, specialization, family, country, justice, culture, progress, intelligence, or science" are both inevitable and indispensable elements for human beings, and yet they can all become occasions for enslavement (249). All enslaving forces of culture have to be resisted. That does not mean they must be suppressed (which would be a mere illusion), but that their true alienating character must be recognized.

Repeatedly, Ellul insists that Christians have freedom in relation to the powers by virtue of Christ's work.<sup>7</sup> In a section explicating this freedom, Ellul claims that the need for battle against the powers is illustrated particularly in the "religion of the state" (144-160). He does not reject working for political freedom or even to topple dictatorships, but cautions that using ordinary political/technical methods will inexorably refashion or reinforce the very thing we are trying to eliminate (158). Since neither individually nor collectively can we break free from the powers, the only way to deal with them in any sphere is to recognize Christ's objective intervention (159). St Paul declares that the powers "have been despoiled" in the victory of the cross of Christ (Col. 2:14). We therefore "live in a desacralized world. But the process constantly begins all over again. Desacralization ... has to be done again and again" (160).

Ellul's entire approach to ethics and structural evil is summarized in this recognition that the powers have not been totally destroyed, but hold no authority in themselves. Only one freed by faith in the victory of Christ can fight against them, and that battle is successful only with spiritual weapons (Eph 6:13ff.). Without this faith and knowledge, a person remains vulnerable to the powers and will continue to be seduced and oppressed by them.

Ellul rejects the positions of the "demythologizers" for whom "the powers have no objective reality" and of the "socializers" who do not recognize the necessity of belief. He insists against the former that the powers have objective reality and against the latter that the victory of Christ can be grasped and lived out only by those who believe and thereby can fight for liberation (160). True freedom requires liberation from the powers.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 17,103,108,116,205,239,265, and 283.

In an earlier work, *Money and Power* (1954), Ellul named money, Mammon, as a "personal force," a power "which has, or claims to have, a reality of its own... a personal master."<sup>8</sup> Later, in *The Subversion of Christianity* (1984) Ellul delineates six powers: Mammon, the prince of this world, the prince of lies, Satan, the devil, and death. Appearing to join the demythologizers, Ellul in this work emphasizes only the function of these powers, viz., deception, accusation, division, and destruction.<sup>9</sup> No longer does Ellul claim that the powers have a kind of reality of their own. In contrast to his earlier position in *Money and Power* and in *The Ethics of Freedom*, Ellul's later works say that the powers exist only in relation to us.

Ellul's elucidation of the power of the "prince of lies," harmonizes with his discussion of truth and reality in *The Humiliation of the Word*<sup>10</sup> His view of the prince of lies as one of the powers must be kept in mind when reading Ellul's works of social criticism and ethics, for he deals often with misuse of language (in such works as *Propaganda*, *A Critique of The New Commonplaces*, and *Ute Humiliation of the Word*) and with deception (in such works as *The Political Illusion* and *False Presence of die Kingdom*).

Ellul's discussions of other powers, in *The Subversion of Christianity*, reveals some weaknesses in his biblical exegesis. His comments about "Satan" are murky and contradictory; those about the "devil" ignore much of the biblical picture. Ellul does not explain his notion of the power of "death" functioning as destruction.

These weaknesses and inconsistencies notwithstanding, the overall coherence of Ellul's emphasis on their functions adds an important contribution to the discussion of the biblical concept of "the principalities." Also, recognizing how his perspectives on the biblical notion of the powers undergird his works of social criticism helps us understand the severity of his denunciations of the technological milieu, of political illusions, of language and of society. Ellul helps us realize the critical importance for Christians to expose the workings of the powers in these social realities and even in ethical systems.

#### Power and Necessity in Ethical Systems

In his introduction to ethics, *To Will and To Do: An Ethical Research for Christians* (1964), Ellul drew together his rejection of systems of ethics with his absolute Christocentrism and his view of the world as the domain of "necessity." He insisted that Christian conduct is an

insoluble problem which people are always trying to solve by theological modification, and which it is important not to solve. .. [W]hat constitutes the Christian life is

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<sup>8</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Money and Power* (1954) Trans. by LaVonne Neff (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1984), pp. 74ff.

<sup>9</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity* (1984); Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), pp. 174ff; See also Ellul's *Anarchy and Christianity* (1988) Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 83-85.

<sup>10</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of die Word* (1981) Translated by Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985).

not morality but faith, and the center of faith is not the good, but Jesus Christ. At this point Christian ethics breaks off all possible relations with every morality whatsoever.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, Ellul devotes a chapter to "The Impossibility of a Christian Ethic" (201-224). He does not deny the importance of formulating guidance for the Christian life, he ends the book with a chapter on "The Necessity for a Christian Ethic" (245-267), which defines ethics as a "sort of preparation" and the way "to create in the hearer an aptitude for life in die world" by developing the capacity to criticize and control sociological trends and to liberate oneself from them. However, ethics does not have the right

to furnish solutions for every problem, solutions which would be imposed with authority. It can only be the reminder that the specific conduct of the Christian is the indispensable consequence of his faith. It should at the same time be the equipping of the believer with an instrument of reflection and explanation concerning himself and his problems. Finally, it will be a reminder that the earnestness of the theological commitment

should be registered in an earnestness of commitment in the world, and it will establish, for the particular time in which it is valid, the conditions and limits of that commitment. But it cannot go beyond that. This preparatory task is modest but indispensable (248).

This fine line between "ethics which becomes morality" (defined by Ellul as "of the order of necessity" and "of the order of the fall"—and therefore subject to the powers) and "ethics which serves the preparatory task" described above is an essential distinction for understanding the contribution of Ellul's "fore-ethics." He seeks to place ethics within the freedom of the gospel and counter its tendency to fall again into the enslavement of necessity and the functioning of the powers.

Has Ellul succeeded in providing us with an adequate "fore-ethics"? Let us return to the agenda he outlined in *The Presence of the Kingdom* as we assess his ethical contribution.

1. *Ethical method must be rooted in the never-to-be-abandoned dialectical nature of the Christian life in its combat against die powers.* The major strength of Ellul's approach is this emphasis on the continued dialectical interfacing of biblical revelation and contemporary social reality (without losing the dialectical hope of his Christian convictions). The weakness is that he rarely makes the dialectic clear. Thus his biblical works appear too idealistic and his sociological analyses too pessimistic. Only in a few places, such as *The Humiliation of the Word*, does he connect the two tracks of his work to reveal the tension of the dialectic and point toward some practical resolution.

2. *The first form of action for the Christian must be realistic assessment of social and political conditions.* Ellul succeeds in building his ethical reflections in a profound

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<sup>11</sup> Jacques Ellul, *To Will and To Do: An Ethical Research for Christians* (1964) Translated by C. Edward Hopkin (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1969), p. 90. Page numbers in the following text refer to this edition.



awareness of social reality. His ethics repeatedly call for Christians to enter the fight against the powers functioning in social realities. In this respect, Ellul's work offers a model for other Christians, tempted to pronounce an idealistic, disengaged set of ethical norms. It remains to his readers continually to refine this social analysis as well as to soften his critical overstatements.

3. *The second action of the Christian is a constant effort to incarnate the will of God in actual institutions and situations.* One of Ellul's weaknesses is that he does not offer many models for this call to action from *The Presence of the Kingdom*. In his desire to avoid any system of specific norms, Ellul tries to work on a middle level that offers guidance; too easily, however, his guidance becomes abstract. A thorough survey of his corpus reveals that he suggests attitudes and goals for Christian presence; rarely does he get specific concerning ways to incarnate the will of God in institutions. Other weaknesses are due to Ellul's frequent overstatement. Lambasting Christians for their compromise and conformity is unlikely to motivate change, nor do his generalizations recognize that many Christians do think well, pose alternatives, and practice eschatological lifestyles. His harsh words turn many Christians away from his helpful perspectives.

4. *The third action of the Christian is ceaseless watching to maintain limits as part of God's order of preservation.* Ellul's study of the technological milieu especially reflects his intention to offer models of such setting of limits. *Money and Power* also gives practical suggestions for putting limits on the power of Mammon. Dialectically, Ellul's *sociologie* shows the dangers when the technological system is not limited and his theological studies offer biblical models for limiting the powers' encroachment.

5. *These actions must be constantly guided by the Holy Spirit.*

6. *Ethics is thus not a system, but following Christ and living eschatologically.* These themes from *The Presence of the Kingdom* are consistent refrains in all of Ellul's theological works and refer us again to our initial point—that any "system" of morality quenches the freedom of the Christian life under the guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Ellul's ethical method is of a piece with his message: that the Christian life must stand in opposition to all workings of the powers. This is a much needed critique, since insufficient awareness of that battle leads to ethical guidance which is allegedly practical, but which ignores the deeper level of spiritual realities requiring prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Ellul's emphasis on dialectical ethics and on a theology that is continually reassessed is consistent with his emphases both on the Holy Spirit and on freedom from legalism and false morality. His ethical method is congruent with his fight against all manifestations of the powers.

7. *Confronting the powers can only happen by the creation of a new style of life in the context of the Christian community.* Ellul consistently rejects "systems" and "morality" for the basic reason that they become legalistic and destroy the essential freedom of the Christian life. In this rejection of "ordinary" ethics, however, Ellul falls into the opposite mistake of not offering enough guidance for Christians. How will we learn how to make moral decisions concerning aspects of life influenced by the principalities? His

view of ethics parallels, in some respects, Stanley Hauerwas's advocacy of "an ethics of character," but Ellul lacks Hauerwas' emphasis on the Christian community as the locus for nurturing attitudes and virtues. Though Ellul gives us an admirable "fore-ethics," he has not addressed our need for specific means to develop the lifestyle he advocates. The lack of emphasis on Christian community in his works suggests that Ellul did not have any notion of structural good to combat the structural evil of the powers.

## The Casuistry of Violence

by John Howard Yoder

How might we compare Jacques Ellul's argument on violence under "necessity" to the way other ethicists make and interpret exceptions? Ellul offers a special category of arguments which consists in a paradoxical suspension of ordinary moral argument. Yet he does so in connection with a case-related description which still seems to sustain or presuppose a claim that in other circumstances the moral guide would still hold.

In the course of his *Violence; Reflections from a Christian Perspective*, Jacques Ellul is concerned, at the same time, to maintain that the Christian message is revolutionary, and that the espousal of radical politics by many Christians in his time was wrong.<sup>12</sup> His entire book makes clear that there is no Christian moral case to be made for violence, but then he opens his exception: a Christian can use violence in a revolution, as many Christians have in world wars.

The point here is not that this is unacceptable, condemnable. The important thing is that, when he uses violence, the Christian knows very well that he is doing wrong, is sinning against the God of Love, and (even if only in appearance) is increasing the world's disorder. He cannot... believe that the violence he commits is in conformity with the divine will and the divine order. The only thing he can do is to admit that he is acting so out of his own fears and emotions; or else he can say that he is fighting for others, not to save his own life... He has fallen back into the realm of necessity; that is, he is no longer the free man God wills and redeemed at great cost. He is no longer a man conformed to God, no longer a witness to truth.<sup>13</sup>

Thus for Ellul "necessity" is a realm where the truth of Gospel ethic no longer is operational. The argument is quick, with some gaps. One kind of sub-argument seems to be implied in the parenthetical distinction between the apparent and the real impact of violence on the world's disorder. Another seems to be implied in the distinction he

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<sup>12</sup> New York: Seabury, 1969. In this argument he faced the same "crusading" adversaries as in his *False Presence of the Kingdom* (New York: Seabury, 1972). The acceptance of some necessary violence, which is the point I am here concerned to identify and challenge, was not the main point of the passage. His primary concern in this later book was to refute the "theologians of violence" or "of revolution" who at the time were very outspoken.

<sup>13</sup> *Violence*, p. 137.

makes between saving one's own life and fighting for others. Yet neither of these side-glances becomes an explicit argument. The abiding condemnation of the violence to "which one necessarily resorts is uncompromising;

Thus violence can never be justified or acceptable before God. The Christian can only admit humbly that he could not do otherwise, that he took the easy way and yielded to necessity and the pressures of the world.<sup>14</sup> That is why the Christian, even when he permits himself to use violence in what he considers to be the best of causes cannot either feel or say that he is justified; he can only confess that he is a sinner, submit to God's judgment, and hope for God's grace and forgiveness. . . . Whatever side he takes, the Christian can never have an easy conscience and can never be assured he is pursuing the way of truth.<sup>15</sup>

In this passage, does not the reference to "the easy way" assume that there was another, more costly way which one could have taken? This way is then less heroic, weaker. And in his reference to "the best of causes," isn't there a tacit casuistic criterion here? The cause must be relatively the most just. By what standard?

In any case, the fact that wrong-doing is not avoidable does not leave Ellul without moral objectivity: "Let me offer a criterion." The criterion is that, once the violent cause (which the Christian joined in the "necessary" yet not morally "justified" way described above) has won out in favor of the relatively more just side of the conflict, then the Christian should change camps and now side with those who in the new situation are now the victims. For this argument to work it is, of course, assumed that the revolution will win. Otherwise the compromise would not have been justified. This is parallel to the "just war" criterion of probable success. Ellul does not go into how we know the revolution will succeed.

Ellul illustrates his criterion with the Free French victory over the Nazi occupation and their collaborators, with the anticolonial opponents of France's occupation of Algeria, and with the hypothetical victory of the other third-world "just revolutions" being romanticized in the 1960's.

If he stays on the side of the victors, he admits in effect that he was not really concerned for the poor and the oppressed in the first place.<sup>16</sup>

So, if a Christian feels that he must participate in a violent movement (or in a war!) let him do so discerningly. He ought to be the one who, even as he acts with the others, proclaims the injustice and the unacceptability of what he and they are doing... He ought to be the conscience of the movement; the one who, in behalf of his unbelieving comrades, repents, bears humiliation, and prays to the Lord; the one who restrains man from glorifying himself for the evil he does.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> "Necessity" is in the rest of Ellul's work the code word for the fallenness of human history, where the Gospel has not yet had its impact

<sup>15</sup> *Violence*, p. 138.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 141-42. .

The function of "conscience" is, thus, not to urge us to do the right we know, but to acknowledge our guilt for the wrongness of our doing what is still the right thing to do. Ellul has introduced a bifurcation in the fabric of moral discernment. Violence is never to be "justified or glorified," yet neither should it be "condemned" or declared "unacceptable."<sup>18</sup> The Christian will go on doing the violence he does not "justify." The notion of "justifying" has thus been moved from the realm of moral discernment to that of one's standing before God. Remember Jesus' accusations against the Pharisees. He did not reprove them for doing the works of the law, what he attacked was their belief that their doing these works proved them just.<sup>19</sup>

As a lifetime admirer of Ellul, I must confess that he does not convince here. This notion that it is proper for necessity to overrule the liberty of the Gospel is not ratified later in his *Ethics of Freedom*. There are in this book a few opaque allusions to "risk" (p. 355) and to "transgression" (p. 332) which might also point in the direction of an action which is both right (in the sense that you should do it) and wrong (not "justified"), but Ellul avoids concreteness.<sup>20</sup> Nor is this bifurcation explicated when he uses the Pauline language of "principalities and powers."<sup>21</sup> Ellul brilliantly illuminates the dialectic of determination and freedom with the "pauline" cosmology but there is no further light on our theme.

*To Will and to Do* may be the work where Ellul expresses himself the most broadly on the doing of ethics.<sup>22</sup> The preface by Waldo Beach says the book will be about "how the Christian is to cope with the ambiguities of daily life." But rather than throwing more light on how believers might concretely make hard decisions faithfully, Ellul here maximizes the use of undiscussible paradox. A Christian ethic is both impossible (pp. 199ff.) and necessary (p. 245). Morality is of the Order of the Fall (p. 39) and of Necessity (p. 59). Morality is not derived from the knowledge of the will of God (p. 73). The closer one's moral stance is to the will of God, the more suspect it is (p. 212).

Ellul's gallic love of paradox is freer in *To Will and To Do* than in some of his other works, perhaps because the other positions he freely critiques are less directly documented, and there is not a specific biblical text being explicated. One might say that he is closer here than usual to the Lutheran concentration on the *usus elenchthicus legis*, the notion that the role of the law in God's purpose is not so much to guide our choices as to show us our sin.

The tension between necessity, and grace is an intellectual challenge which gives free play to Ellul's dialectical skills; it is not a setting for God-pleasing discernment

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<sup>18</sup> These are the two negative descriptions which Ellul had set aside in the first sentence of the first quotation above.

<sup>19</sup> Ellul makes this point about the Pharisees in his *To Will and To Do: An Ethical Research for Christians* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1969), p. 212.

<sup>20</sup> Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976.

<sup>21</sup> See Marva Dawn, *The Concept of "The Principalities and Powers" in the Works of Jacques Ellul* (Notre Dame, Ph.D. dissertation, 1992).

<sup>22</sup> Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1969.

and obedience, whether individual or shared. His last page in *To Will and To Do* cites as "surely correct" Reinhold Niebuhr's statement that Christianity "complicates dreadfully" the situation of the person trying to answer ethical questions, since the commandment of Jesus is by definition inapplicable.

## **Forum Criticism to Politics: Jacques Ellul, Bernard Charbonneau and the Committee for the Defence of the Aquitaine Coast**

by Daniel Cerezuelle  
(translated by Lucia Gill)

In 1967 the French government launched an operation to develop the Aquitaine Coast (the southwestern Atlantic coast of France). In theory, the intent was to combine protection of the environment with the development of regional tourism. By 1972 the government published its tourism development plan and created the "Interdepartmental Commission for the Development of the Aquitaine Coast" (abbreviated below as the "Development Commission") to put the plan into action.

Realizing that such state-run projects usually led, in practice, not to the protection but to the pillaging of nature by tourism, certain citizen groups (ecologists, leftists, and regionalists) began to worry. Bernard Charbonneau, the long-time friend of Jacques Ellul, decided to lead a rigorous critical study of this operation and gather together the various opposing voices. His initiative led to the creation of the "Committee for the Defense of the Aquitaine Coast" (abbreviated below as the "Defense Committee"), officially founded in July 1973. Charbonneau was the first president from 1973 to 1977, succeeded by Jacques Ellul from 1977 to 1979.

Ellul's and Charbonneau's involvement in the Defense Committee translated their concern into a serious search for new forms of political action with which to confront the technocratic rationalism which characterized the government as well as all existing political parties. Having participated in the Defense Committee (I was the secretary for several years), I observed firsthand their efforts to invent new relationships between the citizens and the state, to raise questions concerning the limits of the technicization of life, and, finally, to search for alternatives to the government's approach to development

A Technocratic Dream:

The Development of the Aquitaine Coast

Decided upon in the full technological ecstasy of the Sixties, the development of the Aquitaine Coast was to be the most ambitious example yet of the comprehensive technocratic development of a territory. In order to understand the questions raised by the Defense Committee, it is necessary to recall briefly what this area was before the Development Commission took control.

The Aquitaine Coast consists of more than 200 miles of large sandy beaches and great dunes. Behind the dunes (planted with a ground cover to keep the sand from blowing away), great pines flourished all the way to the edges of the inland lakes and their currents of sweet water. Inland from the marshy shores of the east extended an immense forest of approximately four million acres. The area had been transformed during the period of 1780 to 1870 by the planting of the forests. The climate was damp and mild, often sunny in summer and autumn.

This was an expanse at the same time natural, unspoiled, and humane. The first attraction and charm of the "Landes" is its solitary immensity, embellished by both nature and human initiative. It represented a vast and rare temperate environment in Europe, where one could live, walk, hunt, and fish freely; The first to profit from this free richness were the Landais people, coming from varied situations, and able there to develop their own sensibilities and style of life.

For a long time, the growth of tourism had been limited by relatively slow economic development, various crises and wars, and also the fact that a large part of the coastal forest was owned by the state. Until World War Two, tourists were limited to just a few resorts, isolated from one another by miles of beaches and pine forests. The lakes were almost devoid of motorboats and sailboats. It was necessary to go many miles by rowboat to be able to camp at the foot of sandy cliffs bordered with pine trees on the superb western shores.

In November 1971, after a flight over the area, Jerome Monod, a representative for the territorial development, declared: "what struck us the most is that this coast is practically empty." In November 1975, Michel Poniatowski, Minister of the Interior, compared the Aquitaine Coast with the equally virginal coasts of Scandinavia. The Aquitaine Coast was the last available leisure coastal expanse in Europe.

The Development Commission was committed to two goals which it claimed to reconcile, even though they were evidently contradictory: (1) making financially viable this vein of lush green *expanse* in developing tourism, while at the same time, (2) protecting it from the invasion of tourists. In their own terms, they wished to "protect nature, make a touristic capital of Aquitaine, and manage it well for all." The focal point of the project would be a great canal connecting the lakes and the future developments. It was proposed "to develop Aquitaine for the people of Aquitaine, with respect for their values and with concern for their well-being."

The potential value of tourism was emphasized. A growth of available "beds" for tourists, from 450,000 in 1970 to 770,000 in 1980, was projected. The Development Commission would advertise in foreign markets in order to provoke a growth of about fifty per cent. With the canal and highways providing total access to the beaches, the lakes, and the forest, the tourists invaded the virgin site. "No problem," it was argued, since the exploitation of the Aquitaine Coast will be accompanied by the protection of nature! "It is possible to protect certain sites while equipping others with facilities especially sought after by tourists."

However, one cannot protect nature without sacrificing the touristic development; developing tourism is not possible without, to some degree, sacrificing nature. It was necessary to choose between the two, and the establishment of 300,000 or 400,000 beds in ten years shows what was the choice! The areas set aside as Nature Reserves were in a ratio of about one in a hundred to those equipped with various tourist diversions.

Thus, the "socialization of nature" did not sustain the goal of preserving nature. On the contrary, the state gave up its land and invested money and energy, imposed constraints and passed the measures necessary for the exploitation of the last great green coastal expanse of Europe, to the profit of capitalist enterprise.

## **Citizens Against the Administration**

In the beginning the Development Commission proceeded in a rather democratic manner with a series of consultations. They gathered together, on an informal basis, a number of experts of all types (biologists, geographers, sociologists, economists, et al) who gave their advice on the various projects as each came up. At this early stage, then, there was truly a thoughtful, well-conceived consultation.

Eventually, however (and inevitably), these discussions resulted in some prudent, cautionary, and even immobilizing recommendations. Suddenly, then, there appeared in these meetings some new characters: representatives of tourism and hotel interests, who came to explain forcefully that, while all these intellectual considerations were *very* nice, there remained a major imperative. And this major imperative always was the development of touristic activity, at all costs. After some fairly lively exchanges, the consultations with the experts disappeared.

For the Development Commission, the development of industry was the only thing that really counted. After all, they argued, tourism was a matter of general interest. The "right to tourism" was proclaimed. Their opponents had in mind only "particular personal interests." People were accused of defending their privileges as vacationing persons who were "already installed and rich." Local businesses which objected were "without great importance." It was essential that everyone should be able to vacation on the seashore; those who opposed this idea were "awful, undemocratic reactionaries."

The argument was that the general interest is superior to the interest of particulars, that is, to all personal interests. And only the political power and the administration are capable of appreciating, understanding, and promoting this general interest. Individual citizens are radically incapable of understanding it. All local interests must yield to this general interest, which is indistinguishable from global and economic politics. Naturally, it was from Paris that one could best appreciate the general interest of the Aquitaine region and its people!

The means for managing the Aquitaine region was thus a centralized power an "interdepartmental commission." This was supposed to be a new kind of administration, outside the normal constraints of traditional administrative organs. It was to be a commission with a determined goal in mind, but flexible and efficient in practice.

But, contrary to what was envisioned, it was much more centralized than any of its bureaucratic counterparts. In reality, even when local businesses and architects were participating, everything was conceived and decided in Paris. The impetus all came from Paris. The management work came from Paris and was imposed by Paris. The local organization was reduced to being a link of transmission. In reality, the local citizens found themselves without any power or control before the decisions of this administration, with its suddenly appearing memos, flyers, criticisms, and notices of infractions (always justified, of course, as "shared decisions").

In principle, interested parties could always intervene, protest, or cause a project to be delayed or rescinded, by insisting on the principle of "shared decision-making." But at a certain point in the undertaking of a project on the land, one could no longer stop the process without having to pay out damages to the delayed businesses. Thus, developers would try to keep a project fairly secret up until the work had begun. At that moment, there was no more possible action, no further recourse, for the citizens and the defense committees! There were many examples of this sort of tactic and of this kind of administrative judgement.

The Development Commission observed none of the principles of respectful management that it had earlier enumerated and proclaimed. The Commission, relying on its numerous, well-paid, full-time personnel, systematically practiced administrative secrecy, arranging important financial affairs and manipulating the local media. In contrast, the Defense Committee dedicated to the resistance was composed of members of limited financial means, and little free time for tire struggle outside of their regular professional obligations.

#### Reinventing a Minimum of Local Democracy

From the beginning, the Defense Committee had to define its positions over against a project which prided itself on the unforgiving logic of a technocratic business. The principal objective of the Committee had to be the awakening of the general conscience. They had to demystify for the local populations the anesthetizing treatises of the Development Commission. This consciousness-raising intended to put pressure on municipalities which, until then were completely subjugated to the project. It was necessary to analyze the ideological presuppositions of the plan, its proposed avenues of realization, its socio-economic consequences for the land, and to focus on the precise problems engendered by the development for a given locality.

The Committee had to create a global critique (i.e., on the level of the masterplan itself) and avoid the snares of traditional, local defense associations which couldn't see further than their own narrow territorial interests. The challenge was to show the internal coherence and the overall relationship among the various urban operations projected for the whole length of the coast. The concerned populations needed help to understand that threats to a given locality resulted from a large, elaborate plan contrived by public powers from far away. The work of the Defense Committee was to help them understand their future local destructions as a part of a general and abstract plan.



In order to achieve these objectives, it was necessary to make use of flexible structures and methods of action. At the level of the organization, the Committee had itself to be an example of local committee coordination and an authentic reflection of the plan. From the beginning, the Defense Committee tried to motivate the formation of local committees and encourage them to take charge of the development. Several new local committees were born through these efforts. Where local committees already existed, the Defense Committees job was simply to respond to local initiatives and to the hopes and wishes expressed by the population. The Defense Committee did not want to proceed in the same technocratic fashion as the Development Commission. This led to a certain weakness of organization inherent in the Defense Committee. In many places menaced by the operations of the development, populations didn't react and the birth of local groups was rendered difficult or impossible.

Most local representatives on both the Right and the Left basically supported the developers. The political climate of the Sixties and early Seventies was not hospitable to a debate. Obviously, the touristic development of the Aquitaine Coast escaped a classical political analysis. It was not a question of defending the Aquitaine Coast against abominable promoters (as was the case on the shore of the Mediterranean), but of combatting an undertaking of the centralized state. Thus, the Defense Committee had to organize itself as a local regional opposition force. In order to put the Commission in jeopardy, and to assure its failure, it was necessary for the Committee, consequently, to recruit every person who had decided to fight, no matter what their political persuasion. It was a condition of the efficacy and credibility of the Committee that it maintain at all costs its political pluralism. Certain members thought that the Committee might be able to become a new institutional presence, a new force of regional opposition hostile to all foolish economic development by official politics.

Practically speaking, the result of the work of the Defense Committee was the demystification of the administrative process. In the context of the late Sixties, the whole notion of "development" was surrounded by such an official mythology that it was difficult to imagine the birth of any opposition whatever to the projects of the Development Commission. Against the formidable propaganda of the architects of development with their proposal of a local version of the myth of the ideal city, the Committee gave itself over to the patient work of demystification.

The Defense Committee made use of official documents in confronting the people with the ecological, social and economic realities of the coast. It made efforts to bring about a serious discussion of the true dimensions of the developers' plans. Instead of the unrealistic dreams of the official plans, it was necessary to explain to local populations what would be the real impact on their lives of the various great upheavals entailed by the development plan. That was not always easy; it challenged the imagination. Translating the abstract discussions of the developers into concrete, understandable language and reality, constituted the core task of the Defense Committee.

Slowly the Defense Committee's criticism of the Development Commission penetrated the spirits of the people and their initial enthusiasm gave way to a certain

distrust. This demystification also had an effect in some hearts in the high places of the technocracy. A certain reticence toward the projects of the Development Commission was manifested little by little in some official milieux.

And then the economic situation changed. It is necessary to emphasize the decisive role of economic difficulties, including unemployment problems (which haven't ceased to be felt since the middle of the Seventies). On one hand, these difficulties have incited local collectivities to accept, and even to solicit, any old project of development, even the most frantic and disorganized. On the other hand, there is much less public money to spend on the forced development of the tourist industry!

In the final accounting, the grandiose plan for the comprehensive development of the Aquitaine Coast was chiseled away. Little by little, the Development Commission quietly retreated and finally was dissolved, without ever having figured out either economic development or environmental protection—any better than would have already been done by private or local initiatives.

The Defense Committee for the Aquitaine Coast dissolved shortly afterwards. Despite its limited resources it had done a useful work. They managed to prevent some stupid projects from occurring. And they developed and experienced some new forms of citizenship and political action. Without these it would not have known how to collectively triumph over development and the imperatives of technology. The experience of the Defense Committee shows that resistance is not impossible.

## Ellul's Ethics and the Apocalyptic Practice of Law

by Ken Morris

William Stringfellow noted in his introduction to the 1967 paperback edition of *The Presence of the Kingdom* that Jacques Ellul's work became known in theological and legal quarters in America in the early 1960s through the publication in English of *The Presence of the Kingdom* and *The Theological Foundation of Law*, and their use in preparation for a national conference on theology and law.<sup>23</sup> Apart from this initial interest, however, the relevance of Ellul's ethics for the practice of law in America has received relatively little attention.<sup>24</sup> If it is true, as de Tocqueville observed a century and a half ago, that in the United States all important political questions are ultimately treated as legal questions, then there is no subject more in need of a trenchant Ellulian analysis. This brief essay is meant to spark further thinking and action in this area, for both myself as I begin the practice of law, and others.

The lack of attention to Ellul's judicial thought is surprising, given his academic interest in legal history and the fact that his sociological and theological analyses all concern issues closely related to the practice of law in the United States, e.g. politics,

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<sup>23</sup> (New York: Seabury, 1967), p 2.

<sup>24</sup> Sylvain Dujancourt, "Law and Ethics in Ellul's Theology," *The Ellul Forum*, (No. 5; June 1990)

language, economics, and technology. Certainly Stringfellow, an American attorney who acknowledged Ellul as an "extraordinary witness,"<sup>25</sup> recognized the importance of Ellul's work for American attorneys. However, Stringfellow's work should be considered parallel to Ellul's rather than as an example of its application to the American context<sup>26</sup>

The American legal community's lack of interest in Ellul's work is likely due in large part to that community's aversion to any religious element in public discourse. Yale law professor Stephen Carter has made the cynical but accurate observation that "One good way to end a conversation—or start an argument—is to tell a group of well-educated professionals [i.e., lawyers] that you hold a political position (preferably a controversial one, such as being against abortion or pornography) because it is required by your understanding of God's will."<sup>27</sup> Yet the American public's growing dissatisfaction with the exclusion of faith stances from our political and legal cultures may indicate that Ellul's judicial thought is ripe for rediscovery—if only as an alternative to calls by the "Christian Right" for a return to a jurisprudence based on "natural law" and "biblical principles."

Ellul's early judicial thought, outlined in *The Theological Foundation of Law*, clearly reflects his characteristic procedural dialectic of holding sociological analysis in tension with biblical revelation. Unlike the bulk of his subsequent work, however, *The Theological Foundation of Law* mixes sociological, historical, and theological analyses in the same study. Ellul began with a sociological and historical analysis of law as human phenomenon and followed up by relating this analysis to what the biblical revelation had to say about law in his time. This is the method that Ellul proposed for those who would follow up on his judicial thought<sup>28</sup>

More than anything else, the ability of Ellul both to challenge and to confuse arose from his insistence that our reflections be shaped by a fundamental christocentric query: What does the Lordship of Jesus Christ mean for X (politics, law, urbanization, the media, economics, etc.)? Thus, when considering the relevance of Ellul's ethics for the practice of law in the United States, we should begin with the same question: "[W]hat [does] the Lordship of Jesus Christ mean for law (law as it exists [in the United States]), and what function [has God] assigned to law?"<sup>29</sup>

This is an awkward enough question in the academy; in the legal profession it generates confused stares. Attorneys and the courts have long been socialized into the conviction that to get along (and to get ahead) you do not mention your religious beliefs.

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pp. 10-11. Readers of *The Ellul Forum* will recall Dujancourt's brief essay, the abstract to Dujancourt's Master's Thesis, as an excellent summary of *The Theological Foundation of Law*.

<sup>25</sup> *The Presence of the Kingdom*, p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> See William Stringfellow, "Kindred Mind and Brother", *Sojourners* (June 1977). Stringfellow noted that his and Ellul's views, although analytically very similar, were reached independently of the other. Stringfellow attributed this correlation to the Holy Spirit's prompting.

<sup>27</sup> *The Culture of Disbelief: How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), p. 23.

<sup>28</sup> *The Theological Foundation of Law* (New York: Seabury, 1969), p. 139.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p. 13.

As a result, for the majority of American attorneys, an attempt to link concretely the Lordship of Christ to anything practical, decisional, or empirical, outside the realm of personal spirituality, is an embarrassment at best

For Ellul, of course, it is impossible for the follower of Jesus Christ to dissociate life into "personal spiritual" and "practical material" spheres.<sup>30</sup> The follower of Jesus Christ takes seriously both the Fall and the promised return of Christ, and therefore must consider each moment as "apocalyptic"—penultimate to being confronted by God's judgment and mercy.<sup>31</sup> In Ellul's apocalyptic, taking the Fall seriously means recognizing the world's affirmation of death as the only ultimate reality. Taking the promised return of Christ seriously means living in expectation that Christ's imminent return will shatter the world's affirmation of the power of death. In light of this eschatological hope, the Christians role is to plunge into the social and political problems of the world, not in order to usher in God's Kingdom, but to contribute to the preservation of the world until Christ's return.<sup>32</sup>

Ellul viewed human law as playing a particular role in the order of preservation prior to God's final judgment. Law exists for the sake of the final judgment, solely as an instrument of organization and preservation, and is therefore entirely secular. [Law] is designed only to provide the framework of the spiritual event of God's speaking, and not to translate God's word or to mummify it in legal formulas.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, law is related to biblical revelation by the concept of justice. In devising laws for society, human beings seek to establish viable modes of organization, given existing political, economic, and technical circumstances. When that organization contributes to the order of preservation, then the law is "just" When the law "provokes disorder and death" or "maintains a formal order, but through oppression or rigidity makes the spiritual life of individuals or groups impossible," then it is "unjust"<sup>34</sup>

The biblical revelation discloses that certain fundamental elements cannot be ignored if law is to be just, i.e., contributing to the order of preservation. A just law must, at a minimum, take into account the existence of: (1) institutions, such as marriage, property, and the state, which are created by God with a soteriological purpose, and (2) human rights, which are conferred by God in the act of covenanting with human beings.<sup>35</sup> These rights have no specific, set content; they are contingent upon the claimant's historical situation.<sup>36</sup> Rather than being intrinsic in nature, human rights are instrumental for the order of preservation. God recognizes human rights so that human beings have space within which to covenant with God. Thus, the content of human rights depends on what is necessary at a given point in history for hearing and

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<sup>30</sup> *The Presence of die Kingdom*, p. 14.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>33</sup> *The Theological Foundation of Law*, p. 105.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 76,79.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*,p81.

responding to the word of covenant spoken by God, both to live and to preserve life.<sup>37</sup> The content of the Christian apocalyptic calling is to be continuously working to discern and uphold the human rights and institutional structures necessary to provide room for individuals to live, hear, and respond to judgment and grace in the word of God.<sup>38</sup>

## The Apocalyptic Practice of Law

If Christians in general have an apocalyptic calling, then Christian attorneys have a special calling to the apocalyptic practice of law arising from the Law's special role in the order of preservation. American attorneys and jurists face a number of barriers in their attempts to work out this apocalyptic calling. Some of the most important themes in such a legal practice would include the following:

First of all, it is a commonplace to note that the legal profession in America has surrendered to crass commercialism. This is true not only because of the manner in which law firms are operated, but also because of the staggering debts that law students compile as an investment in expected lucrative careers (only to discover later that they are chained to long hours of tedious work as firm associates in order to keep making loan payments and to achieve some expected standard of living). Critics of this commercialism are found in all camps. More often than not, the proposed solution is a rejection of the marketplace morality and a return to oldtime professionalism.<sup>39</sup>

Ellul's writings on money and power help the apocalyptic attorney to recognize that commercialism, as an outgrowth of Mammon's spiritual power, does not easily surrender its grip. The apocalyptic attorney is called to introduce free grace into this world of selling, buying, and competition.<sup>40</sup> For the American attorney, acts of free grace would include anything that served to desacralize the economic bottom line. From a realistic perspective, however, these acts of grace will not overthrow Mammon's power. The apocalyptic attorney is not meant to be effective so much as to serve as a sign, pointing to the ultimate eschatological subjection of Mammon to God.<sup>41</sup>

A second barrier facing apocalyptic attorneys in the United States is the adversary ethic. In the adversary system, American attorneys have a duty to represent their clients "zealously within the bounds of the law."<sup>42</sup> As long as their client's objectives are lawful, attorneys are obligated to pursue those objectives through any legally permissible means. Moreover, attorneys are not implicated in the moral quality of their

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>38</sup> See *The Presence of the Kingdom*, pp. 32,48; *The Theological Foundation of Law*, p. 101.

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, Sol M. Linowitz's *The Betrayed Profession: Lawyering at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Scribner's, 1994). Linowitz critiques the commercialism of law while having profited spectacularly from a long career which included positions as senior partner at the Coudert Brothers law firm and former Chairman and General Counsel for Xerox Corporation.

<sup>40</sup> See *Money and Power* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1984), p. 99.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>42</sup> ABA Model Code of Professional Responsibility EC 7-1 (1981).

clients' conduct because the adversary ethic views them as merely agents and not principals.

Legal scholars have linked the rise of the adversary ethic and its accompanying rhetoric to the rapid commercial growth in the United States at the end of the 19th century.<sup>43</sup> Leading attorneys sought justification for their representation of the "robber barons" of the late 19th century in response to public perception that they were acting immorally in protecting and representing this form of commerce. They found this justification by formulating a professional ethic based on legal procedure and the individual rights of their clients. As a result of such an approach to professional services, attorneys dissociated their professional morality from the public's sense of the common good.

Legal ethicist Thomas Shaffer has argued that such dissociation is not necessarily immoral.<sup>44</sup> A professional is entitled to consider only one narrow aspect of his or her client's situation when there are others who will attend to the client's other needs. However, if the attorney attends only to the client's technically lawful objective, there must remain enough of a shared sense of purpose and value in the community that it can effectively judge the client's conduct. Without such a shared public telos, professional narrowness undermines the common good. The American public lacks any strong sense of a secular telos, let alone any theological one. In addition, for the Christian attorney the adversary ethic rationalizes the dissociation of the "personal spiritual" and the "practical material" spheres and therefore is incommensurate with apocalyptic practice.

A third barrier to apocalyptic practice is the "technicization" of law, whereby judicial technique is dominated by procedure and order. Since Ellul's warnings forty years ago, this process has only accelerated in the United States. Indicative of this development are the Federal Sentencing Guidelines, adopted by Congress in 1987. These mandatory sentencing guidelines were intended to "eliminate the historical disparity in sentences imposed upon similarly situated individuals for similar conduct."<sup>45</sup> Historically, one of the main barriers to overcoming sentencing disparity has been the inability of judges to agree on a primary goal in sentencing. Where one judge might regularly impose stiff sentences in retributive punishment, another might weigh the offender's potential for rehabilitation more heavily and impose a more lenient sentence for the same offense.

Congress could have attempted to channel judicial discretion by formulating a coherent national sentencing policy that clarified the purpose behind sentencing. Instead, it codified judicial technique at the expense of individual judges' discernment. The

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<sup>43</sup> See Thomas Shaffer, "The Unique, Novel, and Unsound Adversary Ethic," *Vanderbilt Law Review* 41 (1988): 697. Shaffer draws on Michael Schudson's "Public, Private, and Professional Lives: The Correspondence of David Dudley Field and Samuel Bowles," *American Journal of Legal History* 11 (1977): 191, wherein Schudson discusses the historical and cultural developments of the era.

<sup>44</sup> "The Unique, Novel, and Unsound Adversary Ethic," *Vanderbilt Law Review* 41 (1988).

<sup>45</sup> Ogletree, "The Death of Discretion? Reflections on the Federal Sentencing Guidelines," *Harvard Law Review* 101 (1988): 1939.

Sentencing Guidelines adopted by Congress minimize or ignore criteria which are best applied by judicial discretion (unique characteristics of the offender) and emphasize criteria which are empirically measurable (general characteristics of the offense). While this approach has been successful in reducing statistical sentencing disparities within the particular empirical categories addressed in the Guidelines, it has exacerbated disparities in other categories and continues to undermine the public's confidence in the fairness of the criminal justice system.

A fourth barrier to apocalyptic law practice is the confusion and lack of consensus in the church on the role that God has for law. Ellul called on the church (and, implicitly, apocalyptic attorneys) to "examine and to evaluate the foundation and the purpose of law according to the criteria which it alone possesses."<sup>46</sup> But to take up this calling, Christians must first receive instruction on the foundation and purpose of law, in order to develop a "juridical consciousness." American Christians have been quick to use the law where it would advance their causes, but often without any of the biblical and theological reflection that a juridical consciousness demands.

There are hopeful exceptions to this tendency, however. William Stringfellow sought to instill a juridical consciousness among the Christian laity. More recently, Stanley Hauerwas, Thomas Shaffer at the University of Notre Dame Law School, and H. Jefferson Powell, Professor of Law and Divinity at Duke University, have offered helpful theological analyses of the legal profession and constitutional interpretation. Powell's recent book, *The Moral Tradition of American Constitutionalism* (Duke University Press, 1993) draws on John Howard Yoder's theological account of the state and Alasdair MacIntyre's framework for the critique of western liberalism in order to challenge unquestioned theological approval of the American constitutional order. Not surprisingly, Powell and Hauerwas recently wrote a tribute to Stringfellow's apocalyptic practices.<sup>47</sup>

Stringfellow wrote for the laity in the Church. So far, Powell and Shaffer have tended to write for the legal academy. Hauerwas writes for both the theological academy and church laity, as well as seeking to engage readers unaccustomed to reading Christian theology. Perhaps it is in the tentative interface between law school and divinity school, a position occupied by professors Hauerwas and Powell, that the urgently needed juridical consciousness will begin to take hold.

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<sup>46</sup> *The Theological Foundation of Law*, p. 136.

<sup>47</sup> See Stanley Hauerwas & Jeff Powell, "Creation as Apocalyptic: A Tribute to William Stringfellow" in S. Hauerwas, *Dispatches from The Front. Theological Engagements with the Secular* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), pp. 106-15.

# Book Reviews

## *Sur Jacques Ellul*, edited by Patrick Troude-Chastenet

(Le Bouscat, France: L'Esprit du Temps, 1994). 359 pages. Published with the aid of the Region Aquitaine and the Association Jacques Ellul.

*Reviewed by Joyce Hanks, University of Scranton*

Like most Festschrift-type publications, the impressive tome published for Jacques Ellul<sup>1</sup> in 1983 received little attention. The vast majority of its entries made no reference to Ellul, and most of the rest mentioned his name only in passing. The volume was presented *to* him, its contents having been collected *for* him, in his honor. But it was in no sense a publication of articles *about* him.

By way of collections of essays *on* Ellul, except for journal issues dedicated to him, usually in English, we had only two volumes: *Introducing Jacques Ellul*, edited by James Holloway,<sup>2</sup> and the more recent *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays*, edited by Clifford Christians and Jay Van Hook<sup>3</sup>

No such work had appeared on Ellul in French until last year, the year of his death, when his long-time assistant at the University of Bordeaux, Patrick Troude-Chastenet, carefully assembled most of the papers given at the first conference dedicated to Ellul's thought, held in Bordeaux in November 1993.<sup>4</sup>

As one of only six conference participants from North America,<sup>5</sup> I was very grateful to have the opportunity to read most of its papers in written form. Concurrent sessions forced attendees to miss the presentation of many of the papers, so that the published

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<sup>1</sup> Etienne Dravasa et al., eds., *Religion, societe et politique: Melanges en hommage a Jacques Ellul, Professeur Emerite a l'Universite de Bordeaux I* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1983). 866 pages, over 60 authors.

<sup>2</sup> James Y. Holloway, ed., *Introducing Jacques Ellul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970).

<sup>3</sup> Clifford G. Christians and Jay M Van Hook, eds., *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981).

<sup>4</sup> Conference title: "Technique et societe dans l'oeuvre de Jacques Ellul," [Technique and society in the work of Jacques Ellul], held on the grounds of the Institut d'Etudes Politiques of Bordeaux on 12 and 13 November 1993. Papers given at the conference but not available for publication include Carl Mitcham's "The Impact of Ellul's Thought in the United States," Langdon Winner's "The Autonomy of Technique," and Hans Achterhuis's "Jacques Ellul's *Technological Bluff*'m. the Light of His Earlier Works."

<sup>5</sup> See my conference report in *The Ellul Forum*, no. 12 (January 1994), p. 2.



volume constitutes a necessary completion of the conference, even for those who were able to take in the sessions.

Conference contributions fall readily into several sets of categories, including the various disciplines directing different speakers' inquiries. I have chosen to approach them according to the degree to which they take issue with Ellul's thought, beginning with Ivan Illich's summary remarks. Reserved for the end of the conference (a brief address by Ellul followed, closing the final session), Illich's tribute outlines his significant debt as a scholar to Ellul, and focuses on the relation of Technique to Christianity and to the five senses.

Other papers seeking mainly to summarize, extend, defend, or apply some aspect of Ellul's work include Alain Gras's "Dependance des grands systemes techniques et liberte humaine" [Human freedom and dependence on large technical systems]. Gras, who teaches Sociology at the Sorbonne, explores what he calls "macro technical systems" and the autonomy of Technique, especially in the areas of energy, transportation, and signs and symbols. He explores the hidden costs and the sociological causes and effects of these infrastructures. Building on Ellul's insights, Gras proposes an enhancement of human freedom by means of such changes as reducing energy needs by means of small, locally-managed techniques. He recommends decentralizing many aspects of modern society.

Andre Vitalis, another sociologist, contributes "Informatisation et autonomie de la technique" [Technique as information and as autonomous] to the volume. He concentrates on Ellul's contribution to information theory and his reaction to the ideology that has grown up around the computer "revolution." The autonomy of Technique, understood as Technique's independence from political decisionmaking, economic constraints, and ethical and moral considerations, constitutes for Vitalis one of Ellul's most useful insights. Vitalis reviews some of the most telling criticisms of the concept

A second group of contributors concentrates on offering background for understanding Ellul's thought, or information for comparing his work with someone else's. Jean-Louis Loubet del Bayle, a political scientist, gives helpful background on French social and political movements, in "Aux origines de la pensee de Jacques Ellul? Technique et Societe dans la reflexion des mouvements personalistes des annees 30" [At the root of Jacques Ellul's thought? Technique and society in the reflections of the personalist movements of the 1930's]. LoubetdelBayle points out parallels and points at which Ellul diverged from Personalism, "Ordre Nouveau," and the early years of the "Jeune Droite" movement, including Technique as risk, means and ends, and the "necessary revolution."

Daniel Cerezuelle, a philosopher, compares Ellul with his lifelong friend, Bernard Charbonneau, in "La critique de la modermite chez Charbonneau: Aspects d'un compagnonnage intellectuel" [Charbonneau's criticism of modernity: Aspects of an intellectual companionship]. Cerezuelle traces their work together in establishing groups for reflection, the transformation of society, and ecological efforts. Charbonneau, unlike

Ellul, laid particular emphasis on agriculture and the destruction of the countryside, and was especially concerned with issues of development

Maurice Weyembergh, a philosopher at the Free University of Brussels, compares Ellul and Martin Heidegger ("J. Ellul et M. Heidegger Le prophete et le penseur" [J. Ellul and M. Heidegger: The prophet and the thinker]). Ellul (the "prophet") and Heidegger (the "thinker"), using completely different methods, arrive at somewhat similar conclusions regarding Technique, but each fails to offer much in the way of concrete solutions to the problems posed by Technique. Although both attempt to understand Technique as it really is, Heidegger seeks its essence, whereas Ellul finds it to be a system. Ellul proves more pessimistic than Heidegger on the role of art in the technological society.

Marc Van den Bossche, also a philosopher at the Free University of Brussels, offers a more detailed comparison of Ellul and Heidegger on Technique and art, in "Technique, esthetique, et metaphysique: L'art et la technique chez Ellul et Heidegger" [Technique, esthetics, and metaphysics: Art and Technique in Ellul and Heidegger]. They agree, basically, on the relationship between art and Technique, but differ with regard to the definition of truth. Ellul deals more with the practical side of Technique, whereas Heidegger finds Technique to be the culmination of Western metaphysical thought.

Lucien Sfez, a political scientist at the Sorbonne, in his "Technique et communication" [Technique and communication], compares Ellul on Technique with Gilbert Simondin (who constituted a frequent point of reference for several other contributors also). In Simondin's "technical culture," means and ends are not distinguished, nor are subject and object. Sfez emphasizes Ellul's perspicacity in foreseeing the danger of the culture of Technique, of technological discourse.

A third group of speakers at the conference offered substantial criticism of Ellul's thought, within the context of their marked degree of agreement with him. Troude-Chastenet, in "Technique et politique dans l'oeuvre de Jacques Ellul" [Technique and politics in the work of Jacques Ellul], offers several reasons to explain why Ellul was so little appreciated in France. He summarizes Ellul on Technique as related to propaganda, politics, and revolution, and suggests how his theology can be seen as influenced by his work in sociology, and vice versa. In his conclusion, dedicated to advantages and disadvantages of Ellul's approach to Technique and politics, Troude-Chastenet criticizes Ellul's definition of politics as too associated with the State, and his definition of Technique as too broad. Ellul's view of the State dates from the 1930's, and ignores recent developments in which the State seems too weak rather than too powerful. Troude-Chastenet also disagrees with Ellul's frequently repeated assertion that in the final analysis, Right and Left, democracy and dictatorship, tend to share in the same weaknesses, due to their involvement with Technique. The author also faults Ellul's exaggeration and "prophetic style" as tending to weaken his arguments, and questions some of his theological assertions.

Serge Latouche's "Raison technique, raison economique, et raison politique: Ellul face d Marx et Tocqueville" [Technical, economic, and political rationality: Ellul over

against with Marx and Tocqueville] refers only briefly to Karl Marx and Alexis de Tocqueville. Rather, he concentrates on Ellul, whom he finds too pessimistic with regard to Technique. Latouche believes Technique will diminish in importance, since totalitarian governments do not support Technique effectively, society calls it into question each time a disaster occurs, and no one can muster the increasingly costly means necessary to advance its development. Furthermore, market economies, emphasizing economic usefulness, conflict with Technique, which favors efficiency.

In "Pour une approche constructive de l'autonomie de la Technique" [Towards a constructive approach to the autonomy of Technique], Pierre de Coninck, a Canadian professor of engineering, finds that Ellul has equated the terms "autonomy" and "independence" with reference to Technique. Since only a small proportion of Techniques that could be developed are, in fact, developed, Technique cannot be described as "causal," as Ellul does. The "one best way" is not always chosen. De Coninck proposes the development of a new concept of Technique based on constructivist conceptualizations. For him, technique is creative, and constitutes an open rather than a closed system. It is codependent with human beings and their *milieu*, so that society and Technique determine each other. Since each situation is unique, it is important to involve people as much as possible in decision making with respect to Technique.

Gilbert Hottois (who teaches philosophy at the Free University of Brussels), in "L'impossible symbole ou la question de la 'Culture technique'" [The impossible symbol or the question of "technical culture"], also parts company with Ellul on the issue of creativity in Technique. He believes Ellul concentrated on the organization, systematization, and power of Technique to the exclusion of the creativity that can be involved in its development. As a result Ellul denies the existence of the philosophy of Technique and of "technical culture" (as developed in Simondin), seeing Technique and symbol as radically opposed. Hottois, however, situating himself somewhere between Ellul's and Simondin's views, believes the creative aspect of Technique gives it a symbolic dimension. This symbolic aspect often occurs after the discovery of a technical innovation, thus adding a dimension of mystery and risk to the technical process. Like de Coninck, Hottois believes there is room for choice in the technological society.

Although he agrees with Ellul on many points, Jean-Louis Seurin, a political scientist at the University of Bordeaux, concentrates mainly on their disagreements in "Jacques Ellul: L'interprétation de la politique à la lumière de la Bible" [Jacques Ellul: The interpretation of politics in the light of the Bible]. Seurin takes up the issue mentioned by Troude-Chastenot concerning Ellul's failure to distinguish adequately between democracy and totalitarianism. He also disagrees profoundly with Ellul's view of politics as the incarnation of evil and lying. Seurin suggests that Ellul refers more to ideology and political propaganda than to ordinary, practical politics, although he agrees with Ellul that politics involves the will to power.

A fourth group of conference speakers emphasized their sharp disagreements with Ellul. Friedrich Rapp, a German philosopher, in "Il faut analyser le tout pour mieux le comprendre" [One must analyse the whole in order to understand it better], criticizes

the undue importance Ellul gives to the role of Technique as an abstract totality. Ellul personalizes Technique, and sees all human activity as involving means to an end, whereas Rapp believes we are most human when *not* trying to achieve a desired end. Like Latouche, Rapp believes Technique may well diminish significantly in importance in the future, and calls for a more detailed, complex analysis of Technique than Ellul offers, taking into account a series of societal factors that Rapp believes function independently of Technique (including secularization, democratization, individualism, and moral and cultural pluralism).

Franck Finland, who teaches philosophy at the University of Montpellier in France, traces the history leading up to Ellul's concept of a new sort of technical system involving a new level of interconnectedness. Finland compares language and Technique, and explores the possibility that the technical system constitutes a profoundly human development that we should welcome.

In "Sacre, technique et societe" [Sacred, Technique, and society], Gabriel Vahanian, a University of Strasbourg theologian, takes issue with Ellul for three main reasons: Ellul overestimates Technique, underestimates religion, and underestimates society and culture. Vahanian especially objects to Ellul's dichotomy of faith and world and to his neglect of Biblical utopia.

Lazare Marcelin Poame, a philosopher from the National University of the Ivory Coast, criticizes Ellul's concept of Technique as the "determining factor" in western society. He finds Ellul's concept of a "technical system" too limiting sociologically, and believes the transfer of technology can take place without significant cultural effects, as he believes Ellul says it did in Japan. Poame offers various explanations for the failure of efforts to modernize Africa.

Having arrived during the giving of Vahanian's paper, Ellul spoke the final words of the conference. He traced his debts to friends and family, and underlined the importance of the separation of theology and sociology in his work. An English translation of Ellul's address was published as "Ellul's Response to the Symposium in his Honor at the University of Bordeaux, November 1993," in *TheEUidForum*, no. 13 (July 1994), p. 18.

Ellul would have been very pleased to see the publication of this volume, I believe. It explores his thought in depth, from many angles, and seeks to correct and extend it. The Festschrift for Ellul, mentioned above, gives some idea of Ellul's stature in terms of how much he influenced students, perhaps especially those whose theses he directed. The present volume explores in detail part of the considerable impact Ellul has had in the broader French academic world, as well as abroad. More importantly, several of these authors point us to significant areas for future research that would extend dialogue with Ellul's thought in productive ways.

# *Thinking Through Technology: The Path between Engineering and Philosophy,*

by Carl Mitcham. University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Reviewed by Pieter Tijmes

University of Twente, The Netherlands

Carl Mitcham has remained faithful to the idea he formed as an undergraduate in the 1960s: the distinguishing characteristic of our time is technology. This idea has become his continuing philosophical concern and has inspired him to a unremitting exploration of philosophical issues associated with technology. In a certain sense this book is a conclusion of Mitcham's daily pursuits of interpreting technology so far. This recapitulation has become a very interesting introduction to the philosophy of technology.

Probably nobody is so well informed about the literature on this field of philosophy as Carl Mitcham. In this book he delivers with amazing clarity a survey of the philosophical options, his control of which can be concluded from the many shrewd comparisons and fruitful suggestions. He is an ecumenical thinker nobody is refused and everybody is accepted. He who has made a contribution gets the appropriate place in relation to the others. In short, in characteristic and well chosen wording and rewording Carl Mitcham presents the thinkers of technology. In doing this he puts great stress on the acoustic space he presupposes in his readers, so that his compromise between treating the selected authors exhaustively and concisely becomes acceptable. Sometimes a host of authors is dropped on a page, but the indications are sufficient for the reader to select his favorites, so that I can personally very well live with his compromises.

This does not change the fact that the book is a philosophical meal too big for dinner guest with a small appetite. The result is that Mitcham's book is a very helpful introduction to the philosophy of technology, though not suited for beginners. It refers often to the books themselves and draws the reader's attention to uncultivated areas. This outcome may be a new start for the readers.

Carl Mitcham does not develop a philosophy of technology of his own. His contribution consists in giving a key to deal with the daily growing literature on philosophy of technology. In the first part of the book Carl Mitcham gives a survey of the historical traditions in the philosophy of technology, in the second part his aim is to highlight conceptual distinctions and issues. These two cross-sections - historical and analytical - amount to the pleasant fact that some authors may get double notice. With regard to each cross-section Carl Mitcham has a sorting machine at his disposal. To cover the recorded history of technology he makes an interesting distinction between two approaches to technology: On the one hand we find the approach of engineers and technologists whereas on the other hand we see the approach of scholars in the humanities.

Mitcham begins in chapter 1 with the engineers approach to technology. Special attention is dedicated to a cortege of German engineers/philosophers, from Ernst Kapp (technology as organ projection) to Friedrich Dessauer (technology as encounter with the Kantian thing in itself) about whom Cari Mitcham writes with love. From outside of Germany Gilbert Simondon, Hendrik Rissen and Egbert Schuurman, Juan David Bacca and Mario Bunge, among others, are paid a visit. In the second chapter Carl Mitcham focuses his attention on humanities oriented approaches to philosophy of technology — which circumscribes as the attempt of religion, poetry and philosophy to bring "non" or "trans'-technological perspectives to bear on interpreting the meaning of technology. He concentrates on four representatives of the romantic tradition, who make, in his opinion, a strong case for the humanities: Lewis Mumford, Jose Ortega y Gasset, Martin Heidegger and Jacques Ellul. These portraits are nice, intriguing, learned and sympathetic respectively.

In the third chapter he comes back to the difference between the engineering and humanities approaches to the philosophy of technology and gives them a clearer circumscription. Engineering philosophy of technology is even baptized a technological philosophy, because it is one that uses technological criteria and paradigms to question and judge other aspects of human affairs, and thus deepens or extends technological consciousness. Humanities or hermeneutic philosophy of technology seeks by contrast insight into the meaning of technology — its relation to the transtechnical: art and literature, ethics and politics, religion. It typically deals with nontechnical aspects of the human world and considers how technology may (or may not) fit in or correspond to them. At the same time Carl Mitcham undermines, in a certain sense intentionally, the clear distinction between these two traditions by focusing attention upon the bordertraffic between them. In this scope he discusses two attempts to reconcile the differences, one emerging within the engineering community (Society of German Engineers) and another within the philosophical community in the US (John Dewey and Don Ihde). In this context the author also explores the rich Marxist heritage.

In chapter IV he shows a new approach and formulates core issues in the philosophy of technology. With reference to relevant literature the author outlines a spectrum of issues ranging from the conceptual and epistemological through the ethical and political to the religious and metaphysical. Chapter V is the most 'technical' chapter in the book. In it Greek thinking on techne is explored as an example of premodern history.

In the second part of the book the analytical cross-section is dealt with. This part is probably closer to the daily experience of the engineer who may consider the first part of the book interesting but without much concrete relevance to his engineering praxis. It is obvious that in each discourse on technology the meaning of it is different. The engineer's usage of the term technology is rather restrictive, but on the tip of the tongue of, for example, Ellul or Heidegger the word 'technology' is extended to a degree where it no longer corresponds to the commonplace interpretation within the domain of the engineering praxis.

In this second part Carl Mitcham discusses philosophy from four different angles. His analytical cross-section is a provisional framework for analysis — ‘definite enough to provide some guidance and open enough to allow for adjustments and the possibility of winding up with new ideas’ — that considers technology respectively as object, as knowledge, as activity, and as volition. Technology as object can be distinguished according to types of objects-utilities, tools, machines - (chapter VII), technology as knowledge according to types of knowledge - maxims, rules, theories -(chapter VIII), technology as activity according to types of activities - making, designing, maintaining, using - (chapter IX), and finally technology as volition according to types of volition -active will, receptive will - (chapter X). These chapters — in particular the ones on artifacts (chapter IX) –are very stimulating due to the surprising way many viewpoints of heterogenous origin are brought together.

From the two mentioned traditions of philosophy — engineering and humanities philosophy of technology — Carl Mitcham concludes that studies of philosophy and technology are needed. Therefore, he makes a passionate plea for pluralistic philosophy and technology studies. This synthetic point of view represents his effort to think about technology philosophically, in a way that does not exclude engineering discourse. Thinking through technology is in this way more than an critical introduction, it mirrors a philosophical concern that wants to reflect on technology in order to engage engineering practice and take it seriously. Carl Mitcham meets his own philosophical concern.

**Issue #17 Jul 1996 — Ian Barbour  
on Religion, Science, and  
Technology**



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## About This Issue

by Richard Dietrich, Guest Editor

at a privilege and surprise to be a guest editor of the *Ellul Forum*. - his issue features the thought of Ian G. Barbour, Bean Professor of Science, Technology, and Society, Emeritus, at Carleton College in Minnesota. Ian has been important for the Science, Technology and Society Program here at Penn State; as well as for the National Association of Science, Technology, and Society (NASTS); and importantly, as an Ellul-like figure in our technological culture, society, system, and world.

Ian Barbour completed two series of Gifford Lectures (1989-90 and 1990-91) at the University of Aberdan in Scotland. He joins the ranks of such Gifford lecturers as William James, Carl Jung, and Reinhold Niebuhr. The two resultant books—his magnum opus—are reviewed herein by your guest editor. These books, *Religion in an Age of Science* (1989-90) and *Ethics in an Age of Technology* (1990-91) contain clear and patient reflections on the nature of and interconnections among ethics, religion,

science, and technology. Also, they offer “comprehensive and sure-footed synthesis” to peacably conjoin them, giving the reader both a status in the world and a perspective above it.

Ian G. Barbour is the great conciliator. His vision is this: With religion and science conspiring to understand reality, and with ethics and technology reciprocating to emote reality—human existence will persist and prosper. He recognizes the dark side with its nihilism, evil and sin; but emphasizes the light side with its reality, goodness, and reconciliation. For many years Ian was professor of religion, professor of physics, and director of the Program in Science, Ethics and Public Policy at Carleton College. Thus his life’s work (as reflected in the Gifford Lectures) has been to synthesize religion and ethics with science and technology.

With the above in mind, I want to give you some background information about the honoring of Ian Barbour in this issue of the *Ellul Forum*. It came about through the honoring of Ian Barbour at the recent annual conference of the National Association for Science, Technology, and Society—held February 8-11 in Arlington, VA. It was there that an annual lectureship (The Life and Work of Ian Barbour) was inaugurated through my responsibility as Values and Religion Co-chair. Darrell Fasching, who knows of Barbour’s stature, caught wind of the above “annual lectureship,” and the rest is history—or will be when you read this.

Therefore, this issue of the Forum contains, in large part, material from that STS Conference lectureship. My plan is the following: I am opening this Forum, somewhat as I did the lectureship. Next, Ian Barbour will address us, as he did there, with his “Technology and Theology” piece. Then, James A. Nash will respond to Barbour’s address with “Norms and the Man: A tribute to Ian Barbour.” This is a thoughtful, heartfelt, witty, and revealing response; based in part on Barbour’s second volume from his Gifford Lectures *Ethics in an Age of Technology*. Alas, another responder who took ill, was to have responded with material from Barbour’s first volume, *Religion in an Age of Science*.

Included in the lectureship materials are my reviews of the above two volumes to help acquaint you with them. But having done these reviews, I thought it fitting for the *Ellul Forum* to contain an attempt at a few comparisons concerning the approaches and systems of Barbour and Ellul. They address the “religion and technology” question quite differently. I have added a few observations of my own regarding what I see as their surprising neglect of analysis concerning technology in the Post-Modern Era.

My hope is that you thoroughly enjoy this issue.

## Bulletin Board

### The Ellul Publishing Project

Funds are being raised to assist Ellul's heirs in the transcription and publication of his unpublished manuscripts. To date almost \$3500.00 has been raised. Anyone interested in contributing may do so by sending a check made out to the *Ellul Forum* and marked for the Ellul Publication Project. Preliminary work is now being done on *The Ethics of Holiness*.

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# Forum: Ian Barbour on Religion Science & Technology

## The Gilford Lectures 1989-1991

*Religion in an Age of Science*, Volume One.

1990. 297 pages; and *Ethics in an Age of Technology*, Volume Two. 1993 . 312 pages.  
Ian G. Barbour. Harper, San Francisco.

*Reviewed by Richard A. Deitrich*

Assistant Professor of Science, Technology, and Society. The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pa. 16802

Ian Barbour's past scholarship has contributed to the Penn State Science, Technology and Society Program: his 1980 book *Technology, Environment, and Human Values* is a staple here. These two new volumes — his magnum opus — are capable of solid contribution to S-T-S endeavors of every stripe. We shared breakfast at the National Association of STS held near Washington, D.C. in March of this year. He sympathized concerning this task: the review of two volumes with over 600 pages of scholarly reflection spanning nearly a lifetime.

This being the Ellul Forum, I want to set the scene vis 'a vis Ellul. He is not referenced nor indexed in Volume One; and is only once referenced, therefore indexed, in Volume Two. Although they share a conservative Christian theology, Barbour does not share Ellul's pessimism. In fact, Barbour includes a one-page Reply to the Pessimists, and then explains "I am most sympathetic with the contextualists, though I am indebted to many of the insights of the pessimists." (page 24)

Regarding "technology" then, Barbour is a contextualist (i.e., technology is both a product and an instrument of social power); but what is he regarding "science?" He is a conciliator (i.e., science and religion ought to allow all of us to grasp reality peaceably). Having obtained a Ph.D. in physics, he taught and researched several years, then returned to graduate school in philosophy and religion.

Regarding structural components, both books contain nine chapters, and they are heavily end-noted with 447 entries in Volume One, and 767 in Volume Two. Each book has three parts, with three chapters in each. They appear, therefore, homiletically arranged, perhaps owing to the format of the Gifford Lectures.

The epistemology of the volumes should be noted — they follow a similar approach. In Volume One, the first part relates religion to science; and it relates ethics to tech-

nology in Volume Two. Barbour uses a comparative approach which is typical of a conciliator. Part Two treats three large aspects common to religion and science—(physics, astronomy, evolution) in Volume One; while in Volume Two, three large issues concerning ethics and technology (agriculture, energy, computers) are discussed. Part Three, in Volume One, aims for a studied conciliation of religion and science; while Part Three, in Volume Two, thoughtfully places technology under control within its social context via ethics.

With the above foundation in place, I want to fashion a modest structure of key insights, understandings, etc. to convey a sense of the author's essence.

Barbour begins the first volume by facing the conflict between science and religion head-on. Part One, Religion and the Methods of Science begins by opposing two extremes — scientific materialism and biblical literalism; then works toward middle ground through conciliation. It is reached, for Barbour, by a clever shift from natural theology to a theology of nature. The former starts with science and reason while the latter begins with (in this case) the Christian tradition based on religious experience and historical revelation. Barbour admits "I am in basic agreement with the 'Theology of Nature' position, coupled with a cautious use of process philosophy." (page 30)

Part Two, Religion and the Theories of Science, contain chapters 4,5,6 which are entitled Physics and Metaphysics, Astronomy and Creation, and Evolution and Continuing Creation, respectively. These chapters are written ad populum — no specialist jargon, no forbidding math, no assumed background. Yet die major conflicts and touch-points are treated— as by all great teachers—with clarity, fairness, and thoroughness.

These middle chapters have two purposes: one, to address key issues, concepts, and metaphysical/theological implications of the above three relational pairs; two, to acclimate the hearer/reader to the shallow water, before it gets deeper.

Part Three, Philosophical and Theological Reflections, delves deeply into human nature, process thought, and the God/Nature relationship. These three chapters grip the reader through the height, depth, and expanse of Barbour's thought in this, the central stage of his life-drama. He is wide-ranging in referencing, perceptive in epistemic organization, and exhaustive in considering concepts, explanations, and models toward understanding theodicy and odyssey.

Volume Two *Ethics in an Age of Technology* is a quasi-apologetic for the Christian ethical framework; within it, after all, modern technology has arisen. Contra Ellul, Barbour contends that Western religious traditions can waken humanity from the mesmerizing milieu of technique. As stated before, he is a hopeful contextualist, not a doleful pessimist, nor naive optimist.

Material from Barbour's *Technology, Environment, and Human Values* (1980) has been important for this new book. For example, Chapters 3,4,5,10,11 and 13 of the former are reworked into Chapters 1,2,3,4,5 and 9 of the latter. His very helpful values schema of material values (survival, health, material welfare, employment), social values (distributive justice, participatory freedom, interpersonal community, personal fulfillment), and environmental values (resource sustainability, ecosystem integrity,

environmental preservation) has been skillfully integrated into this new work. As the author states on the back cover “The challenge for our generation is to redirect technology toward realizing human and environmental values on planet earth.”

Part One, *Conflicting Values*, begins with the conflicting views of technology as liberator, as threat, and as instrument of power—views held by optimists, pessimists, and contextualists, respectively. Florman, Ellul, Pacey, Ferkins, et al. are cited; but the new insight here is from Barbour’s important delineation of the “two-way interaction” between technology and society.

This new insight drives a hopeful wedge behind which the Human Values discussed in Chapter 2, and the Environmental Values in Chapter 3 can enter technically ingrained discussion. Barbour’s strength of forcing religious values fairly and thoughtfully into supposed secular discussion is very evident here. Tillich did it by “correlation,” Barbour does it by “conciliation.”

As mentioned earlier, Part Two deals with agriculture, energy, and the computer—chapters 4, 5, and 6, respectively. In my view, the intent to be informative regarding these issues (e.g., 132 references for the 30 pages of Chapter 4) overpowers the application of Barbour’s values schema. He obliquely raises the value issues throughout these chapters; then, in a concluding page or two, makes a stronger connection to several applicable material, social, or environmental values. The connections lack compulsion.

For me, the lack of an accompanying religious impetus when engaging these issues allows the overweeming technological milieu to diminish the importance, incisiveness, and power of Barbour’s thought. However, the referencing, clarity, and value-related discussion make this section worthwhile, if not, engaging.

From the analysis of the three previous particular technologies, Part Three turns to a general discussion of Technology and the Future. It is here, most of all, that I miss Barbour’s forte — his irresistible imposition of helpful, and reasonable religious resources into a secularized discussion.

Chapter 7 takes issue with three Unprecedented Powers of modern technology which have huge ethical components: environmental degradation, genetic engineering, and nuclear weapons. There is not much new in this chapter and the ethics content is further reduced, as is the religious impetus.

The above can be said for Chapter 8, *Controlling Technology*, even more so. This chapter, and the previous one, could well serve as required reading for a technology and public policy course because it deals with governing, assessing, and redirecting technology. It touches all the bases, but lacks in-depth analysis of deeper sources for human control of technology.

The final chapter points to New Directions for technology. Barbour returns to his strength as conciliator by insisting on the legitimacy of ethical/theological considerations within technical endeavor. It is strong because of this: he is clearly writing for me and mine, for you and yours, for the future of humanity. Yes, technology should be appropriate! We should conserve! The 98 million overweight American adults should diet for health and justice! Values can and are changing!

Barbour concludes, "I believe that the combination of education, political action, catalytic crises, and (ethical/religious) vision can bring about a more just and sustainable world."

With these two volumes, Ian Barbour's sure-footed scholarship has comprehended a half-century of techno-scientific civilization. His prodigious referencing has garnered from afar. His ordered thought has penetrated the basic dilemmas and issues of post-industrial modernity. His insistent humanity has wrestled with those in scientific and technological endeavor regarding the legitimate and necessary participation of ethics and religion in all human endeavor.

A great soul and proven scholar has spoken. For this, and the above reasons, these works deserve a place on the shelf of any educator who even brushes their content.

## Technology and Theology

Ian G. Barbour

### Technology and Social Justice

Environmentalists have been concerned about the impacts of technology on the environment but have often neglected issues of social justice. Social activists have usually reversed these priorities. I have argued that the Christian tradition has a distinctive contribution to make in bringing together commitment to environmental preservation and social justice. Since 1970, many writers have explored differing forms of Christian environmental ethics, but relatively few have asked about Christian attitudes toward technology in the context of recent awareness of global environmental and resource constraints.

Starting with the prophets of ancient Israel and the teachings of Jesus and the early church, the biblical tradition has challenged unjust social institutions. Many of the leaders in movements for prison reform, the abolition of slavery, women's suffrage, and civil rights were motivated by their religious beliefs. Concern for social justice today must include analysis of the effects of current forms of technology.

#### 1. *Inequitable Distribution of Costs and Benefits*

Frequently one group benefits from a technology while other groups bear the brunt of the risks and indirect costs. A chemical plant may benefit consumers and stockholders, while its effluents, emissions, and toxic wastes put Workers and local citizens at risk. Giant tomato harvesters bring profits to food processing companies and large landowners, but small holders lose their land and farm workers lose their jobs. Biotechnology research is directed mainly to the diseases of affluent societies, while tropical diseases affecting, far larger populations are neglected. Computers, communications, and information are sources of social power, and access to them varies greatly within

nations and between nations. Technology has contributed to the enormous disparities between rich and poor countries because most new technologies require extensive expertise, capital, and infrastructure. Consumption by industrial nations is responsible for a grossly disproportionate share of global pollution and resource use.

Within industrial countries, injustices occur when the risks from pollution fall disproportionately on the poor. The Commission for Racial Justice of the United Church of Christ took the EPA list of the nation's worst toxic dumps, and correlated it with census data on the area with the same zip code. The data which had the highest correlation with the location of a toxic dump was the percentage of Afro-Americans and Hispanics in the local population. The urban poor are almost always exposed to higher levels of air pollution, water pollution, noise, and lead poisoning than citizens with higher incomes, and they have little economic or political power to defend themselves from such risks.

### *2. The Concentration of Economic and Political Power*

Technology is both a product and an instrument of social power. It tends to reinforce existing social structures. In the Third World, the Green Revolution favored large land-owners who could afford tractors and fertilizer, and this led to the further concentration of land ownership. In Western nations, absentee or corporate farm ownership is common, and food processing companies sometimes control the whole food cycle, from farm inputs and crop or feedlot contracts, to food processing, marketing, and restaurant chains. Economic power translates into political power through election campaign contributions. Strong lobbies have promoted policies and subsidies favorable to oil, coal, and nuclear power, while solar energy and conservation measures have received little support. Large-scale capital-intensive technologies require huge investments and the centralization of management, making participation by workers more difficult

The biblical tradition is realistic about the abuse of power. The concept of sin refers to the actions of groups as well as the attitudes of individuals. Every group or nation tends to rationalize its own self-interest. In large-scale centralized systems, such as nuclear power plants, human fallibility and institutional rationalization can have catastrophic consequences. In policy decisions, technical experts often use a narrow range of criteria and have a vested interest in a particular technology, so we need input from a wide range of people who might be affected by a decision. But the biblical tradition is also idealistic in its affirmation of creative human potentialities. Through technology, we can use our God-given intellectual capacities to promote human welfare within a more just social order. The biblical view of human nature would lead us not to reject technology but to seek to redirect it toward the basic needs of all people.

### *3. Priorities in Research and Development*

A large fraction of the world's scientists and engineers are in defense-related research, and many of the remainder are working on projects that will provide luxuries for the privileged. Of the world's total expenditures for scientific research and development, only 6% are in the Third World. Adequate food, health and shelter are the most universal and the most essential human needs. Technologies of agriculture, pub-



lic health, and low cost housing are thus crucial to developing nations as well as to people trapped in poverty in industrial nations. Energy, climate change, and population growth are also urgent global problems, so high priority should be assigned to such research areas as solar energy, high-protein crops, and family planning in all its dimensions. Both environmental preservation and resource sustainability should be considered in all technological policy and design. Energy conservation reduces pollution, global warming, and our trade deficit. Products which are recyclable cut down on pollution and resource depletion, and in most cases also conserve energy. Waste is reduced further when several processes can be integrated, as in the cogeneration of heat and electricity. In industrial nations, future growth should be sought in the technologies related to services, such as education, health care, and communications, rather than in the more resource-intensive and heavily polluting manufacturing and consumer-goods industries.

#### *4. Jobs and the Environment*

The environmental movement has been accused of being elitist and of neglecting the impact of environmental regulations on employment opportunities. However public opinion surveys have consistently shown broad support for environmental measures among all socioeconomic groups. Labor unions and environmentalists have cooperated in working for occupational safety and the regulation of chemicals in the workplace. Both groups have sought greater accountability on the part of corporations and government bureaucracies and greater public access to information and decision processes.

EPA has estimated that industries producing and deploying equipment for the control of air, water and land pollution have created more jobs than have been lost by environmental regulations. Many existing jobs would have been jeopardized by environmental deterioration - in agriculture, fishing, and tourism, for instance. Some companies have threatened to close if emission standards were tightened, but few have actually done so, and most of those that did were heavy polluters with obsolescent plants. There have of course been layoffs that caused great hardships to individuals and local communities, but job retraining, adjustment assistance and job creation programs can mitigate such consequences.

The protection of the Spotted Owl in old timber stands on public lands in the Pacific Northwest did indeed imperil the livelihood of local mill workers. However the Spotted Owl is only one of the plant and animal forms that need protection in the few remaining virgin forest areas. Moreover, the decline of timber-related jobs was primarily the product of many years of overcutting with inadequate replanting on private lands, together with the introduction of automated mill equipment and the shipment of logs overseas for processing. After protective legislation, 9 out of 10 displaced millworkers who entered a federally financed retraining program in Oregon found new jobs; in one year the state added 100,000 jobs and now has the lowest unemployment rate in a generation.

#### *5. Democratic Control of Technology*

The direction of technology cannot be left to economic forces alone because the market ignores environmental impacts and issues of social justice. The market is an efficient mechanism for allocating resources, but it must be supplemented by political decisions to achieve environmental and social goals. National legislation includes environmental regulations, allocation of federal funds for research, taxes, subsidies, and trade policies which influence new technologies. Democracy is difficult in a technological society, because policy decisions often involve technical questions, and also because corporations committed to particular technologies make large campaign contributions to legislators favoring their interests.

Reform of campaign financing would provide more opportunity for environmental, civil rights, public interest, labor and church groups to work together to influence the electoral and legislative process.

#### Christian Attitudes Toward Technology

Apart from issues of social justice, consider four points at which the Christian faith can offer a distinctive perspective on technology.

##### 1. *A Long-term View*

Many of the impacts of our technological activities will be felt by future generations. Degraded land, eroded soil, and decimated fisheries and forests will take decades to recover. Radioactive wastes from today's nuclear power plants will endanger anyone exposed to them 10,000 years from now. If we attempt the genetic engineering of germ-line cells in plants, animals, or human beings, generations far in the future will be affected. The world of politics, however, tends to take a very short-term view. Political leaders find it difficult to look beyond the next election. The main concern of business and industry is this year's bottom line. Economic calculations give little weight to long-term consequences because a time discount is applied to future costs and benefits.

The biblical tradition, by contrast, takes a long-term view. Stewardship requires consideration of the future because God's purposes include the future. The Bible speaks of a covenant from generation to generation "to you, and your descendants forever." The land, in particular, is to be held as a trust for future generations. This long time perspective derives from a sense of history and ongoing family and social life, as well as accountability to a God who spans the generations. So it is not surprising that sustainability has been a major theme in statements of the World Council of Churches, the U.S. Catholic Bishops, and several Protestant denominations.

##### 2. *A Global View*

Acid rain from German factories harms Scandinavian forests; coal-burning plants in the U.S. damage Canadian lakes and trees. Brazil clears rain forests in order to export timber and beef to industrial countries - leading to the extinction of thousands of rare species that are an irreplaceable genetic heritage and a potential source of new medications. CFC refrigerants released in any nation deplete the ozone layer, subjecting people half a world away to more solar radiation that causes skin cancer. In an interdependent world, poverty and political instability in one country affects other countries through trade, immigration, terrorism, and military action.

Religion has often been a divisive force. Religious intolerance has contributed to most of the wars and ethnic conflicts around the world today. Christianity has a very mixed record, but it could be a strong voice for a global outlook. The biblical writers affirm our common humanity and assert that “we have been made one people to dwell upon the face of the earth.” Micah holds up a vision of universal peace: “They shall beat swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (6:3-4). Many churches today are active in working for World peace and in supporting the U.N. They have contributed to famine relief, but more significantly they have advocated agricultural and technical assistance to developing countries. Such assistance is more long-lasting than emergency relief; it is an act of global justice and not simply of individual charity.

### 3. *An Attitude of Humility*

The legends of Prometheus, Faust, and Frankenstein all point to the dangers in the search for unlimited power. The attitude of manipulation and control which is associated with technology is particularly harmful when it is extended to human life. It is tempting to seek “technical fixes” for special problems to avoid making basic changes in social institutions. Unqualified reliance on technology as a source of salvation is the modern form of idolatry. Technical rationality and obsession with things can impoverish our experience and our human relationships. I submit that awareness of the sacred and recognition of human limits can provide antidotes to the search for technological omnipotence. Receptivity and acknowledgment of grace are correctives to the dangers in control and manipulation, but they run against the dominant outlook of a technological society.

Humility requires recognition of limitations in human character and social institutions as well as ecological limits. It would lead us to respect the divine purpose and evolutionary wisdom embodied in the order of nature, and to be sensitive to the far-reaching and often unpredictable repercussions of our interventions. This does not mean that we should abandon technology, or that genetic engineering, for example, should be ruled out. Genetic defects cause great suffering in human life and we should correct them when we can, with provisions to ensure justice in access to such therapy. But we should be cautious about irreversible changes, such as germ-line alterations in human genes, because we do not know enough to predict all the consequences. We should also be more cautious in seeking positive improvements in human nature than in trying to remove impediments to normal functioning, because our ideals for human improvement are so strongly influenced by the current ideologies of our culture.

### 4; *A Vision of the Good Life*

Conservation measures in industrial nations would contribute significantly to a more just and sustainable world. Greater efficiency and improved technologies can cut down on both pollution and resource use. But I believe we must go beyond efficiency and look at our patterns of consumption. In our society there are powerful pressures toward the escalation of consumption. By the age of 20, the average American has already seen 350,000 TV commercials. The mass media hold before us the images of a high-

consumption life style. Self-worth and happiness are identified with possessions. Our culture encourages us to try to fill all our psychological needs through consumption. Consumerism is addictive, and like all addictions it involves the denial of its consequences.

The Christian tradition offers a vision of the good life that is less resource consumptive than prevailing practices. It holds that, once basic needs are met, true fulfillment is found in spiritual growth, personal relationships, and community life. This path is life-affirming, not life-denying. Religious faith speaks to the crisis of meaning that underlies compulsive consumerism. We should seek a level of sufficiency that is neither ever-growing consumption nor joyless asceticism. A vision of positive possibilities and an alternative image of the good life are likely to be more effective than moral exhortation in helping people to turn in new directions. For most people in our nation, restraint in consumption is indeed compatible with personal fulfillment. We can try to recover the Puritan virtues of frugality and simplicity. For the Third World, of course, and for low-income families in industrial nations, levels of consumption must rise substantially if basic needs are to be met.

The new vision will require a reordering of national as well as individual priorities. With the end of the Cold War, the center of our foreign policy could shift from the containment of communism to human well-being and the preservation of our planet. If a third of the \$600 billion the world spends on arms each year were spent on sustainable agriculture, energy conservation, renewable energy sources, and family planning, the prospects for the whole planet would be dramatically altered. The biblical vision encourages us not to reject technology but to redirect it toward such human and environmental goals.

Note: This article is taken from an address given by Ian Barbour on Feb. 9, 1996, at the annual meeting of the National Association for Science, Technology and Society (NASTS). It develops further some themes in the second volume of his Gifford Lectures, *Ethics in an Age of Technology*. The meeting included a session honoring his work and announcing the establishment of the Barbour Lecture in the area of Technology, Values, and Religion, to be given at future annual meetings of NASTS.

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## **Norms and the Man: A Tribute to Ian Barbour**

James A. Nash

I am honored to have the opportunity to honor Ian Barbour. My purpose is to say something about the man and his values by looking at one of his major works, *Ethics in an Age of Technology*, the second volume of his 1989-91 Gifford Lectures. I first became aware of Ian Barbour through two valuable works he edited in the early 70s: *Earth Might Be Fair* and *Western Man and Environmental Ethics*. I have been a fan of his ever since.

The most pressing question about Ian is: What is he vocationally? A physicist, ecologist, philosopher, theologian, ethicist, technologist, even occasionally political analyst, or what? The answer is: all of the above to a significant degree (Speaking as an ethicist, I think Ian knows far more than enough about ethics to qualify as an honored member of the guild). Ian Barbour has no respect for disciplinary lines; he is a Multidisciplinary Man - and that is a major strength of his writings. He shows a broad knowledge base, wide-ranging skills, and a comprehensiveness of concern - features which are true of both volumes of the Gifford lectures.

Another notable feature is that Ian Barbour is a gentle person. He is intensely fair, balanced, or judicious in his analyses and criticisms of various positions - some of which I know he 'i really dislikes. Remarkably, I could not find a single flamboyant sentence, not even a word, in *Ethics in an Age of Technology*. (This is quite in contrast to me: I enjoy throwing an occasional incendiary.) His writings are clear and precise - features which are expressions of his fairness and honesty.

Yet, the feature I admire most in his works is the pervasive sense of ambiguity: Frankly, I believe that ambiguity ought to be elevated to doctrinal status, and I suspect that Ian would endorse that belief. He consistently recognizes the mix of negative and positive values, both in actuality and potentiality (which may be an extension of his balance and fairness). Typically, he maneuvers between one-sided approaches, and supports, for example, "selective economic growth" and a mix of small and large technologies. He knows technology as both threat and liberation, and sees both the dignity of work and its degradation. This sense of ambiguity is helpful in avoiding both romanticism and cynicism. It reflects the influence, I suspect, of both Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich.

To show the man and his thought best in *Technology*, I decided to search for the moral norms (or the personal and social virtues) which underlay his evaluations/judgments. They say a lot about the character and concerns of Ian. I will identify ten of these norms and make a brief comment on each. All are grounded in a sense of solidarity, a moral response to the fact of social and ecological connectedness.

1) *Equity* - or distributive justice, the equitable distribution of burdens and benefits, particularly in taking care of the needs of the poor and maximizing benefits to the least advantaged (following John Rawls). Equity affirms a right to the basic necessities of life. It is grounded in universal human equality. One has a duty to be responsive to this right. In fact, the fundamental moral purpose of technology is to provide for basic human needs and ecological integrity. This prominent concern for equity comes out in

his discussions of everything from computers to the just distribution of risks associated with nuclear wastes. (See pp. 36-37,110,200,203,228,235,243.)

2) *Participation* - to enable powers of choice in decisions affecting our lives, in politics, the marketplace, and work. Participation is tied closely to freedom; Ian speaks of “participatory freedom.” It entails public discussion and public consent, and involves the accountability of economic and political institutions to the people. Thus, Ian calls for the democratic governance of technology. (See pp. 9, 38-39,114,176,221 - 22, 237, 240.)

3) *Sustainability* - that is, responsibilities to future generations. Ian stresses the truly long-term, not the next couple generations. One of the major themes of the book is “impacts distant in time and space.” He tolerates no discounting of the future (at least not without justification). This value shapes his perspective on nuclear energy and solar energy. (See pp. 66,126-27.)

4) *Subsidiarity* - or, more accurately, the *controllability* or *diversification of power* (which is usually the context in which Ian discusses subsidiarity), He expresses grave concerns about the concentration of economic and political power. Barbour wants the decentralization or disposal of political, economic, and technological power. He sees technology, in fact, as unprecedented power. He is also concerned about “large scale” projects; he prefers the intermediate technological scale (245) or a mix of small and large projects. If nuclear energy is justified at all, smaller reactors are preferred (128). He clearly wants public interventions in markets and the regulation of technology.

His concern about power is closely linked to “participation,” and it is grounded in a realistic recognition of the powers of sin. He is consistently aware of the moral ambiguities in human character, and the inevitable mixture of good and evil in human projects. (See pp. 13, 39, 128,179,245.)

5) *Bioresponsibility* - that is, respect for the rest of nature.. Humans have moral duties to nonhumankind, not to ecosystems as such, except as these are instrumental values for life forms. Ian rejects biotic egalitarianism, but his principle of discrimination among species, which gives priority to humans, is not clear in *Technology*. He shows a sensitivity to the welfare of all life, and he supports environmental integrity for that purpose. (See pp. xvii, 69.)

6) *Frugality* - Resources are sufficient for need, but not for greed, he says. His concern is about both profligate consumption and production, both social and ecological responsibilities. Frugality is the foundation of justice and sustainability in Ian Barbour. Typically, for him, frugality is a middle way. It is an important theme in his moral thought. (See pp. xvii, 137,142,251-262.)

7) *Efficiency* - a moral criterion at some points in Ian’s thought, but not one that he has clearly developed. I’d like to see him develop the moral dimensions of efficiency, because he’d have some unique perspectives. He clearly would recognize the ambiguities in the concept. For example, ultraefficiency in energy consumption is laudable; in fisheries, however, a whole species or ecosystem can be wiped out through indiscriminately efficient drift nets. (See pp. 140, 244.)

8) *Proportionality* - a norm which is generally implicit rather than explicit in *Technology*. Costs/risks ought to be proportionate to the good - or evil - expected. This criterion is evident when he deals with risks of low probability but great magnitude. (See pp. 205, 228.)

9) *Flexibility/Adaptability* - a criterion which is implicit in *Technology*, but seems to be a basis of evaluation when he talks about fitting action (35, 44) or “appropriate technologies” which fit local social, cultural (and I add ecological) conditions. This norm is undeveloped in Ian’s thought - and in everyone else’s. Indeed, it is the most undeveloped ecological norm. It is close to sustainability, and perhaps a dimension of it, but I suspect it is distinct.

Adaptability might be described as ecosystemic compatibility or the mimicking of nature. It is an accommodation to the forces and constraints of nature. It is fittingness. It allows room for the unpredictable and uncontrollable; therefore, it is an insurance strategy, such as the redundancy of habitats to protect endangered species. Adaptability is an antidote to the managerial arrogance and imperialism of some advocates of “sustained yield” - for example, in fisheries:-who consider a species to be an isolated unit rather than a part of an ecosystemic whole. (See pp. 35,44,245,247.)

10) *Humility* - the pervasive norm in Ian’s thought, because it is a pervasive feature of the man. Humility guides all the other norms. Adaptability, for example, is empowered by a sense of humility about how little we know ecologically. Humility recognizes the limitations on all human powers and avoids overconfidence in our capacities.

These norms give insights into the character of Ian Barbour. . They are noble norms, and they give evidence of a noble character in a man who takes them seriously.

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*Archivists Note:* The text body footnotes are missing from the PDF, so I’ll just include them here until this can be error corrected.<sup>123</sup>

## Ellul and Barbour on Technology

by Richard A. Deitrich

Ellul published *The Technological System*<sup>4</sup> in 1980, the same year as Barbour’s early major book. *Technology, Environment, and Human Values*<sup>5</sup> We have used these

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<sup>1</sup> Barbour, Ian G., *Ethics in an Age of Technology*, Harper San Francisco, San Francisco, CA, 1993.

<sup>2</sup> Barbour, Ian G., *Earth Might Be Fair-Reflections on Ethics, Religion, and Ecology*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Heights, NJ, 1972.

<sup>3</sup> Barbour, Ian G., editor, *Western Man and Environmental Ethics, Attitudes Toward Nature and Technology*, Addison-Wesley Publishers, Reading MA, 1973.

<sup>4</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System* (New York Continuum Publishing Corp. 1980).

<sup>5</sup> Ian G. Barbour, *Technology, Environment, and Human Values* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1980).

books in our STS curriculum, relying heavily on their seminal (politically correct in this case) thinking about technology. As you are aware, Ellul is usually spoken of as a pessimist; Barbour, however, is a self-confessed contextualist. I call him a “mediator” of Snow’s two cultures. His literary culture expertise is, of course, in theology.

In our flagship course “Critical Issues in STS,” we use Ellul’s basic characterization of technology as artificial, autonomous, self-determining (organismic), self-augmenting, and means-oriented. This characterization, as you know, seems to give technology a “being” of its own — thus Ellul has an ontological approach. This, we explain, is *one way* to understand technology. To help the students identify with Ellul’s “milieu” thesis, we use a 50-item S & T opinion survey with statements such as “The world is a safer place now than it was 150 years ago,” and “S & T will find solutions to our environmental problems.” They respond by circling one of these: (SA, A N, D, SD). We make sure that Ellul’s ontological approach toward understanding *modem* technology is very clearly explicated. (Note: Early in the class we carefully distinguish between generic, modem, and science-based technology.)

This “pessimistic” view is then softened by using Barbour’s “contextual” view. His tripart values schema has worked well in our courses during the eighties, especially. It is as follows:

<i>Material Values</i>	<i>Social Values</i>	<i>Environmental Values</i>
survival	distributive justice	resource sustainability
health	participatory freedom	ecosystem integrity

I material wellbeing | interpersonal community | environmental preservation I I  
employment | personal fulfillment | |

The above schema as well as Barbour’s organizing plan within *Technology, Environment, and Human Values* reveal his “volitional” approach toward understanding technology—as opposed to Ellul’s ontological approach. The book has three parts—Conflicting Values, Environmental Policies, and Scarce Resources. His overarching theme seems to be this: Humans can sort out their values; they can incorporate these into policies which are just and sustainable; and, with this incorporation, they can cope with technology and the finite resources of planet Earth when technique and scarcity are accepted, understood, and properly addressed by humane, value-laden policies.

## Their Depiction of Technology

Barbour’s contextualism, with its volitional approach to controlling technology, allows him to mediate between religion and science, and to *redirect* technology through values. Indeed, his two Gifford lectures (and resultant volumes) attempt this mediation and redirection—these have been his life’s work as a physicist and theologian.



To assure you that I am sure-footed about the above, here is the last paragraph of his preface which summarize the five aspects of the scientific age which set the agenda for volume one, *Religion in an Age of Science*:

In looking at these five challenges—science as a method, a new view of nature, a new context for theology, religious pluralism, and the ambiguous power of technology—my goals are to explore the place of religion in an age science and to present an interpretation of Christianity that is responsive to both the historical tradition and contemporary scene.<sup>6</sup>

The “mediation” intent is obvious here, but I think we in this forum are more interested in Barbour’s redirection intent concerning technology. Coincidentally, the final paragraph of volume two, *Ethics in an Age of Technology* is also instructive here: “The challenge for our generation is to redirect technology toward realizing human and environmental values on planet earth?”<sup>7</sup>

Enough has been said, I trust, for us to conclude that Barbour does place technology in the context of human creativity and control. We can do technology, and we can control technology because we are in the image of God. We can misuse technology because of sin, but we can redirect technology through religion and its concomittant ethics. Thus modem science-based technology is depicted as fairly neutral regarding evil, an imitation of God regarding creativity, and a mainly controllable endeavor regarding responsibility. Nature—and nature’s God—is, for Barbour, still the controlling milieu.

In comparing Ellul’s “pessimistic” approach, we recognize that he depicts modem science-based technology very differently. Although the idea of “technique” has deep conceptual meaning for Ellul, it is science-based technology that powerfully impresses this “technique” upon reality—as does the body impress the human mind upon reality.<sup>8</sup>

Ellul sees modem technology as the result and embodiment of minds and Mind which are obsessed by technique. Mind must be written both small and large because of his intent. His intent is to warn about “fulfillment” of dangerous, demonic, and evil local and worldwide potentialities based upon intense analysis of modem technology as the instrumental cause. Thus Barbour’s “redirection” intent, although thoughtful and well-intentioned, probably appeared to Ellul as the effort of an amiable general who, with his defenses breached, wants to talk the enemy into entering a peace agreement.

## A Brief Systems Analysis

Indeed, Barbour’s system does expect both sides of the “religion and science” equation, and the “ethics as technique versus technology as technique” means) to be under humane, reasonable, and just control. It is true that the “religion *in* an age of science”

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<sup>6</sup> Ian Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science* (San Francisco: Harper, 1990) p. XV.

<sup>7</sup> Ian Barbour, *Ethics in an Age of Technology* (San Francisco:Har-per, 1993) p. XIX.

<sup>8</sup> I think that this parallel, bom of Cartesian dualism, has been a strong factor in Ellul’s analysis of technology in which he sees it as impressing a heartless/soul-less/efficient rationality upon reality. Thus humans have lost the tripart self-understanding which allowed the spirit/soul (religious) nexus to

motif does allude to our S and T milieu, as does the “ethics *in* an age of technology” motif. But without Ellul’s dramatic “technological usurpation of nature” scenerio, Barbour’s system lacks motivational dynamic. His milieu can be livable and manageable if people on both “sides” recognize that they are, in some cases, misguided, underinformed, and working against their own best interests. As Barbour said “The challenge...is to redirect technology...” His mediation is intended to halt the hegemony of S&T, and to result in mutual respect and well-being through integrative harmony.

In looking at his use of “age” instead of “milieu,” my sense is that Barbour is actually proposing peace (as did the general in my analogy) so that these two human endeavors—religion/science and ethics/technology—can be joined to combat their mutual enemy in the coming age of post-modernism.

Let me explain. Religion, forming the common cultural center, had hegemony over S&T throughout the Renaissance; but was weakened by the Reformation. For this reason (and because of advances in concepts, instrumentation, and math, etc.), pre-modernism has given way to modernism with its most distinguishing characteristic being modern science and modern technology—I am speaking of Western Society. Now the *world* is becoming post-modern, before much of it has become modern—i.e. modern in the sense that shared scientific knowledge and widely used technology form the common cultural center. My understanding is that neither common religion—with its ethics, nor scientific knowledge—with its technology, will form the common cultural center of postmodernism. To this thought I will return later.

I have searched Barbour’s works, including his research paper/booklet *Science, Technology, and the Church*<sup>9</sup> for signs that he recognized Western Societies rapid shift from the Modern Age toward the Post-Modern Age. No, it appears he did not because it is not obvious in his system. This is surprising.

But is the impetus toward post-modernism afforded by technology more obvious in Ellul’s system? It is, and it isn’t! I have searched five of his works<sup>10</sup> and found no direct concern with post-modernism per se; however, since *The Technological Bluff* is his most recent work, the recognition of something like it is more latently powerful. Chapter XI Technical Progress and the Philosophy of the Absurd contains my case in point.

In Chapter XI, Ellul speaks of the absurdism of Camus, the existentialism of Sartre, and the Nihilism of Nietzsche. He sees these life-views at work behind Nazism because their effects became actualized through the atrocities at Auschwitz et al., and in the obliging conducts for which Fasching and others still seek explanation. On the first

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oversee the mind/body (techno-scientific) nexus. Thus “la technique” has become autonomous in relation to “le sacré”.

<sup>9</sup> Ian Barbour *Science, Technology, and the Church* (Cleveland: United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, 1994).

<sup>10</sup> The five books are the following: *The Technological Society* (1963); *The Meaning of the City* (1970); *The Technological System* (1980); *The Humiliation of the World* (1985); *The Technological Bluff* (1987).

page of this chapter, Ellul talks about a life-view which goes beyond Nazism. Without naming it, he sets forth a post-modernism explication:

To live is a pure fact. There is no meaning in what happens, nor are we to search for meaning or to attribute it. History makes no sense, it is going nowhere, it obeys no rules, it has no permanence. Good and evil do not exist... There is permanent misunderstanding. What we do is foolish to others;...hell is other people... Only what exists is real. But this, too, is as shifting and uncertain as water sand.<sup>11</sup>

He continues by discussing the effect of the above philosophy of the absurd on scientific thinking. Then he closes the chapter by coupling the above sensitive, existential, picture with short sections about technical, economic, and human absurdity. This is, according to my research, as close as Ellul gets to speaking of the Post-Modern Age in his system—with its ontological approach to technology, and its intent on explaining the “fulfillment” of history by technology. (I trust that an Ellul scholar will address this issue in a later Forum issue.)

My puzzlement about Ellul’s system has two aspects. One, does he anywhere posit within technology the intersection of supernatural good, supernatural evil, and ambivalent human good/evil enterprise? This could go far in explaining the autonomous, self-augmenting, etc. —in short— ontological characteristics of modern technology. Two, does Ellul anywhere explain the role of technology in a theodicy of God, Satan, and fallen humankind? If so, where; if not, why? (I leave it to Ellul scholars to answer these questions.)

## Cautious conclusions

My own “system” is in better alignment with Ellul’s thought than Barbour’s. I am pessimistic concerning our future—unless unusual divine intervention occurs. Technology provides the means for “shallowing” humanity’s morals and meanings as well as amplifying the effect of evil. A global totalitarianism could well grip humankind with cultural/social absurdism, existentialism, and nihilism. This time there will be no Judeo-Christian civilization to fight for the self-evident truths that humans are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, etc. This time, those seeking to turn back the dehumanization may be without sufficient resources in nature, religious motivation from culture, scientific capability in society, and access to technology to confront a global aggressor. This despot may have sufficiently altered nature, its certainties, and human being to brook no human adversary. (The Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the following diaspora of the Jews is an apt analogy here.)

When humanity is sufficiently alienated from nature; and nature is sufficiently replaced by the milieu of technology; and nature’s God is sufficiently replaced by science—then what? Perhaps this is what Ellul is getting at by saying—

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<sup>11</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990) p. 199. s

This ideology of a divine, soteriological science in association with a dream world is reinforced by what we anticipate and by what is about to come seemingly with no human direction and in obedience to none of the existing classical laws. Science is becoming capable. both of absolute novelty and also of the regulation of a world, as is only proper for the deity. Like all deities, it has an oracular power. We ourselves can no longer will or decide. We leave this to the beneficent science in which we believe.<sup>12</sup>

Here, Ellul clearly ontologizes science, but on a different level than technology.

What, I believe, Ellul did not see is that modern science—having spent much of its moral and cultural capital (from mainly Judeo-Christian religious sources) in the Modern Age—will be altered, thereby losing its aura of pragmatic certainty and its ability to hold together a human common cultural center for civilized humanity. As in Nazism, other concerns could become more urgent than the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. We could again see something like Nazism arise; this time a new form of social Darwinianism could be sanctioned by a much more widely relativised scientific community surrounded by nearly “universal” so called norms and certainties which are derived from the exigencies of the moment. ,

I see it this way. The source of “truth” (mainly in the form of universal norms of conduct) which formed the common cultural center in *pre-modern* Western Society has been abandoned in large part. Alongside the above Judeo-Christian source of “truth,” came modern science to form a new common cultural center in Western Society based on “fact.” Now (*modern* Western Society is abandoning its source of “fact” (mainly in the form of universal laws of nature), and a new common cultural center is forming to usher in *post-modernism*.. This new common cultural center, based on neither “truth” nor “fact,” is based on “technique.” The source of “technique” (mainly in the form of universal technical applications) is modern technology from Western Society, and now the world. “La Technique” was, of course, built on the above truths and facts from the two preceding Ages.

We have continually shallowed human spirit by discounting universal norms of conduct which define our human-ness, and we have continually blunted human reason by relativising universal laws of nature which provide certainties. This, I think, explains Ellul’s chapters regarding a global escape to absurdity in post-modernist society with its new common cultural center based on technique. *This “technique-oriented” global society with its technological milieu will, in my view, give rise to the societal and cultural absurdism spoken of by Ellul.* This will be similar to present-day forms of cultural existentialism, which stay safely supported in their cocoons of essential society. But without the support of a sufficiently moral and rational society, existentialism becomes absurdism. Chaos will replace cosmos.

This will occur when the moral-norm capital of pro-modernism, and the certainty capital of modernism are nearly expended. Absurdism is even now at the door; it is admixed with various forms of *escapism*, and there are numerous and various

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<sup>12</sup> *Technological Bluff* pps. 185-186.

means of escape. Western society is widely using many means of escape such as—abandonment, abortion, abuse, alcohol, crime, divorce, drugs, euthanasia, insanity, media, the cyberworld, sports, suicide, violence. These are only a few of the ever-widening activities of escape which embody in our world an absurd attitude toward the transcendent with its norms for truth, and toward nature with its laws for certainty. When humanity will not face-up to these norms - and laws, it will face-away to what remains. What does remain?

# Book Reviews

## *In the Vineyard of the Text*

by Ivan Illich. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.

Reviewed by Joyce Hanks

Ivan Illich believes that our Western approach to the use of books is currently undergoing a second massive seachange, following the first such event more than eight hundred years ago. Current movements away from conceiving of the book as a *text* give us the necessary perspective, he believes, to examine the process through which the book reached that status in the first place. Readers of Jacques Ellul's *The Humiliation of the Word* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1985; French ed. 1981), will find significant parallels in Illich's book.

Unlike most of Illich's books I have seen, *In the Vineyard of the Text* takes a rather traditionally documentary approach to its subject, complete with massive footnotes and bibliography. Following his main line of argument, however, requires very little reference to the scholarly apparatus: Illich shows that, in the time before certain technical changes in book production in the twelfth century, reading was primarily an oral matter, a way of following or discovering what someone had *said*. By the thirteenth century, books served mainly to record another person's *thought*, and book design had evolved so as to make that thought highly accessible to others.

Illich has found a useful vehicle for grounding and elaborating on what he sees as a major shift in Western habits: the *Didascalicon* (dating from 1128), a guide to reading by Hugh of St. Victor, a twelfth-century Flemish theologian, philosopher, and mystic who lived in a Parisian cloister. *In the Vineyard of the Text* is organized as a free-wheeling commentary on the most pertinent sections of Hugh's book. Since the *Didascalicon* instructs in the "old" manner of reading (which will soon begin to disappear from the medieval scene), Illich can contrast it with what he calls "bookishness," the approach to books that we modems know best. According to Illich, bookishness, in its turn, is about to disappear, as the screen replaces the page in the twentieth century.

What significance do such changes hold, in Illich's view? In part, the same significance Ellul found: the word loses power and importance when reduced from something spoken by another person to the status of a series of disembodied notions to be manipulated at will by others. For Hugh of St. Victor, reading constituted a path to virtue, a way of discovering God's remedy for human sinfulness and fallen condition. Reading

for this purpose required certain gifts, intentions, and attitudes, as well as the development of skills related to memory, meditation, historical knowledge, and exegesis. By the late twelfth century, Illich believes that reading had ceased to center on the desire for moral change. The book had become more a source of knowledge than of wisdom. Previously, books had dealt with nature or God; but the new approach concerned the mind. Leisurely reading that had earlier led to reflection gave way to rapid searches for information, now that the written text provided multiple points of entry into a writer's thought.

Illich reveals other important facets of this dramatic change as well: books began to proliferate as a result of twelfth-century technical innovations that made them easier to copy, handle and read—centuries before the invention of printing. These novelties included the widespread use of paper, alphabetical indexing, editing, paragraphing, variation of type size, underlining, and the use of chapter titles. In addition, new reference works, such as concordances, began to appear.

Illich finds subject indexing, a new use of the alphabet, especially significant, and illustrative of the transition he wants to explain: "From the teller of a story the author mutates into the creator of a text" (p. 105). Index-makers wanted to make book contents available to others who could then build on them.

By the thirteenth century, all these new tools will lead to the production of encyclopedias and the use of additional visual and organizational aids, such as punctuation marks and content summaries at the beginning of chapters.

The sudden realization, after Hugh's death in 1142, that the Roman alphabet could serve to record languages other than Latin, leads Illich to formulate a technological principle:

Instead of confirming the theory that tasks become possible when the tools to perform them become available, or the other which says that tools are created when tasks come to be socially desirable, this use of the ABC suggests that an eminently suitable and complex artificial device already available within a society will be turned into a tool for the performance of a task only at that historic moment when this task acquires symbolic significance. The page had to give birth to the visible text, the "faithful" had to give birth to the moral self and the legal person before the dialect spoken by that person could be visualized as "a" language (p. 72).

Further links between Technique and culture, according to Illich, include the development of the universities as a kind of replacement for medieval monasteries. The book as a source of oral reading and wisdom found its place in the monastery, but the new "bookish text" needed a different sort of home, so the university was created to deal with it.

In the monasteries of Hugh's time, teachers spoke while their students listened. By the age of Thomas Aquinas, however, lecture notes and outlines were routinely made available to university students, who sometimes took down the teacher's words, dictation-style. Rather than understanding a moral communication, these later students responded primarily to a written lecture.

The modern shift from the centrality of books to that of “text” leads Illich to meditate on the loss of meaning, another concern of Ellul’s:

A new kind of text shapes the mind-set of my students, a printout which has no anchor, which can make no claim to be either a metaphor, or an original from the author’s hand. Like the signals from a phantom schooner, its digital strings form arbitrary fontshapes on the screen, ghosts which appear and then vanish. Ever fewer people come to the book as a harbor of meaning (p. 118).

Illich has thoughtfully provided both the original Latin (or French) and an English translation for his quotations. This helpful feature enables readers to follow his explanations and evaluate his suggestions for further exploratory reading. He has also taken care to couch in modern terms those words whose usage has changed over the centuries. As a result, his book is not only eminently understandable, but provides a useful introduction to twelfth-century philosophy. That “bookish” medieval invention known as the index, however, is desperately needed to make Illich’s work more accessible.

Readers eager for further information will find endless paths to pursue in Illich’s footnotes. On the specific question of the appearance of portable Bibles in the thirteenth century, a recent article in *Civilization: The Magazine of the Library of Congress* offers additional data; see Jay Tolson’s “The First Information Revolution,” in the Jan./Feb. 1996 issue (pp. 52-57). And a helpful companion volume to *In the Vineyard of the Text* (University of Chicago Press, 1993), is David Cayley’s *Ivan Illich in Conversation* (Concord, Ontario: House of Anansi, 1992).

## ***Resist the Powers -with Jacques Ellul,***

by Charles Ringma. Sutherland, Australia: Albatross Books, 1995.

Reviewed by Donald Bloesch, Dubuque Theological Seminary

Charles Ringma, who established Teen Challenge in Australia and now lectures at the Asian Theological Seminary in Manila, elaborates on various themes in the theology of Jacques Ellul. These meditations reflect both the thought of Ellul and that of the author, who acknowledges Ellul as his spiritual and theological mentor along with Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Henri Nouwen. In absorbing the wealth of insights offered in this volume, we must keep in mind that we are being introduced to this eminent theologian through the eyes of an admirer.

The strength of the book lies in its solid grasp of the salient emphases in Ellul’s spirituality. Ellul stands in an illustrious tradition of spiritual writers and sages, including Augustine, Thomas a Kempis, Teresa of Avila, Blaise Pascal, John Bunyan, Soren Kierkegaard, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Thomas Merton. Too often Ellul is thought of mainly as a sociologist and political analyst but hardly as a spiritual guide. He is certainly a prescient social prophet, yet he is also a remarkable theologian of the Christian life. Ellul deftly brings together the personal and the social, the spiritual and the political, since the kingdom of God is his pivotal emphasis. This kingdom, moreover,



is an entirely new reality breaking into the old reality and radically challenging its assumptions and goals. According to Ellul, the Christian will be markedly different from the worldling, not just because of a disparate belief system, but also because of a unique style of life. Ellul sharply warns against aligning the faith with any particular ideology and underscores the fact that Christians will always be suspect in the political arena, for their loyalty is to a kingdom that is not of this world.

Charles Ringma is to be commended for his astute analysis of Ellul's spirituality. He ably shows that holiness in Ellul's version involves downward mobility and a break with consumerism. Christianity embodies values that palpably conflict with those of the technological society. In the current cultural milieu productivity and efficiency are valued more highly than respect for human dignity. Ellul is adamant that Christians should always be on the side of the poor, but the solution to poverty and exploitation is not new laws (though they may well be necessary), but an altering of consciousness, which only faith can effect. As Christians we should be actively involved in the political and social issues of our time, but our aim should be simply to make life tolerable, not to try to build a utopian society that will only end in tyranny and the crushing of individual initiative. The Christian's most significant spiritual weapon in this conflict is prayer, and prayer is based on the hope of God's intervention in human and worldly affairs.

This book can profitably be used for devotional reading and group discussion. It nurtures the inner life while heightening sensitivity to the crying needs of the poor and dispossessed.

**Issue #18 Jan 1997 — Lewis  
Mumford, Technological Critic**

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## About This Issue

Lewis Mumford died on January 26, 1990 at the age of 94. He published more than thirty books, ranging from the history of the city and of technology, to architecture, urban planning and the philosophy of life. His critique of technical civilization, although based in Humanism rather than theology, shares a great deal with that of Ellul's. In the annals of the critique of modern technological civilization, he clearly stands with Jacques Ellul as one of the giants of the genre. An issue of the Forum devoted to his work is long overdue. Indeed, putting this issue together, for me, is an act of love and respect for the man who first taught me to think critically, both historically and sociologically, about the role of technology in society.

Lewis Mumford, who was born on October 19<sup>th</sup>, 1895 in Flushing NY but grew up in Manhattan, where he took undergraduate courses at City College, and graduate courses at the New School and at Columbia, although he never completed a degree. He was living proof that degrees are not essential to being a successful scholar, author

and public philosopher. Indeed he went on to teach courses at the New School and at Columbia and to write a weekly column for the New Yorker and was co-founder of the Regional Planning Association of America (1923). His first book was *The Story of Utopias* (1922), followed by *Technics and Civilization* (1934) which, along with *The Culture of Cities* (1938), established his reputation as a historian and social philosopher. The themes of these early works were brought together in his mature work of the 1960's: *The City in History* (1961), and *The Myth of the Machine* (2 vols, 1967 & 1970). Mumford has been described as a combination of objective historian, fiery biblical prophet and romantic poet. He clearly shares at least the first two of these descriptions with Ellul. Mumford's life work was recognized when he received the National Medal of Arts from President Ronald Reagan in July of 1986.

Like Ellul, Mumford was a generalist with a wide command of the historical date interpreted through interdisciplinary perspectives. Ironically, in *The Technological Society*, Ellul refers to him as a "specialist". In *Technics and Civilization*, Mumford had divided the history of technology into three phases, Eotechnics, Paleotechnics and Neotechnics, corresponding to Medieval water and wind technology, followed by coal (steam engine) and iron technology which was being replaced in the twentieth century by new electronics & alloy technology. Mumford argued that the new technologies of Eotechnics offered the possibility of overcoming the centralized mechanization of life of the Paleotechnic period in a way that offered a return to the decentralized technologies in harmony with nature of the Eotechnic period. To Ellul this argument looked like it was "machine driven" and missed the point that it was not technologies but technique that led to the dehumanization of human beings. However the two-volume *Myth of the Machine* dispelled that illusion. By the 1960's Mumford recognized that his hope that Eotechnics would give birth to a new age of Biotechnic harmony was crushed. In these volumes Mumford went back before the Medieval period to compare modern technical civilization to that of the ancient city-states of Egypt and Mesopotamia with their totalitarian mythologies and bureaucracies.

Here he demonstrated that he shared with Ellul the conviction that modern technology mechanized and dehumanized life and that the core of the problem lay in the uncritical worship of technology as that sacred power that falsely promised to fulfill all human needs and desires even as it led us down the path of self-destruction. Like Ellul, he held that it is not the machine that is demonic but the "cult of the machine." Therein lay the demonic power that sustained the "the myth of the mega-machine." Mumford parted with Ellul, however, in developing a humanistic rather than theistic response to the threat of technology. The chief accomplishment of human beings, he argued, is not to be found in our machines and our technical organizations but in the creation of our own humanity. Nevertheless Mumford and Ellul shared a common goal of demythologizing technical civilization and restoring technology to a modest but constructive role in a larger, more organic vision of human life and the human good.

In this issue, James Moore, from the University of South Florida School of Architecture and Community Design, and James W. Carey, from the School of Journalism

at Columbia offer us two thoughtful perspectives on Mumford's contribution to the critique of technological civilization, one from the view of urban planning and the other from the perspective of communications theory.

Also in this issue, you will find two book reviews. Andrew Goddard reviews *Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul the Set the Stage*, translated and edited by Marva Dawn. The second, my own most recent book, *The Coming of the Millennium: Good News for the Whole Human Race*, is reviewed by David Gill. I knew I could count on David to provide creative disagreement and he did not disappoint. Finally, you will also find a brief selection from *The Coming of the Millennium*, so you can see first hand what got David so stirred up.

## **Bulletin Board**

### **Ellul Publication Project**

Money raised by contributions to the Ellul Publication Project are being used to prepare for publication Ellul's *The Ethics of Holiness* under the direction of Gabriel Vahanian in Strasbourg. Checks contributing to this project can still be sent, made out to The Ellul Forum and marked "for the Ellul Publication Project" The address is: The Ellul Forum, Department of Religious Studies, Cooper 304, University of South Florida, Tampa, FL 33620.

### **New Ellul Bibliography**

Joyce Hanks is working on a project to combine the various Ellul bibliographies into a couple of user-friendly volumes including updated materials since the 1995 bibliography. Please forward your list of suggestions (especially for indexing) omissions, errors, etc, to: Joyce M. Hanks, University of Scranton, Scranton PA 18510-4646.

### **Ellul/Illich Conference on Education and Technology**

A conference, examining the significance of the work of Jacques Ellul and of Ivan Illich for policy on the interaction between education and technology will be held at Penn State University, September 17-20, 1997. If you are interested in attending, please contact Chris Dufour. Phone: 814-863-5110. Entail: [Conferencelnfol@cde.psu.edu](mailto:Conferencelnfol@cde.psu.edu). For more information, visit their web site: <http://www.cde.psu.edu/C&I/Education&Technology/>

New Book on Bernard  
Charbonneau

A new book has been published in France on the life and work of Bernard Charbonneau, Ellul's life-long friend in the struggle against technocracy. It is published

by Bulletin De Cqmmande, a retourner aux Editions Eres, 11 rue Alouettes, 31520 Ramonville, France. The price is 160 Francs. Fax 05 61 73 52 89.

### **New Courses from Schumacher College in England**

"Technology, Nature and Gender" will be taught by Vadana Shiva, Indian environmental activist and scientist and Andrew Kimbrell, founder of the International Center for Technology Assessment Washington D.C. September 7-27,1997. Another course on Buddhist Economics , will be taught by the distinguished scholars Sulak Sivaraksa and AT Ariyaratne, January 1U31, 1998. Interested individuals should contact the College at email address: schumcoll@gn.apc.org

# Forum: Lewis Mumford. Technological Critic

## Updating the Urban Prospect: Using Lewis Mumford to Critique Current Conditions

by James A. Moore

School of Architecture & Community Design  
University of South Florida

*Nobody can be satisfied with the form of the city today. Neither as a working mechanism, as a social medium, nor as a work of art does the city fulfill the high hopes that modern civilization has called forth -or even meet our reasonable demands.*

Lewis Mumford expressed this sentiment in 1962, as part of a series of articles commissioned by *Architectural Record*, in which he outlined his understanding of the crucial issues facing the contemporary American city. Today, thirty-five years after he penned his words, it is unlikely that his sentiments would receive a lot of opposition. The concerns of Mumford's time, issues that he studied his entire professional life, are still ours today.

Unfortunately, conditions today are distinctly different than they were earlier in the century. We lack urban visionaries such as Mumford to clearly and coherently articulate and debate these critical issues. In many ways, we also lack a forum within which to carry out such debates. The intellectual journals and popular magazines within which Mumford expounded many of his ideas have either disappeared or been subsumed into a sound-bite mindset. Television, despite its enormous potential, has done little to advance critical discourse on the future of our cities. Indeed, the argument can be mounted that television, with its homogenizing influence and its ability to transcend immediate and relevant physical and cultural barriers has done as much to mitigate the time-honored role of the city as a setting for cultural arbitration and discourse. The grove of academe has been replaced by the made-for-TV movie; the forum by the talk show; the salon by the sitcom.

Finally, and most trenchantly, it is conceivable that we've also lost any audience for such debates. The massive out-migration of the past two generations, and the concomitant polarization of race, class and wealth have produced a popular culture that is truly sub-urban in its sentiments and sensibilities. Where urbanism and the

city used to signify culture, excitement and the ultimate in sophistication, today, to many, they signify decay, despair and even danger.

Disinvestment in the traditional cities, the de-industrialization of our older cities, the rapid expansion of suburban developments divorced from the original city centers, the increasing fragmentation of community life and the ever-expanding gap between the have's and the have-not's. These are the issues that Mumford pondered during his seventy-year career as author, educator, lecturer and all-around critic of American society. These issues are still raised at the annual meetings of the American Planning Association, the American Institute of Architects, the Urban Land Institute, the National Civic League, and countless other groups and agencies who are, directly and indirectly, charged with the planning, design and development of today's cities and communities. In many instances, simply by switching the dates, name and images, one could resurrect one of Lewis Mumford's early articles on community design or planning, and find a willing publisher for it in today's professional journals.

Mumford always had a clear idea of what he meant by a "good" community or city. Born on the upper West Side of Manhattan in 1895, he once claimed that his education in urbanism came from walking the streets of the City, "watching buildings being constructed, and talking to the men doing the work — and from studying books in the New York Public Library."<sup>1</sup> The Manhattan that he studied was a closely-knit collection of distinct neighborhoods and districts, areas that were coherent in scale and form, mixed in their uses and functions, sharply defined by the grid-pattern of the City's streets, punctuated by the numerous parks and squares.

New York, at the turn of the century, was a palimpsest of American urban history, carrying traces of all the elements of city-making from our earliest Colonial period to the latest avant-garde urban intervention, the recently-invented commercial office skyscraper. These were woven together in a free-flowing yet structured rhythm that visibly revealed the interdependent essence of the vital city. Mumford's writing,

. . . incorporated Oriental philosophical concepts which call for an interdependent society rather than a society of independents, the inheritors of Darwin's survival of the fittest. Buildings, streets, trees, sunshine, parks, and fresh air affect people's attitudes towards their sense of community, or the lack of it America's best hope, Mumford believed, lay with balancing the man-made environment with the natural."<sup>2</sup>

It was this sense of balance, this sense of completeness that motivated Mumford's thinking and writing on the city. The purpose of a city, he felt, was to foster and instill a sense of belonging to an ever-expanding nested set of communities; the community of the block or the street, the community of the neighborhood, the community of the district or quarter, the community of the whole. The role of the traditional pre-Industrial-city was to foster as great a sense of diversity and "positive friction" as

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<sup>1</sup> Borden, Elizabeth Carlson. *Lewis Mumford: Twentieth Century Architectural Critic*. (Santa Barbara, CA: Ph.D. Dissertation, UCSB, 1989), p.4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pages 4-5.



possible. Cities were places where “too many people were crowded into too little space,” with the result of stimulating creativity and expression. Cities could survive this crowding and friction to the extent that their constituent elements, the neighborhoods, were strong and self-sufficient.

The Industrial city, the “Coketown” of the Paleotechnic Period, as defined and described in his massive study of the history of technology, flew in the face of these holistic and communal goals. The dictates of mechanized industry helped segment cities into distinct and sharply contrasting areas of rich and poor, pristine and polluted, tranquil and squalid.

The massive and obvious inequities of the 19<sup>th</sup> century city were the subject of much debate and activity at the beginning of this century. Programs existed to provide healthy housing at affordable prices for the hundreds of thousands of people who provided the labor for the factories and mills, shops and commercial facilities. Other programs were begun to create parks and public places for recreation and leisure. A sense of *noblesse-oblige* induced some of the worst of the Paleotechnic exploiters, such as J. P. Morgan and Andrew Carnegie, to give back to their communities in the form of libraries, museums, schools, community centers and other sources of cultural and personal advancement. There was reason to believe in the first decades of this century that a new harmonious balance could be re-created within the fabric of our nation’s cities.

By the 1920s, however, Mumford was able to detect subtle, yet systemic changes in the nature of the American city. Part of this was due, he felt, to the development of the skyscraper, a building type for which he had mixed emotions. While admiring it as a work of architecture, a distinctly American addition to the litany of building types, Mumford was keenly aware of the capacity of this new building type to dramatically disrupt the traditional economic, social and physical balance of the city. The skyscraper, he noted, was a direct reflection of an increased pre-occupation with land-values and development potentials. In a traditional city, land at the center was the most expensive. The skyscraper, a building that within twenty years of its inception, could stand ten times the height of its surrounding mid-rise neighbors, enabled builders and developers to tap massive profits from center city locations. At the same time, the dramatic increase in size and scale not only disrupted the physical character of the neighborhood, but the massive increase in worker population also disrupted the social balances.

This first matter, the discontinuity in size and scale between the skyscrapers and their surroundings could be dealt with legislatively. In 1916, due to a large part to the protests that arose following the construction of tall buildings adjacent to residential neighborhoods, the City of New York created the first broadly-applied municipal zoning code. This outlined where in the city various types of buildings could be located, and also created a rigid set of principles for their form, scale and size. One outgrowth of this code was the archetypal New York “ziggurat” or “wedding cake” skyscraper that rose up from the sidewalk and then stepped backwards in equal increments until it reached its peak. This reduction in size and scale enabled sunlight and fresh air to

reach to the level of the streets, even though thirty-and forty-story towers surrounded them.

While Mumford advocated, in principle, the application of zoning as a way of separating incongruous functions from one another, the broad-based adoption of zoning, after World War II, as the primary element of city planning had numerous unintended consequences, some of which Mumford was clearly opposed to. To the degree that zoning codes provided a legal justification for the isolation of incompatible uses -keeping slaughter houses away from apartments, for example—they were to be applauded. To the degree, however, that the success in isolating such uses lead to the broad-based notion that *all* uses should be isolated from each other, zoning was simply another element that was working to disrupt and fragment the organic wholeness that Mumford advocated.

The disruption fomented by the widespread use of one technological innovation -the skyscraper—was matched by the similarly widespread use of a second technological development -the automobile. As Mumford well knew, the skyscraper was a device that allowed us to dramatically increase the density of our city centers, while the car was a device that allowed us to dramatically decrease the density of the same centers. These two elements of twentieth-century urbanism therefore, are, at their roots, fundamentally opposed to each other. The history of the city in this century is the story of the tension between these two forces. Frank Lloyd Wright, the great American architect and great opponent of the traditional city put it even more succinctly. The destiny of the twentiethcentury city, he noted, is a race between the car and the elevator, and anyone who bets on the elevator is an fool.

As early as the 1920s, Mumford could detect the pernicious influence of the automobile on the life and vitality of the city. The car, at that time, was primarily a luxury for the well-to-do. The vast majority of people commuted back and forth within the confines of the city using traditional mass transit systems such as subways, trolleys and street-cars. The car, however, allowed those with the means, to move far away from the city, to rural villages or newly-emerging suburban enclaves. From these redoubts, they could travel to and from the city center at will, enjoying the vitality and energy of the city on their own terms, while ignoring the less vital aspects of urban life.

The earliest suburbs, dating in some instances from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, were microcosms of a traditional urban neighborhood. Many were developed along railway lines and were centered on the train station and the trains that linked the outpost back to the city center. Walkable in size and scale, these suburbs were more akin to villages than to today's sub-divisions. They typically included a variety of shops and stores, offices and professional options, and lent themselves very well to the burgeoning sense of the American middleclass. Men commuted to and from the city center each day, first using the railways, later in their personal cars. Women and children generally stayed at home in the suburbs, away from the harmful influences of city life. Once or twice a week, the women and children would also visit the city, to shop, visit museums, go to plays or experience other cultural events. The balance evinced in such developments

was clearly enviable, and this balance of the man-made and the natural, was the focus of much of Mumford's writing and thought, and was also the impetus for some of his earliest efforts at devising the "ideal" American community.

Along with his colleagues and friends Henry Wright, Clarence Stein, Catherine Bauer, Benton MacKaye and others, Mumford helped found the Regional Planning Association of America as an agency to argue for and promote the vitality of a balanced approach to the design and development of America's cities. It was only within a regional context, Mumford felt, that one could truly hope to understand how to create a truly harmonious and balanced city. To this end, he reflected and developed upon the work of one of his earliest mentors, the Scottish ecologist, Patrick Geddes.

At the same time, Mumford and others were looking to re-define the design and development of the neighborhood, which they felt was the fundamental unit of the city. Toward this end, Mumford championed the planning and construction of an early in-town suburb, Forest Hills Gardens in Queens. He was also instrumental in the development of Radburn, an intended model community in northern New Jersey. Designed by the planner and landscape architect, Henry Wright, and the architect Clarence Stein, Radburn was notable for its early attempts to accommodate the automobile within the plan of the community, by creating separate ways for cars and for people, and for its quasi-socialist approach to housing, in which all the residential units fronted on communally owned and maintained greens. In his 1940s documentary film "The City," Mumford pointed to Radburn as an example of the ideal "modern" community, contrasting it with both the polluted and over-crowded urban environments of the 19<sup>th</sup> century industrial city, and with the socially and economically isolated life of the rural town and village.

Mumford's goals and expectations for Radburn were never fulfilled as the project, begun at the advent of the Great Depression, slowly ground to a halt during the 1930s. For fifteen years, Mumford and others were able only to dream, write and lecture and the nation's energies were directed first, towards overcoming the depression and later, towards the War effort.

In the late 1940s, after the Second World War, America appeared ready to champion some of Mumford's original causes: affordable housing for all, functional separation of various uses within the community fabric, access to light, air, water, open space. Unfortunately for Mumford, our movement towards achieving these goals took a very different direction that he had anticipated or advocated. In the period since the 1920s, even as community development remained relatively stagnant, technology had moved forward, further upsetting the sense of balance that he had envisioned. By the 1950s, Henry Ford's goal of putting a car in every family's garage had clearly come within reach. The automobile industry, looking to reinvent itself after the War, aggressively promoted the car as the status symbol of the times, and, at the same time, did its best to undermine and disrupt the functioning of many of our more effective urban mass transit systems. The failure of our in-city trolley and light-rail systems, it was reasoned, would further expand the market for cars and automobile products. The fact

that a dramatic increase in auto usage and a concomitant reduction in the efficacy of urban transit systems would devastate the traditional urban structure was of little consequence.

At the same time, housing in this country was in a disastrous state. In the 1930s, the crash of the stock market coupled with the ensuing depression left millions of people broke, and effectively homeless as they could no longer pay their mortgages. The federal government stepped in with the first in a series of financial reforms aimed at making it easier for the average household to afford to purchase a home. The government agreed to guarantee mortgage loans, and worked to not only extend the mortgage payment period from five to fifteen or even thirty years, but to reduce the initial down payment needed to purchase a home.

The War pre-empted any broad based application of these new financial policies, but the return of our servicemen from abroad in 1945 and 1946 highlighted the extent to which there existed a pent-up market for new housing and new ways of living. Into this breach stepped the builder William Levitt, a man who was to become Lewis Mumford's post-War nemesis. A general contractor from the New York area, Levitt had prospered during the War by building facilities for the armed forces. From his beginnings as a builder of custom homes, the wartime experience left Levitt with a keen awareness of the potentials for mass construction. Immediately after the War ended, he looked to parlay his experience into success. Buying thousands of acres of Long Island farmland, thirty miles from Manhattan, he commenced upon the construction of the prototypical post-War suburb, Levittown.

Levitt's astounding success depended upon a fortunate confluence of events. Car ownership was booming in the post-War period and Levittown was a relatively easy commute from New York via car thanks to the parkway system created by Robert Moses or by train. Thousands of veterans lived in the New York area, and the thanks extended to these servicemen by the government included underwriting down payments and financing on new houses. By minimizing the design distinctions between units as well as the detailing of any of the houses, Levitt was able to mass produce affordable, albeit small, houses and to create financing programs for these units that simply could not be beaten. For a few hundred dollars down and as little as fifty dollars a month, a veteran could own a quarter acre lot -replete with one tree in the front yard—and a 900 square foot house.

Levitt's success spurred imitators across the country, particularly in the Northeast and in California, a state that had boomed in the 1940s in direct response to the War efforts. The Federal government played a significant role in aiding and abetting this movement. Arguing that a strong, transcontinental highway system was a military necessity in a period of escalating Cold War tensions, from the early 1950s, the government poured hundreds of billions of dollars into the design and construction of today's interstate highway system. Initially envisioning the system as a way of facilitating easy movement between cities, the system was primarily used as a means for decamping from the cities into the suburbs. In the period between 1950 and 1980, the entire nature

of the American city changed as millions of people moved away from the traditional city centers to far-flung suburban tract houses.

Mumford took both the Federal Highway authority and Levitt to task. Referencing a 1910 publication called “Roadtown,” Mumford noted that the sum product of postWarplanning and development efforts is what we, today, refer to as “sprawl.”

In an entirely undirected but diagrammatic fashion, Roadtown has automatically grown up along the major highways of America; an incoherent and purposeless urbanoid nonentity, which dribbles over the devastated landscape and destroys the coherent smaller centers of urban or village life that stands in its path. Witness among a thousand other examples the Bay Highway between San Francisco and Palo Alto. Roadtown is the line of least resistance; the form that every modern city approaches when it forgets the functions and purposes of the city itself and uses modern technology only to sink to a primitive social level.<sup>3</sup>

As for the work of developers such as Levitt, Mumford accused them of creating socially and culturally sterile “anti-cities” that devastated the supply of open land around the older cities, wreaking environmental havoc wherever they went.

The anti-city that is now being produced by the reckless extension of standardized expressways, standardized roadside services, and standardized residential subdivisions -all greedily devouring land—dilutes to the point of complete insolvency all the valuable urban functions that require a certain density of population, a certain mixture of activities, a certain interweaving of economic necessities and social occasions. Despite all that, this negative image has proved, especially during the last two decades, to be a highly attractive one; so powerful that many people already identify it, despite its brief history and meager promise, with the ‘American way of life.’

The reason is not far to seek, for the anti-city combines two contradictory and almost irreconcilable aspects of modern civilization: an expanding economy that calls for the constant employment of the machine (motor car, radio, television, telephone, automated factory and assembly line) to secure both full production and a minimal counterfeit of normal social life; and as a necessary offset to these demands, an effort to escape from the over-regulated routines, the impoverished personal choices, the monotonous prospects of this regime by daily withdrawal to a private rural asylum, where bureaucratic compulsions give way to exurban relaxation and permissiveness, in a purely family environment as much unlike the metropolis as possible.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Mumford, Lewis. “Megalopolis as Anti-City,” *Architecture as a Home for Man*. (NY: Architectural Record Books, 1975), p. 121.

<sup>4</sup> Mumford, “megalopolis...,” *op cit*, page 123.

Mumford ended his five-part series for *Architectural Record* with two essays devoted to developing alternative futures for the American city. His description of the “favored images” of the contemporary city in 1963 are equally pertinent today.

The two favored images of the city today are the products of the complementary process of regimentation and disintegration. One of them is the City in a Parking Lot, a collection of high-rise slabs and towers linked by multi-lane expressways; the other is the Anti-City, a by-product of urban decomposition, which in the pursuit of nature denatures the countryside and mechanically scatters fragments of the city over the whole landscape.<sup>5</sup>

The withering sarcasm of Mumford’s critique would be lost on many today because, even as thirty-five years ago, there is at present no consensus among planners, designers, developers and critics, as to what exactly constitutes a “good” or even a desirable contemporary community. And, unfortunately, nowhere in the landscape of critique, diatribe and harangue has anyone of Mumford’s stature emerged to lend oversight as well as insight into the issues at hand.

Instead, to some extent, the nature of the discourse surrounding the nature and direction of the contemporary city has fractured into splintergroups, each arguing its case and downplaying the holistic and interdependent unity that was the foundation of Mumford’s critique. The solutions that Mumford advocated during his long career as an educator, lecturer, author and social critic, have yet to materialize. His argument for a carefully balanced blending of city and country were applauded by many throughout his seventy year public life, but little of what he promoted was brought to fruition. The models that he applauded and held up for recognition -Forest

Hills Gardens, Radburn, NJ—all have places in the textbooks of urban and community design. Their presence, however, is generally that of an historic curiosity rather than a paradigm of practice. Mumford’s desire for unity and completeness in community design, for an “organic” development has, by and large, been unmet

Mumford would not feel out of place within today’s debate, and he clearly would have his own thoughts on the matter. At present, there are at least four definable positions among theorists, students and discerning practitioners of community design and development Mumford would undoubtedly have significant difficulty accepting three of them, and probably would not accept the fourth without some critique.

Paramount among today’s theories of urbanism is what might be called the *laissez-faire* approach, advocated by those who think that things are moving along just fine and argue only for less regulation and less restriction on how things get planned and built. This position received an enormous boost during the 1980s when financial policies and government regulations were eased in order to promote real estate investment and development. Its tenets and principles are succinctly summarized in the best-selling book *Edge City* by Washington Post journalist Joel Garreau.

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<sup>5</sup> Mumford, “Beginnings of Urban Integration,” *Architecture ...*, op cit, page 129

The book begins in its characteristic positive bent: Americans are creating the biggest change in a hundred years in how we build cities. Every single American city that is growing is growing in the fashion of Los Angeles, with multiple urban cores.

These new hearths of our civilization -in which the majority of metropolitan Americans now work and around which we live—look not at all like our old downtowns. Buildings rarely rise shoulder to shoulder, as in Chicago’s Loop. Instead, their broad, low outlines dot the landscape like mushrooms, separated by greenswards and parking lots ...

The hallmarks of these new urban centers are not the sidewalks of New York of song and fable, for there usually are few sidewalks... Our new city centers are tied together not by locomotive and subways, but by jetways, freeways, and rooftop satellite dishes thirty feet across. Their characteristic monument is not a horse-mounted hero, but the atria reaching for the sun and shielding trees perpetually in leaf at the cores of corporate headquarters, fitness centers, and shopping plazas. These new urban areas are not marked by the penthouses of the old urban rich or the tenements of the old urban poor. Instead their landmark structure is the celebrated single-family detached dwelling, the suburban home with grass all around it that made America the best-housed civilization the world has ever known.

I have come to call these new urban centers Edge Cities. Cities, because they contain all the functions a city ever has, albeit in a spread-out form that few have come to recognize for what it is. Edge, because they are a vigorous world of pioneers and immigrants, rising far from the old downtowns, where little save villages or farmland lay only thirty years before.<sup>6</sup>

Mumford would have had little difficulty in punctuating the inflated self-importance of the Edge City advocates. Their boast that they had encompassed lands that were empty “save villages or farmlands” would have elicited scathing protest from the man who as early as the 1920s was cautioning against the dramatic expansion of the traditional cities to the point that it was becoming difficult to find clean water or untrammeled landscapes within any proximity of a metro area. The goal, Mumford would have stressed, was not to suburbanize everything, but rather to create a harmonious balance of well-built, concentrated city and neighborhood centers to be surrounded by essentially untouched natural areas or lightly developed agricultural and recreational lands.

Mumford was clear, from the outset, in his advocacy of the theories of Ebenezer Howard, the English accountant who wrote the remarkable treatise *Tomorrow: The*

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<sup>6</sup> Garreau, Joel. *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier*. (NY: Doubleday, 1991), pp. 3-4.

*Path for Peace-Jul Reform*, in 1898. Initially the text met with little acclaim. Reprinted in 1901, however, under the title *Garden Cities of To-morrow*, the book became a best seller, and helped create the Garden City movement throughout the world.

Howard's points were clear. In 19<sup>th</sup> century England, neither the city nor the country, alone, was a desirable condition. The cities were too industrialized, too crowded, too fragmented. The country, in general, was too isolated, suffering from too few economic and social opportunities. Instead, what was needed, he felt, was a blending of the best elements of each. This could be achieved by creating new cities, at some remove from the existing cities, to be connected via rail lines and roads, but to be kept distinct through the use of "greenbelts" and permanently open lands.

Mumford wrote the introduction for a post-War reprinting of Howard's book. In it he re-emphasized the uniqueness of Howard's approach.

In treating rural and urban improvement as a single problem, Howard was far in advance of his age; and he was a better diagnostician of urban decay than many of our own contemporaries. His Garden City was not only an attempt to relieve the congestion of the big city, and by so doing lower the land values and prepare the way for metropolitan reconstruction: it was equally an attempt to do away with that inevitable correlate of metropolitan congestion, the suburban dormitory, whose open plan and nearer access to the country are only temporary, and whose lack of an industrial population and a working base make it one of the most unreal environments ever created for man: a preposterous middle-class counterpart to the courtly inanities of those absolute monarchs who, at Versailles or Nymphenburg, contrived for themselves a disconnected play-world of their own. The Garden City, as Howard defined it, is not a suburb but the antithesis of a suburb: not a more rural retreat, but a more integrated foundation for an effective urban life.<sup>7</sup>

Mumford would have raised a second critique of the Edge City, one based on social, economic and environmental efficiency. It is one of the boasting points of Edge City advocates that they have managed to successfully reproduce all of the traditional urban elements -places to live, places to work, places to shop, pray, play— in a suburban environment. Mumford would have countered this argument on two points. First, he would have pointed out that the very nature of urbanity is contained, in part, in the density of its development, in the opportunity it offers for chance encounters, in the "friction" essential to urban life. Vitiating these elements, he would argue, and you no longer have an urban existence, merely a simulacra.

His second critique would develop along the lines of economic, social and environmental efficiency. What is the gain, he would ask, in duplicating elements that already exist in our original cities? How does one solve the existing urban problems by moving all of the essentials out of the city and duplicating them elsewhere? In the end, the "answer" to the problems of the older cities proposed by the Edge City advocates is the non-answer of ignoring them.

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<sup>7</sup> Mumford, Lewis. "The Garden City Idea and Modern Planning," in *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*



Technology plays a critical role in the next two of the current stances towards the city. In the first stance, which might be called technological utopianism, the solution to the problems of today's cities (and, increasingly, our suburbs as well) can only be had through the application of more and more technology. The solution to over-crowding is to create denser housing prototypes, to build higher, or to build on previously unbuildable areas such as over water or across ravines. The solution to water pollution is to come up with fancier mechanisms for cleaning the polluted water. The solution to traffic congestion is wider highways, or computer-driven systems in which cars travel sixty miles an hour, five feet away from each other.

The most extreme examples, of such utopian technological urbanism can be found in the proposals of Buckminster Fuller, the Archigram Group from England, the Metabolists from Japan, and other advocates of what are known as urban "megastuctures." Built examples of this approach can be found in many Asian cities today ranging from Hong Kong to Tokyo.

The counter-position to technological utopianism might be called technological dystopianism. Where advocates of the first approach might be criticized for being too in love with technology as a savior, proponents of the second approach are guilty of their blatantly negative view of the current situation. In short, their view of the contemporary city is that it's on the fast boat to hell.

The strongest proponents of this theory can be found in Los Angeles, and they use their surroundings to gather ammunition for their argument. Not unsurprisingly, a post-Apocalyptic version of LA forms the setting for the movie "Blade Runner," a favorite reference for these theorists. In *City of Quartz*,<sup>8</sup> Mike Davis argues that Los Angeles represents the future of urbanism in America, and that, at best, it's "a sunlit mortuary where you can rot without feeling it" LA, he argues, is the living embodiment of a 1969 federal Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence: We live in fortress cities brutally divided between fortified cells of affluent society and "places of terror" where the police battle the criminalized poor. Technology plays an omnipotent role in this reality. TV glorifies the lifestyles of the rich and famous and plays up the dichotomies between the affluent and everyone else. Guns are available to all, and because they are, the well-to-do spend extraordinary amounts to protect themselves from their fellow citizens. They live behind gates, in secluded enclaves, with 24-hour patrols, guard dogs, and in-house alarm systems. At the same time, conditions in the inner cities occasionally imitate war zones, and the gap between the affluent and the poor increases.

Davis and others see today's cities as an uneasy marriage of necessity, and point to advanced technology as the only way out of the problem. Given enough telecommunications and computer equipment, the affluent who currently must barricade themselves into their exclusive enclaves will be able to avoid the situation entirely. These "lone

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by Ebenezer Howard, (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1965), p. 35.

<sup>8</sup> Davis, Mike. *City of Quartz*. (NY: Vantage Press, 1992.)

eagles” or “modem-toters” will be able to escape the city entirely, for isolated resort communities such as Aspen, Telluride, Sun Valley and Park City. Those left behind will simply wallow in their urban squalor.

Clearly, these two positions represent extremes, both in their interpretation of technology and their understanding of the concept of community. In essence, both establish technological imperatives and suggest that community life is at the mercy of the overriding system of technology. To this end, society is little better off than it was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century at the height of the Paleotechnic period when the rich mill-owners and industrialists could afford to live in the country while the vast majority of people suffered the ravages of polluted air and water, squalid living conditions, over-crowding and malnutrition. The lessons and opportunities of the Neo-technic period that Mumford suggested in his 1933 text *Technics and Civilization* would, once again, have been thwarted. Technological determinism, a concept that repelled Mumford, would once again, have won out.

A fourth position, yet to be fully articulated, attempts to moderate between the extremes, and to overcome the weaknesses in all of the previous approaches. In its current forms, however, it too might be accused of philosophical extremism. Originally referred to as Neo-Traditionalists, this group has unified recently under the rubric of the New Urbanism. The goals of the groups are very much in keeping with those espoused by Mumford and his colleagues in the 1920s, although few if any references are made to him directly. Instead, members of this group acknowledge the work of Raymond Unwin, a British architect who worked with Ebenezer Howard, and the author of a seminal essay “Nothing Gained by Over-crowding,” in which he argued that the answer to urban squalor was to decant the over-crowded portions of the city into self-sufficient, comprehensive “new towns” that were distinct from yet connected to the main metropolis. Mumford championed both Unwin’s work and his article.

Like Mumford, the New Urbanists believe that the neighborhood, not the house, is the fundamental unit of the city, and that the street is the fundamental public space within the contemporary city. Like Mumford, they argue for diversity of forms and functions within a comprehensive and comprehensible neighborhood unit. A good neighborhood, they argue, should be walkable; it should have a clearly defined center, and clearly defined edges; it should be accessible to people in all walks of life, not simply to adults who drive; it should represent the full variety of economic classes, not simply those who can afford \$300,000 houses or one-acre lots.

In many ways, the advocates of the New Urbanism represent an interesting intellectual implement to Mumford. The “theories” of the New Urbanism spring, not from academia or criticism, but from practice. The founders and prime movers of the movement have written relatively little, if only because almost all of them are practitioners: architects, landscape architects, planners, developers..

In an irony that Mumford would have appreciated, the New Urbanists spend the better part of the 1980s attempt to describe an idealized neighborhood unit, one that worked within the current framework of development and construction practice, that

contained the basic elements of communal life and yet, one that addressed their concerns for the integration of buildings and open space, their concerns for continuity of buildings and appearance while allowing for diversity of uses and economic sectors.

Across a ten year period, a variety of models were drawn and designed, and in many instances, built. In general, these were contrasted with standard practices which were mostly in keeping with the Edge City model; shopping malls masquerading as “town centers,” parking lots instead of parks, highways instead of Main Streets. Over time, a model coalesced.

It contained places for commerce, places for schools, places for worship, a variety of housing types, a coherent, interconnected street pattern, a variety of iconic neighborhood spaces such as a “green,” a “Main Street,” a “village square.” It was of a walkable size, approximately ¼ mile in radius.

Once a definitive prototype was drawn up, a curious fact was noted. In almost every aspect, the newly-minted model of how to design and develop a neighborhood was similar to a model developed in 1929 by Clarence Perry, a friend and colleague of Lewis Mumford’s.

The New Urbanists are a group for whom Lewis Mumford would have had an enormous affinity. Just as he and his colleagues from New York helped found and run the Regional Planning Association of America in the 1920s and 1930s, were Mumford active today, he would undoubtedly have been a charter member of the Congress for the New Urbanism. From that vantage, he would have brought external credibility to the group by trumpeting their ideas and ideals. Internally, he would have been a tough critic, chastising his colleagues for their blatant historicism and their inability, to date, to work their way through the myriad legal, financial and economic barriers that burden those who attempt to redevelop the older urban centers.

Ultimately, cities are a consensual creation; we all participate, implicitly or explicitly. The power of the so-called information age is that ideas and concepts of what makes for a “good” community and a “good” city can be easily spread around and distributed throughout the levels of society. The drawback of the age, however, is that information, in and of itself, without critique, without direction, without oversight, is effectively useless. Would that we had a Lewis Mumford to help show us the way.

## **Mumford and McLuhan: The Roots of Modern Media Analysis**

by James W. Carey, Professor of Journalism, Columbia University; Research Professor of Communications Emeritus, University of Illinois

The relationship between Mumford and McLuhan at one level is quite straightforward and open to easy inspection. McLuhan cited Mumford in virtually all his work, certainly in all his important publications. In his later publications Mumford devoted

considerable and often savage space to McLuhan. However, the argumentative relationship between these two important figures in contemporary scholarship was both more subtle and ambiguous than the pattern of citation suggests. There was bigger game. McLuhan and Mumford debated the consequences of electrical technology, in particular, electrical communications for contemporary culture and society. Not only can they teach one something of those consequences but they also illustrate, in a variety of ways, some of the conceptual and ideological pitfalls involved in trying to think sensibly about electrical communication.

Their work leads to an intractable problem which has faced all students of media: did the growth of electrical communication from the telegraph through television and the emergence of electronic communication from simple servo-mechanisms through advanced computer information utilities reverse the general developments associated with printing or did they merely modify and intensify the major contours of modern societies?

There is no easy answer to this question but around it have whirled virtually all the conceptual and ideological debates concerning the relations of communications technology to culture. Briefly, Mumford argued that electronics has intensified the most destructive and power-oriented tendencies of printing, whereas McLuhan argued that electronics has produced or will produce a qualitative change in the nature of social organization and cultural life. There are not only large intellectual stakes in the resolution of this argument but social and political stakes as well, for its resolution will shape ideological discourse and social policy in the arena of communications in the decades ahead.

*Kropotkin-Geddes-Mumford*

The growth of electrical communication rejuvenated utopian social theory in America. It particularly charged the thought of a group of European and American scholars whose work revolved on the relationship of the city and the countryside and were pioneers in what has since been termed urban planning. The principal figures in this group were the Russian anarchist and geographer Peter Kropotkin, the Scot biologist Patrick Geddes and, in America, Lewis Mumford. And their starting point was one of disappointment—disappointment in the nineteenth-century promise of industrialization and mechanical technology. ~

In *The City in History*, Lewis Mumford credits Kropotkin with the first systematic statement of the view that electricity might rescue humans from the blight of machine industry and restore them to communal life. Kropotkin described regional associations of industry and agriculture made possible by electricity and with this new technology a reawakening of the traditions and handicrafts of an older period and the restoration of community life (16, pp. 514-515).

Kropotkin's faith was based upon a valid perception. Electricity, unlike steam, saved the landscape by utilizing water power or lighter, more transportable fuel like petroleum which did less environmental damage than "mining." Similarly, electricity promised a decentralist development by bringing work and power to the people rather

than demanding that people be brought to the power and work. The telegraph similarly promised the distribution of information everywhere, simultaneously reducing the economic advantage of the city and bringing the more varied urban culture out to the countryside. No longer would people need to be physically in the city to partake of the advantages to art, commerce, and intellect that physical massing created. Finally, the small electric motor promised to lift the drudgery of work in small communities, dissipate the advantages of efficiency of the massed factory, stimulate and make more feasible handicraft production and, as in the dream of William Morris, reclaim a more natural and older way of life. The symbol of electricity promised to many the dawning of a new age of decentralist rural production, communal life in small natural associations that would be economically viable and, with the growth of electronic communication, culturally viable as well.

While on a speaking tour of England, Kropotkin influenced the young Scot, Patrick Geddes. Geddes, perhaps more than anyone else, popularized the notion that there were two qualitatively different periods of industrialization. He termed these periods the paleotechnic and neotechnic, differentiated along many dimensions but principally by their reliance on different forms of energy: steam and electricity. Geddes used this distinction to found one of the most important traditions of urban planning, merging it with the earlier Garden Cities movement founded by Ebenezer Howard.

The associations between Kropotkin, Geddes, and Howard merged in Chicago. Both Kropotkin and Geddes received their most enthusiastic American receptions in Chicago and felt most at home in the city. Howard most admired Chicago among American cities and based his work on that of the Chicago architect Daniel Burnham. Geddes influenced John Dewey's thinking on education and other matters. In turn, the idea of the electrical city became symbolized in Chicago architecture. Louis Sullivan built the first structures designed for the potential of electricity. Frank Lloyd Wright, Sullivan's student, conceived the skyscraper as a community within itself: its floors to be viewed as streets in the sky rather than as a collection of unintegrated functions or atomized units (see 9, p. 86). It was mainly through the work of Lewis Mumford, however, that the ideas of Geddes, Howard, and Kropotkin and their attitudes toward electricity and technology entered the American scene.

Mumford based his important work of 1934, *Technics and Civilization*, on Geddes's distinction between the paleotechnic (steam and mechanics) and neotechnic (electricity) phases of industry and *communication*. Mumford shared with Geddes the intellectual strategy of placing technological change at the center of the growth of civilization (1). In viewing the miscarriage of the machine he suggested that electricity had certain intrinsic potentials for producing a decentralist society, creating a new human being, and realizing a pastoral relation to nature. Only the cultural pseudomorph of capitalism, the housing of new forces in outmoded social forms, held back the latest advance in civilization. Throughout that work Mumford strikingly contrasted scenes of peace and order and cleanliness realized in the neotechnic world with the ugliness, exploitation, and disarray of the old world of mechanics. He recaptured some of the oldest

dreams of the American imagination and remodeled them in terms of the potential of electricity (see 8, pp. 185-186; 12, pp. 225-227).

Mumford's demon was capitalism, the fetters which emasculate neotechnics, and *Technics and Civilization* ends with a plea for socialism. But in condemning paleotechnic civilization he saw it, as did Marx in a different vocabulary, as the destruction of the temple, a prelude to a rebuilding.

The central redeeming feature that all commentators on electricity from Kropotkin through Mumford and McLuhan saw in this technology was that it was decentralizing, that it could break up the concentrations of power in the state and industry and populations in the city. In *Technics and Civilization* Mumford argued that "the neotechnic phase was marked...by the conquest of a new form of energy: electricity-lit] effected revolutionary changes: these touched the location and the concentration of industries and the detailed organization of the factory" (12, p. 221).

The decentralizing effects of electrical power were matched by the decentralizing effects of electrical communication. Mumford argued that the giantism typical of paleotechnic industry was caused by a defective system of communication which antedated the telephone and telegraph. With electrical power factories could be placed where they were wanted, not merely where the power source dictated they be. Factories could be rearranged without regard to the centralizing shafts and aisles that a central power source like steam demanded. Similarly, the new means of communication dictated that people no longer had to be in physical contact in order to transact their business. Freed from reliance on face-to-face communication and a slow and erratic mail service, industry could be decentralized into the countryside. As a result, neotechnics spiritualizes labor and reduces the human robot:

Here, as in neotechnical industry generally, advances in production increase the number of trained technicians in the laboratory, and decrease the number of human robots in the plant. In short, one witnesses in the chemical processes the general change that characterizes all genuinely neotechnic industry: the displacement of the proletariat (12, p. 229).

This is the essence of the general argument Mumford made, on the great transition from paleotechnics to neotechnics, from steam power to electrical power, from capitalist to post-capitalist social forms. In describing electrical communication he saw its potential for transcending space — almost at times seeing it, like Frank Lloyd Wright, as providing a complete substitute for social relations:

With the invention of the telegraph a series of inventions began to bridge the gap in time between communication and response despite the handicaps of space... As a result, communication is now on the point of returning, with the aid of mechanical devices to that instantaneous reaction of person to person with which it began; but the possibilities...will be limited only by the amount of energy available and the mechanical perfection and accessibility of the apparatus (12, pp. 239-240).

Mumford, always skeptical within his enthusiasms, always projecting the dark sides of his hopes, recognized the paradox of electrical communication: that the media of

reflective thought — reading, writing, and drawing — could be weakened by television and radio; that closer contact did not necessarily mean greater peace; that the new inventions would be foolishly overused; that human skills in the arts would be extirpated by easy entertainment. Nonetheless he finally registered a reserved but positive judgment on electronic communication:

Nevertheless instantaneous personal communication over long distances is one of the outstanding marks of the neotechnic phase: it is the mechanical symbol of those world wide cooperations of thought and feeling which must emerge, finally, if our whole civilization is not to sink into ruin... Perhaps the greatest social effect of radio-communication so far, has been a political one: the restoration of direct contact between the leader and the group. Plato defined the limits of the size of a city as the number of people who could hear the voice of a single orator today limits do not define a city but a civilization (12, p. 241).

I have here expunged the dark side of Mumford's prophecy to emphasize the essentially optimistic tone. To be fair it must be said, however, that he felt in the 1930s that at that moment the dangers of electronic communication seemed greater than the benefits. He guardedly but warmly endorsed the resurgence of regionalism in the nineteenth century as "being a reaction against the equally exaggerated neglect of the traditions and historic monuments of a community life, fostered by the abstractly progressive minds of the 19th century."

It would be grossly unfair to conclude that Mumford, in his early work, was an unambiguous champion of neotechnics and of electrical communication or felt that the impact of electricity was automatic. He concluded at one point that the neotechnic refinement of the machine, without a coordinate development of higher social purposes, only magnifies the possibilities of depravity and barbarism. And yet his habit of writing of neotechnics in the past tense, his tendency to imply that only the outmoded shell of capitalism retarded the emergence of a qualitatively new electrical world where we would have the cake of power to be consumed at the table of the decentralized community, led to a wide adoption of his views. To put it more strongly, Mumford's essential vision of electrical power and communication became a litany of social redemption which infused most writing, popular and intellectual, on technology and the future, including that of Marshall McLuhan.

#### *McLuhan and Mumford*

The influence of Mumford on McLuhan, both at the level of ideology and conceptual analysis, was not clear until the publication of *Understanding Media*. Even in *Mechanical Bride*, however, McLuhan pointed to Mumford and his "effort to modify the social and individual effects of technology by stressing concepts of social biology" as a road past the Marxist indictments of capitalist civilization. Moreover, he cited Mumford's analysis as an example of how "we may by a reasonable distribution of power and by town and country planning enjoy all the lost advantages" of countryside living without sacrificing any of the new gains of technology. But more importantly

Mumford foreshadowed, where he did not make explicit, the central arguments, indeed, the slogans we have come to identify as the heart of McLuhan's arguments.

The first, and perhaps most important, foreshadowing is Mumford's view that neotechnics was a reassertion of the organic principle in the face of mechanization. He emphasized that the new forms of communication were extensions of biological capacity:

...the organic has become visible again even within the mechanical complex: some of our most characteristic mechanical instruments—the telephone, the phonograph, the motion picture — have grown out of our interest in the human voice and human ear and out of knowledge of their physiology and anatomy (12, p. 6).

The growth of technology was in part an attempt to build an automaton: a machine that appeared to perfect human functions, that was, in short, lifelike. The movement from naturalism to mechanism was to remove the organic symbol: to take the mechanical player from the mechanical piano. Naturalism deeply affected us, however, even in the structure of our language. It is, of course, this same view of the computer which McLuhan proposes: the mind externalized in machine; an automaton, lifelike, yet stripped of the organic symbol which McLuhan's metaphors attempt to restore. And it is this reinsertion of the natural back into the mechanical which is the stylistic hinge of McLuhan's writing.

Mumford and McLuhan ascribe the same general and deleterious effects to the rise of printing, particularly as it served as an agent of uniformity. Again, Mumford:

The printing press was a powerful agent for producing uniformity in language and so by degrees in thought. Standardization, mass-production, and capitalistic enterprise came in with the printing press.. (12, facing P; 84).

While Mumford makes the clock the central invention of paleotechnic times, he attributes to print the effects McLuhan amplified and made less ambiguous:

Second to the clock in order if not perhaps in importance was the printing press... Printing was from the beginning a completely mechanical achievement. Not merely that it was the type for all future instruments of reproduction for the printed sheet, even before the military uniform was the first completely standardized and interchangeable parts...abstracted from gesture and physical presence, the printed word furthered that process of analysis and isolation which became the leading achievement of the era (12, pp. 134-135).

What McLuhan and Mumford originally shared was the view that neotechnics restores the organic and aesthetic. As Mumford put it: "at last the quantitative and mechanical has become life sensitive." For Mumford, the background scene is biological while for McLuhan it is aesthetic, though neither rejects what the other affirms: McLuhan cites the biologist J. Z. Young for support; Mumford refers to the new aesthetes. Mumford notes that from biology "the investigation of the world of life opened up new possibilities for the machine itself: vital interests, ancient human wishes influence the development of new inventions. Flight, telephonic communication, the phonograph, the motion picture all arose out of the more scientific study of living organisms."



And he moves from biology to aesthetics: “this interest in living organisms does not stop short with machines that stimulate eye and ear. From the organic world comes an idea utterly foreign to the paleotechnic mind: the importance\*of shape.”

The same linkage of the aesthetic and technological underlie both their positions. Mumford put it most clearly:

Every effective part in this whole neotechnic environment represents an effort of the collective mind to widen the province of order and control and provision. And here, finally, the perfected forms begin to hold human interest even apart from practical performances: they tend to produce that inner composure and equilibrium, that sense of balance between the inner impulse and the outer environment, which is one of the marks of a work of art. The machines, even when they are networks of art, underlie our art—that is, our organized perceptions and feelings — in the way that Nature underlies them, extending the basis upon which we operate and confirming our own impulse to order (12, p. 356).

I do not wish to overemphasize the similarities of Mumford and McLuhan. Mumford is always more complex, balanced and moralistic in judgment. What McLuhan did was to seize upon a similar linkage of art, perception, and the machine, a set of propositions about technology and culture, and amplify them through literary sources, stripping them of the complex context in which Mumford situated them. Above all, by setting technology outside of the density, the thickness, of history and culture, he produced out of this inherited material a modern drama. He made the electrical machine an actor in an eschatological and redemptive play.

#### *Conclusion*

The relationship between Mumford and McLuhan can be described as the inversion of a trajectory. McLuhan’s earliest work was an analysis of the large cultural complexes which distinguish civilizations and an admiration for “the southern quality”: the pre-capitalist features of Southern culture which provided a decisive if not an effective critique of industrialism in terms of human and organic values. McLuhan ends in the embrace of a thorough technological determinism, a poet of post-industrial society, and a prophet with one message: yield to the restorative capacity of the modern machine, throw off the cultural pseudomorph retarding progress. As McLuhan increasingly projected a “rhetoric of the electrical sublime,” increasingly saw in the qualitative difference of electrical technology a road past the authentic blockages and disruptions of industrial life, Lewis Mumford turned progressively in the opposite direction. While Mumford’s early work was never completely trapped in technological determinism, the decision to hang his analysis of historical change on technological stages such as paleotechnics and neotechnics, an analysis and terminology he inherited from Patrick Geddes and in turn extended, centered technology as the critical factor in human and social development. Politics and culture entered derivatively as the housing, accelerator, retarder of technical potential. The trajectory of his work has been away from this initial position. By mid-century he could see no difference between the capitalist and

socialist state, as both were dedicated to an extirpation of the past, total management of the present, and a future based solely on the mechanics of power and productivity.

In his later work Mumford attempted to systematically deflate the image of humans as “homo faber,” the tool maker, to cut down the received view of technology as the central agent in human development; and to emphasize the role of art, ritual, and language as the decisive achievements in human development. By the 1960s he had abandoned the distinction between the paleotechnic and neotechnic eras. He saw then the trajectory of modern history as the recreation of the “myth of the machine” and the “pentagon of power.” Whatever short run gains and ameliorations had been introduced by electrical power and communication had been almost immediately sacrificed to a criminal and insane world view: the vision of the universe and everything in it as a machine and, in the name of that machine, the extirpation of all human purposes, types, values, and social forms that did not fit within the limited scope of machine civilization. The worship in turn enthroned a pentagon of power: a society devoted to the uncritical development, without reason or control, of power (energy), political domination, productivity, profit, and publicity.

Mumford recognized in McLuhan’s work a defense and legitimation, often implicit, of the very groups and agencies Mumford was attempting to excoriate. In *The Pentagon of Power* he turned direct attention on McLuhan and the “electronic phantasmagoria...he conjures up.” He accused McLuhan of proposing an “absolute mode of control: one that will achieve total illiteracy, with no permanent record except that officially committed to thacomputer and open only to those permitted access to this facility.” In the interests of the military and commerce he saw McLuhan as pressing forward to a world where the “sole vestige of the multifarious world of concrete forms and ordered experience will be the sounds and ‘tactile’ images on the constantly present television screen or such abstract derivative information as can be transferred to the computer.” McLuhan’s goal was, he thought, total “cultural dissolution,” a form of tribal communism; this is “in fact the extreme antithesis of anything that can be properly called tribal or communistic. As for ‘communism,’ this is McLuhan’s public relations euphemism for totalitarian control.”

Mumford’s work toward the end of his career offered a sound diagnosis of the general currents of modern history. If we can forget for the moment large claims and transhistorical beatitudes, modern communications has aided in enlarging the scale of social organization beyond the nation state to the regional federation of countries and fostered the growth of the multinational corporation, cartel, and bureaucracy. In doing so, electronics has furthered the spatial bias of print and increasingly centralized political and cultural power. Whatever tendency existed within electronics to cultivate a new aesthetic sense and a rejuvenated appreciation of the organic has been more than counterbalanced by the tendency of television to increase the privatization of existence and the overwhelming dependence of people on distant mechanical sources of art, information, and entertainment. For all the vaunted capacity of the computer to store, process, and make available information in densities and quantities heretofore

unknown, the pervasive tendency to monopolize knowledge in the professions and data banks continues unabated. The ability of television to involve us in depth in the lives of people around the world is more than offset by its equal tendency to imprison us within our own speechless, looking glass world: the silent spectator as a mode of being.

If we consider this argument between Mumford and McLuhan in terms of the larger debate over electrical technology, it seems reasonable to conclude that electrical communication has up to this time largely served to consolidate and extend the cultural hegemony and social forms that first appeared in the wake of the printing press.

*Archivists Note:* The text body footnotes are missing from the PDF, so I'll just include them here until this can be error corrected.<sup>9101112131415161718192021222324</sup>

For an expanded version of this essay, see *Journal of Communication*, Summer 1981, pp. 162-178.

## Sections from: The Coming of the Millennium: Good News for the Whole Human Race

by Darrell J. Fasching

### *Introduction*

One of the curious facts of Ellul's reception in this county is that he received his widest following from among conservative Evangelicals. Ellul, however, was not an Evangelical in the American sense but in the European tradition deeply shaped

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<sup>9</sup> Carey, James W. And John J. Quirk. "The Mythos of the Electronic Revolution." *American Scholar* 39, Spring 1970, pp.,219-241; Summer 1970, pp. 395-434.

<sup>10</sup> Eisenstein, Elizabeth. *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications in Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe* (two volumes). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.

<sup>11</sup> Goody, Jack (Ed.). *Literacy in Traditional Societies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968.

<sup>12</sup> Innis, Harold. *The Bias of Communication*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951.

<sup>13</sup> Innis, Harold. *Empire and Communications*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972.

<sup>14</sup> Jacobs, Jane. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. New York: Random House, 1961.

<sup>15</sup> Mumford, Lewis. In Charles Beard (Ed.), *Whither Mankind: A Panorama of Modern Civilization*. New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1928, pp. 308-309.

<sup>16</sup> Mumford, Lewis, *City Development*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1945.

<sup>17</sup> Mumford, Lewis. *From the Ground Up*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1956.

<sup>18</sup> Mumford Lewis. *The City in History*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1961.

<sup>19</sup> Mumford, Lewis. *The Highway and the City*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1963.

<sup>20</sup> Mumford, Lewis. *Technics and Civilization*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1963 [1934] .

<sup>21</sup> Mumford, Lewis. *The Myth of the Machine* (two volumes). New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1967-1970.

<sup>22</sup> Rosenstal, Raymond (Ed.) *McLuhan: Pro and Con*.

New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1968.

<sup>23</sup> Sennett, Richard. *The Fall of Public Man*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977.

<sup>24</sup> Steam, Gerald E. (Ed.) *McLuhan: Hot & Cool*. New York; Dial Press, 1967.

in the modern period by Karl Barth. No where have these two traditions come into more obvious conflict than in the American Evangelical response to Barth's and Ellul's vision of universal salvation. For in the hands of Barth and Ellul, the Gospel turns out to be a scandal not only to Jews and Greeks but to many Christians as well. This became eloquently clear in an issue of *Sojourners* published on this subject where Ellul's view on this matter was systematically denounced. The result has been a love-hate relationship between Ellul and many American Evangelicals who love his biblically rooted critique of modern technological society but absolutely reject his understanding of "evangelism" as good news for the whole human race. [J]

In the very first issue of the Forum (almost ten years ago now) I defended the ethical importance of Ellul's affirmation of universal salvation. In the decade since I have become increasingly convinced of the central importance of this aspect of Ellul's drought to ethical task of Christians in the coming millennium. In a world where not only religious but secular ideologies typically divide humanity into "us" against "them" it is important that Christians be not conformed but transform the world with an alternative vision.

In *The Coming of the Millennium* I attempt to state my own case in defense of a vision of universal salvation —one deeply influenced by Barth and Ellul. As his review (p. 18) indicates I have not managed to convince my colleague and friend, David Gill, of the truth of universal salvation. Fortunately, he does not have to believe it in order to "be saved." He accuses me of "cut and paste" exegesis, that selectively reads the biblical text. But the "traditional" position he wishes to defend, does this also, ignoring precisely those messages in the biblical tradition that I am now emphasizing to redress the balance. In his review of my book in this issue, David Gill suggests that I will never succeed in convincing "the masses of Christians" (here I suspect he means Evangelicals, as many in the mainline churches I think will view it quite differently) of my thesis. I suspect he is right. But as an Evangelical Christian myself, in the tradition of Barth and Ellul, I wish to stake a claim on the meaning of this term - one that is less technological. David Gill wants a more "faithful — and *effective*" understanding of the Gospel than I offer. But to make the Gospel *efficient*, as Ellul well knew, is to conform it to the world. Moreover, the "deci-sionism" of some American Evangelicals has turned "faith" into a technique (a conscious act of the will) whereby one can be saved. Such a view renders Christians self-sufficient and eliminates any need for the graciousness of God who loves his— enemies and does good to those who persecute him—. Moreover, it is not clear how a God who loves his— enemies and does them good, carries this out by condemning them to hell. There is a deep inconsistency in such a view. What follows are two selections from *The Coming of the Millennium* which speak to these issues.

*From the Prologue:*

*The World as We Know It is Passing Away*

The year 2000 is at hand. The world as we know it is passing away. Some expect the coming of the millennium to bring the end of the world and God's final judgment on humanity. Others simply expect a different world, a new millennium. They say

we will be entering a post-modern world. All that means is that we expect it to be different than the world we were born into. I believe there is some truth in both of these expectations. I don't expect the coming of the millennium to bring the end of the world but I do believe it will bring the end of the world as we know it. And while the final judgment of the world may not be at hand, a final judgment of Christianity may be.

For the Good News of the Gospel, as it has been proclaimed for the last two millennia, has no future. Out of the noblest of ideals, namely, its concern to save the world through conversion, Christianity has violated its own highest ideals. For while the Jesus of the Sermon on the Mount preaches love of enemies, Christendom had no place for the stranger much less the enemy. Bent on conquering the world for Christ, Christians demanded that all strangers "become like us" or suffer the consequences. That kind of Christianity missed the point Christians are called to be the salt of the earth not to turn the whole earth into salt. Spiritually speaking, that would be a major ecological catastrophe.

A world made up only of Christians is a world that has no place for strangers. However, as I shall argue, whether we explicitly reject the stranger or implicitly do so out of a desire to make the stranger just like us (and hence no longer a stranger), we turn our back on God. For our God is not like us. Nor is our God one of us. Like the stranger, our God is one whose thoughts are not our thoughts and whose ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8). Our God can be found only in welcoming the stranger.

A Gospel that has no place for strangers can have no place in the emerging global civilization of the coming millennium. The world of the millennium that is coming into being before our very eyes is a global community clearly different from that of our ancestors who shared a world with a common vision and common values. The coming of a global community brings with it a religious and cultural diversity that seems to confuse and unsettle us as much as the diversity of language unsettled the citizens of Babel. Like the inhabitants of Babel we long to go back to the good old days when everybody spoke the same language and shared the same worldview. Uniformity is comforting and assuring. Diversity is unsettling.

In the millennium that is passing away the understanding of the Gospel was dominated by the nostalgia of Babel, and Christians dreamed of conquering the world for Christ so that all would share the same faith and values. That missionary zeal reached its height in the 19th century and still strongly colors Christian understandings of evangelism. However, there is something tragically wrong with that understanding of the Gospel. It turned out to be more bad news than good news for a large part of the world's population. Conquering the world for Christ as an evangelical approach has been largely discredited by the history of Christian imperialism and Christian persecution of "heretics." To continue that model raises serious questions about the ethics of religious belief and practice. For if we Christians continue to insist on the values of conquest, we will undermine our message of Good News through an ethical failure.

The Christianity of conquest has no viable future. The way we have told the Christian story, even with the best of intentions, has evoked far too much intolerance, hatred and violence. The evangelism of conquest belongs to the millennium that is passing away. In this book I try to imagine how we might tell the Christian story anew for the coming of a new millennium. The task, I believe, is to focus on the biblical theme of hospitality to the stranger rather than conquest of the stranger.

Some will read the following chapters and feel I have departed from the “true” Gospel given to us. They will wonder why any mortal should be permitted to change the eternal Word of God. That is an interesting question, but it is not one that should trouble us. It is not God’s word but our human understanding of God’s word that is in question. Our concern is to understand why past understandings have been inadequate. The issue is interpretation. The Bible has many themes, so that depending on where we put the emphasis we can come up with very different messages from the same book of scriptures. While one way of understanding the Gospel may have shown itself to be inadequate, still other forms might well be more promising. Christians have always had a choice between at least two very different types of messages from the scriptures. The first is the kind we find in the Gospel of John (NRSV, 3:18), “Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.” The second we find in the first letter to Timothy 4:10, which declares God to be “the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe” (NRSV) — or as the New Jerusalem Bible translates it: “The point of all our toiling and battling is that we have put our trust in the living God and he is the saviour of the whole human race but particularly of all believers.”

How does one decide between these two messages, one promising salvation for believers only and the other promising salvation for the whole human race? My answer is very simple. I believe that in the millennium that is passing away the Gospel was organized around the first kind of proclamation and the results were ethically disastrous. It led to a triumphalistic and imperialistic church that produced the Crusades and contributed to the Holocaust — a church that had no love for the stranger. This message has ethically discredited itself. Therefore, it represents a misunderstanding of the meaning of the Gospel. If Christianity is not to repeat its tragic history it must reconsider where the center of its message lies. My argument will be that the Gospel must be revised to emphasize the second type of proclamation, as exemplified in 1 Timothy.

To engage in this shift of emphasis is not as arbitrary as it sounds. For during the last two millennia Christians systematically ignored the second and emphasized the first. Since Christian lives and Christian truth are to be tested by their fruits, it’s time to reach the conclusion that the Christianity of exclusivism and intolerance, based on the type of message typically attributed to the Gospel of John, is inconsistent with the heart of Jesus’ message as found in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chps 5-7) and that the second alternative, found in the Pauline tradition, far from leading us astray, will lead us back to the Gospel message found in the Sermon on the Mount. In

my view, the Sermon on the Mount is the core message of the Gospel to which all else must be reconciled. If we Christians do so, Christianity in the next millennium will be very different from the Christianity of conquest that shaped the last millennium.

Martin Luther started the Reformation by nailing 95 theses on the church door of Wittenburg. For the coming millennium we are in need of yet another such reformation. In the six chapters which follow I hope to contribute to that reformation by proclaiming six theses that will show how the coming of the millennium can be Good News for the whole human race.

1. You have heard it said that on the day of judgment only Christians will be saved and all others will be consigned to eternal damnation, but I say to you that the Gospel proclaims salvation for the whole human race.

2. You have heard it said that non-Christians are strangers who will not enter the Kingdom of God, but I say to you that that God enters our lives through the very presence of the stranger.

3. You have heard it said that heretics and sinners will have no place in the Kingdom of God, but I say to you that to reject even the least of these is to reject God and God's messiah.

4. You have heard it said that human beings can be saved in no other name than that of Jesus, but I say to you that the name "Jesus" means we are saved in the name of a God who cannot be named or imaged.

5. You have heard it said that only a chosen remnant can be saved, but I say to you that a saving remnant saves not itself but the whole human race of which it is a part.

6. You have heard it said that in the final judgment many will be consigned to the eternal fires, but I say to you, God's judgment is a refining fire which transforms and saves rather than destroys. Even judgment is a manifestation of grace. The final truth is that our God is the savior of the whole human race and especially all believers (ITimothy 4:10).

By what authority do I claim the right to interpret the Gospel in this manner? The answer is not difficult to provide. For the Gospel does not interpret itself, human beings do the interpreting. In the past, when Christians have interpreted the Bible, they have always emphasized some parts and ignored or downplayed others. In this way, in every age, Christians have constructed a canon within the canon of scriptures. That is, they have selected from the rich diversity of scriptures that particular message they believed the world most radically needed to hear. As Luther once put it, everything in the scriptures may be the word of God, but not everything in the scriptures is die word of God for me. And, I would add, not everything is the word of God for our time.

Indeed, the Protestant Reformation began by Luther is a good example of sorting out from all scriptures that which is the word of God for one's own time. The understanding of the Gospel produced by Martin Luther occurred when, on the basis of his "tower room" experience of being bom again, he sorted through the scriptures and decided that nothing was the truly the word of God except that which teaches justification by faith.

Although some argue that we must cling to the eternal and unchanging word of God, it is an illusion to think our *understanding* of the Gospel has ever remained fixed and unchanging. What we need is not an unchanging interpretation of the Gospel but an ethically responsible interpretation. We need not only historical and literary criticism of the Bible but also ethical criticism. St. Augustine once argued that whenever we find something unworthy of God in the scriptures we know that this cannot be meant literally and therefore we must look for a deeper ethical and spiritual meaning.

But who are we to judge what is worthy of God? My answer is that we are children of Abraham. If, as Paul insisted, Abraham is the model of true faith, then we who are children of Abraham can dare to share his audacity. For Abraham is the one who had the *chutzpah* or audacity to argue with God over the fate of Sodom, challenging: *Shall not the judge of all also be just?* Even God must be just in order to be God. If this is so, then the scriptures must be ethical in order to be the word of God. It finally boils down to the ethics of belief and practice. Any interpretation of scriptures that teaches rejection of the stranger discredits itself as an authentic interpretation of the Gospel.

As Christians face the coming of the millennium and the emergence of a global community rich in diversity, it is time to ask whether conquering the world of strangers, deviants and heretics, and transforming the whole world into our own image, is really what the Gospel is all about. If we fail to ask and answer that question, it should not surprise us if future generations look back and chronicle the next millennium as the millennium in which Christianity died of its own intolerance.

Finally, let me say that anyone reading the argument contained in these pages will be able to think of numerous scriptural quotations that stand in contradiction to those I use to support the vision of the Gospel as Good News for the whole human race. It is easy to find statements that warn human beings of God's judgment and wrath, statements suggesting that some will suffer eternal condemnation for not hearing and obeying the word of God. I do not need to refute these citations in order to hold my thesis, for like Kari Barth, I argue that the threats of judgment and eternal damnation are always God's second last word, while God's final word is always forgiveness and reconciliation.

The word of judgment is meant to shake us up and get us to change our lives here and now. The word of forgiveness and reconciliation is the word of grace and acceptance that comes to us in spite of the fact that we are unacceptable. Some will doubt that this is the true message of the Gospel. They will fear that I am preaching "cheap grace." But grace is not cheap; it's free. It has no conditions. That is the whole point of the Sermon on the Mount. Such an understanding of the Good News is one that is in accord with the message of the Sermon on the Mount which demands that we love even our enemies and therefore proclaims the Good News of God's love for the whole human race. Nevertheless, the formulation of the Gospel I offer in this book is a human interpretation. It should be doubted. It should be questioned — both because I am fallible and because without such doubts we might take the Good News for granted and therefore discount the very warnings of final judgment that we need to



heed. Therefore, I do not expect to resolve the question of universal salvation in this book. I only expect to renew our capacity to live in the ambiguity between judgment and grace, even as I believe we are called to live with the ambiguity of being Christians in a pluralistic world of strangers, seeking to spread the Good News yet refraining from making the world “Christian.”

*From Chapter Four.*

*Golgotha - The Stranger as Messiah*

*Crucified Love: The Gospel of Universal Salvation*

... The Good News of the cross, however, lies not in the violence and degradation [of Jesus’ crucifixion] but in the response to it. Violence is not permitted to beget violence. Violence and rejection is answered with crucified love. Just as Jesus forgives those Romans and Sadducees who reject and crucify him, so God forgives those who reject h—.

According to Paul, Christ died for the ungodly, that is, for those who reject God. One of the paradoxes of the Christian theology of the millennium that is passing away is how to view “unbelief” in relation to repentance. On the one hand, unbelief was said to be a sin. On the other hand, repentance was said to be necessary for salvation. But if one’s sin is that one does not believe, how can one ask for forgiveness? It is a “Catch-22.” One has to already believe in order to ask for forgiveness, and if one already believes, one does not need to ask — at least for the particular offense of unbelief.

The problem of salvation was further compounded by the view that while the love of God is unconditional, unless one repented and asked for forgiveness one would be condemned to the fires of hell. Now if one must repent in order to be saved, then God’s love is not unconditional. It has at least one condition. The resulting theology further compounds the problem by saying, Christ had to die on the cross in order to conquer sin and yet those who do not accept Christ are said to be sinners condemned to the eternal fires. This is the traditional dualistic gospel as a sacred story which opposes the children of light to the children of darkness or the saved to the damned. Now if some are sinners condemned for not accepting Christ, then Christ’s dying on the cross in order to conquer sin was not fully successful, since sin wins at least a partial victory. The dualism of the Gospel as preached in the millennium that is passing ” 1 away undermines its own message through its self-contradictory claims.

According to the story of Noah, when God saw the destruction God had caused in anger over sinful human behavior, God resolved to “never again” permit the total destruction of sinners. In so doing, God rejected the totalitarian solution to the ”i problem of sin. For one way of conquering sin would be to

- totally control human behavior through threats and punish

ment — the totalitarian dream. Some have preferred to think of God as such a totalitarian ruler. No one, of course, not even

God, has ever succeeded in totally controlling human behavior and every attempt has been demonic in the cruelty and suffering it has caused.

In the millennium that is to come, Christians will have to accept the logical implications of their own claim that the love of God is unconditional — it has no conditions, not even repentance. God's love falls like the rain on the just and the unjust alike. If sin cannot be conquered by punishment and control then perhaps what the Gospel suggests should be taken seriously — namely that God conquers sin through crucified love, that is, by forgiving those who reject h— and are h— enemies.

To die for another human being, Paul argues, is never easy, but it is understandable that someone might do this in an attempt to protect someone who is good and lovable. However, "God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us... For if *-while we were enemies, we were reconciled* to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life"

☒ (Romans 5: 8& 10).

T ' What is surprising about haul's theology is that there is

. 1 virtually no discussion of repentance in it. This is, I think,

because we are not justified by repentance but by the crucified love that God reveals in the death of Jesus. No love is more painful than loving someone who rejects you, perhaps even hates and despises you. Crucifixion is the appropriate description of such love. Crucified love rejects the natural impulse we all have to reject those who reject us. To say that Christ died for sinners and the ungodly (i.e., unbelievers) while they were still sinners and that they are reconciled to God by the cross is ! to say that no one, no matter how unrepentant, stands outside

the saving love of God. God's love falls like the rain on the just and the unjust (Matt 5:45). Sin and unbelief are conquered not through the fantasy of Babel, that is, through making everyone believe and act the same. Sin is conquered through crucified love.

If we know who God is through the life story of Jesus, then we shall be required to replace the God of unforgiving judgment with the God revealed in the Sermon on the Mount. In the crucified love of Jesus, Christians ought to see the love of God. God turns the other cheek and walks the second mile. God loves h— enemies and does good to those who persecute h—. Crucified love is love of those who do the rejecting. Crucified love is a love that embraces and reconciles itself with its enemies — while they are still enemies. This means that contrary' to those who would sacralize the Gospel and turn it into a contest between the children of light and the children of darkness, no one is excluded from the love of God. God loves and embraces the stranger, even the enemy. So the young pastor, Timothy, is instructed in a Pauline letter, "... we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe. These are the things you must insist on and teach (1 Tim 4:10-11).

# **Advert for The Coming of the Millennium: Good News for the Whole Human Race**

by Darrell J. Fasching

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# Book Reviews

## Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul that Set the Stage

Translation and Commentary by Marva J. Dawn. Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1997. 208 pages.

*Reviewed by Andrew J. Goddard.*

A new volume of Ellul's writing in English is long overdue. It is now six years since *Anarchy and Christianity* appeared. In contrast, between 1964 and 1991 there was never a gap of more than a year between books by Ellul hitting the bookshelves. This book is, however, unique in the Ellul corpus. Marva Dawn, author of several books and a significant doctoral thesis on Ellul's concept of the principalities and powers, here presents eight important articles she has selected from the vast but largely ignored treasury of Ellul's contributions to French journals.

The three opening chapters unquestionably contain the most significant articles in the volume. These (like all but two of the articles) originally appeared in *Foi et Vie*, the French theology journal dominated by Barthians and edited by Ellul himself between 1969 and 1985. Published in 1946 and 1947 as a trilogy under the heading "Chronicle of the Problems of Civilization," they provide a brilliant introduction to the massive life-long writing project which Ellul had already planned out but not yet begun.

The first chapter illuminates Ellul's sociological method and gives the broad context of his theological and ethical work, confirming Dawn's thesis that the theological concept of the principalities and powers provides a link between the sociological and theological strands of Ellul's work. It is followed by "Needed: A New Karl Marx I" This presents Ellul's critique of both contemporary utopian projects and the quest for purely technical solutions. Then, by offering some of the fullest statements of his own debt to Marx's method, it clarifies the methodology and sets the agenda for his later volumes of radical social criticism. The final article in the series ("Political Realism") vividly demonstrates Ellul's personal frustration at the failure of politics to offer a solution to the crisis of civilization and, in its delineation of political realism, begins his analysis of the dominance of means and Fact in modern mass society. Its closing section on the contrasting nature of Christian realism sheds further light on the importance of Christian faith and revelation to all his thought.

These articles are of crucial importance for anyone interested in understanding the early stages, structure and development of Ellul's; thought. They also - half a

century later -make stimulating and challenging reading as they provocatively and prophetically challenge the whole direction of twentieth century civilization. Even if it contained little else of importance, the appearance of these writings in English would, in itself, make this a most significant book.

The next four chapters focus on themes central to Ellul's theology and ethics. "On Christian Pessimism" (1954) addresses the frequent criticism that Ellul's work is wholly and unwarrantably pessimistic. In response it offers a succinct and helpful account of his fundamental theological beliefs and how these shape his view of the world and his ethic for Christians. At the heart of that ethic is, of course, Christian freedom, and "The Meaning of Freedom According to Saint Paul" (1951) provides, in under twenty pages, a summary introduction to the ideas which subsequently grew into his mammoth *Ethics of Freedom*.

"The Contemporaneity of the Reformation" (1959) initially appears an odd choice for this book. Nevertheless, although its reading of Reformation history and thought is open to criticism, it helpfully demonstrates Ellul's desire to stand within that tradition's claim to be faithful to the Word of God and it shows the centrality in his ethics of both a particular conception of the relationship between the church and the world and the need for Christians to identify and then oppose contemporary idolatries.

This important Ellulian theme of the role and responsibility of the Christian in society and how that is shaped by a broader understanding of the relationship between Truth and Reality [or,, elsewhere in his work, God and the World], is taken up in "Christian Faith and Social Reality" (1960), which originated as one of two addresses to the Free University in Amsterdam. Finally, Dawn closes with "Innocent Notes on 'The Hermeneutic Question'" (1968). This article clarifies Ellul's understanding of Scripture and the rationale behind his own biblical studies. It also challenges much scholarly discussion on hermeneutics. Despite these strengths, it fits uneasily with the themes in the rest of the book, and is also quite technical and difficult to follow in places.

All of Marva Dawn's translations into English are, once one becomes familiar with Ellul's distinctive style, very readable. Although there are a few strange translation decisions (e.g., "inutile" as "unnecessary" (p. 106), and a number of places where a footnote could highlight important nuances in the original French (e.g., "avertissement" in the opening title surely contains the sense of "warning" as well as "Preface"), the translations are more coherent and faithful to the original French than those in many English editions of Ellul's books. Her explanatory footnotes also (usually) provide helpful clarification and background information to otherwise often obscure references in the original.

Before each article Dawn adds a brief introduction providing background material, mainly biographical ("Sources"). These introductions will be of great help to those who know little or nothing of Ellul's life and context, but they rely largely on Ellul's interviews in *In Season, Out of Season* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982). Although they only rarely misinform the reader, they could often provide more helpful details. In chapter seven, for example ("Christian Faith and Social Reality"), Ellul would not

have considered his opposition to development of the Aquitaine coast as “one of his most successful commitments,” and it could also be explained that, given the central beliefs of the Dutch Reformed constituency to which it was originally addressed, the article that follows is a very good example of Ellul’s willingness to challenge Christian “sacred cows”.

Each article is also followed by a short sketch directing the reader to later books which expanded the article’s themes (“Trajectories”). Once again, these will be invaluable to those (hopefully many) readers who discover Ellul through this book. They do, however, tend to reflect Dawn’s own special interests, have some surprising omissions, and can often seem rather disjointed and repetitive as they quote from the preceding article and flit from subject to subject and book to book.

These criticisms are, however, relatively minor. I have only one major objection to the book’s general thesis. It claims the eight articles were chosen “because they are the earliest formulations of some of Ellul’s key ideas” (p. 1). Undoubtedly, in taking us back beyond the publication of *La Technique* to the immediate post-war writings, Dawn does a great service in tracing the genealogy of Ellul’s thought. These are not however, “the earliest formulations.” To discover those, one must go back even further. They appear in the 1930s with Ellul’s involvement in the personalist movement. Dawn notes Ellul’s personalist links in passing, but fails to see their full significance. It was during that period, in numerous unpublished writings such as “Directives pour un manifeste personnaliste,” that Ellul (together with Bernard Charbonneau) began to analyse society in the terms of the crisis of civilization which dominates the opening three articles and, as this book amply demonstrates, therefore sets the context for all his subsequent writing.

Despite this caution that there is an even earlier Ellul still to be uncovered, there can be no disputing the value of Marva Dawn’s work. She has made available to an English-reading public some important, early, but still very relevant, writings by Ellul which are otherwise difficult to obtain and have not received the attention they merit. Those who already know and love Ellul will learn yet more. Those who do not know him will be given a helpful and brief introduction to the central themes of his thought in his own words, they will have their appetite whetted, and they will be guided to where they can find more. Perhaps this exciting unveiling of the early Ellul may even persuade publishers that we should not have to wait another six years for the appearance in English of some of the important books Ellul wrote in his final years !

## ***The Coming of the Millennium: Good News for the Whole Human Race***

by Darrell J. Fasching Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996. xiii, 129pp.

*Reviewed by David W. Gill Professor of Applied Ethics, North Park College, Chicago.*

In *The Coming of the Millennium*, Darrell Fasching, the distinguished and indefatigable editor of *The Ellul Forum for the Critique of Technological Civilization*, articulates his version of the essential message of the Christian Gospel. His point of departure is his visceral antipathy toward the exclusivist orientation of most Christian thought over the past two thousand years. Such exclusivism creates a harsh dichotomy between an elect “us” and a damned “them.” It is this exclusivism which leads directly to arrogance and the justification of violence toward the outsider. For Fasching, the Crusades and the Holocaust are the logical and inevitable fruit of such an interpretation of the Christian Gospel.

With the arrival of a new millennium in a couple years, accompanied by an increase in apocalyptic fervor and speculation (as was also the case around the year 1000), Fasching believes it urgent to reformulate and restate the Gospel in universalist terms. His book tries to drive us to such a reformulation by its description of horrors already unleashed by the older exclusivism. He tries to authorize his reformulation by appeal to Christian universalists Origen and Jacques Ellul—and by citing Luther’s and Augustine’s views on Scripture. i.e., that not all written Scripture serves as the Word of God to us (e.g., p. 7).

Fasching builds his case by (re-)interpreting the stories of the Tower of Babel, Jacob wrestling with the stranger, Abraham and the destruction of Sodom, the sufferings of Jesus and Job, and the miracle of Pentecost. For Fasching, the center of Paul’s theology becomes the non-exclusive “engrafting” of Gentile Christians on to the Jewish community. And, with Ellul, the message of the Book of Revelation for Fasching is universal salvation. Ghandi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and all other prophets and teachers of nonviolent inclusivity are the voices to which we must now attend.

*The Coming of the Millennium* is nothing if it is not provocative and creative! It is an impassioned sermon which will challenge all who read it. “Hospitality to the stranger,” in whom God and Christ meet us, is the whole Gospel for Fasching. Our diversity is a gift of God—tout hospitality is how we receive the gift. This is a powerful and authentic theme in biblical Christianity. And certainly Fasching is right in indicting the violence and domination that have been perpetrated over the centuries in the name of Christ.

On a rather practical level, however, Fasching’s message is unlikely to persuade the masses of Christians for whom Scripture must be treated in a less “Jeffersonian,” “cut-and-paste” hermeneutic. The very people who need most to break out of a divisive exclusivism will not listen to an argument that appears to “throw ‘the baby out with the bathwater.’” Nor will most Christians be satisfied to view the entirety of the Gospel message as “welcoming the stranger.” They will not want to relinquish such themes as speaking the truth in love, resisting pride and idolatry, overcoming ignorance and poverty, cultivating a life of spiritual communion with God, and providing salvation and hope to neighbors in need—to name but a few items.

As Jacques Ellul pointed out in his magnificent *The Subversion of Christianity* (ET, Eerdmans, 1986), the heart of the problem is conformity To the world, especially its will-to-power. Unfortunately, the biblical hermeneutic of Augustine played into the hands of the Constantinian marriage of church and state and a justification of the violent suppression of the Donatists. as well as the aggression of the later Crusades. Luther's hermeneutic justified the killing of Anabaptists and Jews and paved the way for a two kingdoms "quietism" later on in the face of Hitler. No thanks.

Despite the horrors perpetrated in the name of Christ (but what good ideas, what good movements, have not been similarly exploited and betrayed?), the more holistic biblical message is not the villain but the answer. Most of the Donatists, Waldensians, Franciscans, Anabaptists, Quakers, as well as the Confessing Christians of the Barmen Declaration, practiced peace in *a* violent world because of their fidelity to Jesus Christ as the unique incarnation of God, as Savior and Lord of a new way of life. Believing that Jesus is the one and only Savior of the world *does not* imply any rejection of the stranger, any unwillingness to listen to and learn from others, any quest for domination of others, any need to control other's beliefs or practices. Just the opposite.

In short, the broad outlines of Fasching's gospel of hospitality to the stranger and his rejection of all justifications of arrogance, violence, and uniformity are a welcome challenge. His creativity is provocative. But in the end, a more faithful— and effective—strategy, I believe, will be to make that Gos-pel-with-Jesus-of-the Sermon-on-the-Mount-at-the-Center the interpretive focal point for the whole of Scripture and the whole of life. A more serious and passionate biblical discipleship is the answer to the apathetic, therapeutic Christianity of today— as well as to the pretentious ambitions to power by the religious Right.



**Issue #19 Jul 1997 — Technique  
and the Illusion of Utopia**

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## About This Issue

My apologies to all loyal subscribers for the lateness of this issue. I had originally planned for this issue to focus on human rights but a number of essays were not completed on time and so that topic is being deferred for future publication. Instead this issue's Forum will feature a very interesting analysis of the technological utopianism of modern Singapore by Lawton Lau. Professor Lau shows that Ellul's analysis of technique and the political order provides a hermeneutic for unmasking the utopian pretensions of Singapore to become the model technological city. Lawton Lau, who teaches international communications in the MBA program of the University of Illinois at Urbana, wrote his doctoral dissertation in Communications on Jacques Ellul and the city.

In addition to Professor Lau's essay, David Gill offers us an essay review of four recent books on technology. Gill walks us through the optimistic vision of Nicholas Negroponte for the future of modern technology and then on to the more critical visions of Neil Postman, Clifford Stoll and Edward Tenner.

Finally, I want to welcome the two newest members of the editorial board of the *Ellul Forum*. They are Marva Dawn of *Christians Equipped for Ministry* in Vancouver Washington and Patrick Troude-Chastenet of the University of Bordeaux in France. Marva is the editor of the recently released book of Jacques Ellul's early writings, entitled *Sources and Trajectories*, published by Eerdmans. Patrick is the author of *Lire Ellul: Introduction a l'oeuvre socio-politique de Jacques Ellul (Reading Ellul:*

*An Introduction to the Socio-political Thought of Jacques Ellul*) published by Presses Universitaire de Bordeaux. He is also author of *Entretiens avec Jacques Ellul (Conversations with Jacques Ellul)* published by La Table Ronde. The latter will be published in English translation in the *South Florida-Rochester-Saint Louis Studies on Religion and the Social Order* series published through Scholars Press in 1998.

## Bulletin Board

### Conference on "Education Technology" Held at Penn State

Joyce Hanks reports that over two hundred people attended a conference on *Education Technology: Asking the Right Questions* which was held September 17th-20th, 1997 at Penn State University. Ellul's work had a prominent place on the agenda. The proceedings will be published in book form in 1998 and details on how to secure a copy will be provided in a future issue. One outcome of the conference was the formation of a group of scholars who will be getting together to discuss Ellul's work in occasional weekend retreats. Anyone who is interested in participating should write to Richard Stivers, Department of Sociology-Anthropology, Illinois State University, Normal IL 61790-4660. Professor Stivers is receptive for suggestions as to which books should be on the agenda for future discussion.

### The Coming of the Millennium

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### Journal Honors the Work of Jacques Ellul

Dr. Richard A. Deitrich, Editor for the Bulletin of Science, Technology and Society published by Sage Press for the National Association for Science, Technology and Society, announces that Volume 15, numbers 2/3 is devoted to honoring the work of Jacques Ellul. Copies are available from Sage Science Press. Anyone interested should call 805-499-0721.

The issue is an outgrowth of a symposium held at the tenth annual meeting of the National Association for Science and Technology in March of 1995. The issue was edited by Willem H. Vanderburg.

The following is the relevant portion of the table of contents:

*The Enduring Dilemmas of Autonomous Technique*

by Langdon Winner

*Technique Against Culture* by Richard Stivers

*Technique Against Nature* by Andrew Kimbrell

*Education, Technology and Human Values:*

*Ellul and the Construction of an Ethic of Resistance* by Henry C. Johnson, Jr.

*Can a Technical Civilization Sustain Human Life?*

by Willem H. Vanderburg

*Two Faces of Jacques Ellul:*

*The Theologian and the Societal Critic* by Rustum Roy.

*Further Readings* - compiled by Willem H. Vanderburg

# Forum: Technique and the Illusion of Utopia

## Singapore: Technique and the Illusion of Utopia

by Lawson Lau

### *Introduction*

Jacques Ellul refers to the efforts of mankind to make its cities more human: “The garden city. The show city. The brilliant city”<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless he maintains the view that cities “are still formed of iron, steel, glass, and cement...[and] of death.”<sup>2</sup> Nothing “spontaneously natural” is left in them.<sup>3</sup> The city is a product of the technological milieu. It is “an entirely artificial world” in which “technological products replace the old natural milieu in which we used to live” and it is “a milieu that is totally dead.”<sup>4</sup> We live in a world that is no longer natural because of “the massive intervention of techniques.”<sup>5</sup> Singapore of the 1970s and 1980s, under the authoritarian rule of the People’s Action Party, has been referred to as “The Garden City of South-east Asia,”<sup>6</sup> a reputation reminiscent of ancient Babylon. Clean, green, cleared of much of its slums and with well-flushed public toilets,<sup>7</sup> Singapore deserves to be the show city

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<sup>1</sup> *The Meaning of the City*, trans. Dennis Pardee, intro. John Wilkinson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1970), p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Continuum Publishing Corporation, 1980), p. 39.

<sup>4</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Perspectives on Our Age*, ed. William H. Vander-burg, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Seabury Press, 1981), p. 59.

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Ellul, “Technique, Institutions, and Awareness,” in *The American Behavioral Scientist*, July/August 1968, p. 38.

<sup>6</sup> Planting trees along roads started as far back as 1881. It is, however, Lee Kuan Yew who is given the credit for inaugurating Singapore’s tree-planting campaign in 1963. Stephen Yeh notes that it led to a “beautification programme” in 1967 [“The Idea of the Garden City” in *Management of Success: The Moulding of Modern Singapore*, ed. Kemiai Singh Sandhu and Paul Wheatley (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1989), pp. 813-832] . He states that there has been “an intensive programme to camouflage concrete structures with plants to soften their harshness.”

<sup>7</sup> A reflection of the priorities of the government-controlled private press in Singapore, two news stories vied for prominence on page one of the June 23, 1989 issue of *The Straits Times*. One was “China Executes Seven More Protesters.” This outcome of the Tiananmen Square pro-democracy movement was juxtaposed with a Singapore news item on the flushing of public toilets: “Time for those who do not flush public toilet from next month” N. Balakrishnan notes the “latest plank in the [PAP] government’s

of Asia. In fact, it attracts millions of tourists<sup>8</sup> to its shores each year because it is “a shoppers’ city.”<sup>9</sup> The island nation also deserves to be the technological show city of Asia,<sup>10</sup> perhaps even of the world. Lee Kuan Yew on July 1, 1966 stresses that “it is of utmost importance that, in the field of science and technology, we should lead the field in this part of the world.”<sup>11</sup> Three months later he again addressed the issue of a technological Singapore: “The place must work and it will only work on the basis of technological and industrial advance.”<sup>12</sup> Since he made the pronouncement, the nation’s efficient Changi International Airport offers millions of tourists a trouble-free entry to admire the man-made nation.<sup>13</sup> “Singapore,” says Lee, “is like a fine mechanism, like a chronometer and not just an ordinary watch.”<sup>14</sup> Led by Lee, PAP politician-technicians and their bureaucratic and technocratic elite have so energetically and thoroughly worked over and redesigned the city-state over the past three decades that it has emerged as the brilliant city. Lee could justifiably identify his cosmopolitan city as “the supreme achievement of man’s technology.”<sup>15</sup>

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campaign to punish those of its population who have not been properly housetrained.” Those who violate the new law risk a fine of up to \$1,000 (US\$510). Enforcement would be carried out by a “crack battalion of inspectors from Singapore’s Ministry of Environment, .[who] ,..will be roving public toilets in pursuit of the aberrant non-flushers” (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, August 3, 1989, p. 33).

<sup>8</sup> In 1990 Singapore welcomed its five millionth visitor on December 10 (*Singapore Bulletin*, January 1991, p. 11).

<sup>9</sup> Peter C.N. Hardstone, “State Viability and the Size Factor: The Singapore Case,” Seminar Report Series No. 2, October 1977. Singapore: Nanyang University, 1977. An island nation that lacks spectacular natural scenery and cultural-historical sites, Singapore makes up for it through catering to humanity’s appetite for bargain hunting and shopping.

<sup>10</sup> Singapore’s National Exhibition (November 16-December 16, 1984) at its World Trade Centre, in fact, was referred to as “the showcase of Singapore history” (*Mirror*, November 15, 1984, p. 1).

<sup>11</sup> Alex Josey, *Lee Kuan Yew* (Singapore: Donald Moore Press, 1968), p. 484. Lee spoke at the opening of the new Science Tower at the then University of Singapore. He emphasized the need to “exploit” Singapore’s “human resources” and “exploit” the nation’s strategic geographical location to maximum advantage. The Singapore story over the past three decades is a tale of precisely such unwavering PAP exploitation.

<sup>12</sup> *Mirror*, October 31, 1966, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> Lee in his 1989 National Day message notes that *Business Traveller*, *Travel Trade Gazette Asia*, and *Pata Travel News (Asia/Pacific)* put Changi International Airport as the world’s best airport *Executive Travel* puts it as the world’s second best *Euromoney* put Changi as the most efficient for luggage retrieval and second best for passport control and immigration (*Singapore Bulletin*, September 1989, p. 1).

<sup>14</sup> Raj Vasil, *Governing Singapore: Interviews with the New Leaders* rev. ed. (Singapore: Times Books International, 1988), p. 244. First published by Eastern Universities Press, 1984.

<sup>15</sup> Jacques Ellul, “The Mirror of These Ten Years,” *Christian Century*, 87 (18 February 1970), p. 201. As S. Rajaratnam, then minister for foreign affairs, says, “In a way Singapore is a country whose environment is almost wholly man-made. A hundred and fifty years ago Singapore was no more than a small fishing village. Its few hundred peoples no doubt lived closed (*sic*) to Nature and as Nature dictated. Today’s Singapore owes little to Nature. Its roads, its concrete buildings, its harbours and almost all its landscape were reshaped, created and moulded by the brawn and brain of our people” (*The Mirror*, November 7, 1966, p. 1).

Singapore has so nicely fitted into Ellul's first litany of positive images that one wonders if he were writing about this South-east Asian nation. His focus, however, is on Babylon, "The City in the Bible,"<sup>16</sup> the archetype. The city, "an essential product of technology,"<sup>17</sup> is "the symbol of...human power."<sup>18</sup> Singapore certainly conforms to and takes extraordinary pride in this symbol. It imported the international corporate style of architecture and the "desire to project power cannot be mistaken: these buildings exuded a macho masculinity"<sup>19</sup> After all, Lee Kuan Yew and the PAP Government devoutly consider themselves to be "creators and custodians of the Singapore nation."<sup>20</sup> A new god has emerged in a land of many gods.<sup>21</sup> Singapore is a secular city-state wrought through technological power. This is evident in its towering waterfront, satellite housing estates, efficient international airport, mass rapid transit system. In fact, Ellul adds to its pantheon of gods: "Progress has become a key term in modern religion."<sup>22</sup> Clifford Christians points out that Ellul's prophetic theme centers on the condemnation of "the unqualified worship of the technological enterprise."<sup>23</sup> Ellul's grim prophetic pronouncement therefore presents a contrasting scenario. It cautions against the economically glowing, utopia-like image of Singapore in the minds of its successful PAP politicians as well as citizens who have been reared in an austere technicized environment to see and interpret their nation and the world according to the

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<sup>16</sup> *Meaning of die City*, p. 48. Ellul maintains that the great city is "a military phenomenon" and "inseparably connected with money" (p. 51). Amassing wealth and the quest for profit are distinctive marks of the city. Singapore is no exception. On the contrary, the PAP has designed it for such pecuniary purposes.

<sup>17</sup> *Technological System*, p. 39.

<sup>18</sup> *Meaning of the City*, p. 48.

<sup>19</sup> Tay Kheng Soon, "The Architecture of Rapid Transformation" in *Management of Success: The Moulding of Modern Singapore*, p. 866. Tay observes that the effort to globalize the Singapore economy and the adoption of the "global city" concept in 1970-1980 led to the coveting of up-to-date symbols of progress and modernity that the international corporate style of architecture conveniently provided. He refers to the "gigantism in the expression" of Shenton Way buildings, the heart of Singapore's financial district. There is nothing "eastern" or "Asian" in Singapore's waterfront. It could be the waterfront of any Western nation.

<sup>20</sup> Vasil, *Governing Singapore: Interviews with the New Leaders*, p. 120. The god-like "creators and custodians" claim is somewhat more arrogant than an earlier conviction. Stamford Raffles who founded modern Singapore had written to the Duchess of Somerset on June 11, 1819: "My new colony thrives most rapidly...It is not necessary for me to say how much interested I am in the success of the place: it is a child of my own, and I have made it what it is" [Charles Burton Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 56].

<sup>21</sup> Roland Braddell devotes a chapter in *The Lights of Singapore* (6th edition, London: Methuen, 1947) to "Many Gods." As he notes of the Singapore situation, "Many and wonderful are the gods of China and far too numerous to mention...and I may remark that it is very hard indeed to find a Chinese who can tell you intelligently about the temples you visit or the gods and goddesses in those temples" (p. 77). However many and spectacular the Chinese gods and goddesses may be, there are other gods in Singapore, including the innumerable Hindu gods and goddesses. Then there are the monotheistic Muslims, Jews, and Christians who worship their own god.

<sup>22</sup> *I Believe*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> "Is Ellul Prophetic?" in *Media Development*, Vol. XXXV, 2/1988, p. 7.

reigning PAP politicians' eyes.<sup>24</sup> Although a mere dot on the world map, Singapore has been substantially spared the damaging winds of political and economic upheavals that have afflicted much larger countries.<sup>25</sup> It has been a politically stable and an exceptionally calm nation over the past couple of decades. It may be likened to the eye of a hurricane: an ominous and deadly calm in a world of much turbulence. This chapter explores Ellul's grave thoughts concerning the pervasive operation of technique in our contempo-raiy technological milieu and its major product, the city, with particular reference to Singapore, and suggests that there are adequate grounds for apprehension.<sup>26</sup>

Singapore's success, I contend, has come about largely through die ruling political party's unyielding employment of technique. Ellul defines *technique* as "the *totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency* (for a given stage of development) in *every* field of human activity."<sup>27</sup> Rationality, efficiency, and gimlet penetration into every public and private area of the Singaporean's life have characterized Lee Kuan Yew's approach to ruling the nation state. He regulates the Singaporean's life from cradle to grave. Unquestioning obedience to his dictates or decrees has its reward. He promises economic well-being if his commandments, however irksome, are timidly followed. To disobey is often to provoke his anger, swift judgment, and inevitable punishment.

As implied, a non-monetary price tag is attached. Ellul maintains that "technique causes the state to become totalitarian, to absorb the citizen's life completely."<sup>28</sup> Tech-

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<sup>24</sup> Utopia may not be too far from the minds of some Singaporeans as the PAP has coined such sentiments as "Excellence Together, Singapore Forever" (featured, for instance, in the 1989 and 1990 issues of *Singapore Bulletin* published by the Information Division of the Ministry of Communications and Information).

<sup>25</sup> A popular saying in Singapore goes thus: "If the U.S. sneezes, Singapore will catch a cold."

<sup>26</sup> Ellul is markedly prophetic in his sociological and theological analyses and pronouncements. Hence Martin Marty's pertinent observation and caution that "one cannot speak as a prophet of judgment against a way of life and expect the public to welcome the Words" ("Creative Misuses of Jacques Ellul" in Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays, p. 3). In the same volume, Clifford Christians furnishes a vital perspective on Ellul's prophetic assertions in "Ellul on Solution: An Alternative but No Prophecy" (pp. 147-173).

<sup>27</sup> *Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson, intro. Robert K. Merton (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), p. xxv. In *The Technological System* Ellul reiterates his contention that the entire field of human activity, including human life, comes under the domain of technique. As for the technological spheres of human activity, he distinguishes between the various types of technologies according to their areas of application: "mechanical technologies (a very wide term, also covering things that are not, strictly speaking, mechanical, like computers); economic technologies (for research and intervention); organizational technologies (for all types of social organisms, including government, administration, etc.); and 'human' technologies (for the individual or for noninstitutionalized groups, advertising, propaganda, group dynamics, psychoanalysis, etc.)" (p. 176).

<sup>28</sup> *Technological Society*, p. 284. When Ellul refers to the "totalitarian state" he is not necessarily making reference to the popular conception of the totalitarian state, that is, "the brutal, immoderate thing which tortured, deformed, and broke everything in its path, the battleground of armed bullies and factions, a place of dungeons and the reign of the arbitrary" (*ibid.*, p. 287). He holds the view that these traits are the transient rather than the real characteristics of a totalitarian state. Arbitrariness



nique “will not tolerate half measures”<sup>29</sup> and “has no place for the individual; the personal means nothing to it”<sup>30</sup> Arnold Pacey reinforces Ellul’s viewpoints. He refers to a technocratic value system as giving rise to a “technocratic” outlook that is “single-mindedly insistent on an unambiguous view of progress, of problem-solving, and of values.”<sup>31</sup> The technocratic world view leaves very little room for democracy in decisions affecting technology: “An idea about choice of technique (or altered priorities, or public participation in decision making) introduces a note of uncertainty which is fundamentally unacceptable to those who take this view. To them,...there is only one logical path forward.”<sup>32</sup> This chapter discusses and comes to the conclusion that what Lee Kuan Yew has done in Singapore over three decades validates Ellul’s contentions. For Lee and the PAP as well as for technique, there is only one best way in planning, implementing and working toward any particular objective. Hence at first glance the marriage between the PAP and technique appears to be a viable marriage between two powerful, compatible partners living in harmony within the confines of a technological city. No matchmaker could have done any better. After three decades of marriage, however, a majority of their offsprings are Singaporeans made soft by wealth, timid through political intimidation, mindless because Singapore is ruled, according to the PAP, by a mere two hundred people.

*Technique Transcends Ideology*

Ellul argues that traditional democratic doctrines are rendered obsolete by technique.<sup>33</sup> He regards this as a normal situation because in a technicized nation, doctrines must change when situations change. “Evolution (of doctrines),” Ellul avers, “is necessary.”<sup>34</sup> Similarly, Ellul contends that propaganda “no longer obeys an ideology”<sup>35</sup> as the propagandist cannot be a believer in ideology.<sup>36</sup> Ellul contends that the propa-

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and totalitarian theories are not part of Ellul’s notion of the technique driven dictatorial state. Scruples concerning tradition, principles, judicial affirmations, the maintenance of a facade of public and private morality still exist in such a democratic state. What is significant is that they are devoid of all power and are disregarded every time it is necessary to do so. It is within this definition of the totalitarian state that Lee Kuan Yew’s rule over Singapore is being considered.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 268.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 286.

<sup>31</sup> *Culture of Technology* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983), p.127.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Langdon Winner comes to a similar conclusion. He agrees with Habermas’ argument that the pursuit of scientific technology brings with it specific ideological commitments. He notes, however, that “those who best serve the progress of technological politics are those who espouse more traditional political ideologies but are no longer able to make them work” [*Autonomous Technology* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), p. 277] ,

<sup>34</sup> *Technological Society*, p. 281.

<sup>35</sup> *aganda*, trans. Konrad Kellen and Jean Lonet, intro. Konrad Kellen (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 196.

<sup>36</sup> Ellul defines ideology as “the popularized sentimental degeneration of a political doctrine or worldview, it involves a mixture of passions and rather incoherent intellectual elements, always related to present realities” [*Jesus and Marx: From Gospel to Ideology*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), p.1] ,

gandist is a technician who manipulates ideology, data, and psychological techniques and he eventually despises doctrines and humanity. This state of affairs arises because the objective of the propagandist or the organization using propaganda is not to disseminate a doctrine or spread an ideology. The primary purpose is “to unite within itself as many individuals as possible, to mobilize them, and to transform them into active militants in the service of an orthopraxy.”<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, the propagandist must not clash with any prevailing ideology upheld by the people. He should instead seek to use such existing ideology for his own ends.

Uncanny as it may seem, Ellul could well have Lee Kuan Yew in mind when he articulated his analysis. Lee Kuan Yew’s pragmatic outlook and his stress on survival and realities work together to ensure that he is not an ideologist. Although a socialist, he is not a doctrinaire socialist.<sup>38</sup> Ellul’s twin observations on the manipulation of ideology and the mobilization of individuals are mirrored in Lee’s candid remarks on his position vis-a-vis ideas, concepts, ideology. Speaking to the Law Society in 1966, he says,

\* I am not interested in ideas as ideas themselves, however much of an esoteric thrill these can give you by way of intellectual stimulation. I am interested in ideas in so far as they can galvanize both our society, which means you and I (s/c), in a way which

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<sup>37</sup> *aganda*, p. 197. Ellul defines orthopraxy as “an action that in itself, not because of the value judgments of the person who is acting, leads directly to a goal, which for the individual is not a conscious and intentional objective to be attained, but which is considered such by the propagandist” (ibid., p. 27).

<sup>38</sup> In a talk broadcast over Radio Singapore in 1961, Lee Kuan Yew voiced his desire To create “a democratic, non-Communist and socialist Malaya” (*The Battle for Merger*, p. 24). Some form of democratic socialism appears to be the best alternative for Lee Kuan Yew. An individualistic, young Harry Lee could not fit into any of the existing political parties of the early 1950s. On the one hand, his thinly veiled ambitions combined with the brash mannerisms of a young cocksure upstart would be rejected by many of the older party leaders. On the other hand, a powerless Harry Lee craved ultimate power and he looked for an alliance with people who could incontrovertibly demonstrate that they have the most potential power. He could then manipulate that power to his supreme advantage. Although he found a widespread power base in the communists and therefore colluded with them to form a new political party, Lee was not attracted to communism. He could not be so enticed. Communism was manifestly hierarchical and owed its loyalty to China. Lee has consistently shown that he would not accept orders from anyone and leaders from a technologically backward China would not be excepted, especially since Lee is British trained and much more in tune with the dynamism of the West’s economic, industrial and technological progress than with China’s economic stagnation. He, in fact, could not speak Mandarin until later in life. If China were the final authority, it would also mean that Lee could be supplanted by a leader appointed by China who was more in tune with China’s aspirations. There certainly were more such leaders on the scene. That Singapore is geographically situated in a predominantly Malay area is not of as much significance if Singapore were part of China.

From the economic standpoint, a semblance of democracy and some form of socialism suited Lee Kuan Yew. Ideological flexibility rather than purity is needed to transform Singapore into a technological city. Without upsetting the small Chinese or Indian businessmen too much, the PAP Government could launch forth into all manner of economic activity. It could turn the nation into one large enterprise. Lee as Singapore’s No. 1 Boss could galvanize, revolutionize, and mold the young, pliable nation into Singapore, Inc.

will enable us eventually to move our neighbors, or those of our neighbors who matter to us, in the right direction.”<sup>39</sup>

Lee Kuan Yew is not the only person in Singapore whose life does not thrive on theoretical thrills. He mirrors the outlook of the majority of Chinese Singaporeans. This in part, furnishes an explanation for Singapore’s economic success story. Shee Poon Kim rightly notes that “Western democracy is an alien product to Chinese-Singaporeans, whose main preoccupation is to make money. They are content to live with a government which protects their interests, whether it be democratic or not.”<sup>40</sup> Except for those Chinese-educated Chinese who were momentarily captivated by Marxist ideology, Singaporean Chinese have shown far more concern over protecting their rice bowl than caring about the contents of their ideological bucket. They regard the breaking of their rice bowl as tragic whereas anyone could kick their ideological bucket for all they care. Lee Kuan Yew understands and reflects the Singaporean Chinese culture in his ideological pronouncements.

Democratic doctrines are also liberally interpreted. Lee Kuan Yew believes, in parliamentary democracy and its basic tenet, the one-man-one-vote principle. Nevertheless he also believes that “Western-type parliamentary democracy may have to be adjusted to fit the needs and requirements of Asian peoples.”<sup>41</sup> Lee displays his political astuteness and manipulative inclinations in his ambiguous pronouncement. His judgment appears at first glance to be most reasonable. It is designed to leave no room for disagreement. It would be foolhardy for any Singaporean politician or academic to argue against Lee’s assertion that Western ideology or practices should not be imported without modification into an Asian nation. On the other hand, if a Westerner argues for it, he could be easily accused of being imperialistic and insensitive to nations and cultures toward which he has but substandard knowledge. Lee’s equivocal contention is then a checkmate in the political game.

What however, does Lee Kuan Yew really mean? He is a firm believer of the one-man-one-vote principle when Singaporeans vote overwhelmingly for the PAP. The principle then becomes a vindication of the PAP’s legislation, policies, programs, and detention without trial of dissenters. It authorizes the PAP to pursue its reign with a resounding mandate heard, it is hoped, around the world. Foreign investments would then pour into Singapore because of its political stability. On the other hand, Lee expresses melancholic uncertainty over the sanity of believing in such a Western concept as one-man-one-vote when a substantial number of Singaporeans vote against the

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<sup>39</sup> Josey, *Lee Kuan Yew*, p. 508.

<sup>40</sup> Shee Poon Kim, “The People’s Action Party of Singapore 1954-1970: A Study in Survivalism of a Single-Dominant Party.” Unpublished dissertation. Indiana University, 1971, p.190.

<sup>41</sup> Josey, *Lee Kuan Yew*, p. 78. Lee defines “democratic” to mean “that there is some measure of popular will, of popular support; that, from time to time, as accurately as is possible with trying to find out what human beings in a large group want or feel or think, one tries to act in accordance with the wishes of the majority” (ibid., p. 78). In 1962 he expressed doubt over the one-man-one-vote system of government in Southeast Asia.

PAP.<sup>42</sup> Lee Kuan Yew is a realist who prefers good news and bristles with anger over bad news. No ideology or doctrine is sacrosanct.

At another level within the nation, the PAP Government's owns (either wholly or partially) hundreds of companies ranging from manufacturing to hotels, shipbuilding to housing, finance to transport. This situation has brought about the "distress of those who prefer either a free-for-all *laissez faire* situation—like that in Hongkong—or a complete socialist system like that in China."<sup>43</sup>

Ideology and ideas as may be expected, are not the only theoretical constructs that often suffer a quick demise within the nation Lee Kuan Yew built. Principles undergo a similar fate. An interpretive history of PAP ideology is necessary if some understanding of its past, present, and possibly future policies and actions are to be better understood. The democratic socialist element of the PAP was conceived and born in a web of chicanery. Unlike their communist comrades who were motivated by ideology, the non-communist element in the PAP led by Lee Kuan Yew did not abide by too many principles during its formative years. In order to earn British confidence on the one hand and to retain the working support of communist sympathizers on the other, the PAP had to do that which is expedient and efficacious rather than abide by any doctrine. This has resulted, says Thomas Bellows, "in a PAP doctrinal tradition of flexibility and/or, a term more favored by its opponents, 'opportunism.'"<sup>44</sup>

Economic ventures, including trading, certainly fall within *la technique's* "every field of human activity." They clearly transcend ideology and principles in the case of the PAP. On the Vietnamese refugee problem, popularly known as "the Vietnamese Boat People," Minister for Foreign Affairs S. Rajaratnam rightly excoriated the Vietnamese government over its inhuman treatment of the ethnically Chinese Vietnamese. They were sent out of Vietnam in "floating coffins."<sup>45</sup> He noted that the Vietnamese government's deliberate policy of sending out their Boat People on "so monumental a scale...is better than (Hitler's) gas chambers." He says, "The Vietnamese move them into the open sea. It cost them nothing and they get money for the boats."<sup>46</sup> While

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<sup>42</sup> Lee Kuan Yew wanted to tinker with the one-man-one-vote principle immediately after the 1984 general election when a massive 12.6 percent of Singaporeans voted against the PAP when compared to the previous election. Lee had "expressed his deep concern about the wild excesses and freak results that may come from the one-man-one-vote system" and was "considering proposals for constitutional changes to prevent this" (Straits Times, January 1, 1985, p. 1) First Deputy Prime Minister-designate Goh Chok Tong, to his credit, pleaded with Lee to leave the system alone.

<sup>43</sup> Lee Soo Ann, "Trying to be Like Others" in *Far Eastern Economic Review*, August 6, 1976, p. 36.

<sup>44</sup> *The People's Action Party of Singapore: Emergence of a Dominant Party System* (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, Monograph Series No. 14, 1970), p. 31.

<sup>45</sup> "Vietnam's Designs," a speech given at the Twelfth Asian Ministerial Meeting at Bali, Indonesia on June 28, 1979, p. 10 in *Speeches: A Monthly Collection of Ministerial Speeches*, (Singapore: Ministry of Culture), July 1979. Earlier in the year, Rajaratnam had given a shorter version of the speech, "Man's Inhumanity to Man," at the Singapore Red Cross Society's 30th anniversary dinner on February 17 (ibid., March 1979).

<sup>46</sup> "Vietnam's Designs," p. 16

Rajaratnam lashed out so eloquently and vociferously in public for the media's benefit at the watery holocaust perpetrated by Vietnam, Singapore quietly and privately continued its lucrative trade with the villainous Vietnam. Hence, while the Vietnamese Boat People drifted southward in their "floating coffins," a steady stream of exports was steered resolutely northwards to Vietnam. The exports, in fact, actually increased with the war of words<sup>47</sup>: 1976 (S\$39 million); 1977 (S\$63 million); 1978 (S\$91 million); 1979 (S\$ 109 million); and reached a peak in 1985 of S\$284 million<sup>48</sup>

On the one hand, such an action seemed excessively unprincipled. If the PAP were so concerned over the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Chinese Vietnamese (as it seems to be, and Singapore is seventy-six percent Chinese), then it would be consistent of the PAP if it were to stop trading with such a despicable and unconscionable nation. PAP words, however, did not match PAP action. On the other hand, it is a most glaring contradiction in the PAP's adamant and vociferous ideological stand against communism.<sup>49</sup> Accommodation of such blatant incongruities at such a fundamental level may be made through an understanding of Lee Kuan Yew's pragmatic outlook or, more pertinently, his acquiescence to the dictates of tyrannical technique. The god of economic progress is willing to trade with the devil himself.

#### *Trial by Jury an Inefficient Method*

Contemporary man, engulfed by the technological state, "needs the conviction that his government is not only efficient but just."<sup>50</sup> Current political doctrine in a government that operates on the basis of technical necessities as such functions as a "rationalizing mechanism for justifying the state and its actions."<sup>51</sup> One formidable institution that could justify state actions is the judiciary. Ellul regrets, however, that "efficiency is a fact and justice a slogan."<sup>52</sup>

A laissez faire economic approach that smacked of inefficiency and a lack of centralization was not the only British practice to be ditched by the PAP Government. Trial by jury suffered a similar fate. In its initial move, soon after it gained power in 1959, the Legislative Assembly passed a bill proposed by the PAP Government that limited trial by jury to capital offenses, or where the Yang di-Pertuan Negara granted his consent.<sup>53</sup> Then came the PAP's electoral victory in 1968 where not a single opposition member was elected. It is a victory which "marked a potentially dangerous voluntary

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<sup>47</sup> This is a major type of war in which the battle-scarred PAP has excelled.

<sup>48</sup> *Singapore Trade Statistics: Imports and Exports*, Vol. III, No. 2, July to December 1977; Vol. V, No. 2, July to December 1979; Vol. VI, No. 12, December 1985. Singapore: Department of Statistics.

<sup>49</sup> Such statistics are embarrassing, if not condemnatory. They are not given in the more popular yearly *Singapore: Facts and Pictures*. But, as though in realization of this baffling incongruity, Vietnam disappeared from the *Singapore Trade Statistics: Imports and Exports* in 1986. This phenomenon—a manipulation of statistics, of truth and falsehood—however, belongs to the next chapter.

<sup>50</sup> *The Technological Society*, p. 282.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Report of the Select Committee on the Criminal Procedure Code (Amendment) Bill* Pari 8 of 1969, p. A6 quoted in Chan Heng Chee, *A Sensation of Independence*, pp. 232-233.

abdication of power by the electorate into the hands of one political group, threatening the isolation of government and encouraging an arrogance of power.”<sup>54</sup> This power was exercised the following year when the PAP Government abolished “trials by jury with a court consisting of three High Court judges.”<sup>55</sup> A British institution of more than a century was put to death some ten years after the PAP acquired power. Chan Heng Chee notes that the PAP Government was dissatisfied over “what it saw as frequent acquittals of persons even where evidence of guilt was ample.” Not surprisingly, the PAP Government concluded that “laymen could not be relied upon for the administration of justice.”<sup>56</sup> Only the judicial elite could administer justice. Protests from the Bar Council, and in particular from David Marshall, fell on deaf PAP ears. They were, however, expected to be deaf. More ominously, the protests fell on deaf Singaporean ears. On the one hand, the vast majority of Singaporeans were culturally not used to hearing debates about esoteric issues like justice and therefore failed to comprehend its relevance. On the other hand, the PAP Government’s propaganda machine has placed high-quality technological earplugs on them.

Ellul distinguishes between justice and judicial technique. Justice has an elusive or unpredictable element; it is not a thing which can be grasped or fixed. He states, “If one pursues genuine justice (and not some automatism or egalitarianism), one never knows where one will end.”<sup>57</sup> He adds that justice, moreover, does not function to serve the state. It is not only independent of the state, it even claims the right to judge the state. This situation is permitted to exist only where the power of the state is limited or its jurists are not exclusively technical rationalists who champion efficient results. Judicial technique does not flourish under conditions where it cannot function rationally.

In contrast, the technician of the law views all law as depending on efficiency. Application of the law is the technician’s sole concern. Such application “no longer arises from popular adhesion to it but from the complex of mechanisms which, by means of artifice and reason, adjust behavior to rule.”<sup>58</sup> Ellul presents two aspects of the technical creation of the law. First, the judicial element is separated from the law. The problem of justice is no longer its concern; it is commissioned to apply the law, not judge the law. It is not concerned with pursuing justice; its chief responsibility is the mechanical application of the laws. It is not a guardian of justice but an inflexible defender of bureaucratic detail. Ellul therefore says that the role is best fulfilled by a technician rather than a philosopher or a person with a sense of justice. A judge seeking true justice within such a state in fact comes to grief. He faces demotion or is assigned to a desk job where he cannot administer justice in the courts. As for the technician

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<sup>54</sup> Turnbull, *A History of Singapore 1819-1975* (Kuala Lumpur Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 324.

<sup>55</sup> Chan Heng Chee, *A Sensation of Independence: A Political Biography of David Marshall* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 233

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *The Technological Society*, pp. 291-292.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 294.

of the law, all he needs is an understanding of the principles of the technique, the rules of interpretation, the legal terminology, and the ways of deducing consequences and finding solutions. He contends that “judicial technique implies that bureaucracy cannot be burdened any longer with justice” and that “law ensures order instead of justice.”<sup>59</sup> A judge who understands this state of affairs in a technological system and is willing to abide by it is assured of promotion within the system.

Ellul states that the technician “dreads above all else the arbitrary, the personal, and the fortuitous.”<sup>60</sup> He continues:

The technician is the great enemy of chance; he finds the personal element insupportable. For that reason he finds it advisable to enclose the judge or the administrator in a tighter and tighter technical network, more and more hedged about with legal prescriptions, in such a way that the citizen will understand exactly where he is heading and just what consequences are to be expected.<sup>61</sup>

Lee Kuan Yew takes no chances with chance. Nothing, it would appear, is impossible in the technological city he has built

Another troubling dimension of the Singapore judicial system surfaced during the slander trial against opposition Worker’s Party leader IB. Jeyaretnam. Keeping his promise to pursue any and all defamatory remarks made against him,<sup>62</sup> Lee Kuan Yew sued Jeyaretnam for slander over comments the latter made in an election rally in August 1988. Jeyaretnam’s statements (a policeman testified that he was instructed to tape the opposition’s election rallies<sup>63</sup>) concerned the suicide of PAP politician Teh Cheang Wan, the minister of national development at the time of his death on December 14, 1986. Teh was subsequently found to be guilty of accepting bribes. Lee Kuan Yew claimed that Jeyaretnam’s remarks implied that he was instrumental in persuading Teh to commit suicide so that a full investigation into allegations of corruption might be avoided. Jeyaretnam denied this charge. He said he was merely questioning the PAP Government’s claim of being honest and open. Teh had written a letter to Lee Kuan Yew the day before his death apologizing for his actions and ended with “I

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., pp. 295-296.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., pp. 297-298.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 298.

<sup>62</sup> Suing is Lee Kuan Yew’s latest weapon in his vast arsenal against those who oppose or disagree with his policies. This strategy attempts to hit where Lee Kuan Yew believes will hurt most in Singapore society: the bank balance. He has promised those who would follow him riches. Conversely, he wishes to reduce those who would oppose him to rags. This is the latest riches-to-rags or rags-to-riches story in Singapore.

<sup>63</sup> This is another instance of the PAP Government’s pervasive presence. Big Brother, it may be said, hears all with the aid of a technological hearing device: the tape recorder. In Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty Four* Winston was well aware that although it was safer in the country than in London because of the absence of the ubiquitous telescreens, “there was always the danger of concealed microphones by which your voice might be picked up and recognized” (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1954, p. 97). In Singapore, while there were rural areas before the coming of the PAP, the “country” has since virtually vanished. Hearing and seeing devices, human and technological, are truly here, there, and everywhere.

would accept any decision which you may want to make.”<sup>64</sup> He then took an overdose of Amytal, a drug not available over the counter.<sup>65</sup>

A significant feature of Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew’s case against Jeyaretnam arose when the trial began on July 2, 1990

with the defense asking the presiding judge, Lai Kew Chai, to disqualify himself from hearing the case because he had found Jeyaretnam guilty of fraud in 1986, the original conviction that led to him losing his parliamentary seat and his right to practice law.

The defense also drew attention to the fact that Lai had once worked for Lee & Lee, a firm founded by the prime minister. Even Lee’s counsel was prepared to get another judge, but Lai ruled that he would hear the case, saying: ”No right-thinking people will think and go away thinking that I will be biased in this case.”<sup>66</sup>

Beyond the webs spun by Lee Kuan Yew and the PAP Government, another remarkably elaborate and intricate web of relationships exists in a small state like Singapore. These relationships extend far beyond blood ties. They expand and lengthen to include business bonds, old boys’ connections, plaintiff-judge links. To the uninitiated, this is but an invisible web. To the well-informed, it is a formidable web. To the well-connected, it presents many an opportunity to “pull strings.”<sup>67</sup> To the unconnected, they have to be careful how they fly if they wish to continue to soar in Singapore skies. There is obviously a danger of being treated like a fly. Surely a reasonable doubt will arise in the minds of right-thinking people concerning the judgments of judges who are part of the web.<sup>68</sup>

Trial by jury was unceremoniously put on trial. It was first convicted of inefficiency and then sentenced to death in a court where Lee Kuan Yew was both judge and jury. He then leaves others to execute the final and somewhat less cerebral component of the judicial process. The technological city of Singapore has no place for inefficient citizens in its system of justice. Inefficiency means that those who are accused by the state of robbing the nation of its political stability are not punished the way the PAP Government deems appropriate. Now, a rather well-connected and well-informed judiciary which forms part of the Singapore elite executes PAP legislation. Justice is one of the PAP’s slogans. In its relentless pursuit of efficiency, Ellul’s contention that justice may well have truly become a slogan has merit.

*One Language, One People*

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<sup>64</sup> *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July 19,1990,p. 13.

<sup>65</sup> In his electioneering, Jeyaretnam had also complained that no inquiry was conducted into how Teh had managed to obtain the drug. Lee Kuan Yew alleged that Jeyaretnam’s complaint implied that he had supplied the drug to Teh and encouraged him to commit suicide.

<sup>66</sup> *FarEastern Economic Review*, July 19,1990,p. 13. (Lee’swife is also a lawyer.) The case ended on July 6, 1990 with judgment reserved.

<sup>67</sup> While bribery is anathema to the PAP, the exercise of such influence by those in power is not openly frowned upon and is certainly a way of negotiating government bureaucracy with ease.

<sup>68</sup> Since trial by jury was abolished, the safeguard of enlisting the possibly impartial judgments of those who are not part of the elaborate web is no longer a possibility.



Civilizations have developed differently in the past, according to regions, nations, and continents. “Today,” says Ellul, “all peoples follow the same road and the same impulse” as many non-Western nations have come to embrace Western technique.<sup>69</sup> While these countries are not at the same point in their industrial or technological development, they are located at various points along the same trajectory. As a result of this uniformity he consequently maintains that “technique is the destroyer of social groups, of communities (whatever their kind), and of human relations.”<sup>70</sup> The homogenizing tendency of technique has a significant impact on pluralism. It often eliminates it. This effect is becoming evident in Singapore in at least one sphere as the PAP Government works hard to eliminate the dialects spoken by Chinese Singaporeans.

Singapore before the coming of the PAP was a plural society. Besides the Europeans, three major ethnic groups flourished in the British colony, namely, the Chinese, Malays, and Indians. Each group had its distinctive culture and subcultures.<sup>71</sup> Since the PAP came to power in 1959, however, “extensive de-pluralization has begun either consciously engineered by the government or evolved unplanned.” The former is easy to document; the latter taxes one’s credibility.

Language, in a multi-lingual society, is often a sensitive issue. It has explosive potentials if one ethnic group attempts to promote its language to the exclusion of the others. This situation could be further complicated in a colonial setting, especially if the colonial power is on the decline. Elected into the Legislative Assembly and wearing the undersized shoes of an opposition member, Lee Kuan Yew spoke adamantly against the policy of the fledgling Singapore government’s encouragement to use the English language in education in an era when Singapore’s school system was still multi-lingual in nature. Addressing the Legislative Assembly on April 12, 1956 he said that it was appropriate that someone like him who was English-educated should oppose the policy. He explained that every time he spoke the English language

there is a sense—I would not say of humiliation—but definitely of inadequacy, that I have not the same facility and control over my own language. That is something you must understand, or you will not understand what is happening in Asia... I was sent to an English school to equip me for an English university in order that I could then

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<sup>69</sup> *The Technological Society*, p. 117.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

<sup>71</sup> Although conveniently classified as one ethnic group (and each appears to be homogeneous to the uninitiated), plurality reigns within each of the three major ethnic groups. The Chinese are divided largely along dialect lines since one Chinese speaking a particular dialect is often totally incomprehensible to another Chinese speaking a different dialect. The five major dialect groups are Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, Hainanese, and Hakka. The smaller dialect groups include Foochow, Henghua, Hokchia, and Kwongsai. Variations in social customs and religious beliefs of these dialect groups which come from different regions in China also contribute to the presence of ethnic subcultures.

Cultural variations that arise because of differences in their regional origins are similarly evident with the Malays and Indians. The Malays consist chiefly of the Riau Malays, Javanese, Boyanese, Bugis, and Banjarese. The Indians consist mainly of the Tamils, Sikhs, Malayalis, Punjabis, Bengalis, and Gujeratis.

be an educated man—the equal of any Englishman—the model of perfection! I do not know how far they have succeeded in that...When I read Nehru—and I read a lot of Nehru—I understood him when he said: \*I cry when I think that I cannot speak my own mother tongue as well as I can speak the English language.<sup>72</sup> I am a less emotional man. I do not usually cry, or tear my hair, or tear paper, or tear my shirt off, but that does not mean that I feel any the less strongly about it My son is not going to an English school...! hope, of course, that he will know enough English to converse with his father on matters other than the weather.<sup>73</sup>

Lee Kuan Yew has used Nehru's sentiment to great advantage. It all sounds so eminently reasonable. Counter arguments would not be advisable in a period when nationalist emotions and anti-colonialist feelings were riding high. Robert Gamer, however, notes that Lee Kuan Yew "has always used the public platform as an effective means of exposing his enemies' unreasonableness."<sup>74</sup> Gamer's use of the term "enemies" has to be defined broadly. In this instance, he was referring, in part, to a Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce's request He writes that on October 2, 1965, "with a bitterly worded, heavily publicized statement, he [Lee Kuan Yew] indicated to the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, which had asked that Chinese be an official language, that he has no truck with those who "assume heroic postures on behalf of the Chinese language."<sup>75</sup> The Chinese Chamber of Commerce erred.<sup>76</sup> It should have written the letter to Lee Kuan Yew ten years ago when he had waxed so eloquently in support of his mother tongue—except that he was then a minority voice in the Legislative Assembly.

The Chinese language issue illustrates the contention that diversity dies a despondent death at the hands of technique, a homogenizing agent of tyrannical proportions.

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<sup>72</sup> Chrew Seen Kong, "Ethnicity and National Integration: The Evolution of a Multi-ethnic Society" in *Singapore Development Policies and Trends*, p. 61.

<sup>73</sup> Josey, Lee Kuan Yew, p. 64. Lee Kuan Yew kept his word in a very limited fashion. His son, Hsien Loong (made deputy prime minister in November 1990), did not start his formal schooling in an English school. However, not only did Hsien Loong graduate from Cambridge University, England, Lee Kuan Yew was also to dismantle the one and only Chinese university in Singapore when he became prime minister. As a coup de grace, all schools in Singapore now use the English language as their first language of instruction. It is not efficient to have schools using Malay, Mandarin, or Tamil as the primary medium of instruction.

<sup>74</sup> "The Lee Kuan Yew Style," in *Far Eastern Economic Review*, November 11, 1965, p. 287.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> It should be noted that Lee Kuan Yew's treatment of non-PAP Singapore leaders is fairly even-handed because control has to be exercised over the motley races. Just the day before his reply, Lee Kuan Yew had summoned the editors of the Malay-language paper, *Utusan Melayu*, to warn them against printing further inflammatory materials. Lee Kuan Yew had barely emerged from the debacle of seeing Singapore being expelled from Malaysia. As the prime minister of a newly-independent nation, he again displayed his extraordinarily adversarial approach to Singaporeans who either disagree with him or suggest any policy that is counter to what he has articulated. Gamer refers to them as "verbal bludgeonings" (*ibid.*, p. 287). They may be considered a necessary tool in order to tying about such a fundamental change as a switch in one's mother tongue.

Chinese immigrants who settled in Singapore had come from southern China and had brought with them a rich diversity of as many as twelve Chinese dialects. Each Chinese dialect may be as different as unrelated languages and each has its own store of aphorisms, and each dialect group even has its distinctive customs and multifaceted ways of cooking. Twenty years after the PAP Government assumed control of Singapore these dialects still flourished. Lee Kuan Yew, however, pronounced the inefficiency of maintaining such dialects. At the opening ceremony of the “Promote the Use of Mandarin” Campaign on September 7, 1979, he referred to surveys conducted a few months earlier on the languages spoken on the buses and in the hawker centers. He notes that the surveys,

disclose how widespread and dominant dialects are. Nevertheless, *within five years*, once parents have decided that their children’s learning load must be lessened by dropping dialect and concentrating on English-Mandarin, we can dramatically alter the language environment. Students will hear and speak Mandarin in the streets, on the buses, in the shops, in the hawkers centres. If, however, the majority of parents secretly believe they can have English-Mandarin plus dialect for their children, then administrative action will not be wholly successful because administrative action cannot reach the home where dialects, already entrenched, will prevail.<sup>77</sup>

Chinese dialects, freely used in China for centuries and in Singapore ever since its founding and left to develop undisturbed by the British, Japanese, and Malaysians were, under Lee Kuan Yew, to wither, if not meet their end. As he ominously pronounced, the language environment was to undergo dramatic alteration “within five years.” Singapore has been called “Instant Asia.” One more “instant” may now be added for this is an instance of instant language.

Technique operates at a rational level, and Lee Kuan Yew often projects the image that he is more than rational and pragmatic. He couched the language issue in terms of the English-Mandarin or English dialect dilemma for Chinese Singaporean students. He points out that English-educated Chinese children speak a Chinese dialect in their home whereas they learn English and Mandarin in school. The results of twenty years of bilingual teaching showed that not more than twelve percent of students could cope with English, and two Chinese dialects. Hence the majority spoke English and their parents’ Chinese dialect. What Lee considered appalling was that even those who showed proficiency in Mandarin after twelve years of bilingual schooling lose their fluency when they attended overseas universities. He was also dissatisfied with the

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<sup>77</sup> “English-Mandarin or English-dialect?” in *Speeches: A Monthly Collection (Ministerial Speeches*, October 1979, p. 2 (emphasis added). Earlier, Lee Kuan Yew pronounced that the “problem of many dialects cannot be solved in four to five years.” He says: “It will take 10-20 years or longer” (“Mandarin: Lingua Franca for Chinese Singaporeans” in *Speeches: A Monthly Collection of Ministerial Speeches*, April 1978, p. 7). He failed to state why, within the grace of six months (the first speech was given on March 4, 1978 and the second on September 7, 1979), there was the drastic reduction in the time period over as fundamental an issue as a linguistic transformation. It is plausible that the governmental machinery, well versed in propaganda, had worked out a rigorous timetable in between.

thought that if the use of dialects was left uncontrolled by the PAP Government, English would become the common language between Chinese of different dialects.<sup>78</sup>

In making the use of Chinese dialects an issue<sup>79</sup> that was virtually non-existent until then<sup>80</sup>, Lee Kuan Yew cleverly fingered the Chinese parents and placed the burden of change on them. What he failed to articulate, for expedient reasons, was that Chinese students spoke dialect in their home because their mothers and fathers had a particular subcultural and linguistic heritage. It wasn't that parents wished to subject their children to a linguistic nightmare. They were giving voice to that legacy of a diverse heritage, of particular regional ancestral roots for China is not as small a small country as Singapore. Efficiency, however, is passionless and has little patience with legacies that it considers outmoded or inefficient. Lee Kuan Yew argued from a common sense standpoint that the daily use of Mandarin gave fluency. Hence, if parents "allow, or worse want, their children to speak dialects, then their children will find their work in school very burdensome."<sup>81</sup> Hence the alternative: "actively encourage your children to speak Mandarin in place of dialect."<sup>82</sup> He knew the audience he was addressing and he knew how to manipulate it. Chinese parents hold the earning of good grades in school in very high regard for top grades mean top schools, fat salaries, high socio-economic status. An appeal to ensure that their children obtain good results is one that will not go unheeded. The unspoken sacrifice on the altar of the God of Good Grades would be

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<sup>78</sup> Lee's contention is not adequately substantiated by the very surveys which he ordered (ibid., pp. 3-5). Chinese bus passengers, for instance, spoke to Chinese conductors in Hokkien 75 percent of the time. (Teochew: 7 percent; Cantonese: 5.2 percent; and other dialects: 1 percent; adding to 82 percent. Mandarin was used only 3.7 percent; English 7 percent; and Malay 12 percent) The distribution of dialect groups in Singapore is: 42.2 percent Hokkien; 22.3 percent Teochew, 17 percent Cantonese; and 18.5 percent other dialects. If the surveys were representative, it could well be concluded that Hokkien is a predominant dialect spoken in Singapore, one that is spoken even by those who are not in that dialect group.

<sup>79</sup> In an earlier speech, Lee noted that the British "left all dialects alone," but the PAP Government "has a responsibility to solve this problem" ("Mandarin: Lingua Franca for Chinese Singaporeans," pp. 67). Lee Kuan Yew again shows his agenda-setting role. His eyes tend to see "problems" where other eyes have not. Once put into motion, efficiency colors the eyes of its adherent and he sees problems where they have not previously existed. Efficiency has an autonomous quality to it

<sup>80</sup> Agenda-setting is not only a prerogative that Lee Kuan Yew jealously guards, he also controls the discussion and directs it along a channel he has created.

<sup>81</sup> "English-Mandarin or English-dialect?," p. I.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. In this speech, Lee stressed that very few Chinese students could cope with English, Mandarin, and a Chinese dialect. Hence the need to start the use of Mandarin and curb the use of the dialect in the homes so that Mandarin will become a living language. In an earlier speech, he said, "If you speak 22 dialects, never fear that your child will lose the dialect you spoke to him as a child... He will speak it because he learnt it from birth" ("Mandarin: Lingua Franca for Chinese Singaporeans," p. 6). Lee's reassuring words, however, contradicts his very contention that a Chinese student is unable to handle English, Mandarin, and a dialect. His argument that there is "no danger of dialects being killed" is empty political rhetoric. It is because dialect is spoken at home that the learning of Mandarin is a failure. If Mandarin is to supplant the use of the Chinese student's mother tongue, the latter will be killed. This is another instance of death in a technological society.

great. It would mean death to the family dialect.<sup>83</sup> Yet many Chinese parents continue to be willing to sacrifice for their children who in turn are to look after them in their old age.

Since educating non-Mandarin-speaking parents to speak Mandarin would pose a problem, Lee Kuan Yew argued that if they could speak dialect, it was not difficult to speak Mandarin. Many Chinese government workers and those who needed a government license to work also speak dialect. Nevertheless since the PAP Government has control over their livelihood, the treatment was to be different for these other categories of Singaporeans. He says:

Once it is clear to the government that parents want their children to learn and to use Mandarin, not dialects, the government will take administrative action to support their decision. All government officers, including those in hospitals and clinics, and especially those in manning counters, will be instructed to speak Mandarin except to the old, those over sixty. All Chinese taxi-drivers, bus conductors, and hawkers, can and will be required to pass an oral Mandarin test, or to attend Mandarin classes to make them adequate and competent to understand and speak Mandarin to their customers.<sup>84</sup>

It does not take much imagination to realize that a sizable proportion of those parents belong to one of the above categories of government employees or in occupations that are licensed by the PAP Government. Lee Kuan Yew concludes, “This is the stark choice—English-Mandarin, or English-dialect. Logically, the decision is obvious. Emotionally, the choice is painful.”<sup>85</sup> Emotion, however, within the PAP Government’s scheme of things is a commodity that is of no economic consequence and to be discarded like a filthy rag. Hence, even non-Mandarin-speaking Chinese over sixty, so nicely, piously, and what appeared to be so thoughtfully spared from having to speak Mandarin in their encounters with government employees by an apparently sensitive prime minister, were not spared linguistic pain in the closing days of their lives. Popular television and radio programs in Teochew, Hokkien, Cantonese or some other Chinese dialect were dubbed in Mandarin on orders from the PAP Government. There was no special, sentimental or Confucian provision for the elderly, those over sixty. They were to end their days in their homeland deprived by their own Chinese-dominated

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<sup>83</sup> Lee gave Taiwan as an illustrious example to support his argument that there is “no danger of dialects being killed.” He points out that in Taiwan, “80 per cent of the radio and television programmes are in Mandarin. Hokkien is still used by the older generation when speaking to the younger generation. But young people have bigger vocabularies in Mandarin, over 3,000 words, and are fluent in it. To speak to their parents, the young need a smaller vocabulary” (“Mandarin: Lingua Franca for Chinese Singaporeans,” p. 6). Taiwan seems the perfect illustration to sooth any linguistic misgivings among the elderly. Lee, however, failed to mention that Taiwanese are not particularly proficient in English. Taiwan, in fact, substantiates his original observation that children cannot proficiently handle English, Mandarin, and a dialect. Taiwan is less than the ideal that Lee would have Singaporeans believe. It is a spurious illustration. Unless analyzed, Lee’s rational thoughts always have a very persuasive appeal.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

government of their own mother tongue. When Lee Kuan Yew spoke of dramatically altering the language environment, he was not really waiting for the decision of parents. It was merely political rhetoric. Nor was he speaking of anything other than total transformation. What was distinctively and uniquely Singaporean—the rich diversity of Chinese dialects<sup>86</sup> and their individual store of wisdom concentrated in a small island nation—is “within five years.” Lee Kuan Yew and the principle of technique do not grant longevity to diversity. The PAP Government is moreover unlikely to mourn its premature death through the erection of a tombstone to mark its burial. If anything, it will celebrate its death with Chinese tea.

### *One Party, One Power, One Provider of Security*

The technological milieu has built a new altar at which humanity may worship. “Progress,” says Ellul, “has become a key term in modern religion.”<sup>87</sup> It is a secular god that demands total veneration from its devotees. Accepting what technological progress makes possible and necessary does not lead to a triumph of freedom. On the contrary it means the “triumph of bondage” and we become “slaves of progress.”<sup>88</sup> He regrets that the “mad passion for progress stays with us, though we can already taste the bitterness of its fruits.”<sup>89</sup> Ellul, however, holds the view that progress is a false god. He refers to “false gods” as “the kind we set up as guardians over our lives.”<sup>90</sup> In very many ways the PAP Government has attempted to be the guardian of the nations<sup>91</sup> in its relentless drive to be the one party, the one power, and the one provider of security for those Singaporeans who would worship it, in part, at the ballot box.

Removing all existing potential opposition to its autocratic rule is only one of the PAP Government’s basic objectives. An even more fundamental task of the PAP ever since it came into power has been to ensure that no organization, however puny, could

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<sup>86</sup> Harvey Stockwin notes that “Hongkong is overwhelmingly Cantonese, while the Manila Chinese community is overwhelmingly Hokkien. But even among the Chinese community as a whole Singapore Hokkiens only account for 42.2% of the total and only 32.3% of the overall population. The Cantonese were the second largest community prior to World War II, but since then they have been overtaken by the Teochews, the largest single group among the Chinese in Bangkok” (“The Singapore Connection” in *Far Eastern Economic Review*, August 6, 1976, p. 42). The governments in these other countries within Southeast Asia or Asia did not consider it necessary to intervene in an authoritarian fashion to alter the linguistic environment The PAP Government—in pursuit of efficiency or enslaved by efficiency—can do no other.

<sup>87</sup> *What I Believe*, p. 4.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>89</sup> *Living Faith: Belief and Doubt in a Perilous World*, trans. Peter Heinegg (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), p. 226.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

<sup>91</sup> Lee has certainly appointed himself guardian of Singapore’s foreign reserves. A responsibility of the newly created executive president of Singapore is that he may defend them. Lee does not trust his handpicked and groomed professors to look after the foreign reserves as he is fearful that his successors may squander them.

grow to challenge its power. Whether it is a political organization or otherwise is immaterial to the PAP. Power structures are in-built into all organizations and a PAP ambition is to attack all organized structures so that it will emerge as the party in which all power of any national consequence resides. Of equal import, a PAP's aim may be said to be its desire to project itself as the nation's breadwinner. Being the sole provider of economic security for every family enhances its sense of self-importance and indispensability. It gives it an aura of fatherly omnipotence. The significance of this role is heightened in a nation where filial piety is practiced by the dominant culture. In order to achieve this objective the PAP Government has either to destroy all existing organizational providers of security or to ensure that they remain anemic. An even more foundational approach by the PAP Government is to ensure that an organization—local or foreign—seeking incorporation in Singapore does not get authorization to incorporate if there is even the faintest hint that it could pose any manner of threat to the PAP Government.

Given such an understanding, one of the functions of an organization like the People's Association is that it is not only to strengthen PAP control over local community life, but also to "reduce the influence of the many non-government bodies which evolved during colonial times to provide social, economic, or cultural security to the population."<sup>92</sup> Established in 1960 and directly controlled by Lee Kuan Yew as chairman, the People's Association was used as a political and social tool to counter "the great political influence wielded by Chinese guilds, clan associations, old boys' associations, and Chinese middle school unions."<sup>93</sup> Lee Kuan Yew's desire to reduce the influence of these organizations or "brokers" is implied when he referred to them in a speech on April 25, 1960:

In the past, the Government was something distinct and separate. The people and their activities were one entity on the ground, and the Government and the administration were something separate, over and above, giving orders downwards. In between were the 'brokers' who acted as middlemen between the Government and the people. These were the committees of social, cultural, clan and other organizations acting as buffers between the colonial administrators and the people, making requests to the Government, with Government either responding to or rejecting these requests. In the past, dissatisfaction first grew on the ground, and when the people were acutely discontented they went to cultural organizations or clan associations who acted as 'brokers', representing the people in the area and making representations to the Government...

It is necessary to keep in constant touch with the people, not only to know what their grievances are, but also to conduct and organize them and inculcate in them social qualities which will be useful in the building up of our society. In the present

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<sup>92</sup> Iain Buchanan, *Singapore in Southeast Asia: An Economic and Political Appraisal* (London: Bell and Sons Ltd., 1972), p. 284.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

phase of political development it will be easier to do this at a non-Government level. For this reason we have decided to set up the People's Association.<sup>94</sup>

Lee Kuan Yew's apparent intent is to bypass these "brokers" with the implication that under the new regime (by virtue of its being national) does not need such brokers. The PAP Government moreover seemed to desire direct contact with the people. It appears to be a magnanimous or salutary gesture on the part of the PAP Government. A much more plausible objective is to emasculate if not eradicate the residual powers of these organizations so that there will be only one power and provider of security in the nation. All persons in need of help would have to seek out the PAP Government and its evergrowing and ever-encroaching structures. It removes all secondary crutches that a person could look for when in trouble. At the communication level, the PAP Government does not want "opinion leaders" in such non-governmental organizations to interpret government policy. It wants to monopolize this interpretive function so that only the authorized version of its commandments is transmitted. It could also discredit any other interpreter. Such a course of action is effective in removing a source of potential impediment to the PAP Government's manipulation of the people.

Traditional religion is moreover secularized. John Clammer stresses that "as religion retreats further and further from attempting to assert its definition of reality, so the secular view is allowed to prevail."<sup>95</sup> He maintains that the effects of secularization are subtle. This is because religion in Singapore has flourished in the climate of religious pluralism. He contends that a major effect of secularization is that "many individuals of a religious persuasion are actually indistinguishable in most respects from their non-religious neighbors" because "they in practice allow the secular world to define the worldview that they largely share—and to set its priorities as being the 'real' ones, and these priorities, as it so happens, are mainly materialistic ones."<sup>96</sup> The PAP Government, as provider of security, has usurped a function that used to be that furnished by religion. What is tragic is that this usurpation has been accepted by docile religious leaders who should know better than their non-religious counterparts.

In the technological city, however, the greatest religious power is the ruling government. Hence the PAP, as creator of independent Singapore, has made a significant effort to usurp this very function. As Thomas Bellows rightly observes of the situation in the mid-to late-1960s, "In recent years, Singaporeans have increasingly come to regard their government as the institution in society most responsible for their material wellbeing."<sup>97</sup> Even millionaires, according to Lee Kuan Yew, have a strong stake in ensuring that the PAP Government remains a provider of economic security. In a speech

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<sup>94</sup> Josey, *Lee Kuan Yew*, p. 144. The People's Association that Lee Kuan Yew referred to as a "non-Go vemment" organization made use of government funds as well as reported directly to Lee Kuan Yew as its chairman. To the vast majority of Singaporeans, with apparently the exception of Lee Kuan Yew, the People's Association is part of the PAP colossal governmental machinery.

<sup>95</sup> *Singapore: Ideology, Society, Culture* (Singapore: Chopmen Publishers, 1985), p. 54.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *The People's Action Party of Singapore: Emergence of a Dominant Party System*, p. 101.



on January 2, 1965, he says, **“You can be the world’s biggest millionaire. But if the country collapses you are in trouble.”**<sup>98</sup> The twin emphasis on the fragility of wealth and of the nation is not without purpose. It requires obedience or acquiescence from the people and the concomitant exercise of ever-increasing authority on the part of the PAP Government to safeguard the accumulation of wealth. It is a situation where one sells one’s democratic birthright for a bowl of rice. Or, many bowls, some would argue.

The PAP Government, however, is not a faceless institution. At its head is Lee Kuan Yew. A PAP politician told Raj Vasil that “it is one-man-rule in Singapore. All power and decision-making is concentrated in the hands of the Prime Minister. He is supreme and he calls all the shots.” The politician elaborates: “The normal checks on executive power which operate in parliamentary democracies do not exist in Singapore. The institutions exist, such as the Parliament and the party, but they exercise little control over the Prime Minister.”<sup>99</sup>

The confidence of PAP politicians in Lee Kuan Yew would seem to be practically absolute. One senior-ranking second-generation PAP politician says, “I am Minister of... In the night when I sleep, I sleep well knowing that if something goes terribly wrong, the Prime Minister is there to take care of the situation. Surely if something goes wrong my head would get chopped, but no harm would come to Singapore as the Prime Minister is bound to take necessary action to save the situation. This same feeling is held by other ministers of the second generation.”<sup>100</sup> Vasil observes that Lee Kuan Yew “is acknowledged as the embodiment of the party and the government and the person who provides and sustains the credibility of the government as a performer.” He adds that Lee Kuan Yew is “the creator of modern Singapore.”<sup>101</sup> These PAP politicians have

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<sup>98</sup> *The Mirror*, January 10, 1966, p. 7 (original emphasis). Enright had observed the pride in Lee’s remarks to the British Labour Party rally at Scarborough on October 1, 1967 when the prime minister described Singapore thus: “I do not pretend that we are an idyllic socialist community in South-East Asia. We still have the highest number of millionaires per ten thousand of population in South Asia. But we are one of a few places in Asia where there are no beggars, where nobody, old or young, dies of neglect and starvation. True, they are modest achievements but none the less precious to us” (*Memoirs of a Mendicant Professor*, p. 194). Lee Kuan Yew underscores the debt that wealthy Singaporeans owe him. While there are some grounds for maintaining that nobody dies of neglect in Singapore (unless the person is terminally ill and a precious hospital bed is not allocated for a person who has outlived his usefulness), many are dying for a chance to be neglected by the PAP Government’s deluge of directives and its army of watchful enforcers.

<sup>99</sup> *Governing Singapore: Interviews with the New Leaders*, p. 160. While the politician qualified his remarks by stating that, in practice, Lee Kuan Yew consults extensively with government departments as well as those in the professions and private industry before making his decisions, it does not vitiate the widespread belief that one man rules the nation. In this light a reasonable doubt is likely to arise in the minds of some people as to whether the judiciary exercises any control over the powers and prerogatives of a prime minister during his years of constantly enhanced powers. The check-and-balance role so crucial in a democracy falls into a dark, doubtful domain in Singapore.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.

been well trained to look upon themselves as nothing and the creator of Singapore as everything. The creator is all knowing and all powerful, and he demands sacrifices of freedom and privacy as well as human sacrifices when the occasion warrants it. Until they rebel, those closest to him are the very ones most obedient to the creator.

### *Summary*

In a speech at the White House on October 17, 1967 during Lyndon Johnson's presidency, Lee Kuan Yew expresses this striking sentiment: "We in Singapore, like others, want to build this brave new world of modern science and technology, and the great life that they can provide when these disciplines are applied to industry."<sup>102</sup> If Huxley, who featured Singapore in his *Brave New World*, could see the nation now, he would possibly not be too taken aback that his brave new world is beginning to take recognizable shape in Singapore.

The PAP, under the leadership of Lee Kuan Yew, has so wholeheartedly clasped the principle of *la technique* to its bosom that their entering into wedlock is apparently not a too ill-advised enterprise. It is a union that explains with lucidity a multiplicity of policies and events brought about by the PAP Government over the last three decades of life in Singapore. Their alliance has predictably led to a drastic curtailment or elimination of anything, including humans, that hinders the efficient operation of technique. The outcome is faceless conformity, sterility, stability. On the other hand, it has also predictably brought about a super-abundance of economic fruits. Selective perception sets in and many Singaporeans readily and zealously grant permission for wealth and its acquisition to domineer over and demean all the other offsprings of the union. The continued harvest of economic products in turn justifies and consequently removes from the minds of a majority of people the initial apprehensions over their joining together. The anti-technological and therefore troublesome conscience is put to sleep.

Singapore's current opulence and intensified regimentation could be taken as indications that total technicization has taken place in Singapore after thirty years of partnership between the PAP and *la technique*. Ellul defines total technicization as occurring "when every aspect of human life is subjected to control and manipulation, to experimentation and observation, so that a demonstrable efficiency is achieved everywhere."<sup>103</sup> Ominous-looking cameras are mounted at major traffic junctions to

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<sup>102</sup> *The Mirror*, October 30, 1967, p. 6. Johnson, in his speech welcoming Lee Kuan Yew, says: "Singapore is a bright example of what can be accomplished not only in Asia, but in Africa and Latin America—wherever men work for a life of freedom and dignity" (ibid., p. 6). It is, however, freedom and dignity with a price that Johnson himself would not want to pay for if he were to be coopted as part of the lower rungs of the system. Nevertheless Johnson's speech is indicative of the untroubled, glowing portraiture of Singapore that is seen by the tourist and in PAP Government's glossy publications.

<sup>103</sup> *The Technological System*, p. 82.

electronically capture the violators at the very instant of committing the offence ,”<sup>104</sup>; hidden cameras are placed in elevators to record in graphic detail persons who use them as latrines: humans are surreptitiously stationed in toilets, all primed to issue court summonses for other humans who fail to flush after use.<sup>105</sup> From minute details to courtship and size of family, the level of observation, control, and manipulation goes to enormous (some would say preposterous) lengths.

Although it is not exactly a holy matrimony—more an unholy union of convenience—divorce, however, is highly problematic. *La technique* has brought about the technological system. Ellul states that it is a system that cannot be detech-nicized. This is so because of the control exercised by autonomous technology which Ellul explains thus:

technology ultimately depends only on itself, it maps its own route, it is a prime and not a secondary factor, it must be regarded as an ‘organism’ tending toward closure and self-determination: it is an end in itself. Autonomy is the very condition of technological development<sup>106</sup>

In this understanding, it is a marriage in which the partners are unequally matched. It is commonly believed that the PAP and Lee Kuan Yew are in control. This is not the case. Technique proves to be the boss in the relationship. Even Lee Kuan Yew is not in a position to bargain with technique. Ellul stresses the preeminence of technique in all arenas of action, including the political. He argues that it is still not fully appreciated that the embrace of technique “means control over all the persons involved, all the powers, all the decisions and changes, and that technology imposes its own law on the different social organizations, disturbing fundamentally what is thought to be permanent (e.g., the family), and making politics futile.”<sup>107</sup> He dismisses the idea that politicians make the decisions. Politicians, he contends “can decide only what is technologically feasible.”<sup>108</sup> In a Singapore that desires and strives for worldclass economic prosperity, no decisions can be made that run contrary to technological growth. Hence only that which is technologically productive is to be pursued. All political decisions are, in reality, dictated by technology. Although credit is lavished

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<sup>104</sup> Singapore is well known for its “instant” Asia image. The electronics branch of technology has now given a new twist to its reputation. It captures traffic violators instantaneously. For instance, I was driving in the middle lane of a three-lane road at 10:00 p.m. in 1989 when the traffic lights turned amber. I stopped, but the two cars—one on my right and the other on my left—jumped the lights. The blinding flash from the camera has etched itself into my mind.

<sup>105</sup> The telescreen in George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is ubiquitous. “Nothing,” Winston notes, “was your own except the few cubic centimetres inside your skull” (p. 25). Singapore, with its own technical and human versions of the telescreen, possibly have traffic and other violators who would mutter something similar.

<sup>106</sup> *The Technological System*, p. 125.

<sup>107</sup> *What I Believe*, p. 135.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

on Lee Kuan Yew and his cohorts for bringing about the Singapore economic miracle, Ellul asseverates that the system that is set up is “not built through whim or personal ambition.”<sup>109</sup> There is only a semblance or illusion of political control. It is because of the supremacy of technique over the PAP that the latter’s many “good” intentions to relax the rigidity of its regulations come to nought. It can only continue to regulate in ever tighter circles—precisely what it is currently doing in spite of promises to be more flexible.

Singapore is a garden city, a show city, a brilliant city, but it is no utopia. It is not the Garden of Eden. It is a technological city built on secular foundations. It does not, however, put a spanner in Lee Kuan Yew’s words and works. As he so lucidly pronounces at the Political Study Centre on July 13, 1966, “What is required is a rugged, resolute, highly trained, highly disciplined community. Create such a community and you will survive and prosper here for thousands of years.”<sup>110</sup> Either Lee suffers from delusions or tiny Singapore will not only survive but prosper for “thousands of years” come what may. Just a few years ago, Lee had sought merger with Malaysia because Singapore could not survive on its own. Be that as it may, Lee has certain thoughts in mind when he evokes the image of “a rugged, resolute, highly trained, highly disciplined community.” Distanced from a natural and social environment, placed in a technological environment and fed upon a diet of technical means, the outcome is the production of a rugged, resolute, highly trained, highly disciplined, highly mechanized people. They are to be distinguished from robots. The latter are mechanical objects invented by humanity’s imagination; however advanced their “artificial intelligence” they are truly things. They are the “its” of this world. Lee fondly refers to them as “digits.”<sup>111</sup> The former may be considered to be more than “its.” After all, they are humans. Nevertheless they are humans who have either voluntarily or were coerced to invite *la technique* into their hearts and lives. In so doing, they have set in inexorable motion an autonomous creature that has the in-built power to take over all control in the political, social, cultural, religious arenas. Technique’s power, however, touches humanity itself. Technique is such that it transforms its unsuspecting humans into the “its” of the world. They are people without a soul but they certainly do survive and prosper economically. They become technique’s robots.

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<sup>109</sup> *The Technological Society*, p. 116.

<sup>110</sup> Josey, *Lee Kuan Yew*, p. 490.

<sup>111</sup> As T.J.S. George notes, Lee Kuan Yew’s “favourite word when referring to Singaporeans is, characteristically, ‘digits’” [Lee Kuan Yew’s *Singapore* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1973), p. 132]. Again, Ho Kwon Ping observes, “This efficient, hierarchical structure of technocrats, technicians and toolpushers is in line with the leadership’s concept of a society in which each person is a ‘digit’—a favourite term used by the Prime Minister” (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, August 6, 1976, p. 46). In his speech to the 4th Delegates’ Conference of the National Trades Union Congress on April 26, 1967, Lee Kuan Yew, for instance, says, “We must all the time train and build better digits than the cadres they [the communists] have withdrawn so that when they come back, they will find the world has left them behind” (*The Minor*, May 8, 1967, p. 6).

# Book Reviews

## Essay Review

Nicholas Negroponte, *Being Digital* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995).

Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Vintage, 1993).

Clifford Stoll, *Silicon Snake Oil: Second Thoughts on the Information Highway* (New York: Anchor,

Edward Tenner, *Why Things Bite Back: Technology and the Revenge of Unintended Consequences* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996).

### Reviewed David W. Gill

Professor of Applied Ethics, North Park College, Chicago

Books on technology and its various roles in our culture are pouring from the press these days. The four books under review here present a wide spectrum of attitudes toward the growth of technology. We begin in the “Amen corner” with Nicholas Negroponte, Professor of Media Technology at MIT, Founding Director of the Media Lab, and columnist for *Wired* magazine.

*Being Digital* is a breathless, adoring tour of the technological future allegedly at our doorstep. This will be a world of high-speed, high-volume movement of “bits” of digitized information—pretty much replacing the movement of “atoms.” “The change from atoms to bits is irrevocable and unstoppable” (p. 4). Digital communication brings not only a quantum leap upward in volume, it changes our relationships to time and space. Your location is your (portable) email address; other geographic places can (virtually) come to you (p. 165). Asynchronous communication becomes more and more prevalent (answering machines, e-mail, on-demand television, etc.). The whole rhythm of work and play changes: the old nine-to-five, five-day work week in the office is gone. Now we can work wherever we want, whenever we want. In contrast to those who might appreciate a break in time and space from their work, Negroponte testifies “some of us like to be ‘wired’ all the time” (p. 193). It is probably not too reckless to predict that in Negroponte’s digitally-obsessive future, psychotherapists will continue to do a booming business.

Oddly enough, just as we manage to escape having to deal with real human beings, Negroponte dreams “that computers will be more like people” (101). He looks forward to the time when computers will read and respond to our presence and our speech (sort of a sophisticated version of motion-sensing light switches).

In the next millennium, we will find that we are talking as much or more with machines than we are with humans” (p. 145). The joys you now experience with ever-extending phonemail menus may soon be with you in all areas of your life and work!

Negroponte’s digital world will inundate us with multi-media possibilities and choices. But “pull” instead of “push” will determine what we see and hear. “Being digital will change the nature of mass media from a process of pushing bits at people to one of allowing people (or their computers) to pull at them” (p. 84). The “news” (and our entertainment—though it may be difficult to know the difference!) will be whatever we want it to be, whenever we want it. The current “information age” is characterized by massive information directed at mass audiences. “In the post-information age, we often have an audience the size of one. Everything is made to order, and information is extremely personalized... In being digital I am *me*, not a statistical subset... True personalization is now upon us” (p. 164).

The digital world, Negroponte predicts, will be great for education. Students will use computer simulations to replace or augment their lived experiences; they will play with information instead of memorizing facts. “Today kids are getting the opportunity to be street smart on the Internet, where *children are heard and not seen* [Negroponte emphasis]. Ironically, reading and writing will benefit... The Internet provides a new medium for reaching out to find knowledge and meaning” (p. 202). Nor need we mourn the disappearance of the extended family, for with thousands of BURP members on line .. “making just that enormous body of knowledge and wisdom accessible to young minds could close the generation gap with a few key strokes” (p. 203). And you thought it was more complex than that!

Personal computers will make our future adult population simultaneously more mathematically able and more visually literate... the pursuit of intellectual achievement will... cater to a wider range of cognitive styles, learning patterns, and expressive behaviors... The middle ground between work and play will be enlarged dramatically. The crisp line between love and duty will blur by virtue of a common denominator—being digital” (220-21)

”The Information Superhighway is . . . creating a totally new, global social fabric” (p. 183). Does Negroponte see any downside or difficulty with the new social order? ”Netiquette” is a problem, although more so for the lack of brevity than for the presence of lies and disinformation, or of the crude, rude, and lewd. “Every technology or gift of science has a dark side. Being digital is no exception” (p. 227). There are problems of intellectual property abuse, invasion of privacy, digital vandalism, software piracy, data thievery, and loss of jobs to automation. Furthermore, bits are not edible; in that sense they cannot stop hunger. Computers are not moral; they cannot resolve complex issues like the rights to life and to death” (pp. 228-9).

But for Negroponte, these are merely glitches in a powerful, unstoppable cultural change. Four powerful qualities of the digital world will lead inexorably to triumph: decentralizing, globalizing, harmonizing, empowering. The globalizing and harmonizing

qualities are clear enough. Negroponte's readers may harbor greater doubts about whether true decentralization and empowerment will occur.

Clifford Stoll describes himself as "an astronomer, computer jock, and weekend plumber" in Oakland California. He was also one of the pioneers of the Internet, but now is a bit of a "backslider" whose "second thoughts on the information super highway" are a valuable counterpoint to Negroponte's euphoria. No doubt, Stoll, writes, the Internet has its challenging, fun, and useful side. But what is the price? What are we trading off to get on this highway? Stoll argues that the medium is being oversold and that there is too little critical discussion.

What are the problems that Stoll sees? First, a great deal of time is demanded just to keep up with one's e-mail, chat groups, and Internet explorations. Little Internet information is genuinely useful and what is there is often a distraction from reality. Life on the Internet is passive rather than active; computer networks isolate us from one another, cheapen the meaning of actual experience, work against literacy and reality, and undercut our schools and libraries. Schools are being sold down the networked river, induced to "spend way too much on technological gimmicks that teachers don't want and students don't need" (p. 11).

"Few aspects of daily life require computers, digital networks, or massive connectivity" (p. 10). Stoll gives long lists of such important non-computer activities: baking bread, curling up with a good novel, and hanging out with friends. He quotes Thoreau's famous comment in *Walden*: "Our inventions are wont to be pretty toys, which distract our attention from serious things. They are but improved means to an unimproved end" (p. 15).

Despite contrary claims, in reality the Internet is painfully slow (especially during business hours). Just as all highway building has led to more traffic congestion, bandwidth expansions are doomed to be forever glutted with as much or more traffic than they can possibly bear (pp. 206-7). And the equipment itself is not at all perfectly reliable: "I spend almost as much time figuring out what's wrong with my computer as I do actually using it" (p. 3)

More than its inefficiency, the abysmal quality of information on the Internet is Stoll's frequent refrain: "Look at the detritus, dross, and dreck sold on the television home-shopping channels"(p. 18): the same will be available on the computer shopping network. A 500 channel system will surely deliver "unfathomable and boundless mediocrity" (p. 21). "Instead of an Internet-inspired renaissance, mediocre writing and poorly-thought-out arguments roll into my modem (p. 26). The Internet is a great medium for trivia and hobbies, but not for reasoned reflective judgment or true creativity. Data, information, knowledge, understanding, and wisdom are different things. The Internet provides mountains of data, some information, a little knowledge and understanding, but no wisdom.

Educators are falling for a bogus promise when they invest in computers instead of teachers and books (pp. 1 30ff). Scarce resources are being wasted, the information gained is of doubtful value, and true creativity is stifled rather than unleashed. "Cre-

ative people are ill-adapted for survival around computers. . . the medium in which we communicate changes how we organize our thoughts. We program computers, but the computers also program us” (46). Creativity is confined within narrow boundaries established by the medium itself.

Interpersonal relationships and communication are also harmed at least as much as helped by the Internet. “Anonymity and untraceability seem to bring out the worst in people” (p. 57). Computer networks isolate us from one another, rather than bring us together. “Electronic communication is an instantaneous and illusory contact that creates a sense of intimacy without the emotional investment that leads to close friendships.” (p. 24).

The key ingredient of their silicon snake oil is a technocratic belief that computers and networks will make a better society. Access to information, better communications, and electronic programs can cure social problems . . . [But] access to a universe of information cannot solve our problems: we will forever struggle to understand one another. The most important interactions in life happen between people, not between computers (p. 50).

It is important to recall, of course, that anonymous hate messages are already enabled by conventional mail and telephone calls, and that pounds of unsolicited junk mail are accompanied by daily telemarketing intruders. But Stoll has written a very important book, whose credibility and persuasiveness is multiplied by his experience with the Internet and by the fact that he “has a life”—in sharp contrast to the sterile, narrow existence reflected in most computer nerd tracts. Reading Negroponte and Stoll together is a great foundation for serious reflection on the arrival of the digital age.

Edward Tenner’s *Why Things Bite Back* examines technology more broadly than do the books by Negroponte and Stoll. In particular, Tenner looks at medicine, agriculture and the environment, the computerized office, and sports. A historian of science at Princeton University, Tenner has provided a voluminously documented and illustrated account of the unintended consequences (called “revenge effects”) of our technologies. “Technology demands more, not less, human work to function. And it introduces more subtle and insidious problems to replace acute ones. Nor are the acute ones eliminated. .. [I]n controlling the catastrophic problems we are exposing ourselves to even more elusive chronic ones that are even harder to address... Our greater safety demands more and more vigilance... I am not arguing against change, but for a modest, tentative, and skeptical acceptance of it” (p. xi).

A revenge effect is when a technology produces a result the opposite of what was intended. For example, When a safety system encourages enough additional risk-taking that it helps cause accidents, that is a revenge effect”(p. 19). Football helmets and protective gear are a case in point. Smoke alarms that make people less vigilant in preventing fires are another. Decentralizing work from the office to a home work station often leads to greater captivity to work rather than greater freedom. Going to the hospital to get well can expose one to more disease than staying away. Intensive use of antibiotics has promoted the development of more resistant viruses.



"If we learn from revenge effects we will not be led to renounce technology, but we will instead refine it: watching for unforeseen problems, managing what we know are limited strengths, applying no less but also no more than is really needed (p. 115).

In the office, Tenner describes revenge effects on the body as well as on the bottom line: repetitive motion injuries (e.g., carpal tunnel syndrome), back injuries from being seated, so long before terminals, eyestrain, and the unknown impact of electro-magnetic field exposure. The financial issue is that net productivity is relatively unchanged: the cost of technical support personnel, for example, erodes the savings from downsizing the regular staff. Instead of resulting in paper-less offices, computerized workplaces use far more paper because of the ease of cranking out revised documents.

Tenner's book is dense with examples of revenge effects; his case is made with overwhelming evidence. The obvious point of his book is that we must face up to the truth of our technologies: there are serious consequences, negative as well as positive. The negative impacts of our technologies are not restricted to their uses made by evil people! Often the consequences are entirely unforeseen (though if we were more realistic and careful we might be able to foresee more than we do). Tenner suggests that we need more "finesse" in the development and application of technology—the capacity to move with moderation and with attention to the environment of application. He also urges "vigilance"; the introduction of technology requires more intense and sustained care, not less (the myth says that technology is more reliable than humans, that it frees us from hard work, etc.).

Neil Postman, Professor of Communication Arts & Sciences at New York University, has been raising questions about technology for many years. In *Technopoly*, he provides a broad and sustained critique of "the surrender of culture to technology." While technology has in many cases made life "easier, cleaner, and longer," Postman argues that "the uncontrolled growth of technology destroys the vital sources of our humanity. It creates a culture without a moral foundation. It undermines certain mental processes and social relations that make human life worth living. Technology, in sum, is both friend and enemy" (p. xii).

Postman notes that technology has a large and enthusiastic chorus of evangelists and promoters—but rather few critics who examine its drawbacks. He looks at specific areas and associated problems (e.g., medicine, computers, social science research, media) but his main contribution is in an analysis of technology as a whole ensemble, in relation to a whole culture.

We have moved historically from tool-using cultures to technocracy to technopoly. In technocracy (18th century onward) technological tools are no longer in roles subordinate to particular, limited purposes—they play a central role in culture (e.g., the "Industrial Revolutions). In the twentieth century, we have moved a further, critical step, to technopoly: technology has become a monopolizing force, dominating and subordinating all of culture to its logic. Technologies can have an important and valuable place in a culture with a grand story or narrative whose worldview and values govern the whole. Unfortunately, the older worldviews have been eclipsed; the progress

and goodness of technology has itself become the narrative of our dominant culture—incapable of passing critical judgment on itself.

Embedded in every technology (and in technology as a whole ensemble) is an ideological bias. Postman quotes the old adage: To a man with a hammer, everything looks like a nail. And today: to a man with a computer, everything looks like data. “The uses made of any technology are largely determined by the structure of that technology itself—that is, its functions follow from its forms”(p. 7). “Technological change is never additive nor subtractive. It is ecological” (p. 18). Adding a television set to a home, for example, does not result in “homelife plus televisions; it transforms the way families eat, interact, think about news, and practice religion; it modifies personal behavior, attitudes, relationships, and the economic and political domains.

Postman discusses with humor and insight the impact of technology on medicine. His chapter on computer technology shows how much is lost when only those things that can be processed on computers have reality and importance. The linguistic fuzzing of boundaries by using terms like “virus” for computers and “programming” and “input” for human activities is symbolic of technopoly’s ideological impact. Less apparent to most observers and technology users are the “invisible technologies” of opinion polls, intelligence tests, and tire worshipful use of statistics.

We live with information glut (well-illustrated in Postman’s account), information chaos, and the elevation of information (especially quantifiable information) to “metaphysical status” (p. 61). Postman shows how this has developed from the inventions of printing, then telegraphy, photography, broadcasting, and now computers. “The computer argues, to put it baldly, that the most serious problems confronting us at both personal and public levels require technical solutions through fast access to information otherwise unavailable. I would argue that this is, on the face of it, nonsense. Our most serious problems are not technical, nor do they arise from inadequate information” (p. 119).

In order to make sense of our lives and of the information we encounter, we need institutions to help us evaluate and synthesize. The school, family, church, political party and state, however, no longer serve us well as controllers of information. The old interpretive myths (Christianity, Marxism, etc.) have either disappeared or retreated to a narrow private sphere. Instead, bureaucracy, “expertise,” and technical machinery (tests, standardized forms, polls, etc.) are the new information controls. Their main controlling impact, however, is to exclude whatever cannot pass through their quantitative, technical filter. Underneath it all, is the broad adherence to a narrow “scientism” that justifies the intellectual operations of technology. While Negroponte celebrates the opportunity for each individual person to pick and choose their identity and environment, Postman mourns the fact that the individual doing this self-creation is a community-less, story-less “atom” at the mercy of a mass society and a firehose of information.

The answer, for Postman, is educational reform. And that does not mean computerizing all classrooms! The teaching of history, including the history of technology, is a

crucial antidote to the a-historical prejudice of technopoly. He also suggests courses in the philosophy of science, semantics, and religion as possible antidotes to technopoly. Such curricular reform, of course, is a path rarely contemplated today.

If Tenner's *Why Things Bite Back* is the voluminous nuts-and-bolts caution about technological enthusiasm, Postman's *Technopoly* is the essential companion piece on the broader contours of technology and culture. A reading of Tenner might just prepare some of our technophile friends to have open minds in considering the vitally important case made by Postman (and before him, with still greater detail and power, Jacques Ellul).

**Issue #20 Jan 1998 — Tenth  
Anniversary Issue**

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## About the 10th Anniversary Issue

Welcome to the tenth anniversary issue of *The Ellul Forum*. It is hard to believe that ten years have gone by. For three years in the 1980's a group of scholars, organized by Dan Clendenin, interested in the work of Jacques Ellul met at the American Academy of Religion annual meetings to discuss his work. At one of those meetings, (in 1987 I believe) it was suggested that it might be a good idea to have a newsletter to facilitate communications among us. Having just recently gotten into "desktop publishing" I volunteered to produce such a newsletter.

As I thought about the newsletter, I got rather ambitious. I decided that it might be useful to have a vehicle not only for the exchange of information but also for the exchange of ideas among those who were interested in Ellul. What I had in mind was something more formal than a newsletter but less formal than a journal - the result was the *Forum* as we now know it, with its combination of news, book reviews and a "Forum issue" addressed in one or two essays. In August of 1988 the first issue came out, and it has been produced twice a year ever since.

On the whole I have been pleased with the results. On page two of this issue, you will find a complete list of the issues produced over the last ten years. It is, I think, an impressive list of topics and I am grateful to the members of the editorial board, many of whom served as guest editors. I have thoroughly enjoyed editing the *Forum*, but after ten years I am ready to step aside and allow others to assume the editorial task. Starting with issue twenty-one, my Associate Editor, Cliff Christians will become the editor and David Gill will step into the position of Associate Editor. Both Cliff and David are seasoned Ellul scholars who have contributed much to the advancement of scholarship on Ellul's work. They will provide able leadership for the issues to come. I welcome them to their new roles. I am not planning to disappear entirely, however. I will remain a member of the editorial board and will also serve as Managing Editor for the *Forum*, taking care of subscriptions, typesetting and production, as I have in the past.

I hope you enjoy the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary issue. The *Forum* essay is written by Rick Clifton Moore from Boise State University. Moore brings an interesting perspective on using Ellul in the analysis of television drama. Then a special *Forum* section celebrating our 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary follows with essays from several of our editorial board members reflecting on the influence of Ellul on their life, work and thought. Finally, we conclude with two book reviews, one of Andrew Goddard's dissertation on Ellul and the other of a book of poetry by Ellul which was published after his death. I hope

you have enjoyed the last ten years of *The Ellul Forum* and that you will look forward to further issues of the *Forum* in the future.

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N.B. Back Issues of the *Forum* are available at \$4.00 each. Send a check made out to *The Ellul Forum*,  
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# Forum: From Ellul to “Picket Fences”

## The Residue of Culture: An Ellulian Dialogic Analysis of Religious Imagery in a Network Television Drama

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In *Technopoly*, cultural critic Neil Postman argues that the technological state has developed to a point where it will allow no competitors. A technopolic world view is one in which technical efficiency and progress are the consummate values. Whereas in the 19th century (a period Postman calls “technocracy”) many world views were able to coexist, in 20th century all drought worlds that compete with technopoly disappear. Among these alternative thought worlds is religion, which Postman argues is made invisible and therefore irrelevant in technopoly.

My purpose here is to analyze the possible invisibility and irrelevance of religion within a technopolistic world, specifically looking at one instance of such invisibility and irrelevance, the depiction of religion in a prime-time television drama. Using the work of Neil Postman and Jacques Ellul I investigate the conflict between a technopolistic world view and a theological world view in one very exemplary episode of the program *Picket Fences*.

### Mass Media in Jacques Ellul’s Technological Society

Postman’s basic orientation toward the technological world is greatly influenced by the work of Jacques Ellul. For Ellul, today’s world is one in which humans are so enamored of technology that the machine becomes the model for society. As Cliff Christians and Michael Real describe Ellul’s theory, “we are beguiled enough by machine productivity to reconstruct almost unconsciously all our social institutions on this model” (Christians and Real, 1979, p. 84). Technique, then, is the elevation of means over ends, the worship of mechanistic efficiency.



Ellul argues that such worship is all-encompassing. One cannot worship technique and God. Accordingly, for the technological society to move forward, all citizens must be consistently reminded of their allegiance to it. This is why such a large part of Ellul's oeuvre relates to the mass media. The media are essential components in the world of technique. As the technological world becomes somewhat cold and heartless, it is necessary for its citizens to be reminded of their allegiance to it. As Ellul states it, "In the midst of increasing mechanization and technological organization, propaganda is simply the means used to prevent these things from being felt as too oppressive and to persuade man to submit with good grace"(Ellul, 1965, p. xviii). Such submission must be all inclusive. His point is that "technique has taken over the whole of civilization"(Ellul, 1964, p. 128).

Recognizing both the Judeo-Christian orientation of Ellul and the Judeo-Christian elements of some facets of American society, however, the reader might question the outcome of clashes between the "religious" element of the technological world (the worship of efficiency and the technological state) and the "religious" elements imbedded in American culture (the religious roots of many western social institutions). There would seem to be a clash between the religion of the new world and the religion of the old world.

Postman addresses this issue by suggesting that the religion of the new world is fundamentally different from the religion of the old. By suggesting that Technopoly has made religion invisible he is not suggesting that it does not exist, rather, that it does not exist in its original form. Technopoly is successful in "redefining what we mean by religion"(Postman, 1992, p. 48).

Postman's shortcoming, however, is in suggesting that such a redefinition is a one-time historical event which occurs in the technocratic world (which, as mentioned earlier is a how Postman defines the world of the 19th century). He maintains that in that era the traditional world clashed with the modern world and something had to give. The machinery of the modern world was already in place, but the minds of the people were not prepared for the massive assault of such machinery. The people were not ready because their minds had been formed in a traditional world, a world he calls "tool-using." Postman (1992, p. 46) claims these people bore the "troublesome residue of a tool-using period." His assertion is that such residue had to be removed, and it was. When we move to technopoly, an authoritarian form of technocracy, alternatives are eliminated.

Yet it is possible that residue of earlier cultures will always remain in a technopolistic world. If so, such residue must be dealt with. Ellul suggests this in his most media-oriented work *Propaganda*. The reader must be aware that Ellul visualizes propaganda not as a specific, biased, communication phenomenon, but as an integral system of modern communication. As Real explains it, "Ellul redefines it (propaganda) as a universal condition which pervades all individual lives in industrially advanced societies"(Real, 1981, p. 110). Basically, technique becomes the determining factor in the flow of information. In this environment, preexisting ideologies cannot be ignored

altogether. Ellul claims that there will be times in the technological society when certain ideologies command belief among the masses and might be an obstacle to the goals of the technological state (Ellul, 1962, p. 197). Such ideologies might even provide the citizen with “criteria for judgment,” a phenomenon that would likely defeat efficiency. As Ellul sees it,

In this case the propagandist must be careful not to run head-on into a prevailing ideology, all he can do is: integrate it into his system, use some parts of it, deflect it, and so on. Secondly, he must ask himself whether the ideology, such as it is, can be used for his propaganda; whether it has psychologically predisposed an individual to submit to propaganda’s impulses. (p.198)

For Ellul, then, cultural residues are not eliminated in the technological society, but must be dealt with within the broader realm of propaganda. The mass media must occasionally adopt these residues and adapt them to their purposes.

#### Dialogic Analysis

Ellul is one of many modern scholars who have shown interest in the way the media deal with conflicting ideologies. Dialogism is a popular method of media analysis that examines this issue. Originally borrowed from the work of Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), dialogic analysis attempts to understand how “meaning is constructed socially through the interaction of a variety of languages that emanate from a given text” (Pany-Giles & Traudt, 1989, p. 147). Bakhtin’s vision of the novel insisted on an “interplay of dialogues” within a given social system (Hoy, 1992, p. 765). He used the term heteroglossia to refer to the multi-vocal characteristic of the medium.

Horace Newcomb (1984) was instrumental in introducing dialogism to mass media scholars. Working with Bakhtin’s original ideas, Newcomb claimed that television critics can study the utterances of characters within a program. Clearly, in any such product, there will be a variety of speakers. Just as a novel, it is considered dialogic because it is “shot through with many coinciding voices” (Shevtsova, 1992, p. 753). Each of these voices represents something. For example, in the world of television drama “each character responds to the central ideologies from a different perspective” (Newcomb, 1984, p. 41). In doing so, the characters create what Newcomb calls “character zones.” These character zones overlap and conflict, revealing much about the program as a whole. As Parry-Giles and Traudt (1991, p. 147) point out, one goal of dialogic analysis is to “discover how the utterance mixes and is changed by its conflict with other utterances.” Newcomb proposed that by examining these character zones and their interaction within the television program one could understand the hegemonic intention of the script. That is, one could determine the ideological orientation of the text as a whole.

Such a task is important from an Ellulian perspective. After all, our perception of characters in many ways has an impact on our perception of ourselves and our own world view. Ellul relates this closely to the role of propaganda.

From then on, the individual in the clutches of such sociological propaganda believes that those who live this way are on the side of the angels, and those who don’t are

bad; those who have this conception of society are right, and those who have another conception are in error. (Ellul, 1962, p. 65).

Which characters are confirmed and which are not thus becomes an important element in textual analysis. Beyond examining specific statements in a text, we must look at the conflict and resolution involving those statements. Ellul claims this is especially true of television as a medium, because of its tendency toward process rather than product. Viewers enter into the dialogue in such a way that “the possibility of reacting and criticizing is accordingly reduced” (Ellul, 1981, p. 360). Most television viewers, then, are unaware of these ideological dimensions of the text. The critic’s job is to help them become aware.

## Picket Fences

David Kelley, Producer of the television show *Picket Fences* was once quoted as saying “If we’re different from other shows, it isn’t that we’ve accented religion, but we have not pretended that it’s not there” (Broadway, 1994). Such a comment calls to mind Postman’s point that in technopoly, many television shows *do* pretend religion is not there. *Picket Fences* offers fruitful ground for dialogic analysis of religious imagery because it dares to recognize the continued existence of religious thought in our culture.

Appropriately enough, the episode of *Picket Fences* examined here begins with scenes of a Christmas caroling event in the town of Rome, Wisconsin, the normal setting for the weekly drama. As carolers sing “Away in a Manger,” the image cuts to a tight close-up of a snowball hitting a statue of Christ. Immediately, the local priest, Father Barrett, steps forward to confront Matthew Brock, the perpetrator. Barrett in a half serious way tells Matthew to be careful, lest he end up in a place “where there are no snowballs.” The boy’s mother, Jill Brock, happens to be a respected doctor in the small community, and asks Matthew, her oldest son, if he will behave and listen to the carols.

As the caroling scene continues, the director begins crosscutting to another location. Jimmy Brock, husband of Jill and the town sheriff, is busy pulling a car from an icy body of water. The crosscutting continues until the carolers finish their song and Jimmy Brock and his crew fail in their attempt to revive a young woman they have pulled out of the car. Jill Brock listens to the final words the carolers utter, her face showing a confused expression of contentment and concern. The scene fades to black and the title sequence rolls.

As the local coroner prepares for an autopsy of the accident victim, she shocks him by showing signs of life. The revival of Dana Marshall (to a comatose state) causes a stir in the small town, but that is just the start of the stirring. In speaking with the coroner, Jill Brock adds a new twist to the plot. Her examination has determined that Dana is four months pregnant.

The coroner objects. During his examination he found the young woman to be a virgin.

At this point a brief subplot is introduced. Snowball hurler Matthew Brock is in the process of telling his younger brother Zachary that there is no Santa Claus. He explains all the gory details. Parents sneak presents into the house, pilfer letters to Mr. Claus, and run other forms of interference. Christmas for Zack is not going to be what it used to be. But it is Christmas nonetheless, and the people of the town are very Quick to make a connection between Dana Marshall and the virgin birth of Jesus. Even the town clergy enter the discussion, though they try to keep things quiet until they can decide a course of action.

Uncertain about her own feelings about a putative miracle is Brock. She explains to husband (and Sheriff) Jimmy that her textbooks cannot possibly explain what she has seen. Maybe, it is a miracle. She's willing to consider that Others have already made up their minds. The coroner, Carter Pike, is immediately suspicious and begins searching for purely scientific explanations, including the possibility that a deluded religious girl might impregnate herself. Dana's gynecologist, Dr. Haber, objects. He is a religious man who does not discount a miraculous explanation. In addition, he takes offense at Pike's claim that religious people are prone to schizophrenia.

Jill feels caught in the middle. As a doctor she wants to adhere to the scientific view. As a member of a society with deep religious traditions, she does not want to discount the possibility of a miracle. Her discomfort is increased when the next major plot twist occurs. Dana Marshall starts experiencing medical complications as a result of the baby. Jill explains to Dana's father that there is little chance his daughter will survive if the pregnancy continues. And, there is no chance the baby will survive if Dana does not. The father recommends that Jill terminate the pregnancy. Since Dana cannot make a decision on her own, however, Jill must ask the local judge to decide the matter. Flamboyant local attorney Douglas Wambaugh takes the case to the judge. At this point the clergy step forward to request an injunction against the abortion. Still claiming agnosticism in regards to the deity of the unborn baby, they feel they must prevent its demise and they ask smooth-talking attorney Franklin Dell to plead their case. The judge agrees to a hearing on the issue.

When the hearing begins, Dr. Haber is brought to the stand and claims there is no medical explanation. On cross-examination, he claims that the fact that Dana was a virgin means the pregnancy must be supernatural. A quick edit to Jill Brock under examination by Wambaugh shows the difference between her and Dr. Haber. She does not see it as supernatural. But, the assertive Franklin Dell confronts her on this issue, asking her if she believes Mary experienced a virgin birth. Jill lowers her eyes and answers yes. Wambaugh confronts Doctors Brock and Haber outside the courtroom, claiming both neglected their medical duties to their patient Dana Matthews. Brock briefly claims that she merely told the truth. Haber, however, responds very defensively, claiming he is tired of having his religion trod upon. He then turns to Brock and denounces her, claiming that she was ashamed of her faith.

Here is where the major conflict of the show comes through. In Dana Marshall's hospital room, Jill Brock discusses the confrontation with her husband. "Do we really

believe in God?”, she asks. He briefly reassures her with an “Of course!” answer. But this doesn’t satisfy Jill. She recognizes that they “dance around religion.” They never confront it. Jimmy explains that he is sure of the presence of his belief, but not its nature. Given his uncertainty about some biblical tales, he finds it easiest to keep his distance from God, knowing he is out there, but “not getting in the same room with him.” Jill, stares at Dana, a patient for whom she can do nothing, and seems to wonder whether it might not be better to have God in the same room with her. She presumes that without a miracle it will be necessary to either abort the baby or watch mother and child slowly die.

Her faith in miracles is soon diminished, however. Further evidence (and a bit of deception) prove that Dr. Haber impregnated Dana. Jill asks Haber why he would do such a thing. He claims that his actions allowed people all over the world to regain hope. Even Jill, he says, received that hope.

With new information, the judge gives Dana’s father the go ahead to terminate the pregnancy. As Mr. Marshall discusses his hesitancy about such a move with Jill, Dana suddenly cries out, coming out of her coma. Her father exults in the occurrence, and Jill immediately calls in the technicians and their equipment. When she has a moment to stop and think, she speaks to Jimmy, explaining that such sudden changes are rare, but they do happen.

As the show concludes, the Brock family huddles together near their fireplace. They listen attentively as Jimmy reads a passage about the existence of Santa Claus. He warmly announces “Thank God, he lives. He lives forever. A thousand years from now, nay, ten times ten thousand years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood.” When the reading is completed, Zachary states “I like that ending.” Jimmy and Jill respond in agreement.

## **The Dialogic Nature of “Cross Examination”**

The opening shots of this episode forewarn the viewer about the acerbic nature of the dialogue within. Certainly a snowball striking an icon of Christ is dramatic enough to make the viewer realize this is no mild mannered Christmas special. More than this though, the opening sequence as a whole shows dialogue. One world is the old world of town squares with manger scenes and citizens gathered in a tradition. The other world is a high technology world with sounds of sirens, wenches, medical equipment and screaming voices. In one venue, carolers and their audience use candles to light their way through a centripetal community event. In the other, scuba divers and EMTs use electronic search lights in investigating a centrifugal event. The two scenes focus on two different sets of technology, and Postman argues that different technologies produce different thought worlds.

The focus of this show is the collision of those thought worlds. Jill Brock is in the path of the collision. Being placed between people who seem much more certain of their orientation toward religion, she is perplexed. She is presented with utterances from

several key characters which lead her to question her own world view. This element is a crucial part of dialogue of the show. Through the juxtaposition of Zachary's questions about Santa Claus and Jill's questions about her faith in God, we get a sense of her discomfort.

Another juxtaposition in the episode is the one between key characters who represent varying points on a religious-tech-nopolistic spectrum. The strongest alternatives in this episode are Dr. Haber and Carter Pike. These two stand as alternative world views Jill could consider. In Newcomb's terminology, they offer us clear character zones. Haber exemplifies one extreme. He is confident of his faith and seems willing to let it have an impact on his everyday life. His utterance suggests that God should play a major role in human affairs. This is demonstrated clearly in the closing arguments in the courtroom. Franklin Dell, the lawyer for the church states it succinctly.

**What has happened in this country that has made us so ashamed of believing in God? Politicians are schooled never to bring it up. Try saying a prayer in school and its 'Quick, call the ACLU!\* Oh no, it's all right to be religious. But for God's sake, keep it to yourself. Whatever you do, don't tell anybody. You'll be labeled a zealot, a ranting demagogue, an idiot. I'll tell you, judge, this country is in moral decay. Maybe if s time we stopped punishing people for bringing their religious and moral concerns into our public arenas.**

This basically reiterates the point Haber makes outside the courtroom when confronted by Wambaugh. In that utterance, Haber sounds as if he is pronouncing a creed. Basically, he disregards the advice of those Attorney Dell speaks of when he says "Whatever you do, don't tell anybody." Haber tells Wambaugh very succinctly what he believes. Jill watches him as he does.

We watch him also, wondering about the viability of this world view alternative. And, at this point in the show Haber is presented as a reasonable alternative. Peter Michael Goetz, who plays the role, is well groomed and portrays the character as amiable and conversant. For him, when the scientific perspective does not answer a question, he turns to religion for the answer.

Yet Haber's world view is eventually discredited, even if there is some cost in this discrediting. The show suggests that he really is a zealot, a ranting demagogue, an idiot. But, he was a demagogue who gave us hope. That is how he defends his actions as he is hauled off to jail. His view of God is one in which God intervenes in human affairs. The clergy in the episode are mandated to take this view and seem aware of that mandate. Yet they are fearful and distance themselves from the whole scenario as much as possible.

When Haber is whisked away, his utterance goes with him. The audience is no longer led to perceive his ideology as a reasonable one. The next scene is in the judge's chambers, where Coroner Carter Pike takes over the dialogue. His utterance is dominant. He doubted the miraculous all along and proclaims he was proven correct in his belief that everything was to be explained by modern science and technology. When

Wambaugh and Sheriff Brock had nearly given up on finding a scientific explanation for the events, Pike had not. He stated. "If that judge finds this could be divine, we look like fools. We can't give up." Any explanation beyond the natural, is unacceptable within this character zone.

Pike's utterance, then, is a stark contrast to Haber's. It rules out the possibility of the miraculous altogether. Though the technological society finds this cold rationality appealing, it is not without its problems. In this case, Jill and her specialists sit next to Dana Marshall's bed feeling helpless. Once Pike determines that the pregnancy is not miraculous, he is content. Yet Jill is not. For her, the pain of watching an innocent young girl and her unborn child suffer is valid reason to question the detached logic of a mechanistic world. At one point in the script she seems to realize that there are times when the only thing she can do is pray. Yet such prayer would deny the utterance of Carter Pike, a technological utterance devoid of spirituality.

Such denial comes in the next scene. Dana's father has consistently been portrayed as a devoutly religious man. Yet near the end of the script he has been swayed by the technological utterance. He looks at his daughter hooked up to the latest medical equipment and seems to have been convinced by the evidence Carter Pike presented. This puts him in contrast with Haber, who was the man of hope. This contrast is starkly demonstrated when in the first line of his final scene Mr. Marshall asks "There's no real hope, is there?" Jill, confirms the position with a simple "No." Haber's utterance held hope but was dismissed. Pike's general orientation is presented as logical, but is presented as hopeless and therefore not desirable. Nobody wants to live in a world without hope.

But Jill and Mr. Marshall are not left to reside in this world. When the miraculous recovery occurs with two minutes left in the story, they are given one more opportunity for hope. Though they have discounted the possibility of seeing God as personal and close, they do not want him too far away. If he chooses to work a miracle or two, all the better. Jill, in the end, seems to embrace her husband's brand of religion.

That this leaves the Brock family in a certain ideological state is demonstrated in the scene that immediately follows, the family sharing in the reading of a story about Santa. Just as Zachary has been convinced that a certain form of belief in Santa is a good *thing*, Jill has been convinced that a certain form of belief in God is a good thing. This message is not only demonstrated in the script, but also with the title of the episode. Herein, "Cross examination" has less to do with the courtroom maneuverings than it does the theological elements of the show. After all, the title is not the legal term "Cross-examination" (which would be almost meaningless since many of the show's episodes contain a courtroom scene), it is "Cross Examination." For Jimmy Brock, Christian belief in general poses no problems. He states that much when speaking to Jill. Yet specific elements of belief are stumbling blocks for him. The biggest stumbling block might not be the birth of Christ, but the cross of Christ. A person can easily bear with a story of a virgin birth 2000 years ago. It is very easy to conceptualize the story in such a way that it has no direct impact on our lives. The

crucifixion, however, calls into question deeper theological issues of human sin and the need for propitiation. For someone like Jimmy Brock, the cross is an offense.

In this light, the first and the last scenes in the episode make perfect bookends and help us make sense of the hegemony of intention. The Brock children's actions in the very first scene are part of the battle between mother and father. Matthew's snowball didn't collide with the icon of the baby Jesus in a manger. It collided with the icon of the adult Jesus on the cross. A close look at the brief shot shows a bearded Jesus with his thorn-crowned head sagging. The presence of such an image might be unacceptable for a person (such as Jimmy) who wants to keep God at a distance. Though Jill was present at the religious event with the children—hoping to enjoy the moment—Jimmy was absent. In the children, the wishes of both parents are manifest. They are present, but they are fighting certain elements of it.

By the end of the episode we discover that this show is about striking a balance. This balance is between a religious faith that invites God to interact with us on a daily basis, and an atheism that says there is no God. The show seems to suggest that something in the middle of these two extremes is comfortable. In the first scene, there are too many images that allow God to get close. For example, the words of the Christmas carol "Away in a Manger" refer not only to the birth of Christ, but the lordship of Christ. Moreover, as noted earlier, the statue of the crucified Jesus brings Christian soteriology into the dialogue in a way that the baby Jesus might not. The less offensive the symbol, the closer it is to the middle position to which this episode points.'

[;] This is manifest in the final scene, a scene God and Christmas have been sterilized. As the Brocks gather around the fire, there are no strongly religious visual images in the room. Rather than carolers singing "Away in a Manger," a canned, instrumental version of "Silent Night" plays. Basically, the words have (or in Christian theology, the Word has) been removed from the message. This is not an uncommon occurrence in the media of the technological world. Ellul suggests that a contradictory cultural element must be dealt with. One option is to "obliterate it or disguise it". Another is to "interpret it in such a way that we can fit it without harm into an understanding that has an answer for every thing"(Ellul, 1989, p. 33). Both of those tactics seem present here. The Brocks are presented as being very comfortable with this view of God and religion. Their "yeah" responses to Zack's affirmation to the message on the eternal nature of Santa Claus is really an "amen," the acceptance of the creed of their religion.

In Postman and Ellul's views of the technological world, this is what one might expect. Granted, the former seems to mitigate the persistent lingering of the residue of earlier cultures in his analysis. Religion is still a factor to be dealt with. But Postman does seem correct in suggesting that religion is assaulted by technopoly. He would probably agree with Frank-lin Dell who claims "This country not only trivializes religion today. It scorns it" Postman's more accurate judgment is on the meaning of cultural elements and how they can shift. In this instance one can clearly see that the religion the Brocks



cling to at the end of the program is very different from the religion which is discussed through much of the episode. Given our dialogic analysis, the implication is that the audience should sympathize with such a shift

Such sympathy is part of the *-weltanschauung* of the technological world. Ellul suggests that audience affinity for certain characters is a predictable element of the entire communicative phenomenon. Much of his work deals with conformity in the modern world.

**To act in conformity with collective beliefs provides security and a guarantee that one acts properly. Propaganda reveals this consonance to the individual, renders the collective belief perceptible, conscious, and personal for him. It gives him a good conscience by making him aware of the collectivity of beliefs. (Ellul, 1965, p. 200)**

This “good conscience” is not proper in some metaphysical sense, only in a cultural sense. What Ellul is suggesting is that this is one more example of our tendency to fall into place in the technological world. He would argue that in a technological world where efficiency and standardization are the driving forces, a religious view such as the Brocks’ does not pose problems. Other views might. To clarify this, we can note that when Franklin Dell steps out of his role as a litigator and openly questions the implications of the court case in which he is involved (and the possibility the second coming is imminent), he recognizes that not all forms of religion are equally beneficent. He reminds the pastor and the priest that if the baby is the son of God, the current political and social systems might not fare well. In his own words, “We’d have to deny him. Otherwise the world order would crumble.” Though readers might not necessarily agree with all of Ellul’s theological arguments, they must admit (as Dell does in his moment of honest reflection) that some forms of religious belief are more problematic for the modern technopolistic state than others. If they are problematic, one would expect the media to question, if not denigrate them. Such is what appears to happen here. Though this is only one example of such, the analysis above suggests that using the ideas of Ellul to analyze the mass media depiction of religion is a worthy task. ’

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# 10th Anniversary Forum: The Influence of Ellul

## Jacques Ellul's Web

by Joyce Hanks

When I have explored the question "How did you discover what you wanted to concentrate on in your research?" with friends, I have found that most of them came to their primary interest through reading related to university course work, usually in graduate school. But Jacques Ellul studies seem to constitute a case apart. Many of us in the United States first read Ellul at the suggestion of a friend who had found him stimulating. Or life-changing. *The Presence of the Kingdom* got many of us started back in the 1970's. Reading one of Ellul's books led to several more, and then to an attempt to lay hands on *everything* he had written.

An enormous bibliographical effort often resulted, leading to contact with other avid Ellul readers who were also trying to find more. My trajectory has differed from that of others mainly in two ways: I never managed to wind down my bibliographic search, and I had a background in French studies. Familiarity with the French language and French libraries has made it easier for me to trade down and read obscure articles by and about Ellul, as well as books of his that were available only in French.

Like so many other people, I continue to "devour" Ellul eagerly, and to give him priority in my research efforts. I can see positive and negative reasons for this persistence. Negatively, my efforts to continue giving papers and publishing in my original research field (French Renaissance poetry) have met with all kinds of frustration. Poetry seems to be currently "out" (although Renaissance studies generally continue to enjoy a good deal of success), so that feedback on papers given at conferences proves nearly nonexistent. Current critical trends in literature seem to have polarized scholars to such an extent that satisfying one editor or referee inevitably involves alienating another. And I have often asked myself if publishing in my original field really adds much to knowledge. Significant knowledge. Working on Ellul has given me a new set of priorities.

On the positive side, I continue to study and publish on Ellul because of continued requests for updates of my bibliography on him, and because he has become so thoroughly central to my thinking. Childhood influences aside, I believe no one has influenced me like he has. Almost everything I read causes me to make mental "notes

in the margin” based on Ellul’s thought, and he elbows his way into an increasing proportion of my conversations.

How does he manage to touch on almost everything? I think he has done it by going “under the surface of the ocean,” to the deep currents, to use his image for what lies under most of our thinking. These normally unexamined presuppositions affect just about everything that takes place “topside.” An example: shortly after Christmas 1997, as I read a review of the philosopher Thomas Nagel’s *The Last Word* (Oxford University Press), I found myself thinking again about the whole matter of objectivity, as Ellul understands it. Rather like Nagel, he considers that we do not have the ability to adopt some sort of “neutral” stance with regard to every issue (“unqualified” thinking, in Nagel’s terms). But we can recognize our biases, and have confidence in our thinking when we make allowances for these preconceptions.

Although Nagel might not recognize this simplified summary of part of his book, I found it reassuring to recognize Ellul’s conclusions in the work of another thinker. And I found additional reasons for agreeing with Ellul on this important issue.

I do not always agree with him, of course. During interviews that he allowed me to record, mainly during the 1980’s, I sometimes attempted to challenge his ideas. I never got very far, but neither did he convince me to change my mind! A case in point: Simone de Beauvoir. I had read a great deal of her mammoth output when I first ran across a slur in one of Ellul’s books. The slur turned into what sounded like a sneer when I asked him about her, and he remained unimpressed, in spite of all I could think to put forward about her importance in establishing the dignity of women. As often proved to be the case, our difference of opinion on this occasion stemmed from historical and sociological roots. Ellul was likewise concerned for women’s dignity, but also wanted to offer a counterweight to French popular opinion that he believed simply bowed to Beauvoir as an admired figure, without examining the content of her thought. I was eager to recognize her influence in establishing the importance of women, but did not feel overawed by her reputation. I continue to teach Beauvoir regularly in French literature and culture courses, and see no reason, at least not so far, to let Ellul’s reasoning affect my appreciation of her contribution. On the contrary, the more I read of her work, the more pivotal she seems.

One of my primary interests in the development of Ellul’s thought centers around World War II and the period leading up to it. I cannot fathom how he grasped the dangers of fascism so early, with such certainty, especially when one considers the fascination it held for many other thinking people in French society at the time. His writings on the subject shine with amazing foresight and clarity, and he does not hesitate to write some “I told you so” articles after the war.

I have interviewed everyone I could find who knew Ellul in the pre-war era, or who had reason to know something about his thinking from that period. So far, none of the suggested answers to my questions about his insight into the true nature of nazism seem to ring true, or to offer an adequate explanation for his understanding. I remain

“stumped,” at least until I broaden my perspective by absorbing more background on the intellectual and political atmosphere in Europe prior to World War II.

even talk of republishing Ellul’s complete works. Some days, I think work on his bibliography will never end. Nor would I want it to.

Ellul’s seminal concepts refuse to remain confined within our convenient categories. The same weekend I read the review of Nagel’s new book mentioned above, I found my *thinking* revolving around Ellul during an adult Bible study at church. Oddly enough, my thoughts had no apparent connection with Ellul’s theological concepts, important as I believe them to be. We were studying one of Jeremiah’s many prophecies of disaster: “If you do this, the result will be that,” the prophet predicted. My mind moved to the same general pattern as we find it in Ellul on Technique: “If you do this, the result will be that,” he so often wrote.

Specifically, I began wondering about my rather uncritical enthusiasm regarding the use of the Internet: so convenient, so quick. I keep in touch with so many people I didn’t seem to be able to, formerly. Problems can be resolved so readily, decisions made without delay. But, “If you do this, the result will be that”—including writing with no forethought, not to mention without care or style, writing as a quick means to a sure end, without nuance—or even diacritical marks! For the sake of speed and convenience, have I, have we, begun to eliminate a facet of life we had good reason to preserve, namely careful writing of letters? Ellul calls us to question new patterns, rather than slipping into them unthinkingly. Before I began to listen to him, I did not reflect on such matters. I took my place, expectantly, as a child of my century, submitting to its influences, considering them as inevitable “progress.” Jeremiah took my thoughts in many directions that day, but at least one of them constituted a response to Ellul’s call.

Ellul’s thought *forms* a kind of World Wide Web unto itself. You can enter this web at an unbelievable number of points, and it may lead you in directions seemingly unrelated to your point of entry. One idea connects with another, and ultimately relates to a vast array, touching most of the important facets of life and thought. Since I first found myself in this particular web, I have not been able to stop making connections.

Some of those connections involve new people. In part because of the Ellul bibliography, hardly a week goes by without someone e-mailing or writing me with an Ellul question: do I have a certain Ellul book, do I know where he wrote about a given topic, do I have names of people interested in Ellul in this country or that? I should not have been surprised, then, when the September 1997 conference at The Pennsylvania State University on “Education Technology: Asking the Right Questions” attracted more than 200 people, most of them apparently readers of Ellul. But I was amazed to find so many of us gathered in one place, with Ellul central to so many of the papers given, and with Ellul-talk filling the conversation over every meal (contact Christopher Dufour, Continuing and Distance Education, The Pennsylvania State University, 225 Penn State Conference Center Hotel, University Park PA 16802-7002, for information on the soon-to-be-published papers from the conference).

My experience at Penn State encourages me to believe that Ellul's ability to clarify and stimulate thinking has not diminished since his death in 1994. On the contrary, his web keeps spreading more widely, touching more and more people. Books and articles about him continue to be written, the second posthumous book by Ellul has just been published in French, another Penn State conference is planned for 1999, and there is

## My Encounter with Jacques Ellul

Bill Vanderburg

My encounter with Jacques Ellul began with the reading of his book *The Technological Society*. I had purchased it at the recommendation of an acquaintance but did not read it until I had to make some important decisions. While I was a doctoral student, a good deal of time was spent with some fellow students discussing the implications of the Club of Rome Report and the environmental crisis. It appeared to me at the time that the very possibility of serious resource crises or an environmental collapse would force our civilization to rethink its steps. The implications for my profession were clearly immense: the engineering, management and regulation of modern technology would have to change fundamentally. To explore the possible nature of these changes, I decided to continue my studies in technology on the post-doctoral level via the social sciences and humanities to see what these disciplines knew about technology that I in my profession would have to become more knowledgeable about

I began reading *The Technological Society* to see if Jacques Ellul might be a possible mentor for my post-doctoral work. After reading about a chapter and a half, I had a powerful intuition that I had found the person I was looking for. However, the encounter was not without ambivalence. On the one hand, the description of technique corresponded exactly to my experiences in the world of engineering. On the other hand, it implied a critique of the technical mind-set that I had spent many years in acquiring. This was rather depressing, because I had always been considered the "philosopher" in the Faculty and had received a great deal of support and encouragement from the assistant dean and the academic vice-president. *The Technological Society* was telling me that the problems were not merely "out there" but that I was an integral part of the technical mind-set and spirit that dominate our age.

My letter of enquiry as to the possibility of studying with Ellul received a negative reply. He explained to me that he would welcome the possibility of working with an engineer, but that he was already so over-committed that he did not dare to take on yet another project. In the meantime, I had received a post-doctoral fellowship from the only non-military committee of NATO, The Committee for Challenges to a Democratic Society. Hence I wrote Ellul again, offering to limit the time I would request of him to seven hours a year on the assumption that, by auditing all his courses, I could probably figure out most of what I needed to know by myself. He accepted, and we packed our

bags to move to Pessac where we spent four and a half years, during which time I rethought everything I had learned.

Upon my return to Canada, I had in my pocket one job offer — if it might be called that — from the University of Toronto to teach a course on technology and contemporary society in the sociology department, a course on the relationship between society and engineering for the Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Technology (a service course to engineering students), and a teaching assistantship in a full-year course on the history of technology. It was a foot in the door, which eventually led to the creation of a new tenured position to develop that part of engineering education which deals with technology-society-environment interactions and their implications for engineering theory and practice. Five years later, I received tenure and at the same time became the founding Director of the Centre for Technology and Social Development.

The mission of the Centre was simple: to reach engineering students to take into account social and environmental considerations along with technical and economic ones so as to make technology as compatible as possible with human life, society and the biosphere — what I now call preventive approaches. I developed from scratch three undergraduate courses and two graduate courses that would give students a conceptual framework for understanding how technology as an integral part of technique is embedded in, interacts with and depends on human life, society and the biosphere, and to use this understanding in their design and decision-making.

What does my conceptual framework and professional approach owe to Jacques Ellul? First, an iconoclastic attitude to science in the sense that it knows things only through abstraction, that is, out of their usual context and in the intellectual context of a specific discipline and, where applicable, in a laboratory. There is no science of the sciences capable of producing a comprehensive understanding of our world and the forces that shape it. Science, like all other human creations, has its place but the limitations of scientific knowing are rarely recognized. Ellul's scholarship includes science, but goes well beyond it in recognizing that human life and society cannot be understood in a piecemeal fashion one discipline at a time. I have tried to illuminate this aspect of Ellul's thought through my book *The Growth of Minds and Cultures*. I can still recall his first reaction after reading it. "Have I not said all of this already?" I could not say I had read all of his work so I asked him for the appropriate references. Thinking for a moment, he said that there were none. What we finally agreed on was that, without a doubt, my theory of culture was implicit in all his work but that nowhere had he made it explicit. His concern was that the book was too systematic and could possibly be assimilated by the "system" to create even more powerful techniques — a problem he had encountered with some of his own writings.

As the Hennebach Visiting Professor at the Colorado School of Mines this year, I have a lot of time to write and hope to complete the second and third volumes of my series entitled *Technique and Culture*. These develop two themes. The first is what can be done with preventive approaches for the engineering, management and regulation of

modern technology to resolve or reduce the many problems humanity currently faces. The second theme deals with what cannot be resolved in this way, namely the influence of technique on human life and society, and ponders what else must be done to make modern civilization more sustainable with respect to the biosphere and with respect to human life itself.

In terms of seeking the best possible understanding of where our most powerful creations of the second half of the twentieth century are taking human life and modern civilization, I believe the thought of Jacques Ellul is second to none for our age. I am not at all sure that it will be recognized as such. One of the reasons may well be his iconoclasm of technique, but I hardly think this is the whole story. In describing individual and collective human life as best he could for the second half of the twentieth-century, Ellul, like other great thinkers who attempted this for their times, goes where science cannot follow. This is because making any claim of alienation or reification implies a norm that human life was meant to be different. This is equally true for the work of Karl Marx and Max Weber, but I believe Ellul goes further than either one of them. The reason I believe this to be the case is that Ellul is much more iconoclastic towards his own position as a person of his time, place and culture. For example, in the case of Karl Marx, if one proceeds to eliminate the great myths (in the sense of cultural anthropology) of progress, work and happiness that dominated Western civilization during the nineteenth century, his entire work comes apart at the seams. Why would the fifth stage in human history be better than the fourth? Why would a political revolution improve the human condition? Why should the characteristics of technology magically change when it is publicly rather than privately owned?

To be iconoclastic with respect to your own culture by means of which you make sense of and live in the world is like cutting the ground from underneath your feet. Of course, this can not be done in an absolute sense, for then we would cease to be people of our time, place and culture. However, even attempting to do so requires what I do not hesitate to call a spiritual struggle that is extremely difficult (I cannot help speculating that Max Weber's long illness had a great deal to do with what he was describing about the human condition). The few people who I regard as having a good understanding of Ellul's work have themselves gone through this iconoclastic journey with respect to their being people of their time, place and culture. It tends to force us toward the periphery of our intellectual disciplines, professions, and institutions and also marginalizes us in our personal lives away from our political, ethical and religious roots. It is like attempting to grow new roots without being able to shed the existing ones.

This aspect of Ellul's life and work was clearly evident in his approach to teaching. In his course on Marx (and only those readers who appreciate the French cultural setting will be able to understand the implications of what I am saying), Ellul stated in his introductory lecture that he recognized that everyone in that room had a position on Marx. He expressed the hope that, when they were finished with the course, they would know better why they held the position they did, and why they could not accept



alternative ones. In other words, as a young French person, it was essential to think through your own life and its commitments of whatever kind with respect to what Marx had to say. There had to be a measure of iconoclasm with respect to one's own position. Otherwise, it would be impossible to understand Marx.

In the Bible studies he organized for students who had approached him with existential difficulties, Ellul proceeded in much the same way. The ideal composition of a group, he told me, would be one quarter agnostics, one quarter Jews, one quarter Catholics and one quarter Protestants. (Today, he would have probably added another group). To my amazement, he pretty much was able to have that mix during the years I was there. The study of the Bible demanded a certain iconoclasm with respect to one's own traditions, profoundly influenced as these are by the spirit of our age. The challenge of the text to all of us, regardless of our commitments, was to be iconoclastic but not to fall into relativism or nihilism. On the contrary, what is demanded is what in secular terms may be expressed as the recognition, in the sense of cultural anthropology, that human life during a particular historical epoch is rooted in myths, and that this cannot be otherwise. In terms of the Judaep-Christian tradition, it is a constant struggle not to bow down to idols or, to put this in more contemporary language, not to be alienated or reified by one's own culture and the spirit of one's age.

I think I can safely say that my intellectual life is unthinkable now without the work of Jacques Ellul. I have sought to build on that work in general, and on its iconoclasm with respect to science and technique in particular, so as to find ways in engineering that can help create some play in the present system. Hopefully this may contribute to the mutation that many recognize is essential. I know there are others who struggle in much the same way with their own profession and their roots. As I already mentioned, this struggle necessarily marginalizes those who engage in it. However, there appears no place or opportunity deliberately and consciously designed to facilitate the sharing of these intellectual, professional and personal ventures. We have all heard about invisible colleges and their fundamental role in the development of science. In closing, I will argue that all of us stand much to lose if we somehow, in the very near future, do not establish an invisible college within which we can each flourish in our endeavours through communication, critical reflection and sharing. I am obviously not thinking of a learned society, not anything that would directly look good on our curricula vitae (if you happen to be a professor or teacher), but a completely informal group where people discuss the intellectual and existential struggles in which they are engaged. At present, there is no such grassroots association, yet I believe that on this tenth anniversary this is what should happen.

# Ellul and the Sentinel on the Wall

Marva J. Dawn

A chance remark to John H. Yoder, my dissertation /jkdiretor atthe Universityof Notre Dame, changed my Ay^Hife in more ways than I can enumerate here. I had just read Jacques Ellul's *The Ethics of Freedom* and mentioned to John that Ellul's comments in that volume about the biblical notion of the principalities and powers intrigued me. John answered that this was a subject that needed much more study — and the rest is, as they say, history. I had planned to do my dissertation On economic redistribution, but that moment led me to exchange this for Ellul's insights into contemporary manifestations of the powers. The requirements of dissertation writing compelled me to read as much of Ellul as possible; his incredible grasp of things, in turn, propelled me into numerous changes of thinking, working, and living.

## Principalities and Powers

The extent of Ellul's influence on my life and work can't even begin to be indicated by the fact that my notes from his publications and my own writings about him Ell a branch of my computer hard disk with almost 6 million bytes, not counting books of mine on other subjects, yet heavily impacted by his insights. Though ultimately not the most important, the most comprehensive element of that influence is his insight into the biblical notion of the powers. The section, "Freedom in Relation to the Powers," in *The Ethics of Freedom* lists the following possibilities of interpretation for biblical passages about principalities:

Are they demons in the most elemental and traditional sense? Are they less precise power? (thrones and dominions?) which still have an existence, reality, and, as one might say, objectivity of their own? Or do we simply have a disposition of man which constitutes this or that human factor a power by exalting it as such...? In this case the powers are not objective realities which influence man from without They exist only as the determination of man which allows them to exist in their subjugating otherness and transcendence. Or finally, at the far end of the scale, are the powers simply a figure of speech common to the Jewish-Hel-lenistic world so that they merely represent cultural beliefs and have no true validity?<sup>1</sup>

Ellul situates himself somewhere between the second and third interpretations, for these reasons:

On the one side, I am fully convinced with Barth and Cullmann that the New Testament *exousiai* and the power of money personified as Mammon correspond to authentic, if spiritual, realities which are independent of man's decision and inclination and whose force does not reside in the man who constitutes them. Nothing that I have read to the contrary has had any great cogency for me. Neither the appeal to Gnosticism nor reference to the cultural background seems to me to explain the force

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<sup>1</sup> trans, and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), pp. 151-2. Page references to this book are given parenthetically in the following text I have chosen not to muddy quotations by changing Ellul's use of 'man' to inclusive language.

and emphasis of the New Testament writers in this area, in particular the opposite view has to follow the common practice of ignoring certain essential passages where Paul cannot be adequately demythologized ,

On the other side, however, the powers do not act simply from outside after the manner of Gnostic destiny or a *deus ex machina*. They are characterized by their relation to the concrete world of man. According to the biblical references they find expression in human, social realities, in the enterprises of man. In this sense the occasion of their intervention is human decision and action... [T]he world of which the New Testament speaks is not just a spiritual and abstract reality but one which is identical with what man in general calls the world, i.e., society (152).

Specifically, Ellul asserts that the way in which the powers transform “a natural, social, intellectual, or economic reality into a force which man has no ability either to resist or to control” and the way in which this force “gives life and autonomy to institutions and structures” or “attacks man both inwardly and outwardly” and “alienates man by bringing him into the possession of objects” correspond to biblical passages such as Ephesians 6:12 (152-3). Consequently, Ellul continues as follows:

Political power has many dimensions, e.g., social, economic, psychological, ethical, psycho-analytical, and legal. But when we have scrutinized them all, we have still not apprehended its reality. I am not speaking hastily or lightly here but as one who has passed most of his life in confrontation with their question and in their power. We cannot say with Marx that the power is an ideological superstructure, for it is always there. The disproportion noted above leads me to the unavoidable conclusion that another power intervenes and indwells and uses political power, thus giving it a range and force that it does not have in itself.

The same is true of money ...[and] technology (153-4).

Ellul's own insistence that he speaks out of a lifelong confrontation with the question of the powers raised for me the issue of how this notion was manifested in his immense and diverse corpus. Especially by means of some of his earliest writings in which he links spiritual causes with economic and political problems, I discovered that from the beginning Ellul's separate tracks of theology and *sociologie* had a profoundly deep connection, that the biblical notion of “the principalities and powers” is that correlating link. His sociological assessments of the all-encompassing influence of such contemporary forces as technology, politics, and economics undergird the intensity of his ethical calls to Christians to be “sentinels on the walls” recognizing and warning of the dangers. Ellul wanted the hope and grace of his theology to be related to the concrete situation of the powers at work in the world. On the other hand, he insisted that only on the basis of true freedom through faith was he “able to hold at arm's length these powers which condition and crush me... [and to] view them with an objective eye that freezes and externalizes and measures them...” (228-33). One of the goals

of my dissertation, consequently, was to demonstrate how the concept of “the powers” thoroughly grounded — and thereby could help us understand -Ellul’s thinking.<sup>2</sup>

In my work of leading clergy conferences transdenominationally I have found that pastors and other church leaders find this “principalities and powers” language extremely helpful for understanding the forces that make their work difficult—such as the passivity fostered in our culture when persons are bombarded by such large amounts of information that they feel incapacitated or immobilized?<sup>3</sup> Learning that the obstructions to ministry are not mere “flesh and blood” (Eph. 6:12), but larger forces often interrelated enables my colleagues to ask better questions to discern what is inimical to the gospel, what should be resisted, what can be modified. The terminology also provides immense hope, since Christians believe that Christ has triumphed over the powers by exposing and disarming them; my teaching and writing can thus offer not only the unmasking of such forces, but also biblical tools for standing against them.<sup>4</sup>

### **Money as *Mammon***

Ellul’s insights into the principalities have not only undergirded my teaching; his perceptions have also shaped my personal life. Though I had already been asking critical questions about such forces as technology and money in my daily life, Ellul’s article, “L’Argent,” and its larger development in the book, *Money and Powers*, influenced my decisions about my salary and book royalties. In these works Ellul insists that money becomes a god in more ways than we customarily realize. I had always thought that I was safe from its seductions since I didn’t have too much (to be, therefore, tempted to hoard it), nor too little (and thus tempted to chase after it). Money, I presumed, was an area of life over which I had sufficient control.

But Ellul blasted me out of that complacency with his discernment that we sometimes sacralize money by being such a good steward of it that we aren’t generous. I felt compelled to go to the person whose Study carrel was next to mine and whose husband was unemployed to ask her if she would help me desacralize what remained in my grocery budget that month by taking it off my hands. She answered that she would never have accepted my gift (it was only \$10) if I had offered it as such, but that she would gladly help me de-divinize that money. The delight and laughter of the occasion helped me recognize the freedom inherent in Ellul’s astuteness.

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<sup>2</sup> See Marva J. Dawn, “The Concept of ‘the Principalities and Powers’ in the Works of Jacques Ellul” (Notre Dame: PhD. dissertation, 1992) and also Marva J. Dawn, trans, and ea., *Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul that Set the Stage* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997). The commentary in the latter attempts to overcome some of the barriers to reading Ellul’s work and to introduce new readers to Ellul’s larger corpus .

<sup>3</sup> See Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1985) and *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Marva J. Dawn, *Is It a Lost Cause? Having die Heart of God for the Church’s Children* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997).

Now married to a man who shares my desire to desacralize money, I experience the same freedom in not requiring more income than his work as an elementary school teacher provides. Not needing royalties, which are given away, I can write books out of passionate concern for the Christian community and without cares about the market. The Board of “Christians Equipped for Ministry,” under which I freelance, similarly shares Ellul’s perspective and helps decide Where our income tithes should be sent and to which places, such as Mexico and Poland, I can go to serve for free. Of course, Ellul was primarily concerned with economics on the global scale, but his constant invitation to “act locally” invites each of us to counteract the world’s constantly expanding “need” for more stuff and larger incomes (to prove our worth?) by de-divinizing money in our own lives and in our churches.

## The Subversion of Christianity

The work that I had already been doing as a freelancer was confirmed and intensified as a result of Ellul’s works on faith and ecclesiology — works which have not received due attention, perhaps because of his penchant for overstating his case to make a point. Particularly *The Presence of the Kingdom* (and *False Presence*) and *The Subversion of Christianity* heightened my efforts to encourage pastors to resist the unbiblical advice of the church marketers and the economic and political pressures that pervert the gospel — though I disagree with how Ellul in the latter book limits his definition of the powers to six functions in a way that contradicts his earlier elaborations, especially in *Money and Power*.

My disagreement on that issue also aided in developing for me a new independence in my scholarship; not having any real mentors for the kind of work that I do, I had often experienced difficulty previously relying on my own work when I found myself objecting to ideas or methods in thinkers whom I trusted. Ellul’s constant insistence that he didn’t want “disciples,” but that he intended to motivate more thorough thinking gave me permission to protest his conclusions while still acknowledging my intellectual inferiority.

One of the main weaknesses in Ellul’s work is his lack of attention to the Christian community — a weakness that he blamed, in conversation, on his own bad experiences with Church bureaucracy. Convinced that the deficiency of true community is a major source of churches’ lifelessness, efforts to equip church leaders with biblical resources for building it comprise a principal portion of my teaching and writing.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> “L’Argent,” *Etudes Theologiques et Religieuses* 27,4 (1952), 29-66, and *Money and Power*, trans. LaVonne Neff (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Marva J. Dawn, *Truly die Community: Romans 12 and How to Be die Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992).

## Hermeneutics

Ellul's widely ranging books on biblical texts accentuated my need to discern when I can agree with him (or, more exactly, when his astuteness opens texts for me in entirely new ways!) and when he stretches texts beyond faithfulness to their intent to make his point I can't say that Ellul's book on the *Apocalypse* affected my own writing on the subject since my book was fleshed out (though the final polishing took twelve years!) before I read his, but his attention to large themes rather than to precise interpretations of minute symbols seemed to support my own approach to the book as a perfect vehicle for encouraging those who suffer handicaps and chronic illness.<sup>7</sup>

Ellul's biblical books which influenced me most were *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man* (on II Kings), *The Meaning of the City*, and *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes*. The first is one of the finest expositions of the dialectical tension between God's sovereignty and human free will that I have ever found, and the second awakened me to the broad sweep of God's grieving over the rebelliousness of human beings which I had never before seen in connection with all the scattered references to cities in the biblical narratives.

Ellul's book on Ecclesiastes has become helpful for my critique of postmodernism in that Ellul deconstructed the myth of progress from *within* the metanarrative of the Bible. His "Preliminary, Polemical, Non-definitive Postscript" joins his "Notes innocentes sur la 'question hermeneutique,'"<sup>8</sup> in reproaching those exegetes who judge the text instead of letting

it judge them. I first read the latter article at a time when I was deeply disturbed by the ways academia so often begins studying biblical texts with a presupposition against their credibility. Since I serve the Church rather than academia, I see the destruction of such extreme "hermeneutics of suspicion" (which often become instead "henneheutics" of blatant rejection), and I find that pastors especially need the encouragement of Ellul's insistence for our hermeneutical methods that we cannot understand anything of *any* Signified whatever it might be, "if [we] do not receive and believe the Revealed [One]."<sup>9</sup>

## Doing Ethics as a Lutheran

In the field of ethics Ellul primarily influenced me by making clear the reason that Lutherans (the tradition in which I was raised) have not been particularly good at doing ethics.-In his insistence that we must have an ethics of freedom and in' his claim

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<sup>7</sup> See Marva J. Dawn, *Joy in our Weakness: A Gift of Hope from die Book of Revelation* (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1994). -

<sup>8</sup> The latter is published in *L'Evangile, trier et aujourd'hui: Melanges offerts auprofesseur Franz J. Leehardt* (Geneve: Editions Labor et Tides. 1968), pp. 181-190, and translated in *Sources and Trajectories*, pp. 184-203.

<sup>9</sup> *Sources*, p. 192.

that we destroy ethics by turning it into a system Ellul is especially faithful to Martin Luther and antagonistic to his Calvinist roots. If we begin with grace and understand questions of ethics as Holy Spirit-inspired responses to that grace, then it is impossible to legislate moral behaviour.

Consequently, as I presently work on my own ethics textbook, I am developing a model of nurturing Christian character by means of immersion in the biblical narratives so that moral behavior will be the (unlegislated and unsystematized) result. Ellul's influence will be apparent throughout, though, at the current stage, I am only wishing that I could produce books as quickly as he did.<sup>10</sup>

## Meeting Ellul

Finally, I must comment on the influence of meeting Ellul personally in the summer of 1987. I had already been surprised by his graciousness in responding to the letters of an unknown graduate student and was further amazed that he would take the time to meet with me. Due to his decline in health, he had written that he would limit the time of our conversation, but then when that time was spent he continued to talk and afterward his lovely wife served raspberries from their garden. Some of my Ellulian colleagues seemed to be frustrated with me that I did not spend my time asking Ellul about his future writing projects, but for me it was far more valuable to discuss his life patterns rather than his work (although we did do some of that, especially concerning his ideas about the principalities and powers). Professor Ellul asked questions about my work, too—especially about some articles I had written on teaching ethics to children in Lutheran schools. This stands out in my memory because for me Ellul served as such an excellent model of a profound scholar who is also able to relate well to other people. Concerning the common split in theologians between the head and the heart he said, “it is contrary to the Gospel.”

We talked about many practical issues that day — the situation in South Africa, the ecology movement, U.S. intervention in Nicaragua, caring for the poor and the handicapped, euthanasia. As would be expected, Ellul stressed the importance of avoiding propaganda and political games, of thinking about each problem as a whole (thinking globally), and of seeing what we can modify practically in our own communities. He urged the U.S. to fight with economic justice rather than armies and to help the poor not only materially, but also with fellowship, spiritual security, and support in their anguish.

Though Ellul often can seem harsh in his writings, his personal presence was of the utmost gentleness and profound sincerity, the generous character of a deeply committed Christian. -

When we discussed presenting our work in publishable ways, Ellul said that he had created his own market/but that it had taken a long time. When I responded that

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<sup>10</sup> See Marva J. Dawn, *A World of Difference. Biblical Ethics for the Daily Life of Common People*

I'm too impatient, he replied, "you must *always* be impatient" Both of those points have been constructive for me since my work as a freelancer has had to create its own market over time. '

I wanted to know Ellul as a person encountering, in the struggle to live out faith and ministry, typical obstacles—such as the one we acknowledged in common of dividing our time between study and relating to people when involved in speaking engagements. He revealed himself as I expected — a wonderful model of a gracious man incarnating the Gospel in practical ways, a brilliant man choosing carefully the values of the kingdom of God.

## All That Counts

Daniel B. Clendenin

summer of 1981 was an important time for me. I had finished seminary in June and then married two weeks after graduation ceremonies. It was also the summer that one of my closest friends in seminary, David Werther, gave me a copy of a book by an author I had never heard of—*The Technological Society* by Jacques Ellul. By the end of that summer I had fairly well decided that I wanted Ellul to be the focus of my doctoral studies. Four years later I had finished my dissertation on Ellul's theological method, and perhaps one of the greatest tributes I can make to the impact he has had on my thought and life is to say that I never grew bored, as so many do, with my dissertation topic, either back then or even today. Since that summer when my friend David introduced me to Ellul, he has always been a living and active force for me.

What attracted me to Ellul or, in a more academic way, what was the true nature of his genius? No doubt his provocative writing style, which in the long run clearly decreased the size of his potential reading audience and the extent of his influence, was attractive. In the academic world where nearly every sentence must be qualified with a tip of the hat to the experts, it was life-giving to read someone who wrote almost without nuance. But style alone would hardly commend a lifetime of influence, and to be sure, entertaining writers are a dime a dozen.

The breadth and depth of Ellul's knowledge was amazing, and is often touted, but, by itself, that is not really too unusual in the university or intellectual worlds. And even if he was in a class by himself in this regard, so what? What has the world gained by someone who is nothing more than a mere intellectual titan? As Paul Johnson has shown in his depressing book, *Intellectuals*, mere intellectual brilliance can sometimes be a sorry measure indeed by which to measure a life. I am not suggesting that this aspect of Ellul was unimportant—far from it—only that he was much more than a "mere" intellectual giant, and that for me personally, intellectual brilliance by itself is not very interesting, and that sometimes is both dangerous and deforming.

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(forthcoming from Eerdmans).



Like many people, I found a number of Ellul's signature ideas to be extremely fertile and provocative — the nature and threat of technique, the propagandistic effect and ultimate powerlessness of all politics regardless of their content, the anarchist nature of Christian discipleship, his critique of the mind numbing contemporary "commonplaces", the new demons of our resacralized world, his unapologetic faith in biblical revelation, and so on. But are these ideas so very unusual? I think not. Other authors have explored similar themes. Perhaps Ellul was a man before his time, in that he wrote about some of these issues before others had discovered them or made them popular, but I think one could easily show that many other authors have explored these same ideas with a similar depth, breadth, and provocative nature.

Ellul has had a singular impact on me, I think, for a different reason. As was his explicitly stated intent, when I read Ellul, he somehow seemed to articulate — albeit in an intellectual manner—what I experienced as an ordinary person in everyday life. Put in Kieiegaardian terms, Ellul captured me, his reader, as that "single individual" whom he hoped to move to action. Every time I read Ellul, I felt like I alone was that "single individual" for whom he wrote.

In the spring of 1985 I was in Bangui, Central African Republic. As when my friend gave me a copy of *The Technological Society*, I have a very vivid memory of the exact time place and setting of a conversation I had with an American missionary scholar who had spent much of his life in francophone countries—and thus, I figured, he would be interested in Ellul. I had given Jack a book or two by Ellul to read, and his analysis of them that day was short but profound. I still remember his exact words: "He writes about what I experience."

Ellul understood as Paul Johnson put it, what intellectuals a too often forget, that people are more important than ideas, or better yet, that people of ideas must somehow connect with the normal everyday world of common people (the theme of Richard Mouw's little book *Consulting the Faithful*). Ellul joined the world of ideas to the world of the ordinary person and he did this both in the books he wrote but, perhaps even more significantly, in the way he lived his own life for others.

How many intellectuals of Ellul's caliber can we think of today who spend significant personal time, energy, creativity and the like with disenfranchised people, as Ellul did with street gangs (long before it was a fashionable cause ), to the extent that a national organization was formed to help these people? Or how many professors of whatever religious persuasion have the vision, the personal skills and the commitment, not to mention the interest, to hold regular church services in their home for blue collar people, preach, and, when the group expanded to four services, because so many people were coming, donate the financial resources for the church to build their own building? Or we could mention Ellul's political activism (at least early on as deputy mayor of Bordeaux, before he grew totally disillusioned with all politics), his environmental causes, work with his Reformed denomination for two decades at the national level, mountain hiking with his students, his remark that above all things he was a man of important friendships, and the like.

When I interviewed Ellul in 1985 he told me the story of a young woman and child who approached him after he had delivered a paper at some conference. "You don't know me, do you?", she asked. Ellul said no, and the young woman went on to remind Ellul who she was and how that ten years earlier he had counseled her not to have an abortion. She then delivered a one-liner that I will never forget: "I wanted to show you the child you saved." For me, Ellul remarked in the interview, "it was extraordinary." An extraordinary experience, to be sure, but rather typical for the way Ellul lived his life and wrote his books.

Ellul's ability to connect both in an intellectual manner and in practical ways with the normal human experiences everyday people is, I would argue, at the center of his overall vocation as he understood it. As he says in *In Season, Out of Season*,

**We are touching on a trait that I consider important I never write ideas. I have always attempted to transmit exactly what I have experienced, in objectifying it I have always thought on the experiential level. And my wife has had a considerable influence in this. I was, before her, pretty much a bookworm; I relied heavily on categories and concepts. She continually brought me back to the living reality which is all that counts. From that point on, my thinking was guided by concrete experience. I tried to think only in relation to what I had experienced and to transmit only what I was capable of living. That is why my work is inevitably incomplete and does not appear to be very systematic.**

**I have never tried to make a theoretical system conceived in itself and for itself.**

Model, Mentor, Sage Admonisher, Questioner, Sufferer, Friend to Many, Faithful to Vocation and Revelation."

In Galatians 5:6 the Apostle Paul writes that "the only thing that matters is faith working in love." This is incarnation, living out one's faith in what Ellul describes above as "the concrete reality" which, in the end, is likely to be "all that counts."

**I claim to be an ordinary man, and I am absolutely convinced of it. I have always seen myself as an ordinary man, immersed in the same environment as everyone else. At the movies, I am an ideal spectator. I laugh when everyone laughs, cry when everyone cries; I am emotional. I am not aloof; I only become aloof later. After returning home, I say to myself, "you reacted in this spot and in this way and here is how the others reacted." And I carry out a minute notation of all that happened. But I am really a split personality. The one watches a play at the theater, and the other observes the setting. A recollection: I told you that I was trained in painting, but I had no musical education. I had never heard the least bit of music before the age of twenty or twenty-one. One evening, I decided to go to a concert I felt almost nothing, followed nothing, understood nothing. I was completely bored. But what was passionately interesting to me was the audience, and I spontaneously began to do a psychological study of the**

audience as a whole and of the individuals as I could observe. I learned a lot that evening. And music seemed like a strange magic to me.

The exact same thing happened when I went to political meetings or mass marches. I was the typical participant and later the analyst of what happened.

The proof that I am indeed an ordinary man is that there are always a lot of people who tell me, “What you write there is exactly what we felt.” The only difference is that I have this ability of verbalizing, of intellectual analysis, that they have developed less than I. That is the only difference.”

A similar way to express this idea is to say that Ellul lived a holistic life, rather than a life that is deformed by an unhealthy absorption with only one area of life — in the instance of intellectuals, too often, nothing more than ideas and books. Marva Dawn captures this nicely when in the dedication of her collection of early articles by Ellul *Sources and Trajectories* (1997) she honors Ellul for who he really was — not merely a brilliant intellectual with fascinating ideas about important matters but as a “Prophet, Social Critic, Scholar, Bible Study Leader and Preacher, Nurturer of Young People, Professor, Advisor, Writer, Resister, Fanner, Environmental Activist,

## Reflections on Ellul’s Influence

by Gabriel Vahanian

If nothing else, the table of contents of my various books I should suffice to give an idea of the extent to which, in fact, Ellul has accompanied me for the last fifty years, and shaped my own thinking for the better part of my life, though I wouldn’t, of course, attribute to him whatever defects still linger on in the subsequent evolution, whether of my commitment to theology or of my academic career. Needless to say, without his support, I would not have been elected to a professorship in Strasbourg; nor would I, without his influence, have been able to deepen and broaden in the first place the problematic of the death of God. Which brings me back to the ‘table of contents’.

Jacques Ellul has left at least two full length manuscripts. Under the title of *e’thique de la sanctification*, one of them deals with the ethic of hallowing. The Other deals with theology and technology, and I have known its existence for almost a quarter of a century. He had told me about it, and told me also that, somehow as a matter of habit, he, so to speak, kept certain manuscripts on reserve. And, so to speak again, but to me more important, the reason for this disclosure had to do with the publication in 1977 of my book entitled *God and Utopia*, upon reading which, he added, he had significantly had to revise his own manuscript on the same subject. The table of contents does indeed show that he had wrestled with *God and Utopia*. In our conversation, he had also remarked in passing that, if people should think this was a difficult book, it would

be because they simply would not want to understand it lest they should discard a number of comfortable beliefs. Ellul knew, as I hoped he would, that though we were not cast in the same theological mould, we nonetheless were fellow-iconoclasts.

No, he did not have major difficulties with my theological reformulations', and, so far as I was concerned, I could put up with his own substantially conservative approach. Surely, and why should I not acknowledge that, at a deeper level, he continued to intrigue me. I hold from him just about everything I know about technology. And that is exactly where the question, "What Ellul has meant for me, personally" bursts forth in a manner few would suspect, considering the critical stance which I have on occasion displayed if only because I deemed him not only *worthy* of it but calling for it. After all, one can only tackle a giant No matter how rough my remarks could be, they never allowed me to lose sight of that. So much so, that what he has meant for me could and should probably be best answered by, chronologically, Jim Holloway, Darrell Fasching, Sylvain Dujancourt, and Andrew Goddard — to wit

Outside of the New York Times Book Review, the first notice of *The Death of God* was given by Duncan Taylor-Norton in his introduction to *The Space Industry*, a collection of articles written by the editors of *Fortune* (Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, NJ 1962). Whether this was to be taken as a nod towards Ellul, the fact is that, ever since, I have for my part understood technology as being neither more nor less than our new *milieu* instead of, though not exclusive of "nature" or "history". The rise of technology has been tied in and woven with the death of God as a cultural phenomenon: the term "post modern" has today become quite fashionable and fashionably acceptable: in those days I used to say "post-christian\*."

I still remember Jim Holloway's phone call. He wanted an article for his journal *Katallagete*, and explained that the reason for this request was simply the fact that his attention had first been drawn to Ellul by reading *The Death of God*. Holloway had no doubt that accordingly I had taken Ellul most seriously: there must be a connection between theology and technology, since they both deal at bottom with our mode of being.

Why conceal it? I have always been skeptical of the Barthianism that infested Ellul's own theological endeavors. Had he not himself once told me that he had swerved away from Barth's political commitments, adding that the great trouble with Barth was that he knew nothing about politics? That did not prevent *him*, however, from remaining — by and large faithful to the framework of Barth's theology. Ellul would certainly not have written, as I did, an article entitled "From Kari Barth to Theology — which in part, at least on the continent, explains why I 'have mostly fallen on deaf ears; why, as Ellul said, they would not understand me: French protestant theology has become frozen with Barth

In spite of that, Ellul had not shied away from admitting to a certain connivance between us. He had been on the main *rapporteur* during the oral examination I underwent for the "super-duper" — and for that matter now defunct — French degree known as *doctoral d 'Etat*. In fact, that was the only time Ellul and his wife were

to come to Strasbourg in many decades. Nor would he do so again in spite of my stubborn efforts. He traveled by train and now, because of his declining health, even that became for him unbearable — just as previously he had always turned down my repeated invitations to come to Syracuse: he would not take an airplane.

Ultimately, the reason I took Ellul most seriously or switched from Barth to Ellul is, simply, because unlike Bultmann, Barth never talked about technology. And, though with Ellul theology and technology tend to look like Luther's two kingdoms, here was at least a theologian who did not pursue his task in total abstraction from our inescapably technological milieu! I could not but take him seriously. And the extent to which I did so is, I surmise, is still remembered by Darrell Fasching and Sylvain Dujancourt if not Martin Kastelic, if only because of the number of times they had to revise their respective dissertations. Not that such revisions are what I systematically expect whenever Ellul is the subject-matter: Andrew Goddard was spared from that, but then, at Oxford, the thesis director— which I wasn't— never is the examiner, which I was.

Undoubtedly, whether the two manuscripts I know of will ever be published depends on Ellul's children and those that advise them. All I know is that Ellul appreciated my efforts such as *God and Utopia* and even wanned up to the notion of utopia, while in other respects he always spared me from the sharp criticisms he leveled at various exponents of the death of God.

Was not his subsequent notion of the "silence" of God" his way of coping with the cultural demise of the ontotheistic notion of God? '

I have in front of me notes I took on the 6th of June 1946 during a lecture Ellul gave on Communism in Basel. No wonder, I had awaited the publication of his *La technique or I I 'enjeu du siecle b Duntil 1954*. Subsequently, thanks to Enrico Castelli and his series of colloquiums, we had met regularly at the University of Rome La Sapienza. For many years we also met just about every six months to discuss the 'fate' of *Foi et Vie*, the journal of which he was the director until his resignation for reasons of health.

No wonder, either, I myself cannot tell what that giant of a man has really meant for me, personally.

## Jacques Ellul Was the First

Pieter Tijmes

For me Jacques Ellul was the first author who has introduced me into the field of philosophy and technology. That is the reason why I am grateful to him. Even possibly justified criticism of him provokes defensiveness in me. This is a sign of my warm feelings for Ellul who was, in ; my view, carefree yet pessimistic. His political engagements were not crowned with success, but nevertheless he continued his way whistling. In a sense, he was unassailable and had a firm confidence in the successful outcome of every thing in the world, in the end. It was a Barthian spirituality that guaranteed

this trust. Concrete obstacles he was confronted with in his career as political activist were treated as minor details. I do not know Jacques Ellul in person nor have I ever talked with him, but I read and have read his books on technology in this mood. I would not like to see things differently, but what I do not like might be necessary.

His books *La technique ou l'enjeu du siècle* and *Le Système Technicien* were fascinating. He did not claim to be a philosopher but always emphasized his sociological approach. Strange to me was his claim to be inspired by Marx. Unfortunately, I could not find a spark of the Marxian tradition, but afterwards I realized that he said so during the climax of the cold war which was evidently a sign of his independent way of thinking - and most independent of Marx, in my view. I was impressed by the way he explained that technology was the decisive characteristic of our contemporary and future life. His typical slogan of "autonomous technology" did its work on me. He showed quite clearly that modern technology was a new phenomenon not to be compared with traditional forms of technology and that this technology evoked a technological universe. I became still more convinced of the symbolic fall-out of technology, to use an intriguing Ulichian expression. It is unnecessary to explain all these insights in *The Ellul Forum*.

In the last book of his trilogy on technology *Le Bluff technologique* he holds the conviction that each phase of technology provides more problems than solutions. Technologists are simply deceivers by bluffing. Ellul is merciless in showing that the view that unexpected and undesirable side effects can be overcome in a technological way is absolutely false. This book in comparison with the other two was still more massively negative and more somber with regard to the irresistible and enslaving power of technology — it was, even for me, too much. The book also irritated me methodologically, because any viewpoint was embraced on the condition that it was blacker than black, even when the insight did not fit Ellul's own frame of reference. He spoke about technology's ambivalence but in fact he meant technology as *massaperditionis*. Ellul's joy of discovering new insights, in my perception, was gone in this book. And he was repeating his original and impressive insights in an inelegant and sometimes boring way. I was relieved to have reached the last page of the book. In a certain sense it was unmanageable to me. To be honest, I was not allowed to cherish such a vision on technology as a protestless consumer of flights and computers.

Nor did I have the courage to tell my students that they were blindly promoting the evils of technology. In my opinion this Ellulian trade was not fruitful for me any more. This is my memory but I know that memories are very manageable by people. The first two books had a freshness of saying new things to me, the last book of the trilogy could be said in fifty pages as for me. His Calvinistic ethos that sought its fulfillment in writing books turned out to be counterproductive as technology. But why pass a negative sentence on an author of whom the last book turns out badly?

- Still, as the readers of Ellul Studies know, I did my best to defend Ellul's vision of technology as a legitimate vision of an outsider. His vision should be comple-

mented with a point of view of an insider or actor (*Ellul Forum, Jan | 1995*). As (Durkheimian) outsider you are allowed to speak about the autonomy of technological decisions, etc., but as an actor or insider you know better, or more precisely you have other insights. The problem how to integrate the truths of the outsider's perspective and the insider's perspective I gladly leave to sociologists. It is the question how to exercise Durkheim's spirit. On the other hand, it is also an existential question how to lay bare relevant moments of decisions in the technological process.

In short, Ellul was a good beginning for me, and I am interested how people explore his possibilities to continue Jacques Ellul's line of thought-In this formulation it is clear that I do not consider this explorative work with Jacques Ellul as a point of departure to be my task. In the philosophy of technology there are on this moment more interesting starting points. I have to make here a great reservation. Ellul's theological passion was not a secret but I do not possess an intimate knowledge of it. I am open to be instructed that the theological insights on the technological universe are more revealing than what is brought into the open from other points of view. I am open to it, but I have not had that experience up to now.

# Book Reviews

## Andrew John Goddard. “The Life and Thought of Jacques Ellul with Special Reference to His Writings on Law, Violence, the State, and Politics.”

Ph.D. thesis, Faculty of Theology, University of Oxford, 1995. Pp. 495.

Reviewed by Joyce Hanks

Andrew Goddard’s dissertation makes a refreshing and much-needed contribution to Ellul studies. Once published, I believe it will prove indispensable, both for those in need of a careful explanation of Ellul’s fundamental theological and sociological concepts, and for those who desire to know more in detail about his life and work.

One of the study’s many excellent features is the manner in which it integrates matters too often separated in works on Ellul: his life and his theoretical stances (see p. 285 on anarchy, for example, and p. 217 on his involvement with the “Associations Professionnelles Protestantes”), his “dialogue” with Karl Barth at different stages of his life, and, especially, his sociological and theological writings. Goddard outlines Ellul’s concerns for society as manifested in both his works and his experience.

Like most dissertations that treat Ellul as their central subject, this one gives an overview, as suggested by its title. But, with the possible exceptions of Bill Vandenburg’s *Perspectives on Our Age* (trans. Joachim Neugroschel; Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corp., 1981), and the translated interviews in *In Season, Out of Season* (interviews by Madeleine Garrigou-La-grange; trans. Lani K. Niles; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), I cannot think of any work in English that begins to offer the wealth of biographical information we find here. Goddard appears to have read and digested everything imaginable on Ellul in French and English. Patrick Chastenet’s *Entretiens avec Jacques Ellul* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1994), was published too late to permit the incorporation of its revelations into the body of this dissertation, but Goddard has made very detailed reference to it in his footnotes.

Goddard has made extensive use of the Ellul collection at Wheaton College’s library and other sources, incorporating many course outlines and unpublished articles by Ellul into his analysis, and confronting these writings with each other (as well as with Ellul’s published books and articles). This early, unpublished material proves especially valuable as Goddard traces Ellul’s thought on society prior to the publication in French of *The Technological Society* (1954).



Following his initial, insightful biography chapter on Ellul, the author considers Ellul's theology (the keys to which for Goddard are the Fall, or the "rupture," and communion with God) and ethics, and then his sociology (in which the concept of "civilization" plays a central role, along with Technique and modernity). The focus on Ellul's theology and sociology separately, and then in dialectical tension, constitutes the structure of virtually the entire dissertation.

Readers will find this arrangement especially illuminating, I believe, in connection with the three "case studies" examined in depth by Goddard in the second part of his study: law, violence, and the State and politics. To deal with each of these themes, Goddard devotes first a chapter to Ellul's sociology as related to the topic, and then a chapter devoted to his theological treatment of it. But throughout, Goddard shows how the two kinds of writing relate with respect to the question at hand. I found Goddard especially provocative on this fundamental issue of the separation and relationship of Ellul's two approaches (see, for example, p. 164, where he ties Ellul's proposed reforms for seminary studies to this dialectic).

Goddard's treatment of Ellul on law may prove rather challenging to non-specialists, but it constitutes a major contribution to Ellul studies, since this significant aspect of Ellul's work has received so little attention in published articles. Goddard offers a welcome explanation for the difficulty many find as they attempt to understand Ellul's *Theological Foundation of Law* (trans. Marguerite Wieser, New York: Doubleday, 1960; French edition 1946), and summarizes the book carefully (along with several of Ellul's articles on law).

Goddard also shows how Ellul's technical studies on law relate to his writings on the theology of law, and explores the relationship of Christian believers with law and institutions. Throughout the dissertation, especially in his chapters on law, Goddard routinely incorporates relevant material from *Histoire des institutions* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1955-; multiple editions, usually in four volumes), customarily ignored in studies on Ellul. The author traces in detail what he believes are essential changes over time in Ellul's theological approach to law. Another significant change in Ellul's theology as seen by Goddard surfaces often in the dissertation: the disappearance in later works of Ellul's early insistence on a "divine order of preservation" of the world.

Although Goddard finds Ellul less original when he writes on violence than on law or the State and politics, he calls violence "the one subject where theological concerns are unambiguously the context for the presentation of Ellul's sociological reflections" (p. 248). He shows how violence, in Ellul's view, stems from humanity's broken relationship with God, and thus relates to the deepest layer in society's structure, forming a constant throughout our history.

Leaving some questions relating to Ellul and the State unresolved, particularly the theological issues, this dissertation outlines a convincing relationship between Ellul's experiences in the 1930's and 1940's and his view of politics (especially anarchy). Goddard offers a helpful distinction between the personal power wielded by governmental

authorities, as seen in Romans 13, and the abstract power exercised in modern states, under the domination of the “powers,” with a view to explaining Ellul’s varying positions with respect to Biblical passages on Christians’ relationship with authority.

Goddard has helpfully divided his dissertation into clearly differentiated sections within each chapter, building to significant conclusions throughout. Readers will also discover more than thirty pages of substantive quotations from difficult-to-find works by Ellul in French, organized in an appendix of endnotes. Goddard mentions several misleading English translations in Ellul’s books, and spots errors in bibliographies of Ellul. His bibliography runs to more than 100 pages.

We should all hope that publishers will vie with each other to obtain the right to bring this important study into print—with the addition of an index, and references to English editions of Ellul’s works, where possible. We would profit from future “case studies” of Ellul on art, the church, propaganda, revolution, the sacred, etc., pursuing the lines of Goddard’s approach. Ellul himself would urge us, however, to go beyond understanding what he has to say, in order to apply his principles and insights to matters he did not address.

Joyce M. Hanks

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For readers wishing to purchase *Silences*, it sells for 75 French francs through Editions Opales, 13 Cours Gambetta, 33400 Talence, France (Telephone/FAX: 011-33-557-96-93-28).

## **Jacques Ellul. *Silences: Poemes.***

Talence, France: Editions Opales, 1995. Pp. 92.

Reviewed by Olivier Millet. Editor of *Fel et Vie*

(originally published in *For et Vie*, vol. 94, no. 3 (July 1995), p. 109. Translated and published here with permission.)

Poems by Ellul: the reader may be surprised, especially to learn that shortly before Ellul’s death, he expressed a desire that they be published. His modesty, as a man and as a thinker, undoubtedly caused him to delay their disclosure.

But reading these poems now, after his death, we realize that the work of Ellul the thinker and the theologian was rooted in an experience and in writing that accompanied the “public” forms of his expression. His deep inner life and his lyricism are located behind his ideas and his witness, or go beyond them. This is probably the meaning of the title, *Silences*.

This volume does not offer us unveiled secrets, but rather visible flashes, rhythmical impulses, and verbal signs that are rich in imagery and in evocative allusions. Showing

through them we can sense an inner life that has both a serious and a gratuitous side (Ellul goes so far as to use nursery rhyme forms).

This inner life is both moral and witty: Ellul's irony with respect to the world and life (understood as a pathos-filled and humorous game), and his humor with respect to himself, do not seek to impress or captivate us. Far from it. Instead, his irony and humor extract from successive moments both the ephemeral and the promise-filled portions contained within the concrete existence of a man. Ellul as poet in this volume reaffirms himself as the reader-exegete of Ecclesiastes we have admired

Waves, flames, fountains of water—these are momentary Visions stemming from Ellul's poetics of vicissitude. Often in a very simple way, sometimes with a rather rare charm, by means of syntax and vocabulary, these images evoke the strangeness of the world (whether natural or civilized) for humanity, or the strangeness of humanity for this world.

To live freed from vanity and concern for self, and to stand in Hope: these constitute the two main poles of this lyricism, which does not seek to coordinate them by means of any discourse.

Instead, the poet records the tensions and the deep currents of his sensitivity, unable to separate Spirit from flesh. Such knowledge is not destined for human beings:

**No one will notice my wretchedness any more dedicated will I be to the works of prayer in the mortal secret of who I am.**

A single poem ("Pelerinage a la civilisation de la mort" [Pilgrimage to the civilization of death]) mentions the collective world that Ellul took pains elsewhere to analyze, in its socio-technological ins and outs. But he describes it as a sort of Apocalypse, sombre and syncopated, from which the Sun of Justice is still absent.

*Translated by Joyce M. Hanks*

**Issue #21 Jul 1998 — Thomas  
Merton and Modern Technological  
Civilization**

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## About This Issue

This issue of the *Ellul Forum* is devoted to the work of the Trappist monk and social critic, Thomas Merton. Merton was born on January 31, 1915 in Prades France. His mother died when he was six and his father when he was fifteen. He grew up without any significant exposure to religion. However in the summer of 1933, traveling in Italy, he found himself drawn to the churches of Rome. It was the beginning of a journey that led him to baptism in the Catholic Church in November of 1938 and then to enter the Trappist monastery of Gethsemani in Kentucky on December 10<sup>th</sup>, 1941. His literary career took off with the publication of *Seven Storey Mountain* in 1948, an autobiographical account of his conversion, which his superiors in the monastery asked him to write. It became an immediate best seller in post WWII America.

While *Seven Storey Mountain* is a powerful book, it is a pious story of conversion that in itself would not make Merton the remarkable figure that he is. It was for Merton just the first installment on a series of biographical reflections on his spiritual journey, whose honesty and power make him a unique author. Two of the most important were *The Sign of Jonas* in 1953 and the *Asian Journal* in 1972. Merton died exactly twenty-seven years to the day that he entered the monastery (Dec. 10, 1968) at a conference on Monasticism, East and West, in Bangkok.

Merton's power as a religious author lies not in writing original theology but in his willingness to make his life transparent to others in the midst of his monastic vocation to solitude. Indeed, being a monk and an author, at the same time, was the most difficult spiritual paradox of his life. Like Jonas, he found himself "in the belly of a paradox" —pulled in two directions. Merton chronicled this spiritual crisis of his first ten years in the monastery in his book, *The Sign of Jonas*. It was only after this "dark night of the soul" that Merton came to accept that he was called to be both a monk and an author. As a result, by the sixties a whole new Merton emerged, a powerful social voice in critique of racism and segregation in America, in critique of the cold war and nuclear war, and in critique of the Vietnam war. At the same time he entered into serious dialogue with religious figures and spiritual traditions around the world, especially the religions of Asia. The framework for his critique of modernity was his own developing spirituality in dialogue with the spiritual traditions of Asia as the basis for a critique of the illusions of modern technological civilization.

For anyone who has read Ellul, the similarity of Merton's critique of technological civilization is startling and impressive. Virtually point for point, Merton and Ellul, writing about the same time, echo each other. Just how much mutual influence, if any,

there was between them would be an interesting subject for a doctoral dissertation. In this issue, Christopher J. Kelly, details the scope of Merton's criticism of modern technological society and its roots in the monastic tradition of the *via negativa* - the way of negation. Christopher Kelly, completed his Masters degree in Religious Studies at the University of South Florida in Tampa in 1998. His essay here is adapted from his Master's thesis on Merton. He is now a doctoral student in the School of Religion at the University of Iowa.

Also in the *Book Review* section of this issue you will find a review of a doctoral dissertation on "Christian Freedom" in Ellul's work. The dissertation, written in Italian, is by Gianni Manzone,. It is reviewed here by Virginia Picchietti, of Scranton University. We are grateful to Gianni Manzone for his fine work and to Professor Picchietti « for her willingness to review it for the benefit of our readers.

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Reviewed by Virginia Picchietti

*Forum: Thomas Merton's Critique of Modern Technological Civilization*  
by Christopher J. Kelly

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# Book Review

## Manzone, Gianni. *La liberta cristiana e le sue me-diazioni sociali nelpensiero di Jacques Ellul.*

Milano: Glossa, 1993. Pp. 290.

Reviewed by: Vigienta Pichietti. University of Soantine

Gianni Manzone's dissertation provides a systematic and detailed analysis of the philosophical thought of French theologian Jacques Ellul. It aims to "reconstruct the theology of Ellul's Christian liberty" (177). The work is divided into three parts, each dealing with Ellul's notion of Christian freedom, and includes a general introduction to both Manzone's opus and Ellul's thought. It also contains a comprehensive bibliography, while each chapter is supported by extensive notes.

The "General Introduction" is divided into six parts. The first part discusses Ellul's biography, including his evolution as a scholar of both legal and Christian philosophy. The second part defines his style. According to Manzone, the style giving shape to Ellul's philosophical writings is the product of tensions arising from his position as a Christian thinker who is firmly *engage* in social reality. Ultimately, Ellul's style aims at provoking decisions on the part of society (12). Part three of the introduction delineates Ellul's production, while parts four through six focus on his theological methodology. Manzone classifies the methodology as theological dialectics, and sees Ellul's thought as being heavily influenced by Barth and Kierkegaard. From Barth, Manzone concludes, Ellul draws such notions as God is Other, God is different from man, and time is different from eternity. From Kierkegaard, meanwhile, Ellul gleans an approach to theological inquiry as a systematic type of thought working with abstract concepts (16). Manzone identifies the richness and originality of Ellul's philosophical approach, which consists of a sociological inquiry and epistemological perception of reality and a theological approach to the Bible, as well as a focus on Christian ethics in the context of theological dialectics. Significantly for Manzone, Ellul's thought can be succinctly described as a "theology of confrontation," an approach that differs from Tillich's "theology of reconciliation." Ellul's philosophical thought, Manzone concludes, is a confrontation between Marxist thought and Christian philosophy, sociology and theology, all "mutually critical" (20).

Part I of Manzone's work focuses on Christian freedom as the governing principle of Ellul's work and life as a Christian thinker. Although noting Ellul's resistance to the "systematization" of his work, Manzone nevertheless recognizes the urgency with which

Ellul's philosophy aims to recuperate the concept of Christian freedom, which has been "ignored and rejected" even by the Church (41). Ellul, Manzone notes, considers liberty as one of the most important values Western society has contributed to humanity. Given this premise, Manzone dedicates the rest of Part I to the diverse permutations of the notion of liberty, from its origins in God and Christ, to its manifestations in God's glory and in love for one's neighbor, to its evolution and realization through faith and action.

In order to provide a clear definition of Ellul's notion of Christian liberty, Manzone examines the "seven misunderstandings or erroneous notions of liberty" Ellul opposed in various articles and books (43). According to the author, the French philosopher rejects the idea of liberty as inherent to human nature and independent of the individual's social milieu and physical and mental condition. Indeed, while Ellul refutes the notion of liberty as a purely spiritual or internal experience, he stresses its correlation to "concrete external restrictions" (45). Moreover, he renounces the idea of liberty as a choice, since choice is artificial and limited. Ellul offers as an example the role technology plays in creating choices, a role he defines as "determinism" (110). An individual cannot approach these choices "freely," the philosopher contends, because they are predetermined and delimited, a concept Manzone expands in Part II. For Ellul, liberty is discontinuous from human nature, something to be achieved and originating from an external source, or God. It also assumes diverse permutations because, Manzone notes, "individuals must construct their own personal lifestyle based on the circumstances in which they live and their own conscience" (47). While performing good actions does not guarantee liberty, liberty can be achieved "answering the personal call from God and accepting the liberation that Christ offers" (47).

Part II of Manzone's opus is entitled "Christian Liberty as Criterion for Socio-Ethical Judgment." The purpose of this part, Manzone clarifies in the premise, is to "understand if and how the concept of Christian liberty becomes the standard for all moral life and for the ethical reflection of the Christian individual" (107). Questions shaping Manzone's inquiry are "Does liberty play a structurally central role and does it shape every aspect of the individual's comportment?"; "Which categories and concepts does Ellul employ to develop an 'ethique de la liberte' and how are they applied in the phenomena he most analyzed and considered most relevant to us today?"; "How does the concept of Christian freedom function in the Christian individual's judgment and action in a technological society, in politics, in mass media, and in law?" To answer the questions he sees as essential to understanding Ellul's work, Manzone divides Ellul's approach into two categories, the concrete realm, in which facts are described, and the philosophical realm. In the former sphere Manzone characterizes the French philosopher as a positivist who distinguishes between fact and norm. In the latter sphere, he identifies Ellul as an existentialist for his focus on freedom.

In his consideration of these questions, Manzone dedicates a section to each of the components that make up Ellul's investigation of Christian freedom. According to Manzone,



Ellul's relationship to politics is one of "total confrontation" in which he sets out to abolish "political illusion" (137). This confrontation also defines the Christian individual's participation in politics, a participation marked by tension and not "distinguishable from other manifestations of faith, but simply a proclamation of the Gospel" (137). For Ellul, according to Manzone, politics are "irredeemable" and cannot be transformed by Christian liberty. In the section on freedom and mass communication, Manzone investigates the relationship between mass media and Christian freedom. More specifically, he examines how according to Ellul "the interaction between technology, politics, and 'propaganda' [the media] constitutes the heart of our civilization" (145). Manzone categorizes Ellul "among the apocalyptic" for whom mass media create people no longer capable of "critical thought" or "autonomous behavior" (150). Finally, in the section on the relationship between Christian freedom and law, Manzone concludes that for Ellul faith is not applicable to the juridical organization of society because law is secular. According to Ellul, Manzone notes, human law is relativistic (169) and "does not express religious values or divine justice. . . . [W]hen thinking of human law, Christians must... not see it as an ideal law derived from their religion" (167).

Part m of Manzone's opus, "Christian Freedom and Social Ethics: Beyond Ellul," performs an "evaluative and critical analysis of Ellul's attempt to define Christian freedom as the measure of Christian life and especially of the Christian individual's presence in society" (177). In the premise to this part, Manzone proposes an analysis based on the "confrontation between Protestant theology and Catholic theology on social ethics" (177). His aim is to understand the way in which the notion of Christian freedom becomes a means through which believers become socially *engages*.

In this section Manzone assesses Ellul's analysis of society and social action, of civil institutions, and of social justice. He asserts that Ellul develops a sociological investigation based on a "neutral methodology" (198). The author recognizes the French philosopher's relativistic tendencies. However, he concludes that Ellul's philosophy of human action and freedom lacks an "anthropological dimension" (199), which would shed light on, for example, "the significance of individual acts for those who perform them" (198). In conclusion Manzone notes that the fact that Ellul does not "consider judgment of individual behavior as a moment intrinsically connected to judgment on institutional actions renders incomplete the dynamics of Christian freedom in its endeavor to relativize and modify norms and social institutions" (256). For Manzone, Ellul considers this undertaking in negative terms because he does not adequately consider the anthropological notion that freedom "incorporates both the individuals' socio-cultural milieu and their personal history" (257). In the end, Manzone contends, human beings are capable of relating to God because they can grasp "Revelation," or the Word of God in human form, because they see themselves in it (257).

# Forum: Thomas Merton's Critique

## Contemptus Mundi: Thomas Merton's Critique of Modern Technological Civilization

by Christopher J. Kelly

### INTRODUCTION

The works of Thomas Merton reflect a combination of intellect and honesty that tends to stir the conscience of even the most casual reader. A vocal social critic, Merton was no stranger to controversy. He spoke critically on the most troubling social and political issues of our time. His work continues to be applicable to today's increasingly postmodern world. Through the concept of *contemptus mundi* Thomas Merton engages in a postmodern critique of modernity. Well before the post-structuralist critique, Merton found his own monastic path "beyond modernity". His is not a pre-modern rejection of the world in the traditional Christian monastic sense, but a postmodern rejection of the subject/object duality of modern techno-bureaucratic European civilization in order to provide a different frame of reference from which one may deal with the *agonia* of existence. Merton's use of the *via negativa* negates the modernist notion of self and liberates the individual from the collectivist pattern of life in modern technocratic society. Merton is postmodern in a historical rather than ideological sense of the word. He is postmodern precisely because he offers post-European and post-Christian critique that opens a path beyond modernity.

My argument is that Merton's experience of the *via negativa*, as reflected in his book *The Sign of Jonas*, led him into a postmodern framework from which came his critique of society. Merton's experience of the *via negativa* is the pivotal point in his personal spiritual growth and his social commentary. Before his experience Merton wanted only to turn his back on the world in order to find God, afterward he saw his vocation as finding solitude in compassion for others. This took two forms: 1) vocal social criticism that attacked the injustices of racism, the Vietnam War, the development of nuclear weapons and 2) a discovery of the spiritual wisdom of other religious traditions, most notably Zen Buddhism, Taoism, and Gandhi's Hinduism. At the end of his life, Merton seemed to have embraced both Taoism and Zen while remaining a devoted Christian. This was possible because he had moved beyond any modernist Eurocentric and Christian-centered spirituality to discover the ethical importance of

other spiritualities, which Merton saw as complementing rather than competing with his own Christian spirituality. As we move from a planet of isolated nations to a global community, Merton's cross-cultural and interreligious orientation speaks to our tune. I think this is a significant note, for while European Christianity sought to make the world Christian, Merton's pluralism, especially his interest in the East, led him to speak out against an attitude toward the world that sought to destroy or convert that which was not European and Christian.

## MERTON'S CRITIQUE OF MODERNITY

Even in the early days of his writing Merton attempted to sound an alarm meant to awaken his contemporaries to the dangers around them. The first line of *The Ascent to Truth*, published in 1951, reads. "The only thing that can save the world from complete moral collapse is a spiritual revolution." According to Merton, human beings are in a precarious position, for "the exposure of the nineteenth-century myths — 'unlimited progress' and the 'omnipotence' of physical science — has thrown the world into confusion" (1951:3). He believed that the violence and hatred he saw around him presented and continue to present a serious challenge to the very existence of the human race. For Merton, the root cause of the crisis of the modern age lies in a misunderstanding of who we are as human beings. "Our ordinary waking life is a bare existence in which, most of the time, we seem to be absent from ourselves and from reality because we are involved in the vain preoccupations which dog the steps of every living man" (1951:10). Merton believed that modern human beings are preoccupied with trying to find some comfort in life by becoming loyal consumers, by surrounding ourselves with material possessions that flatter our own egos. We have become alienated individuals.

Modern individuals are alienated not only by the material world they have created but by the ideological world that undergirds it. According to Merton, Cartesian duality splits the world into subject/object relationships and thereby alienates people from their true natures, in which there are no ultimate distinctions. Descartes' "*Cogito, ergo sum*" is "the declaration of an alienated being, in exile from his own spiritual depths, compelled to seek some comfort in a *proof for his own existence* (Y) based on the observation that he 'thinks'" (1952:80). Merton believed that rather than determining a foundation for truth and reality, the Cartesian ego-self only succeeds in con-

fusing one's understanding of him/herself, the world, and the ineffable divine. By reducing him/herself to a concept and objectifying the rest of existence, the alienated being makes it impossible to experience the true nature of his/her own being. Merton writes:

The world itself is not a problem, but we are a problem to ourselves because we are alienated from ourselves, and this alienation is due to an inveterate habit of division by which we break reality into pieces and then wonder why, after we have manipulated

the pieces until they fall apart, we find ourselves out of touch with life, with reality, with the world and most of all with ourselves (1992:387).

The true nature of the human being and its relationship to the world is existential and intuitive. One cannot come to an understanding of this through a process of deductive reasoning, especially one that has a false sense of self as a starting point.

For the contemplative there is no *cogito* ('I think\*') and no *ergo* ('therefore') but only SUM, I Am. Not in the sense of a futile assertion of our individuality as ultimately real, but in the humble realization of our mysterious being as persons in whom God dwells, with infinite sweetness and inalienable power (1972:9)

The contemplative life cannot be lived by anyone who considers him/herself as an ego-self. Yet, Merton laments, modern human beings steadfastly cling to an illusory sense of identity in an effort to come to terms with what Merton terms "*agonia*." Merton characterizes the concept in the following way. "Life and death are at war within us. As soon as we are born, we begin at the same time to live and die (1996:3)." One may not be fully aware of it, but, according to Merton, there is within each person an anxious agonizing over the nature of existence. We may not think about it but the knowledge that we are mortal is always present. It manifests itself in a wrestling of the spirit in which one confronts the *agonia* of "being and nothingness, spirit and the void" (1996:3). The more one becomes aware of one's mortality the greater the distress. This wrestling with the angst of existence is

manifested largely in desperation, cynicism, violence, conflict, self-contradiction, ambivalence, fear and hope, doubt and belief, creation and destructiveness, progress and regression, obsessive attachments to images, idols, slogans, programs that only dull the general anguish for a moment until it bursts out everywhere in a still more acute and terrifying form (1966:55).

In an effort to find relief from the problem, human beings identify themselves; they give themselves a name or a function. Merton concludes that human beings would rather have a false identity than risk being nothing. However, this false identity results in an alienation of human beings from their true natures as indefinable reflections of an indefinable God. What remains is an ego-self who sees him/herself as the basis of reality and objectifies everything else, including God.

Merton's work seems to imply that there is a subconscious belief among men and women that the *agonia* of existence can be numbed or overcome if people come together as a unit. Here we encounter a nuance in the modern experience of alienation. For Merton, the structure of modern society is configured in such a way that people tend to give up all effort towards understanding their true natures through misguided attempts at forging a common identity with others. People are willing to reject the agonizing responsibility of discovering who they are and become part of the crowd. As a result, people are not only alienated from themselves by asserting the foundation of the ego-self, but they also become alienated from the ability to realize themselves by surrendering all personal independence. Merton writes:

One of the characteristics of "mass society" is precisely that it tends to keep man from fully achieving his identity, from operating as an autonomous person, from growing up and becoming spiritually and emotionally adult (1966:59).

The situation is further complicated by the fact that the modern West is fundamentally capitalistic and materialistic. Its goal is the acquisition of material things. Merton believed that people consume in order to avoid the *agonia* and find some direction in life. The economic structure of the modern West is geared toward providing instant gratification without further need of responsibility. People buy what they want, or think they want, use it and then discard whatever is left over because there will always be more available. Merton was acutely aware of the dangers inherent in pursuing materialistic goals. He writes:

Man is a consumer who exists in order to keep business going by consuming its products whether he ' wants them or not, needs them or not, likes them or not But in order to fulfill his role he must come to believe in it Hence his role as consumer takes the place of his identity (if any). He is then reduced to a state of permanent nonentity and tutelage in which his more or less abstract presence in society is tolerated only if he conforms, remains a smoothly functioning automaton, an uncomplaining and anonymous element in the great reality of the market (1966:29).

The role of advertising, or "propaganda" in Merton's words, is of paramount importance in keeping the system running efficiently. Mass media is the vehicle through which advertising procures its effect Television, newspapers, and magazines are all willing to tell us what is wrong with us and then prescribe a remedy available on an easy payment plan. However, the advertising is sophisticated enough, or the public is blind enough, that it gives the impression that we are actually thinking for ourselves. Merton believed that people gain the impression of assuming some measure of responsibility and management over their lives, yet in actual fact they merely accept what is given to them through economic, political, and social advertising and propaganda.

This is one of the few real pleasures left to modern man: this illusion that he is thinking for himself, when, in fact, someone else is doing his thinking for him...This very special and tempting force of propaganda — that it helps sustain the individual's illusion of identity and freedom — is due to the isolation of the individual in mass society, in which he is in fact a zero in the crowd in which he is absorbed, it is this simple act of apparently thinking out what is thought for him by propaganda that saves the individual from totally vanishing into the mass. It makes him imagine he is real (1966:216-217).

Merton takes care to note that the word "alienation" is also used by those already firmly entrenched in mass society. However, for these people the alienated individual is the one who does not conform to the way things are done, does not participate in the general myth. He or she is different and rebellious, quite uncomfortable with the collective "rightness." When understood in this sense, Merton would be considered an alienated person. Indeed, anyone who voluntarily leaves the world and consciously abandons the *status quo* of massive collectivism and consumerism would be considered

a little odd, to say the least. But this interpretation of alienation is very different from Merton's understanding of the alienated individual, who "though 'adjusted' to society, is alienated *from himself*. The inner life of the mass man, alienated and leveled in the existential sense, is a dull, collective routine of popular fantasies maintained in existence by the collective dream that goes on, without interruption, in the mass media (1992:268)."

### ***Technology and the Myth of Progress***

For Merton, technology plays such an important role in fostering alienation that it deserves special attention. According to Merton, the world we live in is governed by systems and techniques. The reverence for nature, which began to decline with the onset of urbanization, has been replaced by a trust in technology and mass media that is reinforced by the secular myth of progress. Merton was very familiar with the idea of a "better world" promised by the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, but he believed the claims of science and technology to bring happiness and fullness of life to be fraudulent. A technological society, he claimed, does not concern itself with the value of the human being. One's dignity as a member of the human race is disregarded in an effort to determine how one may be most efficiently used. Techno-bureaucratic systems exist merely to promote the functioning of their own processes. For Merton, rather than initiating a golden new age, the results of the Enlightenment and the secular myth of progress only succeeded in further removing human beings from their authentic state.

Unshakable confidence in the ability of technology to provide all that is necessary for human life is a particularly persuasive step in the process of alienation.

It is precisely this illusion, that mechanical progress means human improvement, that alienates us from our own being and our own reality. It is precisely because we are convinced that our life, as such, is better if we have a better car, a better tv set, better toothpaste, etc., that we condemn and destroy our own reality and the reality of our natural resources. Technology was made for man, not man for technology. In losing touch with being and thus with God, we have fallen into a senseless idolatry of production and consumption for their own sakes. We have renounced the act of being and plunged ourselves [s/c] into *process* for its own sake (1992:202).

The problem is nothing new, but what makes it more pressing and international are the tremendous effects that technology can and does have on the modern world. We are far more capable now of destroying ourselves and our environment than in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, for instance. Yet, Merton believed that the majority of the people of his day considered it unthinkable to challenge the veracity and good will of science.

The central problem of the modern world is the complete emancipation and autonomy of the technological mind at a time when unlimited possibilities lie open to it and all the resources seem to be at hand. Indeed, the mere fact of questioning this emancipation, this autonomy, is the number-one blasphemy, the unforgivable sin in the eyes

of modern man, whose faith begins with this: science can do everything, science must be permitted to do everything it likes, science is infallible and impeccable, all that is done by science is right. No matter how monstrous, no matter how criminal an act may be, if it is justified by science it is unassailable (1992:62-63).

As a result of this development, science and technology are now the bearers of absolute power. The desire to apply their ideals is so pervasive that it has no rivals. They need not answer to any control, for, it is believed, whatever they demand must be the best course of action. There is no ethical dilemma in the application of science for it has become an autonomous entity subject only unto itself.

Needless to say, the demands of ethics no longer have any meaning if they come into conflict with these autonomous powers. Technology has its own ethic of expediency and efficiency. What *can be done efficiently must* be done in the most efficient way— even if what is done happens, for instance, to be genocide or the devastation of a country by total war (1992:63).

Merton recognized that questions of morality tend to impinge upon the efficient application of science and technology. He believed that bureaucratic systems that mask any moral responsibility by removing any personal involvement have been organized in order to counter the effects of personal conscience. Modern Western governments, in Merton's opinion, have become preoccupied with getting things done in the most expedient manner as possible by whatever means necessary.

We are concerned only with 'practicality' — " efficiency\*: that is, with means, not with ends. And therefore we are more and more concerned only with immediate *consequences*. *We are* the prisoners of every urgency. In this way we so completely lose all perspective and sense of values that we are no longer able to estimate correctly what even the most immediate consequences of our actions may turn out to be (1992:102-103).

Merton saw the effect of the secular myth of progress as a surrendering of human freedom and spontaneity to an unseen yet pervasive principle of efficiency that promises to fulfill our desires if we accept our roles as cogs in the machine. However, recent history has shown that whenever systems and techniques are allowed to operate without question a culture of death is not far away. Merton lived during a turbulent time in which the possibility of nuclear war was quite real. The United States and the Soviet Union faced off against each other in global competition, each seeing the other as a demonic force in the world. Yet, almost insidiously, the most dangerous threat to humanity lay at the heart of each country's social policy. American democracy was identified in its capitalism, which enticed the individual into mass society. Soviet communism lauded the dissolution of privacy into the collective of the people. However, neither system was aware of the alienating force of its own social structure. The two countries were, and to some extent still are, bent on destroying the other without realizing their own self-destructive natures. In a letter to Bernard Haring dated December 26, 1964 Merton writes:

For one thing, the whole massive complex of technology, which reaches into every aspect of social life today, implies a huge organization of which no one is really in control, and which dictates its own solutions irrespective of human needs or even of reason. Technology now has reasons entirely its own which do not necessarily take into account the needs of man, and this huge inhuman mechanism, which the whole human race is now serving rather than commanding, seems quite probably geared for the systematic destruction of the natural world, quite apart from the question of the 'bomb' which, in fact, is only one rather acute symptom of the whole disease (1965:383).

### *Failure of Organized Religion in an Organized Society*

Secularization is a concern for Merton, but the problem of alienation is not only to be found in the secular world. One gets the sense from reading the works of Thomas Merton that while he was no religious anarchist, he did find fault in those religious organizations that were overbearingly authoritarian and so caught up in tradition and rigid doctrine so as to be part of the problem rather than the solution. It is just as easy for an individual to become alienated within his or her own religious tradition as in popular society. This is entirely possible, Merton believed, in a system that sees God as the mathematical first cause and the operator of a giant machine held together by reliance on a sacramental complex. Merton worried that the church was in danger of becoming simply a mirror of the technological world.

To a certain extent, according to Merton and others, science has become a form of religion. We hold it sacred, because it provides answers in the here and now. Its possibilities astound us and we marvel at each new invention, each new refinement. There is seemingly no end to the power of scientific and technological know-how. People trust in their political leaders to do what is appropriate, but those leaders themselves act on the same principle of efficiency that technology espouses. As a result, political agendas are often directed towards placating the masses in a manner that reinforces their alienation.

Merton believed that rather than conditioning individuals to be productive members of collective society, organized religion should seek to reflect the thoughts of the individual back upon him/herself and the *agonia* of his or her existence.

If in practice the function of organized religion turns out to be nothing more than to justify and to canonize the routines of mass society; if organized religion abdicates its mission to disturb man in the depths of his conscience, and seeks instead simply to 'make converts' that will smilingly adjust to the status quo, then it deserves the most serious and uncompromising criticism. Such criticism is not disloyalty. On the contrary, fidelity to truth and to God demands it (1992:273).

For Merton, the Church has an obligation to promote inter-subjective love between persons rather than the individualistic isolation of mass society that reduces existence to a state of impersonal, formal relationships between objectified entities. By destroying the intimate, personal bonds between extended families and small sub-groups, a process



begun by the advent of urbanization, “mass society segregates the individual from the concrete and human ‘other’ and leaves him alone and unaided in the presence of the Faceless, the collective void, the public (1992:274).” The role of the Church is not to aid the process by “giving it an inviolable religious sanction and tranquilizing the anguish of the alienated mind by injunctions to obey the state (1992:274).” Instead, the Church must do all within its power to help men and women to resist the seductive lure of anonymous conformity, which alienates people from themselves and each other. It must be critical of technology and the exercise of power for its own sake.

## **MERTON’S POSTMODERN CONTEMPLATIVE VISION**

If Merton rejected the world, his was a rejection of the illusory world created by technological mass media society. It was a rejection only for the purposes of transformation. Merton’s espousal of a contemptus mundi and his own experience of the via negativa led him into a postmodern framework for his critique of society. What results from Merton’s experience is a turn toward the social concerns of his day and a vibrant interest in the spiritual disciplines of the East

According to Merton, we are alienated from our true selves by the false identification of self with the Cartesian ego-self. It is a self who subconsciously surrenders all personal identity to the mass organization of society. The alienation is not freely chosen but is, in part, a result of the natural human condition as it is perceived in the West. However, the situation is worsened by an affirmation of an illusory individual identity or dissolution into collectivity. According to Merton, the social, political, and economic spheres of the world seem to act in accord to dissuade any idea of nonconformity or of questioning the status quo. Western governments have more power at their disposal now than at any other time in history, yet their citizens are more alienated and estranged from what Merton calls the “inner ground of meaning” than ever. According to Merton, the situation has reached crisis proportions because of the loss of the sense of contemplation in the modern world. For Merton, honest engagement in spiritual exercises in the West is, for the most part, a thing of the past. Religion has become routine, requiring little effort on the part of the believer. If one is to have any hope of overcoming one’s alienation, then he or she must enter into a contemplative lifestyle. “Far from being irrelevant, prayer, meditation and contemplation are of the utmost importance in America today (1971:375).” It is within the contemplative vision that a contemptus mundi occurs that allows one to see him/herself and others in their proper context.

### ***The Role of the Contemplative Lite***

The monastic ideal has been an important part of Christian history since its inception. It has had an uneasy relationship with the world at large for much of the time. The question has always seemed to hinge on just how far the aspiring monk or nun should be removed from society. Early Church Fathers like Tertullian (153-222 CE)

urged that all Christians should shun the inherently evil world around them and band together in an effort to remain righteous before the eyes of God. The theme carried over into the Middle Ages but was considerably modified. Although a rejection of the world for the good of one's spiritual life was considered praiseworthy, Benedictine monastic communities throughout Europe were actively engaged in improving the social and material well-being of the human community. Yet, in much of Western monasticism there still persisted a strong insistence that one must renounce all worldly pleasures and concerns in order to make any progress on the path towards holiness. This insistence found expression in the formation of orders like the Carthusians and the Cistercians, the latter of which Merton was to join in 1941. Orders such as these were founded on a form of *contemptus mundi* that assumed that

theology had nothing to learn from the world and everything to teach the world. That theology was a store of static and eternal truths which were unaffected by any conceivable change in the world, so that if the world wanted to remain in touch with eternal truth it would do well to renounce all thought of changing (1966:39).

Although it may have been beneficial during its time, such a *contemptus mundi* has little relevance for the modern world. To reject the world in an exercise of self-absorbed contemplation is an act of folly, according to Merton. It assumes, firstly, that one can entirely retreat from the world in monastic isolation, and, secondly, that one can come to self-understanding without the presence of other human beings. Such an exercise simply will not work, for neither the individual nor the monastic community can ever truly be separate from the web of life that is the world.

As long as I imagine that the world is something to be "escaped" in a monastery — that wearing a special costume and following a quaint observance takes me "out of this world," I am dedicating my life to an illusion (Cunningham, editor, 1992:377).

It does one no good to turn his or her back on the world either because it is inherently evil or because it is full of distractions that avert attention away from personal contemplation. In fact, Merton argues, any attempt at spiritual growth that places the individual first is doomed to failure.

The purely individualistic concept of asceticism and of prayer is, paradoxically, very harmful to the development of true personal identity. The identity of the person is fully realized only in a conscious and mature collaboration with others (1971:76).

Merton's *contemptus mundi* is not a blanket rejection of the world. It is a rejection of the secular myth of progress and the domination of systems based on efficiency, and a rejection of the subject/object dualism that alienates humanity from its true nature. This kind of rejection is evident in other religious traditions as well: the Hindu concept of *Maya* or the Buddhist "emptiness of the world," for instance. According to Merton, neither of these traditions rejects reality, but rather seeks to unmask the illusion that the world exists as an absolute and purely objective structure that must be accepted for what it seems to be for the individual subject. For Merton, one has to annihilate the illusory sense of distinction between the divine and the human, and between the human and the world. His is a contempt for the self and the world that

ultimately frees one from the restriction of identity and brings one to the realization of the interdependence of all being. He rejects a society

that is happy because it drinks Coca-Cola or Seagrams or both and is protected by the bomb. The society that is imaged in the mass media and in advertising, in the movies, in tv, in best-sellers, in current fads, in all the pompous and trifling masks with which it hides callousness, sensuality, hypocrisy, cruelty, and fear. Is this "the world?" Yes. It is the same wherever you have mass man (1966:36-37).

It is vitally important to note that for Merton one need not enter a monastery in order to have a healthy contemptus mundi. The spiritual life is by no means confined to the walls of the cloister. It is a "special dimension of inner discipline and experience, a certain integrity and fullness of personal development, which are not compatible with a purely external, alienated, busy-busy experience (Cunningham, 1992: 369)." Although physical solitude and silence are extremely beneficial to spiritual progress, the true isolation is a wandering in the desert within ourselves, and this isolation leads to an awareness of our inherent communal nature. Merton believed it was entirely possible for all human beings to espouse a healthy contemptus mundi through a contemplative lifestyle that is present and active in the midst of society.

The contemplative life offers one a different point of view or vantage point from which to re-examine his or her own existence. It delivers one from the standards of efficiency imposed upon the world by a technological imperative which demands that if something can be done it must be done. In his own affable style Merton succinctly identifies a certain independence gained by those who have espoused a healthy contemptus mundi:

One of the "tyrannies" of "the world" is precisely its demand that men explain and justify their lives according to standards that may not be reasonable or even human. The monk is not concerned with justifying himself according to these standards. Today a man is required to prove his worth by demonstrating his "efficacy." In such a world the monk may simply decide that it is better to be useless — perhaps as a protest against the myth of illusory efficacy. As an American monk I am forced to view with shame and compassion the lengths to which the myths of "efficiency" and 'practicality' have led American power in Viet Nam. To the machinery of an organized efficiency that produces nothing but mass murder I certainly prefer the relative "inefficiency" of my own monastic life, which produces only some milk, some cheese, some bread, some music, a few paintings, and an occasional book (1971:229)

While the contemplative lifestyle is not held to the standards imposed upon the rest of mass society its contemptus mundi is of little benefit if one remains aloof. In order to be fully human one must "re-enter" the world and act for social change. Merton argues that a certain level of involvement in the contemplative life is a necessary component for any successful social action or creative work. Anyone who tries to better others around him or her or the world at large without having a clear self-understanding, freedom, and integrity will not be successful. "He [or she] will communicate to them nothing but the contagion of his own obsessions, his aggressiveness, his ego-centered

ambitions, his delusions about ends and means, his doctrinaire prejudices and ideas” (Cunningham, 1992:375). -

Ultimately, the role of the contemplative life is to focus one’s attention upon oneself in order to unveil the illusion of individual selfhood. Spiritual isolation sets the stage for the realization of our true selves through the experience of direct union with a God who is all in all.

### *The Via Negativa*

The via negativa experience was a watershed in Merton’s life. The focus of his writing and activism after the publication of *The Sign of Jonas* was on social justice and the value of other religious traditions. What follows is an attempt to clarify what is meant by the “via negativa” and to show how Merton’s experience shifted his position from a world-denying monk to a world-embracing proponent of social change.

Throughout this paper the reader has been presented with an idea of the Cartesian ego-self in conflict with a “self” that has yet to be explained. Although Descartes’ thinking subject can be explained and defined, the same cannot be said for a notion of “self” that has ineffable origins. As noted, Merton firmly believed that human beings have divine origins; they are made in the image and likeness of God. Yet, the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition is a God without image. The result is a being made in the image of a God without image. The tradition of the via negativa, or “negative way,” is an approach to theology and a spiritual practice that maintains that it is not possible to say what the divine, or the self, definitively is, but it is possible to come closer to an understanding by determining what it is not through a separation from the world and deep introspection. The contemplative life allows one to dissolve the dualistic and alienating understanding of human identity. The process by which this dissolution occurs is the via negativa.

The tradition of the via negativa denies that either God or the self can be identified or defined by any human concepts or knowledge. It is an apophatic approach to theology that affirms that God is and always will be a mystery because the divine transcends all human modes of thinking and rationalization. No conceptions or categories offered by empirical science can ever come close to describing the true nature of God.

Traditionally, the via negativa as a spiritual discipline was definitively applied to Christianity by Dionysus the Areopagite (Pseudo-Dionysus) around 500 CE. Dionysus, according to Denys Turner, was primarily responsible for forging the language that has become characteristic of the Western Christian apophatic tradition. He made a theology out of “metaphors of negativity” contrasting light and darkness, ascent and descent, etc. Turner argues that Dionysus owes his use of such metaphors to a convergence of Greek and Hebraic influences on Western Christian thought, more specifically, the synthesis of Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave” (Book 7 of Plato’s *Republic*) and Moses’ encounter with God on Mt. Sinai in the Book of Exodus (Ex. 19 and 20).

The prisoner in Plato's allegory at first has a limited view of reality. For him, reality consists of shadows. However, once he is freed and makes his way up to the cave entrance he is overwhelmed by the brilliance of the sun as it exposes the "true" reality of the physical world. Plato's allegory describes the experience of the philosopher as he "ascends" from ignorance into the light of wisdom, which is so bright that it blinds. The philosopher ascends from the pseudo-reality of a world of shadows and is initially plunged into a deep darkness brought about by intense light.

In the story of Moses' encounter with God, the people of Israel are warned not to venture near the foot of Mt. Sinai lest they see God and thereby perish. Moses, however, is permitted to climb the mountain and is enveloped in a dark cloud, wherein he meets God. God shields Moses from the glory of his countenance for no one is permitted to see the Lord and live.

Turner recognizes that in both the Allegory and in Exodus "there is an ascent toward the brilliant light, a light so excessive as to cause pain, distress and darkness: a darkness of knowledge far deeper than any which is the darkness of ignorance. The price of the pure contemplation of the light is therefore darkness, even, as in Exodus, death. This darkness is not the absence of light, but rather of its excess — therefore a 'luminous darkness (Turner, 1995:17).'" As Turner points out, Gregory of Nyssa, one of the Cappadocian fathers of the fourth century, was well aware of the Platonic imagery of Moses' encounter with God. For Gregory, when Moses entered the dark cloud he was gaining knowledge of the incomprehensible; he was seeing without seeing.

According to Turner, the theologians of both the Greek and Latin traditions wanted to bring together Plato's story and Moses' experience. What resulted was the development of metaphors of negativity. However, what Dionysus and the early mystics meant by these terms and what has come to be understood by "mystical experience" in much of contemporary scholarship are two different things. When Dionysus spoke of a "descent into the darkness of God" he was using a metaphor to describe something that transcends experience, for the *via negativa* through which one "descends" is a loss of everything, including experience. Later interpretations have tended to give a psychologized experiential quality to these metaphors that was never intended by their authors. These interpretations limit the *via negativa* to a psychological experience. What is important to note is that the *via negativa* is not a means of achieving some experience in the contemplative life but is, rather, a complete loss of self and surroundings in that which is beyond experience.

Merton's own experience of the *via negativa* de-centered his own viewpoint and turned him toward the world. Published in 1953 *The Sign of Jonas* is a collection of diary entries made by Merton between the years 1942 and 1952. It reflects the thoughts and anguishes of a man who after ten years in the monastery is unsure of his progress in the spiritual life, a man filled with fear and doubt. It is within the pages of *The Sign of Jonas* that Merton begins to lose his identity and enters what John of the Cross calls the "dark night of the soul." For John, the surest measure of one's progress in the spiritual life is the apparent lack of progress accompanied by intense feelings of

depression and despair. One cannot journey through the Dark Night, the *via negativa*, without feeling doubt, fear, and anguish. They are all part of the process that strips the person of the false sense of self. The Sign of Jonas reflects Merton's struggle. He writes,

It is fear that is driving me into solitude. Love has put drops of terror in my veins and they grow cold in me, suddenly, and make me faint with fear because my heart and my imagination wander away from God into their own private idolatry. It is my iniquity that makes me physically faint and turn to jelly because of the contradiction between my nature and my God. I am exhausted by fear (1953:254).

Merton, the enthusiastic monk who had rejected the world and embraced the silence of the Abbey of Gethsemani in The Seven Storey Mountain, discovered that his desire to give himself completely to God was not easily realized. Between 1940 and 1950 the Abbey grew from about 70 to 270 members. Instead of finding the solitude and silence he expected, Merton encountered a growing number of brethren busying themselves with the construction of new buildings. His own writing seemed to him to be a distraction from true devotion. He became more and more frustrated. He was constantly tempted to leave the Cistercians and join the Carthusians, who enjoyed a much more isolated lifestyle. Instead of drawing closer to God, Merton believed he had lost all spiritual direction. It was only his obedience to his superiors that gave him any respite from the doubt concerning his contemplative vocation, which constantly confronted him.

However, Merton persevered through his anguish until he came to a new understanding of the contemplative life. True contemplation, he came to realize, does not concern itself with how to contemplate or the environment in which one contemplates. What was necessary for true contemplation was to "shut up" and be still. The more one is concerned with the trappings of the contemplative life the less one achieves its goal. True contemplation surfaces from deep within when all self-centered thoughts and actions are dispelled, when one no longer attempts to achieve it by one's own efforts. His quest to find God by rejecting the world and concentrating on his own spiritual progress had led him to doubt his vocation as a Cistercian. He felt compelled to isolate himself entirely.

Merton came to understand, however, that true solitude is not supposed to bring one a sense of satisfaction. "Solitude means being lonely not in a way that pleases you but in a way that frightens and empties you to the extent that it means being exiled from yourself (1953:249)." It means undergoing a *kenosis* in which the self is purged through fear, helplessness, and isolation in God. "True solitude is a participation in the solitariness of God — Who is in all things. His solitude is not a local absence but a metaphysical transcendence. His solitude is His being (1953:269)."

It is here that we encounter the language commonly associated with the *via negativa*. Merton speaks of becoming "lost in the darkness of God" and entering the "desert" within himself. With no certainty in his ambitions and no sense of self he is overwhelmed by the infinite light of the divine, which is so bright that it is perceived as darkness.

Decentered by the *via negativa* Merton finds a home in that which has no center, for it is every where. All of a sudden he is able to perceive the world in a different way. The spiritual desert he encountered in the temptations and distractions that beset him purged him of his ego-self and became a desert of compassion. In his solitude he became ever more acutely aware of the interdependence of all things. Merton had “progressed” far enough along the path of the *via negativa* that he emerged with a new understanding and embraced the world around him, for in it he recognized the presence of God.

Merton began to realize that solitude is not the absence of company, just as silence is not merely the absence of noise. They are, rather, interior conditions that are cultivated by removing all concerns of the self. Ambitions and desires, even though they may seem well intended, only serve to reinforce the self-constructed barrier between God and human beings. At first Merton viewed his writing as a distraction that needed to be resolved. Paradoxically, Merton discovered that instead of being a hindrance his own writing turned out to be the means by which he was to embrace these newly found understandings of solitude and silence. His works became the vehicle through which he emptied himself.

In his work as a writer, Merton discovered also a new experience of poverty. By his writing he had made himself and his most inner feelings and thoughts a public possession. In this way he had disowned himself and allowed others to enter into his monastic silence (Nouwen, 1991:45).

Not only did Merton empty himself through his writing, but it also became for him a means of communicating with leaders of nations, scholars, religious figures, and lay men and women about the most pressing concerns of the day. It is clear that following his *vianegativa* experience Merton began to question the injustices around him. This is, perhaps, most evident in his attack on racism in America. Merton was adamant that racism, most demonstrative in the South, was actually a white problem. He writes that the irony is that the Negro...is offering the white man a 'message of salvation,' but the white man is so blinded by his self-sufficiency and self-conceit that he does not recognize the peril in which he puts himself by ignoring the offer (1964:53).

For Merton, the non-violent protest of African Americans was not only a means for them to obtain their freedom but was also an opportunity for whites to de-center themselves and recognize the dignity of all life. It was up to whites to look into themselves and realize that black people were not their enemies or their rivals or subhuman objects of contempt. The motivation behind Merton's words lay in a profoundly different understanding of human nature that sprang from his passage through the dark night. Because Merton no longer was self-centered he was able to describe the plight of African Americans through their own eyes and identify racial tension as an opportunity for spiritual growth on the sides of both black and white.

In the years after *The Sign of Jonas* Merton turned not only toward the world but also to the various religious traditions of the East. His awakening to a de-centered reality beyond all differentiation reflects his keen interest in Zen Buddhism. Zen strives

for an intuitive communion with the infinite. It seeks to negate a “consciousness of things” in order to experience consciousness itself. To be awakened to consciousness one must empty oneself of self-consciousness. The Zen Buddhist searches for his or her “original face” or “mind” which exists beyond identification and transcends the duality of subject and object. Merton states, “Like all forms of Buddhism, Zen seeks an ‘enlightenment’ which results from the resolution of all subject-object relationships and oppositions in a pure void (1992:13).” The real self is realized when one “achieves” no-self (anatman). Having undergone this kenosis one “experiences” Satori (enlightenment) and is immersed in Sunyata (the Void). Liberated from the confining sense of self one becomes aware of the unity of life and is moved by compassion to help others.

Merton believed that Christianity could learn much about itself from Zen Buddhism. According to James Baker, Merton recommended that Christians maintain the discipline of Zen, which is effective in overcoming self-attachment. He did not And any theological or philosophical difficulty in making such a recommendation, for the Christian ideal itself advocates selfless service to one’s neighbor. Zen’s emphasis on experience could also help steer Christianity away from what Merton saw as its preoccupation with dogma and doctrine. Merton observed that “Zen seeks the direct, immediate view in which the experience of the subject-object duality is destroyed. That is why Zen resolutely refuses to answer clearly, or abstractly, or dogmatically any religious or philosophical question what-ever(Cunningham, 1992:311).” To be sure, Merton recognized the importance and validity of theological investigation and clarification. However, caution must be taken to remember that the essence of Christianity, for Merton, is an active “living experience of unity” that must not be clouded by doctrine.

As Baker notes, Zen could also help Christians to better understand contemplation. It neither teaches nor denies anything, and “enlightenment comes neither by quietistic inactivity or by self-conscious overactivity, for both attitudes tend to make the person a subject and all others objects, creating a false and dangerous dichotomy (Baker, 1971:144).” Merton writes, “Buddhist meditation, but above all that of Zen, seeks not to explain but to pay attention, to become aware, to be mindful, in other words to develop a certain kind of consciousness that is above and beyond deception by verbal formulas — or by emotional excitement (Cunningham, 1992:404).” In satori all distinctions vanish for it is an awareness of pure being beyond all subjects and objects. Merton believed that such an enlightenment was part of Christian contemplation, as well. Christian “satori” is experienced when all distinctions between the human and the divine are dissolved.

For Merton, the *via negativa* is the means by which humans realize their true natures. It is a leap into the darkness of the infinite. It is a loss of identity that defies logic and reason. The subjective ego-self would propose that it in itself is the measure of what is real. But the *via negativa* offers an avenue through which to negate all subject/object duality, thereby freeing one to experience that which is both transcendent and immanent “In order to be open we have to renounce ourselves, in a sense we have to die to our image of ourselves, our autonomy, our fixation upon or self-willed identity



(1966:204).” This death takes place through the act of contemplation in which one becomes fully awake and aware of the sacredness of life, of the unity of being itself, and of the infinite source of life, which is recognized as the divine. Through self-negation one loses oneself in order to regain one’s being beyond identification.

To reach a true awareness of Him as well as ourselves, we have to renounce our selfish and limited self and enter into a whole new kind of existence, discovering an inner center of motivation and love which makes us see ourselves and everything else in an entirely new light (Cunningham, 1992:372).

True self-realization is the perception of openness to the infinite in the very core of our being. This is the nature of the “true spiritual self” that Merton is concerned with.

We become real, and experience our actuality, not when we pause to reflect upon our own self as an isolated individual entity, but rather when, transcending ourselves and passing beyond reflection, we center our whole soul upon the God Who is our life. That is to say we fully “realize” ourselves when we cease to be conscious of ourselves in separateness and know nothing but the one God Who is above all knowledge (1996:122).

Merton’s dissolution of the subject/object duality that isolates one from the physical world owes much to his interest in Taoism. His separation from society at Gethsemani afforded him almost constant contact with the natural world. References to nature are scattered throughout his works, and even in *The Seven Storey Mountain* he seemed to be particularly attentive to whatever physical environment surrounded him. By the time he had retreated to a private hermitage on the monastery grounds, however, Merton’s understanding of his place in the natural world reflected his belief in the unity of all life. From studying the works of the great Taoist master Chuang Tzu, he was convinced of the interdependent nature of all life. By objectifying the natural world human beings make it easy for science and technology to seize command. Taoism proposes a cessation of activity in the sense that true understanding of one’s place in the world is not something that can be systematically and technically deciphered. Merton writes, “Chuang Tzu is not concerned with words and formulas about reality, but with the direct existential grasp of reality in itself. Such a grasp is necessarily obscure and does not lend itself to abstract analysis (1992:xvi).” The way to “find” oneself is to be awakened to being through wu wei.

Wu wei is not passivity but action “that seems both effortless and spontaneous [when] performed ‘rightly,’ in perfect accord with our nature and with our place in the scheme of things. It is completely free because there is in it no force and no violence. It is not ‘conditioned’ or ‘limited’ by our own needs and desires, or even by our own theories and ideas (1992:34-35).” Nature does not objectify anything; it simply “is.” By negating a separate self that is concerned with defining itself one is immersed in all that is. According

to Merton, detachment and spiritual isolation, two of the most beneficial attributes of the contemplative life, must be cultivated if one is to remove the mask of the ego-self that hides the divine within. However, it must be noted that while there may exist

certain guidelines along the way for the aspiring pilgrim who enters the via negativa, there is no formula one may use to unerringly find his or her way beyond the subject/object duality and the various pitfalls of a self-centered consciousness. Indeed, to focus on any set of actions as a means to an end, according to Merton and Zen, is to entirely miss the point.

By its very nature the via negativa is anti-technique. It defies the ability of technical systems to dominate the individual precisely because it is not a system. It is the way that is no way. It is the loss of all foundations and distinctions, a journey through fear and confusion. Yet, it is ultimately liberating for it destroys all perceived boundaries and classifications. It is able to counter the alienating effects of mass society because it puts one in a different frame of reference than the constant barrage modern humans undergo from mass media. It affords a liberating and intuitive experience of reality rather than the scientific view of an objective world. For Merton, it offers hope to a world inhabited by mindless automatons who feel alienated from themselves yet lack the courage to stand against the masses.

By denying absolutes and all definitions, the via negativa introduces doubt into one's spiritual life that leads to a healthy questioning of all authority. This doubt is not easy to suffer through but is fundamental to the realization of the interdependent nature of all life. Merton states:

Let no one hope to find in contemplation an escape from conflict, from anguish or from doubt. On the contrary, the deep, inexpressible certitude of the contemplative experience awakens a tragic anguish and opens many questions in the depths of the heart like wounds that cannot stop bleeding. For every gain in deep certitude there is a corresponding growth of superficial 'doubt'. This doubt is by no means opposed to genuine faith, but it mercilessly examines and questions the spurious 'faith' of everyday life, the human faith which is nothing but the passive acceptance of conventional opinion (1972:12).

Doubt throws into question any action taken in the name of an absolute authority, even if the authority is no identifiable figure but a principle of efficiency promoted by a well organized bureaucracy.

### *Interdependence*

According to Merton, the one who is open to the infinite sees the world from a very different perspective. To him or her the world no longer is limited to a plane of physical space in which human beings perform the daily routines of their lives. Instead, it becomes a "complex of responsibilities and options made out of the loves, the hates, the fears, the joys, the hopes, the greed, the cruelty, the kindness, the faith, the trust, the suspicion of all (Cunningham,1992:378)." We all assume some level of responsibility for any pain and suffering in the world. "In the last analysis, if there is war because nobody trusts anybody, this is in part because I myself am defensive, suspicious, untrusting, and intent on making other people conform themselves to my

particular brand of death wish (378).” The other, the stranger, immediately poses a threat by his or her difference. However, when the existence of all people in the divine is experienced, the openness to the infinite transcends all defining characteristics and renders ultimate differentiation impossible.

The deepest level of conscience “is beyond both consciousness and moral conscience; it is beyond thinking and self-awareness and decision. It is the conscience of God in us, it is where the Holy Spirit operates (1988:130).” Merton calls it the spiritual conscience. It is not a state of individual experience only, but is, rather, a kind of communal conscience. It is in the spiritual conscience that one encounters God and everyone else, for God is the source for all beings. We all share in the divine. The contemplative life offers one the chance to experience community in the spiritual conscience.

Here Merton notes the importance of prayer. For him, there is no such thing as individual prayer.

When I pray I am, in a sense, everybody. The mind that prays in me is more than my own mind, and the thoughts that come up in me are more than my own thoughts because this deep consciousness when I pray is a place of encounter between myself and God and between the common love of everybody (1988:135).

We do not meet other people merely in our external contact with them, we also meet them in the depths of our own hearts.

This is what is experienced in the spiritual conscience. It is neither restricting nor constricting. When one renounces self-identification he or she is opened to the infinite and is able to accept other people as interdependent equals rather than identifying and defining them as separate objects.

In the modern world the contemplative life of prayer and detachment is the surest measure of maintaining a liberating sense of community. On August 22, 1967 Merton wrote to Dom Francis Decroix saying:

We should bear in mind that Marx taught an interesting doctrine about religious alienation, which is a consequence of regarding God as distant and purely transcendent and putting all our hope for every good in the future life, not realizing God’s presence to us in this life, and not realizing that prayer means contact with the deepest reality of life, our own truth in Him. Also we should point out that prayer is the truest guarantee of personal freedom... It should certainly be emphasized today that prayer is a real source of personal freedom in the midst of a world in which men are dominated by massive organizations and rigid institutions which seek only to exploit them for money and power. Far from being the cause of alienation, true religion in spirit is a liberating force that helps man to find himself in God (1985:159).

The realization that one is interconnected with everyone else in that which transcends all yet is intimately present in all, necessitates a reevaluation of how we interact. It calls into question all claims to absolute truth, thereby eliminating the desire of one group to dominate another.

The concept of dignity is paramount here. Human dignity is understood to be what we all have in common despite our differences — race, gender, ethnicity, etc. It is not

definable because it is based on our semblance to the image of a God without image. It can only be considered in terms of “not this” and “not that,” and this is why the via negativa is helpful in affirming it. The moment dignity is defined it is defiled, dignity is a sharing in the infinite that transcends and finds expression in all religions.

For Merton, a recognition of the innate dignity of the human being required a commitment to non-violence. Merton was adamant in his support for peaceful protest. His role model in this regard was Mahatma Gandhi. In Gandhi, Merton recognized a kindred soul who was well aware of the interdependence of all life. Merton wrote that Gandhi’s spirit of nonviolence

sprang from an inner realization of spiritual unity in himself. The whole Gandhian concept of nonviolent action and satyagraha is incomprehensible if it is thought to be a means of achieving unity rather than as the fruit of inner unity already achieved...The spiritual life of one person is simply the life of all manifesting itself in him. [It] is very necessary to emphasize the truth that as the person deepens his own thought in silence he enters into a deeper understanding of and communion with the spirit of his entire people (1965:6).

The one who is aware of the unity of life does not consider the use of violence to be a valid option, even in the cause of justice. Gandhi epitomized the struggle of a people against a powerful colonial nation. Yet, his call to revolution was manifest in his devotion to silence and interior reflection. Merton respected that even in the face of cold-blooded murder,

Gandhi’s respect for human dignity would not allow him to return blow for blow,

Gandhi believed that the dignity of all is mitigated if one responds to violence with violence. “To punish and destroy the oppressor is merely to initiate a new cycle of violence and oppression. The only real liberation is that which liberates both the oppressor and the oppressed at the same time from the same tyrannical automatism of the violent process which contains in itself the curse of irreversibility (1965:14).”

Nonviolent response stands as a witness to the dignity of all persons. It challenges the conscience of those who unquestioningly follow the orders of institutionalized authority by transcending the roles of oppressor and oppressed. According to Merton and Gandhi, those who resort to physical aggression are not much more than slaves to their own violent actions. By refusing to acknowledge the innate dignity of all they cut themselves off from the true freedom that emerges from the recognition of the communal nature of all life. If one recognizes oneself in the other it liberates him or her from the confining nature of prejudice.

There are certain principles, however, that can be used to guide the interaction between humans and governments and between individual people. According to Merton, authentic social action must emphasize three things. First, it must emphasize the human being over the collective automaton who is a slave to technology. Human beings have an innate dignity that must not be surrendered by becoming a cog in the machine, a mere step in the process of production. Authentic interaction must focus on the “liberation of man from the tyranny of the faceless mass in which he is submerged

without thoughts, desires, or judgments of his own, a creature without will or without light, the instrument of the power politician (1966:69).” Second, authentic social action must emphasize the personal aspect of the human being. It is not enough to respect the human above the automaton. Every human being’s personal values, which, according to Merton, are spiritual and incommunicable must be taken into account. “To respect the personal aspect in man is to respect his solitude, his right to think for himself, his need to learn this, his need for love and acceptance by other persons like himself (1966:70).” Attempting to convert others to a particular point of view, or even spoon-feeding those who are already converted, does little more than prepare the way for mass society.

Third, authentic social action must emphasize wisdom and love. A sapiential view of society is “less activist, more contemplative; it enables men and institutions to see life in its wholeness, with stability and purpose, though not necessarily in a politically conservative sense (70).” Only when these three criteria are met can men and women hope to effect a significant change in their interaction that will release them from mass society and keep them open and accepting of the other.

In *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* Merton reiterated his belief in accepting others for what they are by stating that the more I am able to affirm others, to say ‘yes’ to them in myself, the more real I am. I am fully real if my own heart says yes to everyone. I will be a better Catholic, not if I can refute every shade of Protestantism, but if I can affirm the truth in it and still go further.

So, too, with the Muslims, the Hindus, the Buddhists, etc. This does not mean syncretism, indifferentism, the vapid and careless friendliness that accepts everything by thinking of nothing. There is much one cannot affirm’ and ‘accept,’ but first one must say ‘yes’ where one really can (1966:129).

While there may exist significant doctrinal discrepancies between faiths, one is not faced with an either/or situation, for we are all interdependent To become blinded by the differences is to miss the underlying wholeness and unity that has its source in the divine infinite. Merton’s advice to the Christian community is to love others “with a love completely divested of all formally religious presuppositions, simply as our fellow men, men who seek truth and freedom as we do (1966:298).”

## CONCLUSION

Thomas Merton possessed not only the ability to recognize and understand what he was feeling at any given time but also the ability to express himself in a manner comprehensible to the conscientious reader. The message that resonates in Merton’s writing is a dissatisfaction with the state of men and women in today’s world.

The basis of Merton’s critique is the extent to which people have become alienated from themselves. Ultimately, the nature of human beings cannot be defined. For Merton, men and women are created by and sustained by the divine. There is no absolute distinction between the human and God. This realization, in turn, dissolves any ulti-

mate distinction among individual human beings. However, modern society does not view reality in this way. It is still firmly entrenched in the modernist paradigm, which begins with self and objectifies everything else. For Merton, this is anathema. By establishing the basis for reality in individual self-consciousness, modern human beings have only succeeded in alienating themselves from their own true nature.

According to Merton, the secular myth of progress blossomed under the objectification of the world and envisaged a new age in which humans would be the masters of their domain and be privy to the highest levels of maturity and freedom. However, instead of inheriting a bright future human beings have become mindless slaves to technological systems that promise instant gratification if one performs one's part as a cog in the machine as efficiently as possible. For Merton, the only way out of the crisis of modernity is the cultivation of a *contemptus mundi* that removes one from the status quo and enables him or her to come to terms with the agony of existence in a way that negates any subject/object duality and opens one to the infinite.

Merton rejects the world in order to truly embrace the world. He negates himself in order to realize his lack of isolated, individual identity. The contemplative lifestyle is the embodiment of his *contemptus mundi*. Originally, Merton sought only solitude and silence; he wanted nothing more to do with the world. But the more he renounced all selfish claims the more he began to realize that solitude and silence are things one carries within the heart and are only fully effective when they are put to use in the world. A person is never truly alone when he or she unmasks the illusion of selfhood and is exposed to the interdependence of all beings. The *contemptus mundi* removes one from the preoccupations and imposed standards of a world bent on maintaining a consumeristic ideal. In such a world the only respite one gains from agony is a fleeting moment of gratification experienced when some new material possession is consumed. The false self briefly clings to a sense of satisfaction at having accomplished something.

The *via negativa* is the means by which one is able to escape the confining effects of false identification. It decenters one's consciousness as the basis of all reality and throws him or her into darkness and confusion. All foundations and footholds are dissolved and one languishes in despair. But this despair is purgative. By giving up all claims to self-control we die to ourselves and are liberated from the confining labels that identify us as objects in a material world. Without identity and definition we experience the true freedom that is part of the source of all life, the infinite divine. By denying absolutes and refusing to define, the *via negativa* calls all authority into question. By removing oneself *from the machine* one immediately offers an alternative to the unquestioning obedience of mass society. The person who empties him/herself is no longer concerned with any doctrinal differences that may separate religious traditions and refuses to deny the one who is different, precisely because differences cease to exist when there is no foundational identity in which they could take root.

Merton's critique of his society is a postmodern response to the claims of modernity. It is postmodern because: a) Merton critiques the myths that form the foundation of modernity: the illusion of individualism, the collectivism that it engenders, and the

myth of progress that fuels it; and b) It does so without reverting to a pre-modern "Orthodoxy." Merton replaces such an orthodoxy with a de-centered approach to all religions and cultures. It should be noted that Merton is not merely making disinterested observations about the world around him. He is actively engaging in a systematic critique of what he considers to be the most pressing problems for a world in considerable turmoil. The earliest works of Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain* in particular, have a sarcastic tone to them. They do espouse a rejection of the world, but it is not a critique. Before the *via negativa* experience of *The Sign of Jonas* Merton rejected the world because of its failings. After his passage through the *via negativa* he embraced the world as a realm of interdependence. Merton's writing took an obvious turn toward social issues. Now from the vantage point of no-self he attacked those elements that were dehumanizing. Titles like *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* and *Contemplation in a World of Action* are highly critical of the unquestioning conformity that characterizes mass society. *Seeds of Destruction* and *Faith and Violence* make no apology for their criticism of racial segregation and the use of violence as a political tool. The fact that he identifies and critiques certain elements of modernity without reverting to a pre-modern ideal is what makes him postmodern without being ideologically so. He was surrounded by a Western Christian paradigm yet was able to take a step back, reflect upon what he saw, and voice his disapproval.

Merton does not revert back to a pre-modern standard when critiquing modernity. He does not see the answers lying in a retrieval of some noble, beneficent European golden age of Christendom. His response is clearly something different. He does not judge other religions and cultures by Western standards. Indeed, Merton rejects those standards precisely because they turn the physical world and all people in it into isolated objects. Recognition of the interdependence, dignity, and equality of all life immediately removes him from any Eurocentric world view and, in fact, makes him decidedly post-European.

Merton's response cannot be characterized as traditionally Christian - in the sense of embarking on a world mission to convert everyone. His ability to embrace the thought of and adopt some of the principles of Mahatma Gandhi, Chuang Tzu, and various Buddhist figures clearly makes him post-Christian. He is a Christian who points the way beyond "Christendom." For Merton, authentic Christianity is not threatened by other faith claims and does not find it necessary to turn all people into model Christians. He sees Taoism, Buddhism, and Christianity as converging and diverging in the *via negativa* and is able to learn more about his own potential from his encounters with other traditions in a manner that transcends cultural distinctions and doctrinal differences.

Readers of many of Merton's later works could question to what extent he remained a Christian. His immersion in the religions of the East that do not profess a belief in the traditional Judeo-Christian God, could cause many to misinterpret his message or avoid his thought altogether. Yet his description of Christianity in relation to various aspects of Buddhism *The Asian Journal* for instance, he remained fundamentally Christian and

essentially biblical. The problem with Merton is that he cannot be boxed in. The tone of his early works is doctrinal; the issues seem black and white. After *The Sign of Jonas*, however, Merton's writing changes considerably enough in content that one could question if the same man wrote *The Seven Storey Mountain*. In fact, Merton himself insisted that he was not the same man. Like Abraham, he was a man who set out on a journey, not knowing where he was going but trusting God to lead the way. As such he opened a path into a postmodern world that still awaits full articulation.

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**Issue #22 Jan 1999 —  
Conversations with Jacques Ellul**

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## About This Issue

Welcome to Issue number 22 of the *Ellul Forum*. This issue is a special treat, for the entire issue reflects contributions from Ellul himself. Although he is no longer with us, thanks to these publications, he is still very much apart of our lives. Our *Forum* features excerpts from anew book of conversations with Jacques Ellul by Patrick Troude-Chas-tenet Chaste net worked as Ellul's research assistant for over ten years and published these conversations in a French edition, *Entretiens avec Jacques Ellul (La Table Ronde)* in 1994. The English translation is being published by the *University of South Florida-Rochester-St. Louis Studies on Religion and the Social Order* through Scholars Press. We express our appreciation to Scholars Press for permission to publish these excerpts from *Jacques Ellul on Religion, Technology and Politics* by Pierre Troude-Chastenet. See the ad on page two for details if you wish to order a copy. In addition, we have selected poems translated and reviewed by James Lynch. Lynch reviews two books of Ellul's posthumously published poetry. These books reveal yet another side to this complex scholar. We owe both Chastenet and Lynch a great debt for bringing Ellul to us in these contributions.

The next issue of the *Ellul Forum* (July 1999) will devoted to the issue of human rights in relation to Ellul's work. Articles included will be: "Natural Law or Covenant: Human Rights and the Rights of Others" by Sylvain Dujancourt, "Law Rights and Technology" by Andrew Goddard and "Human Rights and the Natural Flaw" by Gabriel Vahanian.

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*About the Ellul Forum*

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Jacques Ellul (1912-1994), historian, theologian and social philosopher, was among the very first to look upon Technique as the key to our modernity. Because of the gloomy picture he paints of a society delivering humanity up to the manipulations of propaganda, state oppression and political illusion, this prophetic thinker has often been accused of describing today's world as little more than a wasteland. Yet hope and liberty are at the very heart of all his thinking. This book tells the story of Ellul, the anarchistic Christian, through a series of conversations where, for the first and last time in his life, he bares his heart to reveal to us what is tantamount to an intellectual legacy. It also gives us an overview of an immense lifework as yet insufficiently known.

Patrick Troude-Chastenet is a senior lecturer in Political Science at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques in the University of Bordeaux in France. He has published three books and numerous articles on Jacques Ellul. He is a member of the editorial board of The Ellul Forum.

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# Forum: Jacques Ellul in Conversation with Patrick Troude-Chastenet

## Jaques Ellul: on Religion, Technology and Politics Conversations with Patrick Troude-Chastenet

### From Chastenef s Introduction:

"I describe a world with no prospects, but I believe that God accompanies man throughout his whole existence". This is what Jacques Ellul told me one day. The man who wrote *La Foi au prix du doute* (The price of faith is doubt) died with this certitude on the 19th of May 1994 at his home in Pessac, just a few kilometers from the Bordeaux campus.

Right to the very last his long illness was to provide an illustration of one of his favourite themes namely that of the ambivalence of technological progress. It was to prevent him from completing our last two interviews. He, who used to thank his Maker continually for having given him an iron constitution and computer-like memory suffered agonies at not being able to find the name of this or that poet or painter that he had so loved. In the twilight of his life his body, which he had for so long overlooked, claimed its due forcing itself in a myriad ways into our conversation. My *maitre* was made of more than just his great intellect. Having to face this fact left me feeling very uneasy.

I should point out that for more than ten years, no doubt out of a sense of propriety, so-called personal questions, even the usual platitudes about general well-being, had been singularly absent from our conversations. The name of the collection where this book was originally to appear left no doubt as to the biographical nature of the undertaking, but by tacit consent we were constantly putting off the moment when we would leave the work and talk about the man.

It is probably not a coincidence that our relationship took a new turn following the death of his wife on the 16th of April, 1991. From that date on Jacques Ellul's life was never the same again. He was overcome by grief. For a while I thought he may never be able to get over it. He had covered the walls of his sitting-room with photos of his wife, Yvette. This is where he used to receive all his guests. I think he was filled with

regret and felt that it was urgent that he bear witness to how important she had been in his life. He wanted to convince me that his wife had shaped his destiny and that without her he would never have achieved his life's work.

I remember once when he handed back the manuscript of an introduction to his ideas that I had written, having conscientiously corrected the misprints and spelling mistakes, like the good teacher that he was, he turned to me and said: "That's good work but you haven't once mentioned my wife." I found this remark rather unjust since I was presenting the work in an academic context, nevertheless I promised to repair the oversight. In fact it wasn't an oversight but a deliberate, admittedly debatable, decision on my part to treat the work without systematically referring to the author's life.

If one is to go by the definition given by the German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey the work of a biographer is firstly to determine the objectives of the subject of the biography and then use these to throw light on how he lived his life and did what he did. There are extremely few lives that actually lend themselves to such a mechanical approach but if one were to apply this method to Jacques Ellul one would have to say that he always wanted to be a free man and a free spirit. Too bad if the word free has become a hackneyed term today; there is no better word to describe the underlying value that guided Ellul in all fields and in all circumstances.

Ellul cherished this freedom throughout his whole life having received it, as he said, as his father's legacy to him. Just six months before his own death, at an international conference dedicated to his work, Ellul revealed to us that his father had bequeathed him three guiding principles: never lie to anyone including yourself, be charitable towards the weak and stand up to those more powerful than yourself.

## **From the Interviews:**

### **Chapter One**

Patrick CHASTENET - *You seem to be the perfect personification of the old adage, "no man is a prophet in his own country" / In your opinion, what explains your success abroad and your belated popularity in France? Far from Paris, no salvation?*

Jacques ELLUL - To a large extent my success abroad was due to the fact my book on the technological society came out in America at a time when the Americans were experiencing the sort of problems I was talking about. As far as France is concerned, being provincial is always a determining factor if one wants a career as a writer or a philosopher. Several years ago a Parisian journalist came home here to interview me and asked: "But how can you be an intellectual if you live in the provinces?" That was a very typical reaction ! Anyhow I've always been quite marginal in all the activities I have been involved in.

I had a university career but did little work in my speciality. I am a Christian, but being a Protestant I am in a minority religion and within Protestantism I belong to an even smaller minority. Naturally I've always been on the side-lines because I've always

refused to join any of the mainstream political currents. Perhaps this has something to do with my character. I have the habit of always starting by criticizing all the things I like, which does not necessarily endear me to those who are close to me. Consequently I don't tend to criticize right-wing ideas or people since I have nothing in common with them, but I do criticize the left because I have friends there and a certain affinity for them. So it is obvious that I have always found myself alone and out of place...

*Without God, does your-work still have a meaning?*

Without God, my work would have an eminently tragic meaning. It would have driven me to taking the same way out as Romain Gary: suicide. I describe a world with no prospects but I have the conviction that God accompanies man throughout history.

*You are aware that some of your readers are atheists?*

Yes, but I believe that what I have to say about Christianity is open to everyone including non-believers. By that I mean that hope is transmissible, even without reference to a given God. Hope is the link between the two sides of what I write, which communicate back and forth in a sort of dialectical exchange in which hope is both the crisis point and the solution.

Chapter 4 ur

What is your earliest recollection?

It must have been in 1914 when I was two and a half. I was playing in the park, the Jardin Public, and I remember being drawn towards the sound of music, military music, when I saw some soldiers coming towards us carrying rifles and my mother saying to me: "Look at them they are soldiers going off to the war". Then I don't really know what got hold of me but I went over to a flower-bed picked a small bunch of flowers and took it over to one of the soldiers and said: "Here soldier this is for you".

I remember that he then took me in his arms and kissed me. I was extremely moved by that procession. Naturally at that age I had no idea what war was but I did understand that something extremely serious was going on...

*You once described yourself as being "cold and calculating". Is this true?*

I would say so. Even though I am very moved by poetry for example. I am both very passionate and very cold. I would describe myself as being cold insofar as I cannot help distancing myself from events. When I take part in social gatherings I do so wholeheartedly, I share the emotions of those who are close to me and afterwards I "ponder the matter". I try to analyse why certain things had been said and done.

*What would you say has changed in your character over the years?*

I have become more open towards other people this has happened under the influence of Christianity and of my wife. At sixteen I was a little brute interested in absolutely no-one except my friend Farbos and I was an absolute ghrton for work. Work and books were my passion. You mustn't forget I was an only child.

*In your spare time did you have a typical loner's activities?*

Not as far as my taste for a good fight was concerned. But it is true that I did have a hobby which was rather unusual for an antimilitary type like me (laughs). I would spend

whole afternoons making lead soldiers. I would take the little lead figures and work on them with a soldering iron. Then I would paint them taking care to be absolutely faithful to real-life uniforms because I was already deeply fascinated by history. I can show you my collection, I still have it I believe it must be rather unique...

*Do you see yourself as an austere and undemonstrative Calvinist?*

First of all I am not a Calvinist. I am a follower of Kari Barth who was just the opposite. He was joyful and warm-hearted. Calvin wanted to introduce an unshakeable logic into a domain that I consider not as intellectual. I can't go along with that.

*But you were a Calvinist at the outset?*

No. I was much more influenced by Luther and by Kierkegaard than I ever was by Calvin. I've studied Calvin (Laughs). When I was reading theology I was landed with the task of writing a critical summary of Book IV of the *Christian Institutes*. I read the whole work and believe me I found it deadly boring. I have never been attracted by that kind of rigour.

*You would agree, wouldn't you, that you are rather cold, even though this does not stem from your spiritual convictions?*

Yes. Despite the fact that I am Latin I am not demonstrative.

*How do you account for this reserve?*

I would say that it comes from the distance that existed in my feelings for my father. He was always extremely kind with me but he was never demonstrative. I suppose I've followed his example.

*I can't put my finger on it but I feel that you are leaving something out when you describe the influence of your parents.*

Perhaps I should have mentioned that my mother passed on her love of poetry to me. Fortunately I always had intelligent teachers who let us choose our own recitation texts. Mother, who adored poetry, always guided me towards the better poets. From the age of six or seven I have had a taste for poetry. Poetry is the art form which pleases me the most and in which I find deep meaning.

*Have you ever thought of publishing your own poems?*

No. I believe I've told you before if my heirs feel like publishing my note-books of poems, if they feel it's a good idea, they can. That is the way I am. In poetry one bares one's soul and I don't like baring my soul. [Forum editorial note: Some of Ellul's poems are published in this issue.]

*For those of us who have read your "What I believe" it is clear that you do not like confessions.*

Quite honestly I have to tell you that I am not enormously interested in myself. For example I've never been able to stand Proust's style. All that business of writhing tormented souls, tearing things to shreds, and going deeper ever deeper, it all leaves me stone cold. I may not be demonstrative but I am very outward-looking.

*But surely in order to understand others you must also understand yourself? Is introspective work necessarily self-satisfying?*



That is what I have always experienced, even in sociology. I watch a film or a T. V. program and feel this or that about what I've seen. My feelings are spontaneous, I'm a very good audience. It is afterwards that I start to turn it over in my mind.

I analyse my own feelings which I later transpose. I use myself as a model of the average man, usually I react like any man in the street. I'm rarely mistaken, quite simply because I'm well-equipped intellectually and that I don't consider myself as being different in any way...

Chapter 5 ve

*At what age did you discover the Bible?*

I began reading the Bible at the age of seven or eight. It was a book that I found fascinating. Of course there were lots of things I didn't understand in it.

*Don't you think that that is rather normal for an eight-year-old?*

It wasn't the actual content that I had trouble understanding. In the version of the Bible that we had at home some words were printed in italics. I asked my mother what that meant. She was unable to come up with an answer so she sent me off to a preacher she knew. I took my Bible along to show him but he couldn't give me an answer either. I was very disappointed and put a second question to him.

There's a passage in the Bible where God says he will spare all those he loves for a thousand generations but those who sin against him he will punish for three generations. I asked the preacher to explain to me how the calculation worked. What happens if in the middle of the thousand generations one man should disobey, this would imply that the next three generations should be punished, in which case what happens to the remaining five hundred generations who were entitled to be spared? He just stood there dumb struck, unable to answer this my second question. At which point I felt extremely frustrated and I said to myself: "You're going to have to manage on your Own. Grown-ups simply don't understand anything." This episode pretty well illustrates how I would read the Bible later on.

*When and how did your conversion occur?*

I would have preferred not to talk about that. When it did occur it was overwhelming I would even say violent. It happened during the summer holidays. I was staying with friends in Blanquefort not far from Bordeaux. I must have been seventeen at die time as I had just taken my final exams at school. I was alone in the house busy translating Faust when suddenly, and I have not doubts on this at all, I knew myself to be in the presence of a something so astounding, so overwhelming that entered me to the very centre of my being. That's all I can tell you.

I was so moved that I left the room in a stunned state. In the courtyard there was a bicycle lying around. I jumped on it and fled. I have no idea whatsoever how many dozens of kilometers I must have covered. Afterwards I thought to myself "You have been in the presence of God." And there you are.

*Could you physically see or hear this presence?*

No. No words were uttered. I saw nothing. Nothing. But the presence was unbelievably strong. I knew with every nerve in my body that I was in the presence of God.

*What happened to your usual critical faculties, which in any other situation would make you doubt your first impression, would make you check again and search out any counter-evidence? They didn't come into play here, did they?*

I very quickly realized that I was experiencing a conversion and that indeed I should put it to the test to see if it held strong or not. So I set about reading antichristian writers. By the time I was eighteen I had read Celsus, Holbachref EX “de Holbach Paul Henri” and also Marxref EX “Marx Karl” whom I’d come across earlier. My faith did not budge. It was for real.

*At the moment that this “revelation ” occurred did it cross your mind that perhaps your senses were playing tricks on you?*

No. I was in excellent shape both physically and psychologically. I was well-balanced. Of course I did entertain that possibility but finally I rejected it

*Have you ever felt like writing about your conversion and how it happened?*

I have never written about it and have no intention of ever doing so. Once again, I don't like talking about myself. As I have already explained for my poems, they give away too much about me. And I certainly wouldn't like to behave like a second Claudel. After all my conversion is a matter between me and God and it really isn't anyone else's business.

*Perhaps it's because you are afraid of ridicule that you don't -want to?*

Don't worry on that score. I've never been in the least afraid of ridicule.

*From your description it was sudden, violent and disturbing. There was nothing of the beatific illumination about what happened?*

Certainly not. And it didn't involve fear either but I was stunned. Meeting God had brought a complete change in my whole being. To begin with this meant a re-ordering of my ideas. I would have to think differently now that God was near me.

*Following this “startling ” encounter I believe your actual conversion happened at a much slower pace?*

Yes, it was a process which went on for years. On the one hand I knew that I had experienced something fundamental and unquestionable but on the other hand I wanted to avoid God's presence in my life. No doubt this has to do with my need for independence. I didn't want to have to depend on anyone in my life. What I hadn't understood was that faith can bring extraordinary freedom. For me Christianity was a sort of orthodoxy, a moral constraint and not at all a sort of liberation.

*You spoke of having to re-order the way you thought. Does this mean you already had a structured mind at this stage?*

I had an academic mind. In secondary school we didn't do anything too fanciful, believe me. I had done very well in my final year, majoring in the humanities. I had studied metaphysics but that left me cold. Intellectually I was in good working order but nothing more...

*When and in what circumstances did you meet Bernard?*

We were together from the beginning of the secondary school onwards. He was already remarkably eccentric and untidy. I was fascinated by his brilliant mind but was rather put off by his savage wit which frightened me somewhat. He was just the opposite of me. He did not work hard, he did not do well. We had nothing in common until one day, during our freshman year at the university, he invited me to go camping with him in the Pyrenees.

There were just the two of us, entirely by ourselves in our camp up in the mountains. I was bedazzled to find myself with someone who was ten times more cultivated than myself, who could talk about loads of writers I'd never even heard of and who miraculously seemed to have found something in me that he appreciated. Perhaps it was my gravity or perhaps my ability to listen. And goodness knows Bernard needed someone to listen to him. (Laughs). After that we often went on camping holidays together and became close friends.

*What did you get out of this friendship?*

Charbonneau EX "Charbonneau Bernard" taught me how to think and how to be a free spirit. Between the way I had been brought up by my father and the education I had received at school I had the single track mind of the good student. He got me out of this mindset and taught me how to think critically. Among other things he taught me, a confirmed city-dweller, to love nature and the countryside.

*You were a self-confessed Protestant and he was rather antichristian?*

Strictly speaking Bernard could not be described as antichristian. The Protestant scouts had left a deep mark on him but from the very outset he always claimed to be an agnostic and from that he never wavered even though he was to go through some experiences which would bring him closer to Christianity.

*Do you consider him as your intellectual equal?*

Today the answer is yes, but for years he was my intellectual master. He was the one who told me what to read and influenced my views on society. Make no mistake about it he was the captain and I was an excellent first-mate.

*Can you explain why his work has gone unrecognized?*

As Bernard used to say "I attacked society at its most sensitive points. If you attack society, society will hit back, the weapon it uses is silence." I believe he was right.

*Can you tell me more about your activities during your student days?*

I divided my time between attending classes, reading and working to keep myself. I used to give private classes every evening for a couple of hours. From 1932 or 1933 onwards much of our time was taken up with meetings of the Bordeaux section of the Friends of Esprit EX "Esprit". By then Bernard was studying History at the university and we saw each other every day. We would organize camping holidays to which we would invite along fellow students we found interesting.

*Were these mixed-sex camps?*

Of course.

*What were your views on that matter?*

Strange as it may seem Bernard who always seemed to be rather lax was very straight-laced on sexual morality and so was

I. As far as I was concerned it was out of the question to have a steady relationship with a girl if I didn't intend to marry her.

Indeed, but surely nobody even thought of you as being "lax" did they?

No. (Laughs). But then I suppose the fact that I didn't have a cent to my name was a bit of a godsend from that point of view too. While all my friends were able to treat their girlfriends to dances or take them for coffee, there wasn't the slightest chance that I could do the same. I couldn't even treat myself to such things I simply had no money. I never tried to approach a girl and indeed I never met any girls.

*Didn't this make you feel frustrated?*

No. I was happy with my private life, my reading and the more time went on the more I withdrew into my books. It was my wife who got me out of that, but that was much later on.

*Did you feel any antagonism towards people who were different from you, did you feel contempt for womanizers?*

Not at all. My best friend at university a young man named Ldca, was an incredible womanizer. He used to have a new girlfriend every three months, and that didn't shock me one bit. I was very strict with myself as far as morals went but completely openminded towards what others got up to. It was this attitude that enabled me to work with delinquency prevention clubs in later years. Ldca was to become very useful to me, he was an extremely good boxer, so after 1934 when the serious fighting began he became my bodyguard. ...

*You just mentioned the strikes over Jeze Gaston! What happened exactly?*

They happened in 1934 or 1935 shortly after Mussolini's EX "Mussolini Benito had invaded Ethiopia. Professor Gaston Jezeret EX "Jtee Gaston" was defending the cause of Ethiopia before the International Court of Justice in the Hague. This provoked an incredible mobilisation of extreme right-wing students in all the law schools throughout France, who called for the resignation of Jdze on the grounds that, in their view, fascist Italy was acting within its rights.

In the turmoil I can still see myself grabbing demonstrators by their jacket lapels out of the fray and asking them "But do you have the faintest idea who Jdzeref EX "Jeze Gaston" is?". They had no idea but kept on shouting "Jeze must go 1". For me that was quite a revelation into the base mentality of the masses.

In the end there were only three of us left standing against these baying hounds. There was Henri Rodelref EX "RCdel Henri", who was shot by the Germans during the war. There was a girl, who looked as if she may be Dutch and who was trying to curb the demonstrators. And there was me.

*And who was the Dutch-looking girl?*

She was my future wife. We married in 1937. She was a first year law student and I was working for my doctorate. When we met she had already trained as a nurse. Her father lived in South Africa and didn't look after her at all. It was her grandfather

who had decided that she wasn't strong enough to be a nurse, which was quite true. On his advice she had turned to law, but that didn't interest her at all.

*Was she involved in politics?*

Strictly speaking, no. She had leanings towards the Jeune Republicref EX "Jeune Republique" movement but what really disturbed her deeply was crowd behavior. It was enough for the crowd to shout against a man for her to leap at once to his defence.

*Was she a Christian?*

She had been an ardent Catholic. She was brought up by a former nun of an order that had been secularized who was a most admirable woman indeed, and whom I came to admire enormously later on. At about the age of eighteen she started asking herself the usual questions one asks at that age so she sought out a chaplain to help her. He listened to her veiy patiently with a gentle smile on his face then said: "My dear little Yvette, I've already dealt with all your questions in the catechism class. Now you just look back through what you learned and you'll find all the answers."

Yvette stood up and said "Goodbye. You won't be seeing me again." That was how she broke with Christianity as a whole, to the great sorrow of the former nun who had brought her up.

*Was that in Bordeaux?*

Quite near, in Cadaujac. My mother-in-law lived in Paris. By the time I met Yvette she had become antichristian and was very much under the influence of Nieztscheref EX "Nieztsche"Error! Bookmark not defined.. One day I had invited her to come camping with me. There were three or four of us on that trip. I used to read the Bible quietly in my comer. Now this intrigued her as she had never opened a Bible herself. She then asked me to explain certain passages to her and that is how, thanks to the Bible we became close. We would always read and discuss the Bible together from that time on...

*Chapter 6*

*Around 1930 when you organized yourfirst camping expeditions in the Pyrenees were you actually unaware of the Wandervogel" which after all had been in existence for some time?*

Completely unaware. Our goal was simply to get closer to nature and to enable young city-dwellers to come and live in the countryside. This corresponded deep-down to what we were and to our own experience.

*Wasn't there something ofa initiation rite in what you were doing which could be compared with the ideology of those German youth movements?*

No, we did not share the same ideology. But it is true that we required anyone who wished to take part in our camping expeditions to be able to spend a weekend alone in the mountains. No-one actually did that however I As for the rite of diving into ice-cold water, that was something we had already been doing for a long time, from the time of the Protestant post-scout movement in fact. We took those scouts who were able to stand an extremely tough existence. Among other things they had to go

though there was the what we idiotically called “the drawing of lots” every morning which involved diving completely naked into one of the lakes in the Vosges.

*Were you all around the same age?*

Paulo Breitmayerref EX “Breitmayer Paulo was the eldest. Then there were two or three boys of my age, that is to say less than twenty. One of those was Pierre Fouchienef EX ’Touchier Piene” who was later to become a remarkable pastor. We were the organizers of this movement which was supposed to be anti-boyscout We would perform some of the scout rituals backwards. For us the scouts were far too disciplined and far too likely to become a youth movement in the service of the State. Whereas what we were proposing was totally anarchistic. I can still remember some of the things we got up to at night that were extremely funny.

*Can you give me an example?*

Certainly. Two or three of us would decide to create havoc throughout the camp. We would start by pulling up all the tent pegs sb that the tents collapsed on their sleeping inhabitants. we would walk twenty-five kilometers through the mountains because we wanted to get to such and such place.

*So this was in no way linked to a belief in physical effort or a glorification of virile strength?*

Not at all. Not at all. Absolutely not. We never ever held that kind of belief. Charbonneauf EX “Charbonneau Bernard” was always saying to anyone who would listen to him that he did whatever he pleased. Of course this quest for what pleased him could entail the most incredible marches through snowflows high up in the mountains.

*I believe you attended a Nazi meeting in the thirties. Is that right?*

Yes, I went to Germany for the first time in 1934. I went again in 1935 when I attended a Nazi gathering in Munich.

*Had this any connection with your activities in the personalist groups?*

Not at all I had been invited to Germany by some Protestant associations.

*So how did you wind up attending a Nazi meeting?*

I went out of curiosity. There were such meetings taking place all over at that time, you know.

*Did these meetings give you foodfor thought for your later work on propaganda?*

Absolutely. It was fascinating to see how easily a crowd could be whipped up and welded into a single unit... No-one, absolutely no-one, had any individual reactions left.

*Was this a Protestant scout movement?*

No it was rather a Protestant anti-scout movement. (Laughs)

*Did you have a uniform?*

Absolutely not. The scouts made a ritual of raising the flag. So we performed a mock ceremony for the lowering of the flag.

*Did Bernard Charbonneauf EX “Charbonneau Bernard” come along with you?*

No. He had once been a scout but after that he refused to let himself be dragooned into any organized group whatsoever.

So at the same time as you were attending the anti-scout camps and you were also attending those of Bernard Charbonneau EX “Charbonneau Bernard”. Did he attach any importance to tests of endurance?

He didn’t devise endurance tests specifically. Our endurance was tested by the activities we indulged in. For instance

*What about you? Did you get caught up in the crowd reaction at that instant?*

No, but it was difficult not to raise my arm in the general salute. We did get lots of funny looks but somehow managed to contain ourselves nevertheless...

*Chapter Seven*

*What did you actually do in the Resistance?*

I was never involved in any fighting. Basically I did relief and liaison work We were able to help a good number of Jewish families from our area. We also worked with friends from Poitiers who redirected “deliveries” from Paris to us from time to time. Despite being very run down our home was very large so we were able to house anyone who turned up: French resistance-workers, escaping Spaniards and even three Russian refugees from prison camps in Germany.

These three guys had crossed the whole of Germany and the whole of France and it was my job to get them into fit condition. They were as nice as could be. It brings a lump to my throat when I remember our first evening meal together. My wife had served them soup and invited them to start. All three of them had their heads bowed and their hands joined. They only began their meal when they had finished grace and crossed themselves with a flourish. This had me flabbergasted I can tell you. These were members of the Komsomol I We got on extremely well together all the time they stayed with us the only thing that bothered us was their complete lack of sense of danger. They were tall and blond so they were recognizable from miles away and these silly fools roamed all over the place.

The reason we had so many people coming through our house was that it was situated only a few hundred meters from the demarcation line. I spent most of my time helping people get across into the free French zone. I was in cahoots with an organization that dealt in forged papers. So I was able to provide a whole series of people with forged identity cards or forged ration books.

I was also in contact with three neighbouring maquis in Pellegrue, Frontenac and Sauveterre-de-Guyenne and was able to transmit messages from one to the others.

*So you were a go-between, in fact?*

Yes I was. I was there to warn them of any danger as well. One day a German motorized company came and camped for a while in our garden. When I saw them preparing to head off towards Pellegrue I leapt on my bike. Since I knew all the side roads I managed to get to the maquisards to warn them just in time.

*Was anyone aware of your clandestine activities?*

Yes. Of course. Whenever the gendarmes came to make inquiries about us the mayor would always answer: "No you've got nothing to worry about with the Elluls. I've got nothing on them. They are O.K." And nothing more came of it. Now the mayor was a wily old peasant. He knew perfectly well what we were up to but always covered for us. I never talked to anyone in the village about things but everybody knew. Moreover just before the Germans began their retreat some of the older inhabitants of Martres came to see me to offer their services. Their rifles dated back to the first world war but they wanted to join the fray.

*Was it because of your convictions about non-violence that you didn't take up arms?*

I didn't have a theoretical position on the subject. At the end of 1943 I had brought several young people to live with us who were coming to the end of their studies. We came to the conclusion that it would be better if we were armed. I got in contact with the network that provided forged documents but was never able to track down any weapons. That's all there is to it. Had we been able to lay hands on some revolvers or tommy-guns no doubt we would have joined the maquis in Sauveterre. I was perfectly well aware that if I got involved in the fighting I would be crossing over into the realm of necessity but if I had to I was quite prepared to give up my liberty...

*Chapter Nine*

*Locally I believe you are very much involved in the prevention of juvenile delinquency?*

Yes indeed, this is all due to a meeting I had with Yves Charrierref EX "Chanier Yves" in 1958. He came to me asking for legal and spiritual advice. He had been working as community instructor with a public organization and he felt that very little could be achieved for maladjusted boys by keeping them in institutions. In other words, he wanted to work with young delinquents, not in an enclosed environment, but in their natural surroundings: the street. We therefore founded the Prevention Club in Pessac and I worked there with Yves until he died in 1969 as a result of a diving accident.

*Concretely, what was your role?*

Basically I was an intermediary. I was a buffer between Charrier, the police, the courts and the Social Services Department who paid his salary but wanted assurances. Actually I was the local personality who was there as a sort of caution for the running of such a marginal club. At that time in France there were no more than two or three such experiments being carried out

*Do you have any direct contact with these youngsters?*

Yes, I often went to the club and they knew that I was "The boss" as they would say. I was very well received by these young people who could in fact be very violent. I never had any problems. Something quite extraordinary happened as the deviant behaviour changed pattern from bomber jackets to the beat generation to drug addicts, some of them asked Charrierr if he knew of someone who could explain the Bible to them. So once a week I gave Bible classes for thirty or so misfits who I must say turned up very regularly.

*Was Charrier a Christian?*



Not explicitly ! Whenever I asked him about it he would always say, “Look, I’ll look after doing what has to be done and you can do the believing for. me.”. (Laughs) He wasn’t a Christian but he behaved as a Christian should.

I believe Yves Charrier took great personal risks, and to his cost, by physically confronting hooligans.

*How did he cope with drug addicts?*

Chanier had less success with the new style delinquents than with the black-leatherjacket brigade. He once said to me: “When all is said and done, what can I do? I know a young boy who lives in the basement of a tower block in Burck. He spends all day on a mattress on the floor. There are some girls who bring him food but he does nothing, simply nothing”. In other words Charrier felt he could only do something with delinquents whose delinquency took an active form. As he often explained to me: “They have bags of energy but they bum it all up in deviant behaviour. What I do is to try to get them to channel it into doing something good”. With lethargic, indolent youngsters he didn’t know where to start

*Has the Prevention Club survived his death?*

Yes. After his death I took over the directorship of the club which was not easy. Then I found an excellent instructor, Luc Fauconnet, who was almost the complete opposite of Charrier, but who was the sort of person who could deal with this new type of misfit. He was a man of words. And it’s true that drug addicts, although they are very sluggish in behaviour, can be immensely talkative. The most difficult part, as the new director told me, was that they wanted to start talking at two in the morning.

*Chapter 10*

*If you had to sum up in a few words what your wife has brought you, apart from her love, what would you say it was?*

I think I can answer that question by quoting something she said herself. We were not yet engaged but were seeing a great deal of each other and I was preparing for the agregation exam at the time when she said to me: “Do you realize that if you go on like this you’ll end up being nothing more than a bookworm?”

I replied that I couldn’t really see what else there was to do, to which she replied: “But you must live your life !” I was completely baffled by that because I had no idea what living actually meant

That is what she did for me. She helped me learn to live. This meant that I learned to relate to others. I wouldn’t say that before knowing her I was completely insensitive to the simple pleasures of life, but with her I learned to appreciate and enjoy so many things. She also taught me to listen. That is something I didn’t know how to do. That’s absolutely true. Being a teacher by nature I was someone who talked and who didn’t listen (Laughs)

Learning to listen was useful to me in my job and even more so for me as a Christian and the work I had to do there. She used to say to me, “You can’t be a good Christian if you don’t listen to other people. How can you help people to understand if you don’t listen to their problems and questions?”

Obviously, and I don't want this to be taken as a criticism, I had been modeling my attitudes on those of my friend Charbonneau. He was completely impervious to other people's questions too. He would air his own views without a thought for what others might think. I was rather like that when I was twenty.

*So your wife was able to change your character?*

She changed my whole way of being. After that receiving people and listening to them became a very important part of my life...

*What were your wife's interests and her tastes when you first met her? Which of her passions did she pass on to you?*

What she passed on to me was more a certain sensitivity that she possessed than her position on different matters. She was extraordinarily sensitive to atmosphere. Sometimes when we were in a group she would pick up any feelings of unease or tensions between various people there. As for me as long as I was talking I never noticed if anything was the matter. I was completely oblivious of anything else going on.

It was very important for her that the relationships of those people around her should be free-flowing both with her and between themselves. She found it very hard to stand the roughness of exchange that had always existed with my old friends. We could be very violent in our arguments and then be the best of friends when it was over. She would defend her ideas with much more delicacy...

*What do you regret most in your life?*

This is going to sound very pretentious but I don't really regret anything. Nothing apart from having been a little impatient with my wife towards the end of her life. Otherwise I regret nothing in my life, even if I have sinned. I'm not a saint.

*I was thinking in terms of what you would have liked to have done or to have seen achieved. Or of an area which may have disappointed you?*

First of all there are books that I would have liked to have written and that I never got round to. For example I would really have liked to write a book about what the sea has meant to me. Next I regret having several hundred unfinished poems that I can't be bothered to go back to. I criticize myself for that sometimes.

*So that is what you regret about writing. Are there any regrets concerning your life as a man of action or simply your life as a man?*

I don't regret much in fact. Perhaps I focused too much on my self that is true. I always succeeded what I wanted to succeed in. Perhaps I didn't help others enough. Although I do know that my students appreciated me, liked me and I helped them to the best of my ability. I don't judge myself severely even though I wasn't always what I should have been as far as my wife was concerned.

# Book Reviews

## The Poetry of Jacques Ellul

An Essay-Review & Translation by James Lynch

After Jacques Ellul's death in 1994 (at age 82) there were added to his *oeuvre* two small books of poems: *Silences: Poemes* (Bordeaux: Opales, 1995) and *Oratorio: Les quatre cavaliers de VApocalypse* (Bordeaux: Opales, 1997). Both volumes were published with the assistance of l'Institut des Sciences de la Nature et de rAgro-alimentaire de Bordeaux. Neither book contains an introduction or a preface, or any explanation to the poems that they contain, save for a blurb on the back cover of each.

*Oratorio* is composed of poems Ellul wrote during the 1960s and embodies many of the major themes of his life work: nature, technology, death, God, man, isolation, and freedom. These poems, divided into five chapters, form a unified whole narrating Ellul's vision of the Apocalypse. As the seals are broken, various narrators describe the world's destruction and the roles they play in it. These monologues are interspersed by different "choruses," whose purpose, as in Greek tragedy, is to comment on and forward the action taking place.

Ellul has chosen to write these poems in a variety of forms and meters, but has a tendency towards alexandrines, often rhymed, which fit his lofty, tragic subject matter. The poems are at turns reminiscent of the mysticism of St Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross:

Quand le Seigneur des Temps accepte de mourir et que la liberty s'affirme en cet instant dans l'accueil de ce pas qu'homme peut seul subir soumis au plus profond dernier depouillement (Mort amere ou la fleche retombe au sommet de sa course)

(from "Quatrieme partie: La Mort, III")

*When the Lord of all Times agrees to die and liberty's affirmed at that moment in the welcome of the step man alone can suffer subjected to the final, deepest examination (bitter Death when the arrow falls again to the summit of its course)*

or of the beautifully-described horror of Baudelaire:

Pour cet appel!—a ce cheval—le quatridme— arrachd lourdement des mondes inférieurs flechissant sous le poids des victoires certaines et A son cavalier couronné de tumeurs (from "Quatrieme partie: La mort, I")

*As for that call—to such a horse—the fourth dragged heavily from inferior worlds sagging with weight of certain victories and that of his horseman, crowned with tumors.*

*Silences*, by contrast, is a less unified collection of sixty-six poems originally handwritten by Ellul in a notebook and later gathered into their present format by his secretary, Claude Fauconnet, and his oldest son, Jean Ellul. These poems are more varied in both their themes and forms than those from *Oratorio*, as well as being more personal. The majority are untitled, as one might expect from poems taken from such an intimate source. Despite the shift in focus, these poems deal with many of the same themes as those found in *Oratorio* and in Ellul's work as a whole.

I have chosen for the purpose of my translation two poems from each book which I consider to be representative of the collections in general. I have alternated stanzas of Ellul's original French with my English approximation.

From *Oratorio*:

"Troisième partie: Le cheval noir"

II: Choeurs alternés

Premier chœur

*Part Three: The Black Horse*

*11: Alternating Choruses*

*First Chorus*

L'homme a dit: "Je produis" — Les richesses écloses au terme du travail des générations ont répondu sans frein au viol total des choses — Détruite la Nature, et l'homme en est caution!

*Man said: "I produce"—The riches budding at the end of the toil of generations responded unchecked to the absolute rape of things— Nature Destroyed, and man is the guarantee!*

Ah! quand seront comblés les fossés de ton âme assainis les marais et constants les remparts répandus dans la plaine et bunkers et silos — Érige cette Tour d'où tu comptes tes biens!

*Ah! when will the gaps in your soul be filled the swamps drained and the ramparts constructed and scattered across the plain with bunkers and silos— Erect that Tower where you count your wealth!*

Contemple l'esclavage où tu mis ta fortune Les fleuves avortés les conduites forcées Et les monts déboisés qui pleurent leur absence Les Elons épuisés et les poches vides

*Consider the slavery in which you place your fortune The aborted rivers the forced canals*

*And the deforested mountains that weep their lack The exhausted veins and emptied pockets.*

Les monceaux de scories restants seuls de ta rage et seul libra, le vent qui disperse tes biens...

Devant tant de richesse — regarde donc les mains qui se tendent en vain — reflétant ton image

*Only the slag heaps of your rage remain and, solely free, the wind that scatters your goods... Before so much wealth—look at your hands that grasp in vain—reflecting your image*

Chaque instant te dévoile un besoin ddsold Tant de travail pour rien que plus d'oeuvres encore ndeessaires toujours vide toujours encore oil s'enchame l'dcho des travaux consommés

*Each moment reveals to you a sorry need*

*So much work for nothing but still more work (always necessary always ringing hollow) following the echo of accomplished tasks*

Où prendrais-tu ce qu'il faut pour répondre? usure de la terra et de ta propre vie quand pour l'entretenir et combler ton envie tu t'dnerves, te chatres

*Where will you find what is necessary for responding? the wearing-away of the earth and of your own life when, in order to maintain it and fulfill your desire, you become nervous, castrate yourself*

Pour ta force tarie tu t'es fait relayer et tu comptes pour vivre en cette ardente quete sur les monstres actifs qu tu as embrayés — Sombres founders en toi de l'implacable Bete.

*With your forces run dry, you make yourself step down and, to live on that ardent quest, you count on the active monsters that you have set in motion Somber harbingers for you of the Implacable Beast.*

Mais te voici maintenant soude a tes machines et rien ne pent plus te ddgager de leur destin La Machine elle fonctionne— elle fonctionne de nuit, de jour

Tu te fatigues, tu te crispes, tu te tends tu te trompes — Tu la suis.

*But here you are now fused with your machines and nothing can extricate you from your destiny The Machine it operates— it operates by night, by day*

*You grow weary, you grow tense, you strain, you fool yourself—*

*You follow it.*

Bientot dormir! Non ton repos ou le prendras-tu? quand la machine tourne encore et ton bras fatigud n'a plus d'ardeur mais elle continue ignorante — aumemeiythme ettedepasse te laisse loin derriere endormi au long des routes ou san faiblir tourne le fer.

Soon to sleep! Where will you take your repose? while the machine still turns and your weary arm no longer has fervour, but It continues ignorant—at the same rhythm and it surpasses you It leaves you far behind, asleep along the routes where, without weakening, the iron turns.

Deuxieme choeur

Second Chorus

Reve, oh combien, avant que l'Inexpiable t'arrache le bras de ses ongles de fer

avant que l'Impardonnable arrache ta cervelle oublieuse

Elle qui n'oublie jamais — et ne peut supporter qu'on l'oublie

Reve de ta possession, de ta maitrise, de ta gloire

Reve

de ta production, de ton bonheur qui vient

Ce qui vient e'est la calculante Broyeuse.

Dream, oh how much, before the Inexpiable tears up your arm

with Its iron nails  
 before the Unpardonable extracts your forgetful  
 brain  
 the Machine that never forgets—and cannot bear that another forgets it  
 Dream of your possession, of your mastery of your glory Dream  
 of your production, of your coming happiness  
 What comes is the calculating Grinder.  
 From Silences:  
 Pdlernage & la civilisation de la mort  
 Pilgrimage to the Civilization of the Dead  
 Quelle ombre, Messeigneurs, je n'eusse cru si dense L'absence oh je m'enfonce et  
 m'ignore moi-meme Simple question de r^flexe sans doute.  
 Mais nous sommes ddpassds par ce jeu provisionnel dont nous avons l'impression  
 de faire les frais sans en etre encore certains.  
 Such darkness, Sirs, I wouldn't have believed so dense The absence into which I  
 plunge and ignore myself A simple question of reflexes no doubt.  
 But we are outmatched by that provisional game of which we have the impression  
 of bearing the brunt without yet being certain of it  
 Quoidonc? unedtoile?  
 Le matin?  
 Quelqu'obscur souvenir, ou le choix d'un destin.  
 On ne nous la fait plus. Nous avons laissd tout cela a la ddrive.  
 Et c'est trds loin de nous—Introduction  
 au monde de la Terreur—Parade sur l'echafaud.  
 Nous avons cet azur dans le ventre.  
 Mais oui—et pas ailleurs—pas meme sur le drapeau Rouge.  
 What then? a star?  
 The morning?  
 Some obscure memory, or the choice of a destiny.  
 We can do it no longer. We have set all of that adrift.  
 And it is very far from us—Introduction to the world of Terror—Parade on the  
 Scaffolding.  
 We have that blue in our bellies.  
 Of course—and not elsewhere—not even on the  
 Red flag.  
 L'immense intestin prophylactique nous tympanise sans arret  
 Et nous nous retrouvons nez a nez  
 Sans aucune podsie  
 The immense prophylactic intestine splits our ears without  
 stopping  
 And we find ourselves face to face  
 Without any poetry

sans aucune reciprocite  
 sans aucune profondeur densite masse epaisseur sans mythes ni auroles dans un  
 etat de digestion ties avancee  
 without any reciprocite  
 without any depth density mass thickness  
 without myths and halos  
 within a very advanced state of digestion  
 Bol alimentaire d'une civilisation mondialisee om-niprsente  
 omnicompetente omnispatialisee  
 Nous sommes ainsi assures de nous y retrouver  
 Mais il fait noir et nos desserts se font attendre  
 Peut-etre aura-je l'honneur de me retrouver tout entier fecal certainement trds saur  
 Car tout l'utilisable est dejd utilise et l'on cherche affole quelques briques d lui  
 remettre Enorme coquecigrue qui risque de s'arreter (chemise longue—boucle blonde—  
 et les yeux Rien n'espere que le bistre et que la nuit)  
 Bolus of a globalized civilization omnipresent omnicompetent omnispatialized  
 We are thus assured of finding ourselves there  
 But it's pitch dark and our desserts keep us waiting  
 Perhaps I will have the honor of findingmyself entirely fecal certainly very smoked  
 Because all Are usable has already been used and we search, panic-stricken  
 for some bricks to put back  
 Enormous chimera that risks stopping  
 (long shirt—blonde curl—and the eyes  
 hope for Nothing except the black-brown and the night)a  
 part <?a vos trompettes peuvent sonner  
 Pour le boulot, midi sound—pour le devoir, sainte cohorte  
 —et la  
 Patrie ou le Proletariat  
 Plume la Poule—  
 apart from this your trumpets can sound  
 For work, lunchtime blown—for duty, saint troop  
 —and the  
 Patria or the Proletariate  
 Pluck the chicken  
 Eveques ou Maries, Secretaire du syndicat, chef de cellule du  
 Parti des Fusilles—Croix de Lorraine et croix faucillee— dollar  
 et goupillon—sabre—etoile rouge et blanche— Ambassadeur ET  
 Commissaire du peuple—Poete Surrealofficiel du malheur des pauvres et du Mard-  
 chal quelqu'il soit  
 Les nouveaux aristas *i* la lanterne  
 Mais s'il y a des canons  
 il n'y a plus de son.

Bishop or Maries, Secretary of the union, chief of the committee of the  
Party of the Executed—Cross of *Lorraine* and cross of the reaped—  
dollar

and holy-water sprinkler—saber—red and white star

ET Ambassador

Superintendent of the people—Surreal-official Poet

of the misfortune of the poor and of the Marshal whatever-it-might-be

the nouveau riche at the lantern

But if there are any cannons

there is no more sound.

Adolescence

Adolescence

Avez-vous oublid ces jours de solitude oh rien ne nous pouvait sortir de nos ennuis  
quand l'implacable avait organisd nos fugues et ramenait sans fin l'absurditd des nuits

Toutes les Nuits—et nous allions de l'une & l'autre les fidaux s'abattaient sur  
des blds de misdre et nous quetions les grains jaillis des yeux d'un autre Lueur seule  
accordee dans ce ddsert de pierre

Oh tragi que innocent des amours enfantines

Have you forgotten days of solitude

when nothing could save us from our boredom: the implacable organized our flights  
and brought back endlessly the absurd nights Every Night—we went from one to the  
next the plagues swept down on miserable young shoots we sought the flashing scraps  
from others' eyes the sole Gleam granted this stoney desert

Oh tragic innocence of childish loves

These collections serve well both as an epitaph to Ellul and as a compliment to his  
scholarly works; they offer insight into the spirit of a man who is often more recognized  
for his mind.



**Issue #23 Jul 1999 — Jacques  
Ellul on Human Rights**

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## About This Issue

Welcome to Issue number 23 of the *Ellul Forum*. This issue focuses on Jacques Ellul's views on human rights. Although human rights come up in a variety of places in Ellul's work, he wrote surprisingly little directly on this subject. Our guest editor for this issue is Gabriel Vahanian, Professor Emeritus of Strasbourg University. Professor Vahanian asked two of the most impressive new Ellul scholars from England and France to analyze Ellul's views on human rights and to respond to each other's papers. The first, Andrew Goddard, on the theology faculty of Oxford University, analyzes Ellul's views on law, rights and technology. The second, Sylvain Dujancourt, a pastor in the French Reformed Church, examines the themes of natural law and covenant in Ellul's treatment of rights. Vahanian's own essay both introduces and responds to Goddard and Dujancourt. These authors manage to pull together Ellul's views on human rights, evaluate their adequacy and offer some creative insights of their own. We owe them a debt of gratitude for framing the issues, suggesting constructive future directions and encouraging further dialogue among us on this important theme in contemporary ethics.

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Jacques Ellul (1912-1994), historian, theologian and social philosopher, was among the very first to look upon Technique as the key to our modernity. Because of the gloomy picture he paints of a society delivering humanity up to the manipulations of propaganda, state oppression and political illusion, this prophetic thinker has often been accused of describing today's world as little more than a wasteland. Yet hope and liberty are at the very heart of all his thinking. This book tells the story of Ellul, the anarchistic Christian, through a series of conversations where, for the first and last time in his life, he bares his heart to reveal to us what is tantamount to an intellectual legacy. It also gives us an overview of an immense lifework as yet insufficiently known.

Patrick Troude-Chastenet is a senior lecturer in Political Science at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques in the University of Bordeaux in France. He has published three books and numerous articles on Jacques Ellul. He is a member of the editorial board of The Ellul Forum.

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# Forum: Ellul on Human Rights

## Human Rights and the Natural Flaw

by Gabriel Vahanian

Obviously, this specialist on institutions that was Jacques Ellul, was by and large, in his writings if not in his personal life, rather unappreciative of a chief and once most conspicuous one amongst them, the church. At best, he was scarcely more appreciative of it than he was suspicious of the state. Just as he shunned developing a theory of the state, he seems to have deliberately refrained from investing in a theory of the church. A jurist and, therefore, a debunker of all that claims to represent the law (*Droit*) together with the rights (*droits*) it implements, he does not believe in the technicalized and sociological promotion of human rights, deeming them to be non-biblical. A theologian, he revels in the linguistic anachronisms of a so-called biblical theology and never thought real help if any might ever come from philosophy. Influenced by Barth's *Church Dogmatics* as he was, his own theology is more ethically oriented than it is church-bound. At best, it aims at a future church above and beyond its current confessional or denominational demarcation lines.

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As a matter of fact, with the advent of modernity the church is bound to be no longer as it used to be. Better put, or worse yet, the church itself can no longer afford to be as it used to be, if only for one reason, namely religion. Religion is on the path of shrinking further and further, but what is actually shrinking is religion in its traditional structures. And it will unavoidably go on withering until or unless it is grasped through a different set of parameters, as for example Schleiermacher will point out. But, then, how different? From religion as feeling of absolute dependence to the emergence of the absolute state by way of papal infallibility, the fact is that belief is becoming more a matter of private choice than of social consensus. Even the private individual is turning from believer to citizen. And that probably explains, in part, why both sociology and ecclesiology come into being as inventions of that same modernity, no facet of which is spared from Ellul's unrelenting critique, sooner or later.

By training as well as by calling, Ellul inevitably becomes aware of the fact that a significant, and probably not the least, upheaval caused by the rise and spread of modernity came precisely in the wake of the gradual - and perhaps not so gradual —process by which ecclesiology was supplanted by sociology, though perhaps more in the latter's pretense than in its actual appearance. Not that the demise of die church

was not echoed in the larger cultural arena. But even the overshadowing of ecclesiology by sociology might legitimately be viewed as expressive of yet another need, namely a new understanding of the church.

Indeed, if the shift from ecclesiology to sociology does point to various aspects of the secularization of a social order till then informed by the Christian faith and shaped in the shadow of the church, whether in its sacerdotal and sacrificial or in its prophetic and charismatic guise, a question still remains. Insofar as, in keeping with the Christian tradition, the secular does not exhaust tire religious but is fulfilled through it, and vice versa, is not that shift in the construal of the social scheme of Western culture to be understood as becoming really radical only if, and when, from religious to secular or, for that matter, from mythological to technological, it is viewed as beckoned by the need for a new albeit somewhat repressed understanding of the church, rather than its mere demise?

The shift becomes radical only to the degree in which the church, instead of being superimposed on society and overshadowing it, is viewed at one and the same time as concomitant with and iconoclastic of the social order. Or put differently, to the degree in which the church implements a principle inherent to its faith and whose focus consists in changing the world rather than changing worlds rather than, as seems to be the case with Ellul and his penchant for the two kingdoms, driving a wedge between creation and redemption. That such seems still to be the case with Ellul is to me undeniable, though not beyond a point of no return. He does compensate for that wedge, somehow. He thus exhibits a rather incongruous if genuine emphasis on an alternative, not to say an oxymoron: universal salvation. Which he pits against another type of oxymoron, predestination. Claiming, though perhaps for the wrong reason, that the latter is for him much too philosophical a notion, he nevertheless construes it in chronological rather than eschatological terms, historicisti-cally rather than temporally, and so to speak as a story rather than as a scenario - as a plot in search of actors rather than on account of actors in search of the plot, yet one in .constant re-enactment, much in the sense of repetition.

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Given their task, neither Dujancourt nor Goddard use this kind of language. They keep to Ellul's own whose re-establishment does in some way approximate re-enactment, at stake in which is the life lived here and now, once and for all, in and through that autonomy which enforces the secular, allowing it thereby at once to come into its own and to be put into question. However muted, it seems to me, a sense of this pervades Ellul's re-establishment, although Dujancourt, correctly, hears it in terms of the God who saves against whose blocking of the God who creates Goddard rightfully protests - and all of them, however, overlook the God who reigns. This is the God who is all in all, only because, whether as God who saves or as God who creates, God was and is as God will ever be - radically Other. So radically other that in Christ there is neither Greek no Jew, that Zion is no place unless it is a birthplace for all people, and that if I am created in the image of God, then God is closer to me

than I am myself. No self being self-sufficient, I have no self unless I am claimed by another. I have no rights unless they are granted by others, or by that God who is radically other.

Rights are gifts, not “givens”. Gifts that can be denied only by those who take them for granted as givens. And what through them is at stake is what the Jews called Torah, i.e. religion overcoming itself, while the Greeks called it *nomos*, i.e. physics overcoming itself, allowing for nature to become second nature. Moreover, what Jews’ and Greeks’ have in common is the fact that neither the Jews nor the Greeks approach is immune from the confusion of the theological and the juridical. This confusion can feed on a misbegotten craving for some Natural Law, just as it can profit from a short-changed, adulterated Divine Law, since no God is worshipped that cannot become an idol or since even the individual Jew who as such has no rights before God compensates for their lack by claiming the right not to be like other people. A sham, for which the people of the Covenant are rebuked by the prophets and Jesus alike. The very person who becomes an individual by reason of a divine calling ends up behaving as though it was by some inalienable self-justifying right. Which amounts to courting Ellul’s critique of rights under the guise of which and hence under any kind of sky, Jewish or Greek, always “the strong man is right” But no sooner is the gift spun off into a given and human rights are taken for granted than they hark back not so much to the Law, whether Torah Or *nomos*, as to a flaw whether natural or supernatural.

Not that Ellul is wrong all the way. Solidarity is not always the winner when, under the guise of human rights, what is sought after is scarcely more than the satisfaction of some newfangled tribalistic drive. But his critique of both Natural Law and human rights as stemming from a basic flaw of it, does not fully shelter him from a perhaps equally grievous suspicion that of substituting a supernatural flaw for a natural one. Not that he is unaware of this temptation, or that he succumbs to it entirely. Somehow he even warns against it, especially when, as Dujancourt reminds us, he rejects von Rad’s contention of a supposedly biblical distinction between a profane law (*droit*) and a sacred law (*loi*). To the contrary, Ellul argues that not only does the Bible know of no profane law, but that it even secularizes the law. But then, paradoxically, therein seems to lie for him the root of his rejection of all pretention to human rights. This makes no sense. On the one hand, he correctly repels the dualism of sacred and profane and adheres to the biblical dialectic of the holy and the secular which he perhaps inadvertently reduces to the dualism of the two kingdoms. On the other hand, he sticks to a purely spiritualistic understanding of the law, altogether shearing it of any secular authentication. It is as if there could be a Promised Land, but no Canaan. It is as if Ellul the theologian has been shortchanged by Ellul the sociologist. And, by the way, considering the extent to which sociologists have been addicted to the dualism of sacred and profane, it is safe to assume that likewise, they too have fallen short of understanding the impertinent relevance of secularization as a way of implementing the biblical dialectic of the holy and the secular. Or is it that Ellul simply does not let his theology interfere with his sociology? That would sound like him.

Are we then in a quandary? Yes and no, for the simple reason that there is no Christian ethic, a contention vastly and deeply demonstrated by Ellul's own construal of an ethic of hallowing. But - given his reservations about human rights fanned by flaws of a technicalized nature - would he go so far as to construe this ethic of hallowing as an ethic allowing for the re-enactment of a secular morality always in need of forgiveness or, simply, always reformable? There is no answer to that question unless it is a reformable one. Even more significant is the fact that, rather than letting us wallow in our holier-than-thou presuppositions, Ellul has led us to the brink of such a question.

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All the more regretful to my mind is therefore Ellul's general conception of technology: as Goddard points out, it is much too sociologically and materialistically oriented. Nor am I in turn surprised that, accordingly, "his" ecclesiology, even as interface of faith and culture, is much too sociologically and spiritualistically oriented. No wonder the anarchist that he was deserves to be rescued from the bear-like hug of sociology or from the swan song of theology. And he fully deserves it, especially since he does impel us towards a new conception both of the church and of society if we must cope with the globalization of our parochial questions, yet without penalizing the human person - much less when that person must cope with the worldhood of a world come of age, with the secular as theater of the glory of God. The wholly other God is not God at the expense of the person each of us is, whether by grace or by virtue of so-called rights. However usurped, should they be shunned? Admittedly, in terms of a person's relation to God they are undeserved. And so they are neither more nor less deserved or, for that matter, usurped than the grace of God. A God whose sun shines on the just and on the unjust.

Ellul correctly construed Christian involvement in the world in terms of an-anarchy .categorically refusing thereby all subservience to any sacralized order of things. No gap hence needs to be kept yawning between holiness and the secular, between *Dieu et mon droit*.

## Law Rights and Technology

by Andrew Goddard

Jacques Ellul wrote so much on so many different subjects that few realise that his primary area of academic expertise was law. Apart from his five-volume untranslated legal textbook, *Histoire des Institutions*, legal issues are discussed briefly in a number of his other works but it is only his first published book which focusses on the subject<sup>1</sup>. Unfortunately, this book and over thirty subsequent journal articles developing an elaborate sociology of law and re-formulating his earlier theology of law have attracted

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<sup>1</sup> *The Theological Foundation of Law*, Doubleday, NY, 1960.

little attention, even from Ellul scholars. In the short compass of this article my aim is to highlight four central theses in Ellul's work relating to law, rights and technology. I shall then sketch three proposals of my own which seek to demonstrate that both in the history of Western thought and in our contemporary world there are important inter-relationships between these four Ellul theses.

*Thesis 1:*

*The modern world is dominated by Technique and the State in a way which renders our society qualitatively different from all previous societies in history.* This is probably Ellul's most famous and widely known argument which, from the time of his earliest unpublished personalist writings in the 1930s, drives and shapes his varied sociological studies.

*Thesis 2:*

*Law today is not only technical law (a phenomenon found in other periods of history), it has undergone such a total transformation that it is no longer truly law.* One of the great strengths of Ellul's classic work, *The Technological Society*, was that it traced the effect of Technique on so many aspects of human life, including law<sup>2</sup>. In several articles from the 1960s onwards he further develops this argument, providing an analysis of the transformation and dissolution of law in the modern world. His central claim here is that such factors as the non-normative status of law and its subordination to the state means that law no longer has the functions it had in all historic civilizations and that what we still call "law" has now become the means of state administration and regulation.

*Thesis 3:*

*We are now obsessed with the idea and language of subjective rights.* This is probably the least controversial of Ellul's theses presented here but it is also the thesis he develops least in his writing. His major discussion of the subject bemoans the wholesale juridicisation of our society and claims that "The idea of 'having rights' has become essential in contemporary human and social relationships...Everyone in our society demands 'his rights'"<sup>3</sup>

*Thesis 4:*

*There are serious dangers in any conception of rights which focusses on the individual as a possessor of rights.* Although Ellul uses the language of "rights" in his initial theological foundation of law, this becomes less prominent in later writings. He consistently takes care to emphasise that "human rights" in his understanding are not the human rights of modern liberal rights theory and are most certainly not natural, inherent rights of individuals: "Man cannot have any rights except as part of society...It is therefore man in relationship...who has rights. These are not inherent in his bare existence"<sup>4</sup>. This is one reason why, throughout his later writing, Ellul remains highly

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<sup>2</sup> *The Technological Society*, pp 291-300.

<sup>3</sup> "Recherchesur le droit et l'Évangile" in Cristiane-simo, *Secolarizzazione e Diritto Moderno* no 11/12 (1981), Luigi Lombardi Vallauri & Gerhard Dilcher (eds.), pp 16, 122.

<sup>4</sup> *Theological Foundation of Law*, op. cit., p 80.



sceptical of all Charters of Human Rights and unsympathetic to the many Christians who seek to provide a theological justification for human rights<sup>5</sup>. These four theses are central to Ellul's thinking on law, rights, and technology but each is developed and discussed largely without reference to the others. With the obvious exception of the first two theses (where Ellul demonstrates at some length that the fundamental change in the character of contemporary law is derived from the dominance of Technique and the State in our society) there is no sustained attempt to develop the important inter-connections between them. In what follows I will therefore attempt a more holistic approach by proposing that Ellul's theses are inter-related in three significant ways:

(1) The conception of rights currently dominant in the Western world (which is focussed on the individual as possessor of rights) arises from the same nexus of ideas as that which also fuels the growth of Technique and the power of the state.

(2) This "liberal" conception of rights (and its dominance in popular thinking about law) can take a form which represents another distinctive and dangerous feature of contemporary law.

(3) The substantive content of subjective rights is now highly elastic and constantly increases as a result of the state's increasing power and the development of new techniques.

### *The Common Theoretical Roots of Modern Liberal Rights Theory, Modern Technique & the Modern State.*

"This century of technique was also the century of the 'Rights of Man'...The idea of human rights appeared at the same time and in the same country as modern technique, and I do not think that there is much that is accidental in history, certainly not here"<sup>6</sup>. These sentences, framing a very short discussion of human rights in Ellul's last major volume relating to Technique, show that he had a sense that this first proposal was correct. Ellul however did not develop that sense in any detail and this omission reflects a wider problem in Ellul's account of the historical development of modern Technique: its neglect of philosophical developments and an over-emphasis on material, sociological changes. As with each of my three proposals, what follows may often appear to be as much a matter of assertion as a fully developed argument but its aim is to begin to plug this major gap in Ellul's work and thereby also to assist further reflection on the inter-relationship of law, rights and Technique in our society.

Attempts are often made to trace the history of rights back to the ancient world, including the Old and New Testaments. Although some small traces of continuity may be discernable, our contemporary conception of rights (certainly in the West) is totally

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<sup>5</sup> Amongst the most influential Christian theologies of human rights are the writings of Jürgen Moltmann and Jacques Maritain. See Ellul's comments on WCC discussions on rights in "Some Reflections on the Ecumenical Movement?", *Ecumenical Review* Vol 40 (1988), pp 387-8.

<sup>6</sup> *The Technological Bluff*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids MI, 1990, pp 128, 129.

unknown to the world of the Bible or Roman civilization. Its origins can perhaps be traced back to scholastic writers of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries but its full formulation was the work of seventeenth and eighteenth century thinkers, notably Hobbes and Locke who “typify the emergence and classical consolidation of the liberal ideology of individual rights”<sup>7</sup>.

Three fundamental philosophical shifts occur in the course of these two centuries. They provide the necessary intellectual context for the rise of Technique, shape liberal rights theories, and alter the character of both law and the state.<sup>8</sup> First, there is the diminution and effective disappearance of the previously dominant classic Christian conception of objective laws higher than human law (natural and divine law) which determine “right” in human society and provide a normative limit to the human will and human activity. Second, centre stage in social and political theory is seized by the abstract individual who contracts with other individuals. The primary significance previously attached to community and persons-in-relation within human society is thus lost. Third, the goal of human freedom not only becomes of much greater significance but it ceases to be conceived of as set within a wider objective, limiting order and is instead replaced with the ideal of the individual’s will being free from external constraints and free to create its own order. Ellul’s account of the reasons for the eighteenth century explosion of technical progress does not acknowledge the significance of these three key developments in the history of ideas even though they provide the intellectual foundation and justification for many of the social changes he highlights. The first shift brought to an end the constraint on technical development previously exercised by Christian moral judgment which required that every change “had to fit a precise conception of justice before God”<sup>9</sup>. The second fuelled the campaign against natural social groups and so increased social atomization and plasticity<sup>10</sup>. The third provided the spur both to removing taboos and to the creation of a “technical intention”<sup>11</sup>. These developments not only provided the necessary theoretical context for the modern dominance of Technique, they also transformed the theory and the reality of both human law and political power (and they did so in large part via rights theories).

In social and political theory conceptual priority is given to the individual subject who is held to have fundamental, natural rights. These rights are anterior to any social or political relationships and are not founded in any divine law which would impose obligations as well as granting subjective rights. As a result, in relation to the law and the state, most individuals today view themselves as rights-bearing and

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<sup>7</sup> Ian Shapiro, *The Evolution of Rights in Liberal Theory*, CUP, Cambridge, 1986, p19. See also Joan Lockwood O’Donovan, “Historical Prolegomena to a Theological View of Human Rights”, *Studies in Christian Ethics* (9), 1996.

<sup>8</sup> A number of modernity critics have discussed these philosophical shifts at length. See particularly, Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, CUP, Cambridge, 1992.

<sup>9</sup> *The Technological Society*, op. cit, p 37.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p 51.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p 52.

rights-claiming subjects and the actual content of these putative subjective rights is increasingly shaped by the belief that individuals should be free to live as they wish without external influence or powerful social constraints such as the law. Political power is, from this period onwards, regularly viewed as something derived from a contract in which individuals divest themselves of certain individual rights, powers and freedoms and grant certain rights and powers to a governing authority. Law is also re-conceived. It is no longer a society's common work which is formulated, perhaps through a representative ruler, with reference to some higher normative law. It becomes instead the locus for establishing individuals' competing rights-claims as legal rights in positive law and the means by which the political authority, usually claiming popular sovereignty, exercises its own rights and powers in order to shape the social body according to its free and sovereign will.

### ***Rights as a Distinctive & Potentially Dangerous Feature of Modern Law***

"I have a right to...". This form of statement is now a commonplace in both legal and moral debates. Its dominance is one of the most important distinctive features of modern law. It is also potentially a very dangerous one for law because a focus on individual rights-claims can help to undermine law's traditional relationship to an agreed social morality and set of values. Ellul argued that whereas historically law always reflected a particular society's values and represented a common objective for that society to attain, modern law had become purely technical. Our contemporary concern with "rights" and the law as adjudicator in disputes over competing rights claims has played a significant role in this transformation because it has meant that the important quest for social agreement on the good is often forgotten or ignored in legal disputes.

This development is sometimes positively encouraged by those who extend the traditional liberal belief that there are certain areas of the moral life on which the law should not pass judgment into the much more dubious claim that the law should not be concerned with any definition of the good because law is a matter of limited public social regulation while morality is a matter of private individual preference.

The importance of the phrase, "I have a right to...", demonstrates two major problems which arise from any concentration on individual subjective rights rather than the formulation of a community consensus on what is right. First, except in those cases an individual protests that a clearly defined legal right has been violated (e.g., the legal right, after a specific time under arrest, to be either released by the police or charged with a crime) the claim to a right is actually equivalent to a moral claim. Despite this, the legal system and society as a whole is often reticent about engaging in serious moral debate about substantive issues concerning the conception of the good implicit in any particular rights claims. This is in large part because the modern

intellectual framework pushes both the legal and moral discussion into the terms of individual freedoms and subjective rights without addressing in sufficient detail the more fundamental issues of the content of the good and what is right.

Second, although claims to rights are common currency and this form of expression is now almost universally accepted as valid, there is clearly only limited agreement as to the substantive content of claimed rights. Globally, there are regular debates about whether non-Western countries must accept liberal democratic conceptions of human rights as universally valid. Nationally, we find regular and often heated contention over rights-claims. In the United Kingdom this has recently occurred over different elements of “gay rights” (e.g., an equal age of consent and protection from discrimination in employment) and the meaning of “the right to life” in relation to artificial feeding of people in a permanent vegetative state. Even where it might be thought rights are clearly stated and legally agreed upon, we discover strong disagreements (e.g., the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights are often vehemently opposed by many who recognise its legal standing as interpreter of the Convention on Human Rights).

In short, the dominance and widespread agreement on the importance of “rights-talk” can prevent discussion of the more fundamental moral question of a society’s common conception of the good and the shared values which must be the foundation of rights claims. It can also mask the fact that the often heated disputes over rights really reflect that the protagonists each have “a different view of humanity, society, and power, and of the relation among them”<sup>12</sup>. The effect of these changes on any legal system is serious. Rather than providing procedures to enable civil peace based on an agreed set of values shared in society as a whole, the legal system regularly becomes an open battleground between the competing and conflicting rights claims of individuals and cause groups.

This battle is of such significance to the participants because contemporary law now functions, in part, as an effective technical means by which society as a whole is given its shape and direction. The most powerful group will therefore benefit greatly if they succeed in establishing their conception of rights within society’s law. Unfortunately, the result is often that the law becomes a means of securing power and so sections of society become increasingly alienated from the legal system. This occurs, of course, in other legal systems but in our Western technological and democratic society, the liberal conception of rights plays a much more important role than is often recognised. The underlying reason for this was stated by Ellul in his first book, “The affirmation of one’s rights actually becomes the justification for oppressing others...Whenever man pretended that he could found his rights on his own strength and contain them within himself, his pretention was built upon violence. Any distinction between violence and justice breaks down. The strong man is right”<sup>13</sup>. Any doubting the validity of this

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<sup>12</sup> *The Technological Bluff*, op. cit., p 129.

<sup>13</sup> *The Theological Foundation of Law*, op. cit., p 84.

analysis need look no further than the long-standing conflict between “right to choose” and “right to life” groups campaigning over abortion legislation in the heartland of liberal, democratic, technological society.

### *Technique, the State and the Demand for Rights*

The demand for legal recognition of claimed rights is often driven today by technological progress and the increasing power of the state. Our conception of rights therefore provides an important medium by which these dominant social forces shape both our juridical system and society as a whole. The importance of the state in relation to rights theories can be traced back to the origins of modern liberal rights theory outlined above.<sup>14</sup> As the power of the state has increased this century, citizens have responded by attempting to limit it by the legal entrenchment of basic rights.

With the development of more and more sophisticated techniques in the hands of the state (e.g., in relation to surveillance and the invasion of privacy), there arises the need to claim and to defend new rights in order to protect individuals against the state and the techniques it can employ. Of course, as Ellul regularly pointed out, the basic problem is that the state itself now so dominates the legal system that it is almost impossible to limit state power effectively by legal means. In addition to this negative source of the demand for legal rights in the face of growing state power, there is also the increasing claim to certain positive rights arising from the development of powerful new techniques in numerous spheres of life. [Paradoxically, these rights (especially in relation to social welfare) are often demanded from the state in its more benevolent guise]. Oliver O’Donovan has argued that, “technology derives its social significance from the fact that by it man has discovered new freedoms from necessity. The technological transformation of the modern age has gone hand in hand with the social and political quest of Western man to free himself from the necessities imposed upon him by religion, society, and nature”<sup>15</sup>.

That social and political quest is now often expressed in the juridical language of rights with claims that there is a right of access to new technological developments (e.g., in health care) which assist the individual’s quest for liberation from traditional necessities. Due to technological innovations and the intellectual environment created by the three philosophical shifts noted above, this right of access to technical progress in turn generates previously incredible rights-claims which can become widely accepted and defended (even almost unquestionably) in modern society. Perhaps the best example of this is the claim, based on the growth and success in the development of reproductive techniques, that any woman has a right to her own child (and, increasingly, her own healthy child). This utilisation of the language of “rights” by those who would

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<sup>14</sup> See Paul Marshall, *Human Rights Theories in Christian Perspective*, Institute of Christian Studies, Toronto, 1983, p 11-16.

<sup>15</sup> Oliver M.T. O’Donovan, *Begotten or Made?*, OUP, Oxford, 1984, p 6.

benefit (financially or physically) from new techniques makes it increasingly difficult for society as a whole to place effective and long-standing legal limits and controls on their development and deployment. When this difficulty is combined with the speed of technical advances we discover that modern law finds itself lagging far behind the social reality it is meant in part, to shape. Even when one country does attempt to use the law to restrain newly developed techniques, other countries will refuse to do so and eventually legal constraints will become increasingly redundant and have to be relaxed or removed.<sup>16</sup> In contrast to these legal problems generated by the conjunction of technical progress and rights-claims, there is a further important correlation developing between technology and rights. Not only do the beneficiaries of Technique seek to prevent legal inhibitions on technical progress by reference to their rights but those who wish to defend those suffering in contemporary society (particularly as a result of elements of the modern technological enterprise) likewise reach for the terminology of rights.” Thus, as already noted, opponents of the massive rise in abortions performed in technological cultures seek to reform the law by advocating rights for the foetus and, similarly, in the face of the impact of Technique on man’s relationship with the natural world (particularly in relation to food technologies and genetic manipulation), there is a growing acceptance of the validity of “animal rights” or even “creation rights”. The scope and the specific content of rights claims is therefore highly elastic and it is the powers of the state and Technique which now play a crucial part in setting the agenda for defining new rights and generating much of the legal debate.

## *Conclusion*

Ellul always insisted it was impossible to understand any particular social phenomenon without reference to the wider society of which it was part. His own work applied this in an illuminating way to aspects of law within the context of our technological society. This article has recalled four of Ellul’s central theses concerning law, rights and technology and argued that there are important inter-connections between them which were not developed in Ellul’s own work, largely because he did not give sufficient weight to the fundamental intellectual shifts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which underlie both the rise of modern Technique and the development of modern liberal rights theories.

## Comments on Goddard

by Sylvain Dujancourt

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<sup>16</sup> This is illustrated by the recent British case of Diane Blood’s claim to a right to artificial insemination with her dead husband’s semen. She was eventually allowed to export the sperm to another European Union country even though its use in the UK was judged illegal because the original removal

Often taken for a philosopher, Ellul had always been careful not to make such a claim for himself. For a good reason: dealing as his works do with technology, their major concern is the fruit of a method of social analysis as simple as it is original. Intimately steeped in Marx's thought, and convinced that "If Marx lived today, he would make neither the same analysis of society nor the same proposals for the correction of its ills," Ellul wondered "How would Marx describe the dominating central phenomenon of this society of the twentieth century?" And it is fortunate that, in order to answer this question, Ellul did not try to philosophize about it. Otherwise, given what philosophers have written about technology or about law, one could easily bet that his work would be devoid of any relevance; it would lack depth as well as breadth. Abstraction, insofar as it only engages in a game of the mind, hardly interested him.

One should not, however, draw any hasty and erroneous conclusions: he does come to grips with philosophy in the formulation of his thought and the expression of his work. One need only read his assessments of ethics and realize how inseparable they are from his analysis of technological society before one is immediately convinced not only that Ellul had a perfect knowledge of philosophy (his lectures and conferences were regularly studded with quotations from and references to the best philosophers), but also that he used certain philosophical tools, if only to criticize them. In this respect, one can usefully go back to the pages devoted to the axiomatic foundations of ethics in *Le vouloir et le faire*.

It would accordingly seem difficult to hold that Ellul gave little attention to the fundamental transformations of our conceptual framework, in particular those that took place in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. His historical output amply shows the preeminence of ideas over facts, even in the making of history. To wit, his five-volume *Histoire des Institutions*, not to mention his dissertation on the *man-cipium*. And with respect to liberal theories, a mere glance at his impressive bibliography would suffice to show that he not only knew about them, but also knew them well enough to be their keenest critic - and the same of course applies equally to liberal or subjectivist theories of law.

Admittedly, Ellul did not produce a systematic work, in the manner of a philosopher, whether on law or the history of ideas. But that would be a lack if it were not compensated for by references scattered throughout the exposition of his thinking in the pursuit of an original position. And were it a lack, it would possibly hinder a better assessment of his work. But even so, would that not be sufficiently offset by the creativity this work displays, especially in an area as fluctuating as is that of law?

## Natural Law or Covenant?

### Human Rights and the Rights of Others

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and preservation of the specimen had occurred without her late husband's consent.

by Sylvain Dugancourt  
(Translated by Andrew Goddard)

There can be no real dispute that Ellul wrote much on a variety of subjects and that he did so with talent, pertinence, erudition, lucidity, and perhaps even prophetic insight. His writing on so many areas (often where he was not a specialist) sometimes evidence a bulimic character which can damage the literary quality of his work, if not its intelligibility or coherence. Nevertheless, his numerous publications are marked by a paradox: this jurist by training, this historian of law, this specialist on institutions from Antiquity until the present day (the success of his five volume *History of Institutions* has never been denied and Ellul willingly confessed in private that most of his royalties came from this volume), this teacher of Roman Law at Bordeaux's Law Faculty, wrote little on the subject of law. He published only a single work on law: *Le fondement theologique du droit*<sup>17</sup>) and a number of articles, generally on the philosophy of law.<sup>18</sup>

The paradox is even greater when it comes to human rights. Ellul's work is contemporaneous with the expansion of human rights in the juridical realm and in the world at large. Developed after the First World War, the internationalisation of human rights declarations became prominent after the Second World War: Universal Declaration of Human Rights (10 December 1948), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (16 December 1966), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (16 December 1966), American Convention on Human Rights (1969), The Helsinki Final Act (1975), African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981), UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment (1984), Universal Declaration of the Rights of AIDS and HIV Sufferers (1989), Declaration of the Rights of the Family (1989), UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Despite all these occurring while Ellul was writing, it is not possible to find any article by him specifically devoted to this highly debated discipline within modern law, and Joyce Hanks' bibliography contains very few references to human rights. In fact, anyone wishing to know Ellul's thinking on this subject is condemned to reading his work as a whole (especially the articles) in order to discover here and there, always within discussions on some other subject, scraps of analysis of human rights.

This is not noted simply to highlight the difficulty of dealing with this subject over a number of pages. It is noted above all to draw attention to how much Ellul ultimately felt rather uncomfortable with the law as a social phenomenon and an object of theological reflection, and how much his opinion on the subject of human rights was a critical and negative one. It is significant that, in the fifth volume of his *History of Institutions*, the treatment of human rights is kept to the bare minimum with only three pages on the subject (mostly devoted to a critique) and no reference to "Human Rights" in the index. Similarly, the exhaustive bibliography of Ellul's works

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<sup>17</sup> ET *The Theological Foundation of Law*, SCM Press, London 1960.

<sup>18</sup> For details see, Sylvain Dugancourt, *La pensee Juridique de Jacques Ellul* (Mdmoire de maitrise, Faculte de Theologie protestante), Strasbourg 1989.



produced by Joyce Hanks, does not contain “Human Rights” in its subject index while in her index of publications on Ellul, although “Human Rights” appears, the entry is empty and refers readers instead to the articles under “Humanism.”<sup>19</sup> The explanation for this silence, which almost amounts to a defiant refusal to discuss the subject, is twofold. On the one hand, his reasoning as a jurist, his distancing as an historian, and his analysis as a sociologist lead *him* to perceive human rights more in a political and ideological framework than a juridical one. On the other hand, his theological stringency, his bringing of everything back to the Bible as the basis of his ethics, pushes him to discern the profound spiritual ambiguity and perhaps even the incompatibility of human rights with biblical faith. This is despite the fact that a number of theologians, especially Protestants, have sought to demonstrate that human rights have a biblical and evangelical origin.

In my research, I have found only a single article by Ellul entirely devoted to human rights. This appeared in the weekly *Reforme* (7 January 1989) in the bicentenary year of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen which was issued on the 26th of August, 1789. The ironic, mordant and polemical title gives the tone of the article: “Du vinaigre dans la Declaration des Droits” (Vinegar in the Declaration of Rights). In a few lines, he delivers a juridical reading of articles that in the 1789 Declaration refer to equality and liberty. Noting first that equality is not classified among the “imprescriptible” rights belonging to man in his standing as a human being, he observes that the extent of equality is greatly weakened by recognising only equality “in rights.” This is done in such a manner that in fact real inequality (rich and poor, superiors and inferiors) is legitimated by the “common good.” For Ellul, liberty is an imprescriptible right which attains “bliss” in that it permits resistance to oppression. But for Ellul, oppression today lodges itself in technicalised administration and in the offices which produce decrees, circulars, regulations, and other orders. And so he exclaims, “Citizens, to arms ! Take your hunting rifle when Bridges and Roads wishes to expropriate your land, or Electricite de France wants to build a Power Station, etc. You have the law [*le droit*] on your side — the very Declaration of Imprescriptible Rights. If you prevent the works, you are not terrorists, but the representatives of these rights !” Concerning private property as the proclaimed guarantee of liberty he insists: “It is with a gun in the hand that it is necessary to defend one’s own property [...] Private property, inviolable and sacred ! Well, pardon the expression, but that makes me laugh.” Few readers of this article will respond positively to Ellul !

### ***Human Rights and The Natural Law***

These criticisms by Ellul of the 1789 Declaration are already expressed — although in a less scathing style — in his *History of Institutions*. Presenting human rights as

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<sup>19</sup> Joyce Main Hanks, *Jacques Ellul: A Comprehensive Bibliography*, Research in Philosophy & Technology, Supplement 1, 1984, JAI Press Inc., Greenwich, Connecticut, p.266.

“the affirmation of natural rights, attached to man’s nature, superior to the State and to the Nation itself” he uncovers several sources of these rights, quoting the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, then the 1776 American Declaration of Independence, Enlightenment philosophers, and the precedents of the French Monarchy. This list largely summarises the standard presentation of the sources of human rights although it should be noted that the theological source is here given first place and there is no reference to the British antecedents which are generally referred to in the history of human rights. Describing succinctly the Declaration’s content, Ellul emphasises the preamble that adheres “to the doctrine of natural law based on the existence of God, as the foundation of the social order”

The Declaration of the Rights of Man, like all subsequent declarations and conventions on the subject, emanates from natural law. Ellul underlines this because it is this which constitutes the original and conceptual flaw within human rights. If there is a constant within Ellul’s juridical thought it is certainly his opposition to natural law. All his students who followed his doctoral course on natural law will admit that he knew his subject perfectly and that his arguments ended up by convincingly “de-constructing” this natural law. What is natural law for Ellul? “The confusion of the theological and the juridical,” Ellul replies.<sup>20</sup> Whether they be philosophical, juridical, or theological in form, theories of natural law have never found favour in Ellul’s eyes. He reckoned that particularly those theories of natural law elaborated by theologians have in common the desire “to find a common ground for encounter between Christians and non-Christians.”<sup>21</sup> They rest either on a conception of man as not totally separated from God by the Fall and on a conception of justice as eternal and something which man can know by himself (the catholic idea), or on a conception of God’s Law, with opposition between the Law and the Gospel (the Protestant idea).

Ellul never changed in his opposition to natural law.<sup>22</sup> For him, natural law does not exist, whether inherent in human nature, created by God, woven into the order of creation, formulated in the Revelation of the Torah, written in the human conscience, or produced by reason.<sup>23</sup> His criticisms of natural law are both juridical and theological.

Natural law is a “creation of the human mind,” and rests on a “blurred notion of nature,” a “variable common principle,” and “doctrinal differences.”<sup>24</sup> What is more, it no longer corresponds to the current state of the law and is ineffectual for all the new

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<sup>20</sup> Jacques Ellul, “Loi et sacré. Droit et divin, de la loi sacrée au droit divin,” in Enrico Castelli, ed., *Le sacré: Etudes et recherches* (Actes du colloque organisé par le Centre international d’études humanistes et par l’Institut d’Etudes philosophiques de Rome, Rome 4-9 janvier, 1974), Aubier/Montaigne, Paris, 1974, p. 194.

<sup>21</sup> *Theological Foundation of Law*, op. cit., p10.

<sup>22</sup> Jacques Ellul has also very often drawn his doubts about any explanatory doctrine without practical and concrete consequences. So, in the introduction to his thesis, he expresses his annoyance with “theories, based on easy solutions, with the appearance of cohesion” (Jacques Ellul, *Etude sur l’évolution juridique du mancipium*, Delmas, Bordeaux 1936, p5).

<sup>23</sup> *Theological Foundation of Law*, op. cit., pp10-12.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p36.

rights which have arisen with Technique: “this doctrine is based on juridical observations related to a situation which has ceased to exist.”<sup>25</sup> Ellul adds that natural law is “anti-scientific”<sup>26</sup> and observes that this doctrine “has been ineffective in preventing the evolution of our law in a direction which is absolutely contrary to it.”<sup>27</sup> That direction, which Ellul challenges, is the technicalisation of law, its submission to the state, and its assimilation to being merely a social fact.

To these sociological and juridical arguments, Ellul adds theological considerations. Already in 1939, he wrote that “every theory of natural law is a negation of the eschatology of the Kingdom.”<sup>28</sup> It allows man to define what is suitable as a social rule. He reproaches natural law theory for reducing God to “a convenient hypothesis” and refusing God as “Creator, Saviour and Revealer.”<sup>29</sup> Natural law allows man to escape from the “radical nature of revelation.”<sup>30</sup> Ellul thus shares with Niebuhr the refusal “to seek some common ground between Christians and non-Christians on which they are able to agree among themselves and construct a juridical system.”<sup>31</sup>

By taking this position, Ellul places himself in a current of Christian theology which, although a minority one, sets itself apart from the naturalist temptation of law and seeks a foundation to law other than that of nature. “Wherever nature comes to an end, there creation can begin” writes Vahanian,<sup>32</sup> adding that “nature ignores God as, indeed, it ignores evil,”<sup>33</sup> meaning thereby that the categories of nature are not those of God nor those of morality. Which “means that since God is no longer confused with nature or bound to history, at the same time man is removed from determinism, from the realm of necessity characterizing history and nature.”<sup>34</sup> In other words, with the Bible nature is no longer divinised nor to be feared any more than it is to be ignored or ridiculed, because man is no longer dependent on it. Consequently, it seems difficult to accept human rights which originate in natural law.

But Ellul adds others arguments in opposition to human rights: the reduction of man to the individual, the ideological function of human rights, and their ineffectiveness. Ellul does not make man into a value. He never considers man as Man with a capital M, because he rejects the idea of an abstract, perfect man of whom therefore nothing new can be said in his life. This man does not exist for Ellul who, following in the

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<sup>25</sup> Jacques Ellul, “Le droit occidental en 1970 a partir de l’expérience française,” *Bulletin SEDEIS* (Société d’Etudes et de Documentation Economiques et Sociales), no 840, supplement no 2 (1963), pl 8.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p5.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, pl9.

<sup>28</sup> Jacques Ellul, “Droit,” *Foi et Vie* (1939) 2-3, p279.

<sup>29</sup> *Theological Foundation of Law*, op. cit., pH.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>31</sup> Jacques Ellul, “Christianisme et droit. Recherches américaines,” *Archives de Philosophie du Droit*, 5 (1960), p31.

<sup>32</sup> Gabriel Vahanian, *God and Utopia: The Church in a Technological Civilization*, The Seabury Press (A Crossroad Book), New York 1977, pl41.

<sup>33</sup> Gabriel Vahanian, *Dieu anonyme ou l’auteur des mots*, Desclee de Brouwer, Paris 1989, p24.

<sup>34</sup> Gabriel Vahanian, *God and Utopia*, op. cit., p27.

line of Marx's thought, knows only men and women in their situation. Ignoring human nature, he knows only the human condition.

That man has rights is not a recent invention. The learned historian that he is, he can say that the idea is very ancient. Apart from the Stoics, he can also appeal to the Bible: "You shall not violate any of these rights, you shall not show partiality" (Deut 16.19). The problem with rights as they have been conceived and formulated since the eighteenth century is, according to Ellul, that they no longer concern people but individuals. The individual is an abstraction which places the person outside of humanity, opposing them to other people and to society? These human rights are thus opposable rights to use the juridical terminology. On the contrary, man is the person included in society, within humanity, who is situated among his contemporaries but also in relationship with his ancestors and his descendants. He is a man who is representative of other men. This man does not oppose his rights to those of other men but rather transforms rights into obligations. The notion of duty or obligation constitutes the most interesting critique addressed to the traditional idea of human rights. Outside this milieu, man loses his rights, says Ellul, either because he abolishes them or because he cannot profit from them. In contrast to the individual who places himself in a situation of conflict, man places himself in a situation of reciprocity in his relation to others: "Man is called upon to acknowledge the rights of others, since he requests his own to be recognised."<sup>35</sup> According to Ellul, to claim to found human rights on the individual reverts to founding law and right on a relationship of permanent forces, on violence, and on the reason of the strongest.

### *Privacy and the Bible*

For Ellul, the Bible shows that man is man only when he is in relationship with others, particularly with his God whose revelation confirms to him once and for all that he is no longer alone in life. Just as there is not any individual in the Bible, similarly there is no private life, no sphere reserved to man from which God will be excluded. "What appears surprising to me is that in the Bible man appears to me extraordinarily delivered over to others. He is always a prey to others."<sup>36</sup> The only moment, Ellul concedes, where this man becomes alone is when God calls him. Calling is always individual, a call by name which extracts a man for a time from his social group in order to place him in that unique and revelatory relationship with his God.

Ellul calls into question not only this reduction of man to the individual by human rights but also their ideological function. In his commentary on the 1789 Declaration he underlines two characteristic elements of the political function of human rights: the Declaration aims first to destroy politically the Ancien Regime, and its rights have the

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<sup>35</sup> *Theological Foundation of Law*, p83.

<sup>36</sup> Jacques Ellul, "Information et vie privée: perspectives," *Foi et Vie*, Vol 66, No 6 (novembre-décembre 1967), p60.

purpose of limiting the State, essentially the king. The theoretical reference implicit to it all is the law-abiding state (*I 'Etat de droit*). This is an idea that will carry different meanings, from the 19th century German school of public law (which, inspired by the Hegelian conception of the State, subjugated law and right), to the narrow linkage between the law-abiding state and democracy which dominates today. For Ellul there is no possible doubt—the creation of the notion of the law-abiding state is “a subterfuge.”<sup>37</sup> The great fear Ellul felt in the face of the state is well known. He saw it as the focus of most of the powers and oppressions of the twentieth century. He was never a positivist jurist nor a supporter of human rights because he always reckoned that the law could not stand up to the state in a situation where it was principally the state which created the law. The idea of limiting — indeed judging — the state by the law seemed perfectly unrealistic to Ellul, who at the most would concede that the law is able to act as a “guarantee against the arbitrariness of the state.”<sup>38</sup>

It is on this basis that Ellul also raised the argument of the ineffectiveness of human rights. Concerning the Declaration of 1789 he notes that, despite the proclamation of liberty, of equality, of defence against the encroachments, abuses and arbitrariness of the royal state, “this declaration does not protect all the classes of the nation,”<sup>39</sup> mainly because of the absence of any interest in social and economic questions. In his thought on the new powers generated especially by Technique, Ellul coherently shows that this Declaration “does not protect citizens from the eventual tyranny of powers other than the King.” But for Ellul this lack of effectiveness is inherent within human rights. He judges the principles of these rights to be “very theoretical and hardly revolutionary,” noting that from the beginning there was set up a discrepancy (which increasingly grew) between the actual politics of the revolutionary assemblies and the Declaration. That “politics of pretence” will justify the multiple derogations from the principles of the Declaration such as basing the right to vote on a property qualification.

This analysis of a jurist taking formal note of the distancing of human rights from an effective, accepted law, evolving by osmosis with opinion — and we must not forget that for Ellul the model of law remains the Roman law, the opposite of a law with an ideological connotation and function<sup>40</sup>—explains his distrust and even automatic rejection of the principles related to human rights. His outlook as an historian and jurist prevails over that of the moralist who will not let himself be deluded or fooled by words or declarations. We can take as one example that of private life and information. Here are two areas that, from the viewpoint of human rights, clash as regards principles: the right to respect for private life and the right to information. Observing that information

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<sup>37</sup> Jacques Ellul, “Remarques sur l’origine de l’etat,” *Droits, revue française de théorie juridique*, 15 (1992), p14.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Histoire des Institutions*, Presses Universitaires de France, 6<sup>ème</sup> Edition, tome 5, Paris 1969, p12.

<sup>40</sup> “Human rights are part of the attempt to give a feeling of security to the law” wrote Ellul, “Sur l’artificialité du droit et le droit d’exception [suite] ,” *Archives de Philosophie du Droit*, 10 (1965), pl 92.

is, as well as a communication, a participation in society and therefore only a matter of organisation, Ellul concludes there does not exist a right to information belonging to the individual because he is human. “It is useful, in the society in which we find ourselves, to be informed; this is something on the level of the useful and there is no need to inscribe that in the great principles, in the charters of the rights of humanity. It did not exist one hundred years ago and perhaps will not exist any longer a hundred years from now. It is a transitory matter on which we need not focus our attention.”<sup>41</sup> The same relativisation of principle is found concerning private life in regard to which Ellul insists on the haziness that surrounds this notion whose content varies in different societies. Sparta ignored the private life whereas two centuries later Rome erected around the domus a wall which could not be breached even by the lictors. It is necessary, writes Ellul, “to reject all private life that has a static character, that is simply the private domain, [...] to show that there is no clear, objective, marked limit to what we call private life.”<sup>42</sup> Ellul strengthens his argument with more biblical and theological considerations. According to his biblical analysis, man has no private life before God. This is because he hasn’t a private domain — this God touches all aspects of man’s life, even the deepest. To put it differently, any private life would be subverted by that relationship with God which reaches “all of man and all men” (G. Vahanian).

### *From Natural Law to Covenant*

We are now able to examine Ellul’s theological views on human rights more deeply. There are here two arguments to consider, that can be summarised in two theses: man has no right before God, his right is in God through Jesus Christ.

Claiming a biblical basis, Ellul holds that man has no right before God. This affirmation is not his alone as it is also the opinion of Barth and Bultmann: “The Jew as such has no right before God.”<sup>43</sup> Such an assertion raises two questions. Firstly, why is there law from a theological viewpoint? To which Ellul replies that it is quite simply because man is a sinner, living in the order of sin and a ruptured relationship with God; but that, because no human community would know how to live without such “rules of the game” (which is what the law is for Ellul), the existence of human law is a sign of the patience of God towards these human sinners. Secondly, where is the right of man? In God, replies Ellul. More precisely in that particular relationship God establishes with man called the covenant and in that particular act of God towards men which is the act of judgement

The word “covenant” betrays a juridical connotation that it is helpful to clarify. According to Ellul, the covenant explains both the situation of human law and the origin of human rights. What is this covenant? It is a gracious act an election, a choice

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<sup>41</sup> “Information et vie privée: perspectives,” op. cit., p58.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p61.

<sup>43</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus, mythologie et demythologisation*, Seuil, Paris 1968, p61.

of God to *find* a partner for himself in that relationship of love which characterises him and which is brought to us by his word. Over and above this bond with this quality, the biblical covenant also has a content: the Law which defines the conditions of the covenant. These conditions, according to Ellul, have certain similarities to “a contract requiring adherence,”<sup>44</sup> a contract in which one of those contracting fixes the totality of obligations such that the other partner can only accept or refuse (as, for example, in the contract represented by a train ticket).

The covenant, as the fruit of God’s revelation to a person or to his people, restores that relationship which was broken by sin. It is far from static and so the Bible knows several covenants (Adam, Noah, Abram, Moses) with the last covenant being with Jesus. In covenant, the law of God is nothing other than “the prerequisite for maintaining the situation which God has re-established in his covenant.”<sup>45</sup> It is in this framework of the covenant that God recognises human rights and Ellul cites a number of examples: to rule the creation, to be avenged if one is killed, to kill for one’s own food. This list is not complete and we could never know an exhaustive list because “the biblical revelation does not contain a chart of human rights” and “the content of these human rights is essentially contingent and variable.”<sup>46</sup> These rights are determined by thought-forms, political and social structures and economic constraints, but above all by two elements: the mission conferred on man by God and the demand of personal rights judged necessary if man is to be able to live.<sup>47</sup>

The main consequence of the covenant is the acceptance by God of human law. Between God and man, man is little, God is all, and the relationship between the two, being one of faith, turns out to be differentiated and unequal. Ellul shares the opinion of Bultmann: “The distancing of God has the same origin as the proximity of God, that is to say the fact that man belongs to God and that God issues him with a law.”<sup>48</sup> But he goes much further than his illustrious Marburg colleague and insists on the absence of any interference between the law of God and human law: “the law of God cannot be used to elaborate a human law.”<sup>49</sup> However, countering von Rad who distinguishes sacred and profane law (*droit*) in the Bible, Ellul supports the thesis of the secularisation of law by the Bible in such a manner that he does not hesitate to assert that there is no profane law (*droit profane*),<sup>50</sup> nor any “sacred law (*loi sacree*) on which all human laws depend and which measures all law.”<sup>51</sup> This remark is crucial and very revealing of the deep reason for Ellul’s indifference, even hostility, to human rights. In effect, his theological approach to law opposes all the foundations

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<sup>44</sup> *Theological Foundation of Law*, op. cit., p50.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p55.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p81.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp81-2.

<sup>48</sup> Bultmann, op. cit, p!65.

<sup>49</sup> Jacques Ellul, “Loi et sacré,” op. cit., pl 87.

<sup>50</sup> *Theological Foundation of Law*, p49.

<sup>51</sup> Jacques Ellul, “Loi et sacré,” op. cit., pl 87.

habitually attributed to human rights. To nature it opposes the covenant, a gracious act of God. To the “metajudicial normativity” advocated by some philosophers of law<sup>52</sup> it opposes a refusal of any objective law from which all other rights could be derived. To so-called imprescriptible principles that would be the measure of all law it opposes the apprehension of law in concrete situations. To a law that organises it opposes a law that is “a condition for life imposed on man [by God].”<sup>53</sup> And Ellul categorically concludes, “Anything that man builds up under the name of law is precisely non-law. It engenders the antijudicial situation.”<sup>54</sup>

If Ellul sharply separates human law and the law of God, he separates just as sharply two conceptions of law and refuses as energetically the idea that human law could take its source in divine law. There is law and law for Ellul. The reference of law is the justice of God, understood as the manifestation of the divine will. The law is therefore an act of God in that it is formed by the judgements of God, formulated in relation to human rights, rights here understood in a positivist sense as the totality of the law elaborated by human beings. But for Ellul that justice is fully expressed, revealed and affirmed by Jesus on the cross, which, in a quasi-mystical formula, he describes as the “ultimate manifestation of God’s justice.”<sup>55</sup> In Christ re-establishment (a fundamental notion for Ellul) is at work: the reestablishment of the relationship between men and God, the reestablishment of the relationship between men, the reestablishment of the situation of humanity for all men, the reestablishment in the juridical order of man in his rights. This is because, Ellul clarifies, the judgement of God intervenes “according to the law of man” (in reference to Ps 7:9). It is in the covenant with Jesus Christ, a covenant “giving meaning and value to all previous covenants”<sup>56</sup> that God fully shows his justice. This covenant is distinctive because Jesus Christ, being the only man God has accepted, is *de facto* by his blood — and why not *de jure* — a man who contracts with God for all humanity and “through him God views all mankind.”<sup>57</sup> Thanks to Jesus, man acquires rights in an absolute manner and becomes the subject of law. In the framework of his covenant with God, Jesus acquires new rights that, since he acts for all men, he shares with all those who from now on relate themselves to him. By the miracle of substitution, no one is any longer without a right, the first right being the ability to claim Jesus Christ for oneself.

From this theological perspective, Ellul draws two conclusions. The first is that Jesus accepts human law, all the more easily than the covenant which does not provide this law with some sort of divine meaning. Jesus makes of this human law “an instrument

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<sup>52</sup> Mireille Delmas-Marty, *Pour un droit commun*, Seuil (La librairie du XXe siècle), Paris 1994, p!38.

<sup>53</sup> *Theological Foundation of Law*, p55.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p49.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p47.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p56.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p57.



for the justification of man.”<sup>58</sup> Inspired by Proverbs 29:26 and John 5:30, the second conclusion is that God makes himself the guarantor of a person’s right when that right is held up to ridicule by other men. For Ellul, quoting Is 49:4, because the right of man is in God, the right of the powerful or the rich is not a right. On the other hand, God is supremely concerned with the right of the widow, the poor and the orphan, who are those to whom the law gives its full attention. He is concerned in order to assure or preserve for them a just relationship with others even though, as those cursed by every society, they do not have at their command the strength or money to assert their right.

It is obvious that we are here far from the habitual conception of human rights which was more ideological than juridical, more moral than theological. Even if Ellul did not explicitly do so himself, it is possible to extend his thought through the development of a juridical ethic valid for and shared by all men whether Christian or not, whether they refer to the Bible or not. It is well known that Ellul found repugnant the idea of a “ready-to-consume” ethic and preferred to leave his readers and hearers to elaborate for themselves their own ethic through reflection on the elements which he provided for them.<sup>59</sup> It is clear, however, that for Ellul human rights do not constitute an ethical base relevant for the modern law which elsewhere he judges to be in crisis. From his analysis there arises the need for a deepening and an elevating of our law and of our relationship to it. Perhaps, despite their incantatory character, human rights conceal the difficulty of taking into account the spiritual dimension which inhabits all acts of social and human life, particularly the law. Ellul is able to make his own Bultmann’s phrase: “At every instant the law of God reaches man. That signifies that man is in decision, in the here and now”<sup>60</sup> — all the more so because, Bultmann insists, the man who has rights does not hold these rights simply “in his bare existence, but only in his situation as a responsible human being.”<sup>61</sup> Man has these rights on the basis of his capacity to take decisions, to develop responses to problems, to face up to difficulties, and to establish, in the face of life’s vicissitudes, some distance for reflection, a return to fundamental values and engagement.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p58.

<sup>59</sup> See Dujancourt, “Technique et éthique selon Jacques Ellul,” *Foi et Vie*, XCH (decembre 1994) 5-6, pp29-41.

<sup>60</sup> Bultmann, *op. cit.*, pl 65.

<sup>61</sup> *Theological Foundation of Law*, p80.

<sup>62</sup> Other writers have often highlighted the profound influence of Karl Barth on Ellul’s theological thinking. This is certainly the case regarding his juridical thought looked at from a theological viewpoint. The ideas used by Ellul are all found in Barth’s *Dogmatics*. [For example: Re-establishment: “The death of Jesus Christ preceded His resurrection. God established and maintained His own right against man and over man, and the right of man Himself. This makes it clear in what sense in the resurrection of Jesus Christ He willed to justify both Jesus and Himself, and has in fact done so, proclaiming His own twofold right and the right of man as His creature as they were there established and maintained to be the basis and the beginning of a new world” (Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/1, 59.3, p3U) — Judgement: “Divine judgement in the biblical sense means that God vindicates Himself against man, but

## Concluding Remarks

Our purpose is not to minimise the distinctiveness of Ellul's thought but rather to detect some of the influences and the original manner in which he uses them to elaborate his Christian ethic. The most profound influences are theological ones and so any understanding of his work is incomplete unless it takes into account his theological choices. It is by that measure that it is also necessary to appreciate his work concerning human rights for it is, we believe, that which truly clarifies all his thought. This is shown, for example, by his conclusion of a very penetrating juridical analysis of the Nuremberg trial. This trial marked the revival of natural law in the 20th century since it used all the juridical concepts which arise from natural law. For Ellul, this trial also marks the degeneracy of contemporary law in that it shows contempt for the bases of law and profits a perverse use of the law in which it is reduced to being a political instrument and part of the propaganda of power (in this case that of the victors of the Second World War). Here retroactivity, circumstantial laws, the creation of penalties after the crimes, the invention of unknown juridical concepts after the facts, and the superficiality of human rights are all seen clearly and Ellul does not fail to denounce them. Is this just the backward-looking reaction of a jurist fascinated by Roman law, the bitterness of the humanist who sees the nobility of principles made fun of by *raison d'Etat*, the excessive rigour of a moralist who refuses to accept that one can get away with talking a lot of hot air, the disarray of the Christian before a change judged to be incompatible with his faith? Here, in this area and on this occasion as in others, Ellul displays clarity of thought and rigour but also a hope. These establish the richness of his thought and encourage us to pursue working through his oeuvre. The judicial history of human rights justifies the precocity of his critique. The long drawn-out trial of Maurice Papon arouses an uneasiness comparable to that generated by the other trials of war criminals accused of crimes against humanity. A recent international conference<sup>63</sup> has underlined how much the struggle against such crime overturns the traditional principles of criminal law such as individual responsibility, the non-retroactivity of laws, the presumption of innocence, and prescription. At the end of the war, in which his life was a semi-clandestine one of resistance, and at the moment where the growth of human rights was asserting itself, Ellul furnished us with a proposition on human rights which appears both original and representative of his thought:

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that in so doing He vindicates man against all that is alien and hostile to him. It means that God does what is right for Himself and therefore for man" (op. cit, III/2,43.2, p32). — Grace: "the divine grace is the mercy and justice of God operative mid revealed in the divine decision" (op. cit, m/2, 44.3, pl64). — The role of Jesus Christ: "[Jesus Christ] lives in His time as the Judge by whose Word and work the right of God is vindicated in the sight of men, and therefore that of men is vindicated before God and among themselves; by whom the kingdom of God is thus established among men and His covenant with them fulfilled" (op. cit, III/2,47.1, p439).]

<sup>63</sup> "Du proems 4 l'histoire," Berlin Colloquium, 25-27 January 1998, organised by Centre Marc Bloch (the German extension of Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Science Sociales), Centrum Judaicum of

”The only humane international law will be that which, valid for all countries, assures, within each country, a minimum of rights for all people, guaranteeing them a minimum of freedoms and an individual security which allows each person to choose their own destiny and to respond, by themselves, either ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ when God speaks.”<sup>64</sup>

## Jaques Ellul and Human Rights — A Short Response to Sylvain Dujancourt

Andrew Goddard

*“Is there any other point to which you would wish to draw my attention?”*

*“To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time.”*

*“The dog did nothing in the night-time.”*

*“That was the curious incident,” remarked Sherlock Holmes.*

—Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Sylvain Dujancourt’s article powerfully draws attention to the curious incident of Ellul writing almost nothing on human rights. The strangeness of this is increased given Ellul’s regular engagement with his socio-political context, his own legal expertise, and the brief outline of a theology of human rights in his first published volume. By focusing on this curious incident Dujancourt offers an illuminating account of the various reasons — sociological, theological, legal and political — for this relative silence.

There is little I would dispute in Dujancourt’s account of this although I would, I think, add one further major reason for Ellul’s refusal to follow those of his contemporaries such as Moltmann and the World Council of Churches who were developing a theology of human rights. That is Ellul’s consistent and fundamental opposition to all forms of justification. This stance, rooted in his Protestant objection to man’s self-justification by his works, is perhaps most memorably expressed in his unpublished 1975 lectures on authority:

”Although it is our permanent temptation we do not have to add a small spiritual hat to whatever exists. This is always the risk. The power of the state exists. How are we going to explain that doctrinally, theologically? The power of the head of the family exists (well, it no longer exists, it used to exist). How are we going to justify that.. Understand that from the moment where you engage in this system of justification, you set yourself to justifying everything.”

To my mind there can be little doubt that as he looked at the political and juridical world around him with the prevalence of human rights Ellul felt exactly the same — the sudden rush of certain Christians to baptise this language and ideology was simply another form of the temptation into which the church regularly fell and which he constantly resisted.

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Berlin, and the Einstein Forum (cf. *Le Monde*, 25 Feb 1998, p10).

<sup>64</sup> Jacques Ellul, “Notes sur le proces de Nuremberg,” *Verbum Caro*, Vol 1 (Aug 1947), pl 12.

Dujancourt's article does not, however, only shed light on Ellul's refusal to address human rights in more detail. He also signals some ways in which Ellul's wider theology of law and his largely unexplored critique of modern technical law may be constructively elaborated into a more positive response to the dominance of human rights theories.

In particular, Dujancourt's sympathetic account of Ellul's rejection of the individualistic emphasis of modern rights theories and the need to develop a more personalist understanding in which obligations play a role is one which merits further development. It is one which has been much aired in recent liberal-communitarian debate in political philosophy and on which some biblical work has already been done by the Old Testament scholar Christopher Wright. In sketching a biblical account of human rights Wright argues that "to say that B has certain rights is simply the entailment of saying that God holds A responsible to do certain things in respect of B...Rights do not exist apart from the demand of God upon someone."<sup>65</sup> Dujancourt's work, in dialogue with Ellul, offers further important contributions to this task of developing a fuller conception of "human rights" in which humans are viewed not as abstract individuals but as persons in a wider community under God.

However, as Wright's work shows, any Christian attempt to reshape contemporary rights theories must also pay close attention to God's purposes in creation and here the spectre of "natural law" looms. Dujancourt emphasises that human rights theories grow out of natural law, highlights Ellul's criticism of all traditional natural law theories, and claims that "Ellul never changed in his opposition to natural law." He helpfully sketches the diverse arguments Ellul advanced to "deconstruct" natural law. While all this is certainly true it fails to recognise that elements in Ellul's legal thought share some important common features with certain natural law theories and that these may in fact prove necessary for the task of developing an alternative Christian account of human rights.

In the 1939 article, which Dujancourt cites to show Ellul's early explicit opposition to natural law (nl2), Ellul gave the Decalogue and human conscience a role in relation to human law which in his later book he rejected as too similar to natural law theories. However, even in that book (on which Dujancourt relies for most of his account of Ellul's theology of law), Ellul's theory of institutions given in creation again presents ideas which, in his own earlier writings, he had accepted were a "sort of natural law." This important strand of Ellul's juridical thinking was partially developed in a number of later articles but as with his early writing on human rights it unfortunately remained an aspect which failed to get the further attention it deserves.

By failing to recognise this part of Ellul's juridical thought and by giving insufficient attention to some significant changes within his developing theology of law, Dujancourt has perhaps missed an important point of tension in Ellul's own work. One focus of that tension is found in Dujancourt's own account where he begins by stressing Ellul's rejection of a common ground between Christian and non-Christians in the creation

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<sup>65</sup> C. Wright, "Walking in the Ways of the Lord," *Apollos*, Leicester, 1995, p253.

of a juridical system (n5 and n15) but later writes, “it is possible to extend Ellul’s thought through the development of a juridical ethic valid for and shared by all men whether Christian or not” It may well prove that any such shared juridical ethic and any substantial account of “a minimum of rights for all people” (for which Ellul calls in the final quote by Duj ancourt) must ultimately be related to a more substantial theological account of the calling and function of human beings as created beings within a wider created order such as that originally sketched in his account of human institutions.

Ellul, perhaps because of his voluntaristic emphasis on freedom and his antipathy to both natural law and teleological ethics, failed to provide such a theological account. As a result, despite the great insights shown in his critique of much modern human rights theory, his attempt to refound rights on God’s covenant remains rather insubstantial. We are left with only the rather general statement that these rights are “essentially contingent and variable” (n30) as they are founded on “the mission conferred on man by God and the demand of personal rights judged necessary if man is to be able to live” (n31). In a century which has witnessed not just the growth of human rights language but, as Ellul himself pointed out, the ineffectiveness of that language to prevent a terrifying increase in man’s inhumanity to his fellow humans, that statement is not sufficiently specific to be of any real practical use. If, however, it is to be made more concrete and given substance, then a deeper study of the covenant of creation, an explanation of some form of created order and institutions, and the calling of human beings within that is — despite its overtones of natural law — probably required.

**Issue #24 Jan 2000 — Academics  
on a Journey of Faith**

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## From the Editor

My thanks to our guest editor, Dan Clendenin. And my heartfelt thanks to Daryl Fasching for faithfully editing *The Ellul Forum* for more than a decade. Daryl had a vision for going beyond a newsletter on Ellul activities to a roundtable on our technological civilization. And he has made it happen splendidly, actively involving a broad membership from Europe, North America, and elsewhere in dialogue on Ellul and technology. Daryl has been a superb leader, and I'm pleased he'll be vitally involved henceforth as a member of our editorial board. Now that we've made the transition to the University of Illinois, we'll be on our regular publication cycle of two issues per year appearing in January and July. Send your possible articles and book reviews to me. Topics for guest editing an issue are welcome too.

Clifford G. Christians, Editor

## About This Issue

Whatever else Jacques Ellul was or sought to be, he was first and foremost a Christian, and that not merely by chance or coincidence but by choice. About half of his written work explores themes of the Biblical revelation and much of his time was spent in direct Christian ministry such as pastoring the blue-collar French Reformed church that met in his home, or serving on his denomination's committee for pastoral education and training. Ellul was typically unapologetic about his Christian journey; but on the other hand, he was consistently cryptic about his conversion experience. To my knowledge his two-volume autobiography that he wrote some time ago remains unpublished (in an interview he told me it would be left to his family to decide whether to publish it after his death).

Ellul was a man of formidable intellect and ideas, but he always wrote about his experiences. That is, he wrote out of his personal story. I suspect that many of the people like myself who have been so deeply influenced by Ellul were attracted by elements of his personal narrative.

A common but mistaken cultural assumption is that the modern university, to quote a physician friend from Yale, is "a Christless hellhole." This generalization has at least some merit, but people like Ellul belie its ultimate accuracy. A spate of recent books have chronicled the personal stories of believers who, like Ellul, work at the highest

levels of the academy and likewise locate themselves squarely in the Christian community.<sup>66</sup>

In the fall of 1997 a group of Christian professors at Stanford formed what has become known as the Christian Faculty Fellowship. A year later a second group of physicians at the Stanford Medical Center did likewise. In the last three years about 70 people have attended one of these groups (not all from Stanford and not all professors). Both groups meet on a weekly basis. In this issue of *The Ellul Studies Forum* three of these professors explore their specifically Christian journeys as university intellectuals—a truly Ellulian theme.

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## Science and Faith - A Personal View

by William T. Newsome

It is a privilege to contribute to this volume of the *Ellul Studies Forum*. Preparing this paper has “pushed” me more than any of the 80 or so papers I have published in my professional life, precisely because I have never before written for a public, academic readership on any aspect of religious faith. I do not, however, come to the topic completely unprepared. Across twenty-five or so years of adult life, I have tried to discern for myself whether there is anything in the universe worth having faith in, what it means for me personally to live in faith, and how my faith is related to all other facets of my life—including the science that I do. In a sense, then, my search for

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<sup>66</sup> See, for example, Kelly Monroe, *Finding God at Harvard* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997) or Paul Anderson, *Professors Who Believe* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998).



an authentic faith is as much a part of me as eating, sleeping and breathing, and it is certainly a more essential part of who I am than is the science I do.

I wish to begin with a disclaimer. I consider myself to be an expert-in the academic sense-only on the neurophysiology of visual perception, and I will have *nothing at all* to say about visual perception in this paper. However, my topic demands that I consider the nature of reality, the nature of meaning, ways of knowing, and the foundations of ethics—and I state openly that I am an expert in *none* of these subjects. While I have little formal training in philosophical analysis, I am a philosopher in the sense that every one of us is a philosopher in the sense that we all must get out of the bed every morning and *act* in numerous situations throughout each day. I believe that every action we take, and every decision we make, form a living philosophy in the sense that our actions imply certain beliefs about what is real and about our ultimate sources of meaning and value. This is the spirit in which I write, and this spirit is reflected in the title I chose for this paper, “Science and Faith: A Personal View”. I readily acknowledge that many readers have pondered these matters longer and more searchingly than I have. I am not writing to *instruct* anyone. Rather, I want only to share my own experience and reflections concerning the life of faith in a secular academic setting.

Many readers of this volume are probably Christians or perhaps theists of other stripes. Others are likely to be agnostic, perhaps tending toward atheism, simply because they have not been able to see a way to any form of faith that is both reasonable and nurturing in a deeply personal sense. A few readers may be strongly convinced atheists. My remarks are aimed predominantly toward that middle group—most of whom are authentic seekers—because this is the group that I seem to encounter most often in private conversations within the academic community.

I want to relate one such conversation because it captures the essence of many others I have had over the past couple of decades. When I was a junior faculty member at SUNY Stony Brook, my wife and I invited a young couple over for dinner at our house. Karen and Dan were both postdoctoral fellows in other neurobiology labs, but they loved children and did some baby-sitting for us on occasion. Karen and Dan were aware that Zondra and I were members of a local Presbyterian Church. Vaguely religious topics had cropped up in conversation among us on previous occasions, mostly concerning childhood religious backgrounds, as I recall. As fate would have it, religious matters came up during after-dinner conversation on this particular evening, and Karen finally blurted out, rather indelicately, “I don’t understand how a smart guy like you can believe in all that stuff!” Perhaps this unusually candid declaration was facilitated by the wine we had consumed during dinner, I don’t know. But I relate this story because Karen’s reaction is fairly common even though it is rarely expressed so straight forwardly. More often it is conveyed merely by a raised eyebrow or by a vaguely embarrassed or surprised facial expression when a friend discovers that I—a respected scientist (in some circles, at least)—am a Christian. What I would like to

do in this paper is to answer Karen's question as straightforwardly as I know how, because it is fair, it is authentic; and, it arises so often.

Karen's question can be answered on a number of levels. At one obvious level, I am a Christian today because I was born in the United States of America rather than in a Moslem or Hindu country. Yet many native born Americans are not Christians, so this cannot be the entire explanation. At another level, one might say that I am a Christian because I was raised in a deeply religious family. I am the son and grandson of Southern Baptist ministers, and thus am a conspicuous outlier in the community of academic scientists. Obviously, my family milieu played an important role in my spiritual development, but neither was this a completely determinative factor. The stereotype of the rebellious 'preacher's kid,' in fact, might lead one to expect the opposite outcome. People raised in deeply religious families go on to a wide variety of lifestyles and belief systems as adults.

Historical factors—biological, cultural, and familial— influence all of us profoundly, but any of us with two wits to nib together will (or should, at least) examine and question these influences critically at some point in our lives. To some extent then, I am a Christian today because I consciously *choose* to be. For me, the simplest answer to Karen's question is that I am a Christian because my life makes more sense to me with my faith than without it. Now I would be the first to admit that there are times when my life doesn't seem to make much sense from any point of view. But on the whole, I have not found any other system of belief—or disbelief—that accounts as well or as consistently for the world as I experience it, from deeply personal matters of ethics and hunger for meaning to my sense of awe at the physical universe.

Before getting to the heart of my remarks, I would like to clear away a bit of underbrush. When I speak with academic friends about religious faith, I often find that they have certain mental blocks that prevent them from taking the Christian faith seriously, and many of these obstacles appear to me unnecessary because they can be dealt with fairly straightforwardly. I want to mention four of them briefly, simply because I encounter them so frequently. I will not deal with any one in depth, but I hope merely to point toward ways of thinking that can perhaps defuse these issues a bit.

1) One obstacle is the perception that Christians, and evangelical Christians in particular, are intolerant. Claims for possession of ultimate truth are generally viewed with suspicion in academia, and attempts to make converts on this basis are viewed even more harshly. Let me state plainly that I believe in evangelism, but my model of evangelism differs importantly from other commonly encountered models. As anyone who knows me realizes, I am not out to beat anyone over the head concerning matters of faith. On the contrary, I am actually fairly private about my faith. To use a metaphor (not original with me), evangelism, properly understood, is simply "one bum telling another bum where he can find some food." For me, the achingly good news of God's love is most effectively offered out of a very deep sense of humility, within a relationship, and to a demonstrated need. From this perspective, faith is *communicated* in

dialogue, arising from a sense of common humanity, not from a sense of arrogance or triumphalism I have no problem with this sort of evangelism, either as a human being or as an academic. But, let me say something further about intolerance. To some extent intolerance is a virtue. If we are *tolerant* of everything, then we *stand* for nothing. For example, Stanford University—where I am employed—has values that it espouses, including academic freedom, dialogue by reasoned discourse, and mutual respect for the diverse members of the university community. Stanford is properly intolerant of gross violations of those values. If nothing else, the modern university is intolerant simply of intolerance! So it should not be surprising that Christians, or feminists, or scientists, or environmentalists, to name just a few, have certain bedrock values that they refuse to compromise. All such groups are entitled to a voice in our academic communities as long as they abide by the basic rules of reasoned discourse and respect for others.<sup>67</sup>

2) A second obstacle is the perception that in terms of moral conduct, people inside the Christian community are no better, and may be worse in some respects, than people outside the community. For a community whose basic *raison d'être* is to be the hands, the feet, and the voice of Christ in the world, this perception can be particularly damaging. I think about this issue on two levels. First, realize that Christians make no claim to be different at a fundamental human level than anyone else. We are all needy. We have all experienced the brokenness of this world in the pain that we inevitably inflict on others and the pain that is inflicted on us. Most of us have experienced despair at the way small people are damaged by the frenetic thrashings of our political and economic culture. Christians are simply a subset of ordinary people who have found a beacon of hope and light in a world that is all too often bleak. At a second level, however, the expectation of moral growth and leadership in the Christian community is entirely justified; most Christians I know would certainly affirm a desire to become more Christ-like as their journey of faith progresses, and that something is wrong if this is not happening at least in some feeble way. Contrarily, as C.S. Lewis<sup>68</sup> has pointed out, however, the key issue is not whether some large collection of Christians is morally superior to a similar collection of non-believers. The central problem is whether each individual believer is growing in moral stature *more* than if he or she were a non-believer, and whether each individual non-believer *could grow more surely* if he or she were a believer. I am certain that the positive moral influence of my faith is real for myself, for my wife, and for most of my close friends who are believers; one can only make that judgment for oneself by trying I think. In statistics, of course, the concept I am driving at is *partial correlation*. For those of you who speak statistical lingo, I am convinced that this effect is highly significant

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<sup>67</sup> This point is argued at length in GM Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1997.

<sup>68</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*. New York: Macmillan Publishing. 1952.

3) A third obstacle that I want to mention is the perception that the things that go on in churches are simply irrelevant to modern life, even if one is sympathetic in principle to some form of religious faith. Church gatherings are frequently perceived as little more than events for forming social and business contacts, and the forms of worship are sometimes perceived as outmoded relics of another age. While these criticisms have some truth to them, I can say emphatically that my primary experience of church is positive and directly relevant to the cutting edge of life. The best times are usually in small group gatherings or in retreat settings. At these times I see people struggling with grievous or impending loss, searching with each other for strength to continue the journey, in optimism and faith. I experience in these settings, and in corporate worship as well, clarion calls to remember who I really am, to constantly refresh my moral priorities, to be attentive to my highest intuitions, to be a servant as well as I can to my family and to those I work with each day. This is indeed food for the soul. Where do you go to get yours? I don't know how I could live without it.

4) A fourth obstacle is the perception that Christians are anti-science, and I must admit that there is some justification for this view. Every Christian should study the history of the Church's interaction with Copernicus and Galileo in the 16th and 17th centuries. As most of us know, Galileo provided the first compelling evidence that the celestial bodies in our solar system revolve around the sun rather than around the earth. While some of Galileo's difficulties arose more from palace intrigue than from theological considerations, he was nevertheless brought before the Church's Inquisition and forced to recant his beliefs, and remained essentially under house arrest for the rest of his life. It is the textbook example of how one of the greatest intellectual achievements in history was suppressed, the scientist himself persecuted, and the entire process rationalized religiously by narrow, very literal interpretations of specific passages of scripture. In our own age, a vocal segment of Christianity flirts dangerously with the same mistake by *engaging* in knee-jerk denunciations of biological evolution without open-minded consideration of the scientific evidence. Most Christians, however, value science deeply. One of the foremost achievements of liberal Protestantism in the United States was the establishment of our great research universities, including Stanford, and the nurture of the spirit of free inquiry that drives science today.<sup>69</sup> The founders of our great universities realized that Christians should have no fear of truth from any source. We believe that there is only one author of truth, and that is God. All truth is a gift from God. Unlike some segments of academia, however, Christians realize that the truth offered by science is limited and cannot speak to our deepest questions and hungers concerning value, purpose and meaning. We believe in science, yes, but we believe in much more than science. Which brings me to the issues at the core of this paper what are the proper roles of science and faith in my life or in anyone else's life? And, where does the power of one end and the power of the other begin?

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<sup>69</sup> G.M Marsden, *The Soul of the American University*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1994.

It seems to me that we should make at least two major distinctions in thinking about the proper roles of science and religious faith. First, we should realize that science aims primarily to answer questions about *mechanism*, whereas religious faith seeks answers to questions about *purpose, meaning and value*.<sup>70</sup> Much confusion arises when we look to science for ultimate answers to our quest for meaning and value, and I will have more to say about this shortly. Similarly, painful confusion arises if we look to religion for answers about mechanism. We need only look at the example of Galileo to see this. I believe that there is no necessary conflict between the two; I view mechanism and purpose as complementing each other, not as exclusive of each other. A balanced view of the world will realize the importance of both mechanism and purpose in almost every realm of endeavor. Many readers of this paper are deeply interested in mechanistic issues. For example, we wonder how physiological events within the brain give rise to perception, memory, and learning. We are curious about the fundamental forces that bind all matter together. We ask what molecular events turn a normal cell into a cancerous one. We seek to understand how macroeconomic phenomena arise from countless microeconomic decisions made by individuals. But all of us care deeply about issues of purpose and value as well. For example, is there any *absolute* difference between Hitler and Ghandi, or were their differences simply a matter of taste, or perhaps a matter of different gene pools competing for survival? Should our country's relationship with any other country be governed more by economic and military considerations, or by issues of human rights and social justice? What *is* justice anyway? Do the countless ethical decisions that I make during a given year have any ultimate significance, or are they essentially hollow and transient?

I can illustrate this difference between mechanism and purpose with a simple, almost trivial, example. Someone who has never before seen a computer might rightly be amazed that the letter 'a' appears on the video monitor when the matching letter 'a\*' is pressed on the keyboard. If our observer is the curious type, she would want to know all about this spectacular phenomenon. Now I could offer her two types of explanation. A mechanistic explanation would talk about the key press closing a switch, which sends a particular voltage into the CPU over a particular input line, which exerts multiple effects on myriad transistors, flip-flops, etc. and eventually causes the monitor's electron beam to excite R, B & G phosphors at specific pixel locations to create a replica of the letter 'a.' A purposeful account, on the other hand, would simply

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<sup>70</sup> realize that the distinction between mechanism and purpose is not a black-and-white cleavage. Upon scrutiny, neither mechanism nor purpose is likely to remain tidily contained in its separate box. The evolutionary idea of a "niche", for example, reaches outside the confines of "mechanism" into some aspects of "purpose". Nevertheless, the distinction that I am making is fundamental, and it captures substantial truth about the relationship between science and religion. For present purposes, it is most important to get the primary distinctions clear; extended analysis of exceptions is beyond the scope of this paper. The view of complementarity between science and religion along the lines of mechanism and purpose is, of course, not remotely original with me. I follow in the footsteps of a host of others, including recently, S.J. Gould, *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fulness of Life*. New York: Ballantine Publishing Group, 1999.

note that the computer is a powerful machine that can perform remarkable services for the user, but only if the user has a way to communicate effectively with the computer. The keyboard/monitor system was designed to accomplish that communication. Now these are very different accounts, but both are obviously true. One concentrates on mechanism; the other on purpose. The levels of explanation do not compete with each other, they are complementary. The *key* question in any given situation is exactly what kind of truth are we looking for?

My point, of course, is that all of us have a stake in both kinds of questions—those of mechanism and those of purpose. We should not parse ourselves into scientific and religious communities who believe that truth lies substantially in one or the other camp. Rather, we should be clear about what kind of truth we are searching for when we ask a particular question, and then search for it in the proper place.

An important corollary to this distinction between mechanism and purpose or value is that science cannot provide adequate grounds for ethics. Science can tell us how to build nuclear weapons, but there is no experiment I can do in a laboratory that will tell us unequivocally whether it is ever right to use them. Science can tell us how to clone an organism from one of its cells, but cannot define for us when it is right to do so. Science can show us how to create pregnancies for infertile ; couples, and it can show us how to terminate pregnancies. But, it cannot tell us when we should or should not do either. Anyone who seeks to act ethically in the world or influence our political and economic culture in an ethical manner must obviously look beyond science for guidance.

The second major distinction we should make is that science is primarily concerned with public, repeatable events whereas religious faith is often most concerned with unique events. The phenomena that science likes best are those that occur reliably given a specific set of initial conditions, and can therefore be repeated again and again with various subtle but enlightening twists. Religious communities, on the other hand, are frequently concerned with *unique, life-changing* events that occur in the lives of individual believers, whose initial conditions can never again be replicated. Christianity, in particular, is concerned with unique events that happened 2000 years ago in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. I would argue once *again* that these realms of experience are not in competition, but that all of us have a stake in both. If we want to know precisely what *makes* a normal cell cancerous—and what we might *ultimately* do about it—then we have a stake in the public, repeatable world of scientific investigation. We want as many bright young people as possible manipulating cells in all conceivable ways to discern the complex chains of molecular events that lead to uncontrolled cell division. But, all of us have an overwhelming interest in unique events as well. Anyone who has been a parent, especially of teenagers, knows all too well the excruciating decisions that must be made on the basis of very limited data. And once the moment of decision is past, we can never return to it We can never start again at the same place, *make* a different decision, and see how it comes put In *scientific* parlance, we can never do the control experiment Although I used parenting as a specific example, anyone in

an intimate relationship will find her or himself in the same boat. Decisions must be made and actions taken on the basis of woefully incomplete knowledge: incomplete knowledge of our partner, of ourselves, and of the deepest sources of behavior of either party. We are all afloat on a sea of unique events, and we must all try to discern deep patterns and truths that lie beneath the ever-changing surface. All of us have a stake in any source of wisdom, religious or otherwise, that will help us discern those truths and steer a stable course.

From these remarks, it should be quickly perceived that I perceive no necessary conflict between science and faith. Science, rightly understood, has no quarrel with religious faith unless religious authorities attempt to establish by fiat “facts” concerning mechanism that are properly in the domain of scientific investigation. Similarly, religion, rightly understood, has no quarrel with science itself. However, religion does have a major quarrel with the many attempts in our century to establish—in our universities in particular—a specific materialistic “faith” under the guise of science. Various forms of this faith have dominated the intellectual ethos of our major research universities for half a century at least. The core tenets of this faith, or world-view, are several-fold:

1) The universe and all that is in it works entirely by blind, cause-and-effect mechanism.

2) Mechanistic explanations, based on reductionist analysis, are the surest and perhaps only road to truth.

3) Phenomena which cannot be studied and verified by scientific means are either not real, or not meaningful, or simply not worth worrying about (As Frederick Buechner has pointed out this seems a bit like a blind man who believes that anything that cannot be heard, touched, tasted or smelled is a figment of the imagination.<sup>71</sup>)

4) Attempts to fashion a personal life in this world must be based, in the eloquent words of Bertrand Russell, on the foundation of unyielding despair.

5) Advances in scientific understanding are the best hope for addressing the world’s many ills. (This one is going out of vogue faster than the rest)

As should be easily observed by now, I have many misgivings about this particular world-view, but I will try to restrict myself to a few key observations. First, we should acknowledge that this world-view is not science or a necessary result of science. It is indeed a specific faith and interpretation of reality, arrived at by a segment of people. There is no experiment that one can do in a laboratory, and no unequivocal chain of reasoning, that can demonstrate any of these tenets to be true. Adherents to this world-view cling to it, I suppose, because it accounts for their experience of the world better than any alternative they have found. Or perhaps many cling to it simply because it represents a modern intellectual consensus, just as many academics in previous centuries adhered uncritically to theistic points of view that formed the intellectual consensus then.

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<sup>71</sup> F. Buechner, *Wishful Thinking*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1973.

My problem is that this materialistic faith does NOT account well for my experience of the world. The most deeply meaningful issues of my existence cannot be addressed on mechanistic grounds or by reductionist analysis. To give one outstanding example, how does one design a reductionist approach to the question: “Is it better to live or to die?” This is likely to be a live issue for some readers of this journal, or for some among their loved ones. I would argue that it is one of the most important questions a person can ask Or how do we address a question that is surely a live one for many readers: “Should I marry this person? Do we have what it takes to form a life-long bond that can endure through severe difficulties?” Or how about the question asked by many bright but disaffected high school students: “Do I want to buy in to this society and its educational, political and economic values? Is there another way?” Such questions can certainly be reasoned about, but they cannot in the end be answered by scientific method. In contrast to the materialist ethos, I would argue that the importance of any question is in general inversely proportional to the certainty with which it can be answered.

Let us make no mistake about it: the central crisis of our culture is a crisis of meaning,<sup>72</sup> and the dominant intellectual ethos of our academic communities does a paltry job of addressing the crisis. The world hungers for meaning, and our intellectual communities offer the spiritual equivalent of a stone. We need only consult many of our best scientists for confirmation of this critique. The astronomer, Stephen Weinberg, closed his widely read book, *The First Three Minutes*, with the observation that “The more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless.”<sup>73</sup> In his highly acclaimed book, *The Selfish Gene*, the Oxford biologist Richard Dawkins concludes that all of the living, striving, loving and valuing of arty human being serves only to abet one set of DNA molecules in its competition with other sets of DNA molecules.<sup>74</sup> That’s the whole ball of wax! This is the faith that is frequently presented under the guise of science; it is a faith that does not sustain, uplift or ennoble; it is a faith that I resist, both within the academy and without<sup>75</sup>

So what does Christianity offer as an alternative? A retreat to a discredited if more cozy past? An opiate to ameliorate our pain? An altar upon which to abandon our minds in favor of dogma? A lifetime of boring church services and stifling piety? I don’t think so. These certainly are traps that can be fallen into, but they can be avoided with reasonable judgment

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<sup>72</sup> See, for example, V. Frankel, *Man’s Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984.

<sup>73</sup> S. Weinberg, *The First Three Minutes*. New York, Basic Books Inc., 1977.

<sup>74</sup> R. Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976.

<sup>75</sup> I argue vehemently here against a particular materialistic philosophy, substantially devoid of meaning, that is peddled on our campuses and in popular culture as a “scientific” world view. In so arguing, I do not mean to neglect or denigrate the many reflective academics who are sensitive to the transcendent dimension of life but are seeking patterns of meaning outside the usual religious traditions. A recent example is Ursula Goodenough’s book, *The Sacred Depths of Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). Ursula, in fact, has gently chided me for the “caricature” of a scientific world view



At its best Christianity offers a balanced, holistic view of the universe in general, and each of our individual existences in particular. It offers a sense of awe at the majesty and intricacy of God's creation in the physical universe. It provides a deep appreciation of scientific inquiry. (In one of Einstein's most memorable phrases, the process of scientific discovery is learning to think God's thoughts after him.) Christianity points the way toward an ecologically sound ethic: this is not our world, it is God's—we are only stewards. Christianity provides perhaps the best, most saving personal news that we can ever hear, that we are known and loved deeply and fully, that our highest values and intuitions are not a farce, but rather point more or less faithfully toward the essential core of reality. It frankly acknowledges the brokenness of our self-centered psyches, but offers us forgiveness and healing. It does not shrink from the pain of our existence, but points toward a man on a cross and says that no horror, however dark, cannot yield some good. It offers as much challenge for the future as any human being can embrace—to become as fully Christ-like in the time we are allotted on earth as God gives us the grace to be. It is a coherent view of existence that tolls the depths of our being, that calls out from us the very best that we have to offer. It reveals to us a world that is permeated with holiness at every turn, if only we have eyes to see it

Charles Birch, an Australian biologist, has captured much of this vision in a memorable reflection on the book of Job.<sup>76</sup> Job, as most readers will recall, was a righteous man who lost all that he had—wealth, family, health—but sought to remain faithful to God. In the end, broken and embittered, he lashed out at God with great anger and frustration. In a dramatic passage, the Almighty finally responds to Job's ranting, confronting him with his own finitude:

Who is this obscuring my designs with his empty headed words? Brace yourself like a fighter; now it is my turn to ask questions and you to inform me. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me, since you are so well-informed! Who decided the dimensions of it, do you know? Have you Journeyed all the way to the sources of the sea, or walked where the Abyss is deepest? Have you been shown the gates of Death or met the janitors of Shadowland? Have you an inkling of the extent of the earth? Tell me all about it if you have! Who carves a channel for the downpour, and hacks a way for the rolling thunder, so that rain may fall on lands

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presented in this paragraph. In response, I can only say that this "caricature" is very much alive and well in the corner of academia that I inhabit. I recently spoke with a faculty colleague at Stanford who declared his (hyperbolic) desire to "bomb" Memorial Church (a campus landmark established by the Stanford family) because it is a "monument to irrationality." More importantly, I frequently speak with Stanford students who are grappling with this materialistic world view as the received wisdom of our academic culture, they are usually amazed and gratified to find a Stanford faculty member who will argue strongly what they already suspect—that this particular emperor is short on clothing.

<sup>76</sup> Quoted from L. Charles Birch, "Nature, Humanity and God in Ecological Perspective". Address delivered at the Conference on Faith, Science and the Future, sponsored by the World Council of Churches. Boston, MA, July, 1979.

where no one lives, and the deserts void of human dwelling giving drink to lonely wastes, and making grass spring where everything was dry? Who gave thee; this wisdom and endowed the cock with foreknowledge? Does the hawk take flight on your advice when he spreads his wings to travel south? Does the eagle soar at your command to make the eyrie in the heights?

Job 38 & 39, Jerusalem Bible

In reflecting on this passage, Birch says:

Some of these questions are still questions to us, though not all. . For we have more than an inkling of the extent of the earth, even of the universe. Someone has calculated the number of electrons in the universe and has come up with the round figure of  $10^{80}$ ! We have journeyed all the way to the sources of the sea and beyond to the moon. We have walked where the abyss of the sea is deepest and now we plan to dig it up. We know something, of how the cock got its wisdom and the cock foreknowledge. We think we know something about the beginnings of the universe and the beginnings of life. But our dominant scientific-technological world view provides no framework within which we can find comprehensible answers to questions of point and purpose.

Birch then tries to imagine what God would say to the modern questioner:

Who is this obscuring my designs with his mechanistic models of the universe so that there is room neither for purpose, mind nor consciousness?

Brace yourself like a fighter, for now it is my turn to ask questions and yours to inform me.

Where were you at the big bang?

How is it that out of a universe of pure hydrogen you have come into existence?

Did life begin when the first cell came into existence or do elements of life exist in the foundations of the universe?

How can you be so sure that all is contrivance? How can mind grow from no-mind? How can life grow from the non-living?

Do people grow from blind mechanism? Is not a universe which grows human beings as much a human [ or humanizing universe as a tree which grows apples is an apple tree?

Or do you think that figs grow on thistles and grapes on thorns?

Does not the life of Jesus tell you something about the life of the universe? Was he not there in some sense from the foundations of it all?

You who live in rich countries, can you not see how every increase in your standard of living reduces that of someone in a poor country now, as well as threatening the survival of future generations?

Who is madly Christian enough among you to cut his standard of living by a third for the sake of the poor?

Do you think the world and all that is in it is simply for your use? Has it no other value?

Because there are accidents and chance in the world, why do you think there is therefore no room for purpose? Can you not have both?

And when you have analyzed life down to its molecular building blocks in DNA, why do you think you have discovered the secret of life when you have not yet discovered the source of love and all feeling?

And why do you want to make of me either an all-powerful engineer or an impotent non-entity when I am neither?

To all of which we can only reply as Job replied:

*I have been holding forth on matters I cannot understand, on matters beyond me and my knowledge. I knew you then only by hearsay; but now, having seen you with my own eyes, I retract all that I have said, and in dust and ashes I repent.*

Job 42 (Jerusalem Bible)

I hope that by now everyone is beginning to see the shape of my answer to Karen's question—"How can a smart guy like you believe in all that stuff?" I write in one sense as a successful, middle-aged neuroscientist. But in a more profound sense, I figure out, in a semi-bewildered way, what sort of mess I have landed in. I am convinced—most of the time—that it is a holy mess. I struggle for coherence and consistency, and this holy view of existence is the one that accounts best for life as I experience it, both with my mind and with my heart.

One of the saints in my personal pantheon is the Christian writer and minister, Frederick Buechner. Buechner gets to the essence of this holy world-view in a memorable reflection on the creation story in the first chapter of Genesis:<sup>77</sup>

"Who knows what I have in me of the [woman and the man] who in their heyday begot me? Who knows what all of us have in us not just of our parents but of their parents before them and so on back beyond any names we know or any faces we would recognize... Who knows what we carry in us, either, from those unspeaking, unthinking creatures that slithered and crept their way through the millennia until they turned

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<sup>77</sup> F. Buechner, *Telling Secrets*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991.

into foe likes of you and me and who have never stopped speaking and thinking since? And you ‘can cany it back farther even than that to whatever unimaginable event took place, in one instant of time to bring time itself into being, and space itself and that basic matter of which you and I and foe star of Aldebaran and foe tooth of the great white shark and foe petal of foe rose are all composed. As individuals, as a species, as a world, our origins are lost in mystery.

“The passage from Genesis points to a mystery greater still. It says that we come from farther away than space and longer ago than time. It says that evolution and genetics and environment explain a lot about us but they don’t explain all about us or even foe most important thing about us. It says that though we live in foe world, we can never be entirely at home in foe world. It says in short not only that we were created by God but also that we were created in God’s image and likeness. We have something of God within us foe way we have something of foe stars.

“...I believe that what Genesis suggests is that this original self, with foe print of God’s thumb still upon it, is the most essential part of who we are and is buried deep in all of us as a source of wisdom and strength and healing which we can draw upon, or with our terrible freedom, not draw upon as we choose. I think among other things that all real art comes from that deepest self.. I think that our truest prayers come from there too, the often unspoken, unbidden prayers that can rise out of the lives of unbelievers as well as believers whether they recognize them as prayers or not And I think that from there also come our best dreams and our times of gladdest playing and taking it easy and all those moments when we find ourselves being better or stronger or braver or wiser than we are.”

I share Buechner’s belief here, and I say this acknowledging fully foe peculiar nature of religious belief For me at least this is always composed of roughly equal parts of cognitive assent intuition and unspeakable yearning, leavened with a dash or three of doubt We are all probing at the edges of a very great mystery, or perhaps the best way to say it is that we *are being probedby* the greatest of mysteries. To paraphrase the Apostle Paul, now we see through foe glass darkly, but we hope for a day when we see face to face.

I would like to conclude by saying to those who are trying to walk in Christian faith, I think you are on foe right track, that the path you are following is the path that leads *home* in foe truest sense of foe word. For those who are interested skeptics—and believe me, that is all of us most of the time—I would encourage you simply to try this path and see where it leads. It can be a tough road to go alone, and finding (or forming!) a small group of like-minded travelers to share foe journey is a tremendous gift For those who disagree with everything I have said and are searching for answers to ultimate questions elsewhere, I can only say in foe parlance of my teenage sons: “Hey, that’s cool, dude!” I certainly admit that in the end, you may be right and I may be wrong. I would urge you, however, to attend closely to your “best dreams, times of gladdest playing, and those moments when you find yourself being better, stronger, braver or wiser than you are.” The voice that rises up within us in those moments, I

*think*, is an eternal voice that beckons us to our truest being, our most joyous selves, our ultimate destiny. And I would also ask, if you reach a point in life where the way is dark and the spiritual hunger overwhelming, remember that there is a place where you can find some food. The path of Christ *is* a living option.

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## Experiences of God’s Guidance

By Richard H. Bube

In a number of wonderful ways my life’s journey, by the grace of God, has involved personal commitment to Jesus Christ, as well as to authentic scientific descriptions. It is not surprising that exploring the interaction between science and Christian faith has been a major activity of my life.

My first book was published in 1955, *To Every Man An Answer: A Textbook of Christian Doctrine*.<sup>78</sup> It was written to explore the Biblical revelation following the birth of our first child. My first paper on science and Christianity was published the following year, “The Relevance of the Quantum Principle of Complementarity to Apparent Basic Paradoxes in Christian Theology.”<sup>79</sup> I started work on my second book in

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<sup>78</sup> *To Every Man an Answer: a Textbook of Christian Doctrine*. Moody Press, Chicago (1955).

<sup>79</sup> “The Relevance of the Quantum Principle of Complementarity to Apparent Basic Paradoxes in Christian Theology,” *Journal ASA* 8, No. 4, 4(1956).

1955, *Photoconductivity of Solids*,<sup>80</sup> the first of seven scientific books related to photo-electronic and photovoltaic properties of semiconductors. In the following forty years I gave talks on science at many scientific meetings and conferences around the world, and I also spoke on science and Christian faith at over sixty colleges and universities. I almost continuously participated in Adult Education programs in at least seven local churches. A particular focus of my efforts has been to clarify what a whole vocabulary of words involving science and *Christianity* really mean, as opposed to the ways they are often popularly used to argue for various special agendas. The central theme of these reflections is the many ways in which critical riecí sinns and opportunities in my life can be traced with *thanksgiving* to the providential guidance of God.

## *Early Years*

I grew up in Providence, Rhode Island, with parents who were loving and supportive, but were not believing *Christians* in my first year at Classical High School I became good friends with another student in my class. One day he told me that his church, the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, was building a new church building not far from my home, and he invited me to attend the dedication service. I always remembered that the first hymn in the service was *Holy, Holy, Holy*. The church, the people, and the service spoke to me, and I started to attend Sunday School shortly thereafter. I do not know how long it was—but probably not very long—before my kindly Sunday School teacher clearly presented the Christian Gospel of God’s grace in Jesus Christ to us teenagers in the class as part of the regular lesson. My heart said “Yes” to God almost immediately, I was a member of the 1941 Confirmation Class, and I began my walk with Christ as one for whom He had died and risen again.

### *Brown University*

After Classical High School, where I started my writing and editing experience by editing the school newspaper for two years, I went on to Brown University during the nontypical war years. My fundamental concern in choosing a career program at Brown was to find some kind of activity for which I had some talent, and which promised to provide gainful employment. I was, after all, a child of the Great Depression, and the ability to find a job that would enable one to support a family, live a reasonably constructive life, and be a helping member of society dominated the list of job requirements. I think I subconsciously assumed that any honorable job could (and should!) be done to the glory of God.

These were very nontypical days for life on a university campus. There was only a handful of civilians on campus. My own list of courses was almost totally limited to those related to science: physics, chemistry, mathematics, and a single course in astronomy. The few non-science courses consisted of required Freshman English, two

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<sup>80</sup> *Photoconductivity of Solids*, Wiley, N.Y. (1960); Russian translation (1962); reprinted by Krieger, Huntington, N.Y. (1978).

semesters of French (I knew that ultimately, to fulfill the requirement for a PED., I would need to be able to read in two languages other than English, and I already had some education in German.), and my major excursion away from the standard science curriculum: two courses in Political Science.

The two Political Science classes were a radical departure from my technical curriculum and reflected a growing interest I had in some of the ideas involved. The two courses I took were “From Luther to Hitler”, and “The United Nations”. I took the latter around the birth of the United Nations, when there were high hopes for major changes because of its existence. I even wrote a major paper entitled, *Religion and Internationalism*, which had a section titled, “Religion and Science”; I was overjoyed when this paper was awarded the Samuel Lamport Prize. It is interesting to note that I was later strongly criticized by a physics faculty member for having done an inappropriate thing for a physics major to seriously spend time thinking about political science! “You’ll never succeed in physics that way!” I was warned. You can imagine the response that my Christian faith stimulated.

There are a few other papers, written while I was at Brown, related to the interaction between science and Christian faith. One of these is not specifically dated and is titled simply, *Science and the Christian*. Its major concern is the development of a positive treatment of the meaning of science for a Christian, and it sets forth the capabilities and the limitations of science in a way that foreshadows my more complete treatment of these issues in later years.

### ***Other Examples of Divine Guidance***

Several times in my life I made crucial, life-shaping decisions that in many ways were not really mine at all. Some of these can be seen in the early years described above. In the following I have called these ‘special occasions of divine guidance’ and have singled them out for particular attention.

#### *Princeton University*

My eight consecutive semesters at Brown during the war came to an end in February 1946. Considerably before this, however, came the consideration of how to continue my education after receiving my Bachelor of Science degree in Physics from Brown. Again, I had very little experience to draw on, but for a variety of reasons I decided that good choices would be Cornell, Yale and Princeton. I felt it important to get my graduate education in a different environment from my undergraduate education. I applied to each, with the obvious proviso that I couldn’t come without financial aid in some form, and waited to hear what would happen.

Cornell admitted me, but regretted that they had no financial aid available in the middle of the academic year. Yale responded in the same way. Finally Princeton admitted me, with the happy news that they did have a Teaching Assistantship for me if I chose to accept I had no trouble in making a decision between them.

I have always regarded this particular set of circumstances as a focal point for God's providential activity in my life, and as an example of how God often does choose to act in a person's life. I did not make the independent decision to attend Princeton rather than Cornell or Yale; God made the choice through the circumstances in which the events happened. Left to myself, and with my limited knowledge, Princeton might well have been my last choice among these three Universities. But the opening of the door to Princeton—and particularly the delay of the offer of financial aid from Cornell until too late—set the entire framework for the rest of my life. The wonderful relationship with the woman who became my wife, my growth as a Christian, and my fulfilling scientific career all grew out of the Princeton experience in unique ways.

While I was a graduate student in physics, I was on the founding committee for a new Lutheran Church in Princeton; however, I was too young to serve on the first governing board of the church. I received notice that I had been hired to work on the cyclotron project at Palmer Physics Laboratory during my first summer at Princeton. The cyclotron in question was a 12-ft diameter model, which was quickly replaced over the next few years in the field by machines orders of magnitude larger and more complicated. I came away from the experience with the reinforced conviction that I did not want to do 'big machine' physics.

In 1947 I did some of my most careful reflection on what kind of a future career I felt called to pursue. Should I continue my path toward a career in science, or should I consider instead a calling to some specific theological ministry? It was obviously a critical point in my life; a number of crucial events occurred in the next couple of years. First, I became convinced by the end of my PhD. degree work that I had better gifts for scientific research than I did for pastoral ministry. Second, there was born within me the conviction that God was calling me to serve Him through my science, especially through my witness as a respected Christian scientist, a member of both the scientific and Christian communities. Third, a whole new field of physics, solid-state physics—or as it has become known in recent years, condensed matter physics—was just opening up. This was exactly the kind of challenging, 'small machine' science that appealed to me at that time.

While I was a grad student in physics at Princeton, I attended a talk given by a distinguished and respected Old Testament scholar, who had written a book stressing the literal interpretation of Genesis One. At the end of his talk in the question period, one of the students asked him, "How can one reconcile the scientific theory of evolution with a literal Genesis account of creation?" He replied, "Until evolution is proven to be true, I do not really need to consider its possible interactions with the Genesis account" This answer struck me as being so inappropriate that it triggered my lifelong concern for dealing with the interactions between science and Christian theology in a way that preserves the integrity of each.



## *The love of my life.*

While I was a 20-year old grad student at Princeton, I met Betty, a wonderful Christian woman with whom I quickly fell deeply in love. We had a brief period of turmoil when we tried to come to grips with the fact that she was 10 years older than I which neither of us had earlier suspected. After a brief straggle with some of the socially defined issues in such a relationship, we both came to the conclusion that God had called us together. We shared life together for the next 48 years passionately in love, with our four children, until God called her home to him in 1997. Certainly no single experience in my life could express so powerfully the loving guidance of God in my life.

### *Choice of scientific field of research.*

My first two summers at Princeton I worked on projects at the university, but there did not seem to be a suitable opportunity for the third summer. Since Betty was working at the nearby RCA Laboratories, I applied to them to see if a summer appointment might be available. Providentially there was.

When I began this work, my supervisor said to me, "Which would you rather do: grow crystals or measure luminescence?" Because of my background in physics, I said, "measure luminescence," and this simple choice set in motion the main focus of much of my scientific research in following years. ;

### *Opportunity for Ph.D. research*

Betty and I wanted to get married in the Fall of 1948, and I had heard that it might be possible to do my Ph.D. research while employed at the RCA Laboratories. So I was led to the situation where I was able to do my complete Ph.D. thesis research to fulfill my requirements at Princeton University, while being employed full time for the next two years at the RCA Laboratories, supported by a Navy Contract

My first summer's research at RCA resulted in my first scientific publication, "A Correlation between Cathodoluminescence Efficiency and Decay as a Function of Temperature".<sup>81</sup> My interactions with my group director provided me with valuable instruction in a variety of activities essential to a successful scientific career in addition to the actual experimental and theoretical scientific work itself. Every member of our little research group was required to speak at each weekly meeting, even if it was to confess that no progress had been made in the previous period. Week after week of this activity through the years provided essential training in public speaking.

We also had a monthly written Progress Report to which each member of the staff was required to contribute. In addition to the experience gained by several years of this activity, in subsequent years I was assigned the job of putting together and integrating all of the individual progress reports into one total Progress Report for the whole group. This gave me valuable experience in scientific writing that was very important to me in the future, as well as helping me to develop my general editorial and writing skills.

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<sup>81</sup> "A Correlation between Cathodoluminescence Efficiency and Decay as a Function of Temperature," *J. Optical Soc. Am.* 329,681 (1949).

An extension of my thesis work, *summarizing* the principle thrust of my research in luminescence, was published in 1953 as “Electronic Transitions in the Luminescence of Zinc Sulfide Phosphors”.<sup>82</sup> This work began to involve explicitly the phenomenon of photoconductivity—a change in the electrical conductivity of a material upon absorption of light—which was soon to become the principal focus of my research in the future. Again I was providentially at an exciting place at the right time. The September 1951 issue of the *RCA Review* was devoted to the subject of “Photoconductivity in Insulators,” and included a *fundamental* paper, “An Outline of Some Photoconductive Processes”.<sup>83</sup> Throughout my years at RCA, the author of this paper served as a continuing example and mentor for me in my research. In this paper he had laid the foundation for a thorough investigation of photoconductivity phenomena; almost the only thing that was needed was someone to carry out the experiments, test the models, and contribute to the theoretical descriptions. What a wonderful spot to be in!

While my own research in photoconductivity was developing, I started to write *Photoconductivity of Solids* in 1955.<sup>(1)</sup> This bode proved to be one of my best-received contributions. It sought to describe—all of the developments in photoconductivity and its applications since it was first discovered in 1873. It included 1009 references, was published by John Wiley & Sons in 1960, and stayed in print for 26 years. It is interesting that an invited article on “Photoconductivity” by me was published in 1999 in the *Wiley Encyclopedia of Electrical and Electronics Engineering*.<sup>84</sup>

I also started the practice of including a Bible passage on the dedication page of each technical book that I wrote. In *Photoconductivity of Solids*, the reference was to Romans 1:20: “Ever since the creation of the world His invisible nature, namely, His eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.” The book had the good fortune to become a worldwide classic in its field, and for years afterward I met researchers from many countries who instantly knew me because they had read the work when they were students. It was even republished in a Russian language edition. I probably partially owe my appointment to the Stanford faculty to the general reputation associated with this book.

In the early 1950’s I joined an organization named the American Scientific Affiliation, an association of men and women with commitments to both Christianity and science. The ASA had been formed in 1941 by a small group to be of service to college and university students as they encountered questions relating science and their Christian faith. For the years of my association with the group, I have repeatedly testified that it is one of the few such groups in the world (like the Research Scientists Christian Fellowship in England—today known as Christians in Science, and the Cana-

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<sup>82</sup> “Electronic Transitions in the Luminescence of Zinc Sulfide Phosphors,” *Phys. Rev.* 90,70 (1953).

<sup>83</sup> A Rose, “An Outline of Some Photoconductive Processes,” *RCA Review* 12, No. 3,362 (1951).

<sup>84</sup> “Photoconductivity,” *Wiley Encyclopedia of Electrical and Electronics Engineering*, Vol. 16, John G. Webster, Editor, Wiley, N.Y., 257-269 (1999).

(1) Repeat of footnote 3.

dian Scientific and Christian Affiliation) that seeks to maintain both the integrity of authentic science and the integrity of authentic Christian theology. It has certainly played an important role in the development of my own thinking. As part of its work the ASA publishes a quarterly journal, originally known simply as the *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* for which I served as Editor from 1969 to 1984 (now known as *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith*), holds an annual meeting, and is supported by local groups around the country that also hold occasional meetings.

#### *Moving to Stanford*

For several years I had been taking a look at other opportunities to use my research skills in other organizations. Things were changing. When I first came to RCA, it was almost unthinkable that anyone on the staff would actually leave. The '50's were a Golden Age for research at RCA, as well as a number of other industrial research laboratories. The principal emphasis was on the quality of the research and the possibility of its results leading to new patents, which could be licensed to anyone in the entire electronics industry. Now with each passing year, the emphasis shifted more and more to guiding research efforts at the Laboratories by the immediate manufacturing needs of other parts of the company, or obtaining Government Contracts to support desired research

And so it was at such a time that I had attended my first scientific meeting ever in California, the Spring American Physical Society meeting at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, after my first cross-country flight I had attended these Spring APS meetings around the country every year because of their concentration of interest in solid-state physics. It was March, things were cold and dead in New Jersey, and things were warm, blossoming, and beautiful in Monterey. I have said often my feelings were like those of Moses viewing the Promised Land. I was impressed and began to reflect that perhaps there might be an opportunity for employment in California.

In another of those marvelous providential events in our lives, I realized that a former member of the RCA staff whom I knew was currently Director of Research of an electronics company in Palo Alto, California. My friend went out of his way for us, set up interviews at several local companies, and even made contacts for us with the School of Engineering at Stanford University, who were looking for someone with my qualifications. The Department of Materials Science at Stanford appeared to be very interested in someone who could bring inputs on electronic materials into their program. We visited the campus, had dinner with a group of the faculty, and I gave a basic talk on photoconductivity.

On the next-to-last morning in California, Betty and I were discussing events at breakfast at our motel I had about decided not to accept an offer from Stanford, since it was such a major move away from my 14-year research program at RCA and all the way across the country, disrupting our lives and the lives of our four children. That morning I was scheduled to have a meeting with the Stanford Provost. In the course of our conversation, he said to me, "Dr. Bube, we really want you to come." It was all I needed! What a difference to the rest of my life it would have made if I had not had that last-day

appointment I returned to tell Betty that I thought that we should come to Stanford. At any rate I received an offer to be appointed Associate Professor of Materials Science and Electrical Engineering at Stanford, starting in Summer Quarter 1962, and accepted. A new research program in Materials Science was just being started, supported by a major grant from the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA).

And so, we brought to an end 14 years of married life in Princeton, and began to make plans to move across the country and start a new life. Immediately upon arriving at Stanford, I became involved as one of two faculty sponsors for the undergraduate InterVarsity Christian Fellowship group, an association that has continued since then. In the last few years the ministry at Stanford has broadened to include an active Graduate Student Christian ministry, and a Christian Faculty *ministry*.

I was editor and author of *The Encounter Between Christianity and Science* (1968),<sup>85</sup> which was the first of my five books on science and Christianity; it included a set of personal memoirs, *One Whole Life*.<sup>86</sup> My most recent book was *Putting It All Together: Seven Patterns for Relating Science and Christian Faith*,<sup>87</sup> which summarized a theme I had been developing for a number of years, dating back to before the 1985 joint ASA-RSCF conference at Oxford.

At Stanford I started another tradition in 1968: an Undergraduate Seminar in “Science and Religion”, which I taught for academic credit relatively continuously one quarter each year for 25 years. I prepared a reading list and a syllabus for this seminar, which focused in the first half of the 10-week series on the history of the interaction between science and Christianity and the importance of different worldviews, the definition of science and its potential and limitations, the interaction between science and theology, determinism and chance, and the significance of being human. In the last half it considered test areas of practical, interaction such as creation and evolution, abortion, euthanasia, genetic engineering, and the environment. Since the seminar was an elective, it was taken primarily by students who already had a Christian commitment. Indeed, one of its contributions was to help students who had been taught that as Christians they could have nothing to do with science, to not forsake their faith when they realized that there were inputs from science that they could not in good conscience ignore.

In 1971 my book *The Human Quest: A New Look at Science and Christian Faith*<sup>88</sup> was published with a Foreword by a Fuller Theological Seminary Professor. Written within the context of the issues raised by my Undergraduate Seminar, and with topics for discussion at the end of each of the ten chapters, it represented my most complete attempt to date to deal with a broad range of questions. In spite of the fact that the time it remained in print was rather brief, it received a good reception by those

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<sup>85</sup> \**The Encounter Between Christianity and Science*. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI (1968).

<sup>86</sup> *One Whole Life: Personal Memoirs* (privately published) 1994, 3rd ed. (1998).

<sup>87</sup> *Putting It All Together Seven Patterns for Relating Science and Christian Faith*, University Press of America, Lanham, MD (1995).

<sup>88</sup> *The Human Quest A New Look at Science and Christian Faith*. Word Books, Waco, Texas (1971).

interested in these issues, and references to it continue even after more than twenty years have passed.

### *Beginning research in photovoltaics.*

My research during my first decade at Stanford was concerned primarily with a variety of issues related to photoconductivity and photoelectronic properties of semiconductors. My first PhD. student completed his work in 1965, and over the next 30 years I mentored a total of 56 PhD.'s at Stanford.

A significant new ingredient entered our research pattern with the beginning of our 25-year research program dedicated to the photovoltaic conversion of sunlight into electricity (solar cells). Our entrance into the field came about in a very providential way. One day I received a phone call from an Electrical Engineering Professor (one of the inventors of the first silicon solar cell when he was at the Bell Laboratories), who said, "I have in my office a man from NASA, who would like to get some work started at Stanford on cuprous sulfide/cadmium sulfide (Cu<sub>2</sub>S/CdS) thin-film solar cells. I haven't worked with cadmium sulfide, but you have. Would you be interested in getting involved?" The opportunity afforded by this offer from NASA, particularly with the broad non-military applications for solar cells as one considered the environmental and energy needs of the future, was particularly appealing to me. It was close to my areas of previous interest and experience, and it seemed to afford a special opportunity to live out a Christian sense of stewardship for God's world.

Many years later when I wrote *Photoelectronic Properties of Semiconductors*,<sup>89</sup> I included a special section that I called, "Cu<sub>2</sub>S/CdS: Theater for Photoelectronic Effects." A colleague, Alan Fahrenbruch, who had done his PhD. work with me, and I wrote a book on *Fundamentals of Solar Cells* (1983),<sup>90</sup> and more recently I wrote a book on *Photovoltaic Materials* (1998).<sup>91</sup>

#### *Opportunities to see the world*

One of the great blessings given to my wife and me was the opportunity to establish contacts around the world. In one way the world came to us, as more than 40 international scholars came to Stanford to spend time with my research group over the past 35 years. And in another way I was encouraged to travel to many places in the world, making many friends along the way—some under quite providential circumstances. This started with my teaching a NATO Summer School in Ghent, Belgium two weeks after we moved to California, and included later participation in scientific conferences in Berlin, Hamburg, and Montreux, with sidetrips to other research centers. We were also able to participate in two conferences on science and Christian faith in 1965 and

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<sup>89</sup> *Photoelectronic Properties of Semiconductors*. Cambridge University Press (1992).

<sup>90</sup> A. L. Fahrenbruch and R. H. Bube, *Fundamentals of Solar Cells: Photovoltaic Solar Energy Conversion*. Academic Press, N.Y. (1983); Russian translation (1988).

<sup>91</sup> *Photovoltaic Materials*. Imperial College Press, England (1998).

1985 at Oxford, between the ASA and the Research Scientists Christian Fellowship of Great Britain.

Certainly one of the most wonderful experiences for us personally was making eight trips in eleven years to Switzerland, with sidetrips into Germany. My elderly parents had moved to California in 1967 and care for them made long absences impossible in the last 15 years of their life. In 1984 our first opportunity for a traditional Sabbatical came up. I had had a Visiting Scholar from Neuchatel, Switzerland, working with me on photovoltaics during 1982, and so I was providentially led to spend our first Sabbatical at the University of Neuchatel, while also giving a class on photovoltaics at the Ecole Polytechnic Federate Lausanne. We made friends with a number of families in Neuchatel, and were active both in the Egjise Evangelique Libre of Neuchatel, and the state Eglise Reformee in nearby Cortaillod. I was even enabled to give a sermon in French with the help of one of the good friends whom we had met in Neuchatel earlier. The sum of those eight trips enabled us to live a little over a year in Switzerland and we were thankful for every minute.

## Summary

As I look back over my life, I am filled with gratitude to God for His providential leading and guidance on so *many* occasions.

The central emphasis of my perspective is that authentic science and authentic Christian theology—both of which must be carefully defined—give us valid insights into what reality is like. Each gives us descriptions from a different perspective, and yet they tell us about aspects of the same reality. They should be regarded as complementary and then be appropriately integrated, while preserving the authenticity of each approach.

**Richard H. Bube** is Emeritus Professor of Materials Science and Electrical Engineering at Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305, where he served as Chair of the Department of Materials Science and Engineering from 1975 to 1986. He has been engaged in scientific research on the photoelectronic and photovoltaic properties of *materials* for 45 years, and has written seven books on these subjects. He has also been involved with the interaction between science and Christian faith, has written four books on this subject, and served as Editor of the *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* from 1968 to 1983. He has been blessed with 48 wonderful years of love with his wife Betty, who went to be with the Lord in 1997, and their four children.

## Now a Convinced Theist

by Robert G. Olsen

I was in bom in Brooklyn, New York, and grew up in New Jersey. My family was Christian, and almost all of my social life was within this group. I was expected to go

to Sunday School, Morning Church, Youth Group, and Evening Church every Sunday as well as all other organized youth activities. Although I attended public schools and participated in sports, questionable activities such as dancing were discouraged. As a result, I was on the periphery of the high school social scene and did not experience much of the world.

As far as I can remember, I believed in God since I was a small child. But as I grew older I had serious difficulties with fundamentalist culture. Looking back on it, I find things for which I am grateful (such as a family-including uncles, aunts, etc.-clearly committed to the “best” for me, the importance of the fact that you believe something to be true, and the importance of an individual decision to believe in God). Other things I still have a great deal of difficulty with (such as family devotions, the tendency to believe in salvation by perfectly correct theology, and an unnecessarily judgmental spirit).

Most people in my subculture were expected to go to Christian Colleges. Since I found open rebellion unpalatable, my quiet rebellion was that I did not consider it and broke the mold. To my parents’ credit, they did not choose to enforce the unwritten rule. With simultaneous fear and relief, I enrolled at Rutgers University. My interests were to prepare for a good job and to find out what the world was like since I had been separated from it in my high school years.

I found out quickly that without God, the world (from which I had been isolated to a great degree) was not bright. I remember my neighbor, he always wanted sex with his girlfriend, but when asked if he would marry her said no— because she had no principles. Somehow he failed to see the inconsistency that was so obvious to me. I also remember seeing people plastered after weekend drinking binges and wondering if they had anything to live for.

I came to realize that something about life without God didn’t add up, but couldn’t fully articulate it until later. I quickly found and became associated with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (TVCF); that group became a source of great stability for me. For the first time, I became publicly committed to the faith. In my undergraduate years I learned about my responsibilities as a Christian, but I did not grow much in the faith intellectually.

The first inkling of the way I was to develop intellectually came in response to a challenge to read through the Bible. Most of my reading was perfunctory. However, when I came to Ecclesiastes I couldn’t put it down. For example, I read

*2:10, I denied myself nothing My heart took delight in my work... Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done... everything was meaningless.*

*12:13, Here is the conclusion... Fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man.*

This hit home but I didn’t really know what to do with it

After graduating from Rutgers with a degree in Electrical Engineering in 1968, I enrolled in graduate school at the University of Colorado-Boulder. During my studies there, the Anti-War, counterculture, and Jesus movements all peaked. Exposure to

these produced many challenges to my faith, including: 1) the counterculture claim as pursued in the United States that middle class life is meaningless; 2) the Jesus movement assertion that preaching (especially about salvation and the end times) is the only meaningful thing to do since the end of the world was near. This was a challenge to my brand of *Christianity*, which fit in well with middle class life; 3) the antiwar movement statement that the government was corrupt to its core and war was always wrong. This was a special challenge to me since I had been commissioned an Army Lieutenant through ROTC.

I matured as a Christian in Boulder in many ways. I had several outstanding Christian teachers and began a program of serious reading about Christian issues. However, I have never had any formal training, such as seminary classes. During the time of growth I faced numerous intellectual challenges. I was developing as a scientist, and for the first time learned that doing research is fundamentally different from doing homework problems. I spent two years trying to solve a problem, and learned that that process of science is one of proposing a theory and trying to disprove it by comparison to consistency, plausibility argument, and experiment. If you can't disprove the theory, then you can accept it as tentative. In retrospect, I learned a great deal about becoming a researcher from this frustration.

By having to struggle with what I could believe scientifically, I came to believe that there was never proof of any belief only corroborating evidence which makes the belief plausible. In fact, scientific models were not necessarily a representation of the real world (or "truth"), but only successful at predicting the results of experiments. This would haunt me later.

During this time, I became interested in a career in academics. In fact, I came to believe that God had called me to this. If you ask me today *how* I knew, I'm not sure that I could give you a satisfying answer. This led me to another defining period in my life.

I had backed into a ministry to street people from the counterculture by living at a house with fourteen Christians in the Hill district of Boulder, and by being asked to be part time manager of the local Logos bookstore. During that time, I remember that within (I think) a few days I had two distinct conversations about God. One was with a street person to whom I said that feeling something is right is not sufficient I stated ; that you must also have a reasonable basis for your belief. Another was with my Ph.D. advisor, to whom I said that reasons alone are insufficient but that you must also just "know" some things.

The apparent incongruity of my statements—plus my scientific belief about proof and truth—started me on a spiral downward to as close to agnosticism/atheism as I could go. I felt that I could not come up with good enough reasons for many of ; the things I claimed to believe. I was moved by those who said that then you should simply leave those questions unanswered and live your life as an agnostic. Somehow I never could go all ; the way because I believed (and still do) that agnosticism i necessarily leads to despair, and I could not embrace that I p continued reading but my reading



list (at least of Christian L books) got narrower and narrower. One writer I could read was ; Pascal, and I was impressed with the *preface* to his wager. In the wager, Pascal concedes that you cannot prove or disprove God. He then suggests that it is more rational to wager your life on God than on atheism because you have more to gain by belief than unbelief. The wager didn't mean much to me, but the preface to it did. In the preface, Pascal was confronted by a skeptic who said that he would not condemn Pascal for either wagering on God or atheism but for taking any stand at all He said that without "proof you should take no position at all (i.e. agnosticism). Pascal's response was to say that *you must wager*. You have no choice. Since you are in this life, you wager by default Your only choice is which way to wager. This hit me; I recognized that everyone makes a decision about belief in God and that not deciding was not an option. Despite this insight, the transition out of my black period was neither easy nor quick

I remember praying a number of times in desperation for God to unequivocally show himself to me. Among other things, I prayed for the more public gifts of the Spirit-which I never received. I also never received any *unequivocal* demonstration of God's presence. Once I prayed the following: I said that I believed that I was called into an academic career and that (despite the feet that there were no jobs at that time in p academia) I would not accept employment in industry. I l remember getting up and feeling rather silly, since it would be at least a year before I finished my Ph.D., and no answer to this prayer was possible before then. Nevertheless within a few days Westinghouse Georesearch Lab in Boulder called and wanted me to consider coming to work for them. I knew that they were looking for a permanent replacement for an employee who had left I went for an interview, which was quite humorous (at least to me) since I had decided to be true to my promise. I told them all the reasons not to hire me and why some of the other graduate students were more well suited for the job; I didn't tell them the real reason. They called back and still wanted me. I struggled, and finally told them that I was committed to a career in academics and would consider the job only if it was part time, and if I left after my Ph.D. They offered me the job anyway.

The feet that I was able to cany through was one small step back to God. Further, it played a part in a bigger picture later.

When I finished my Ph.D. in 1973, there were still *almost* no advertisements for faculty positions in Electrical *Engineering*. In feet, I was advised to not bother looking. Then one appeared from Washington State University (WSU) in *Pullman* that seemed to be written for me. I was quite skeptical that I could get it, but said I would apply because "I owed it to God" to try. I knew I had no chance. Later, when I got the job as an Assistant Professor, I found out that I surfaced to the top in part because I had some industrial experience. Was this God? Is it true that when you pray, coincidences happen more often?

Shortly after I arrived in Pullman, I met Marsha (a student, though not mine). We were married the next year. We now have 3 children: Erik (who is a senior in

Management of Information Science at WSU), Kari (who is a junior in Mechanical Engineering at WSU) and Kari (who is beginning the seventh grade).

I have had a wonderful career. This is in part because the expectations of WSU when I first arrived were not as great as my own expectations of myself. Because I was not under as much pressure to produce, as is now the case, I was able to study many different issues within electromagnetics, from fiber optics to underground wave propagation, antenna theory, radar scattering, and applications to power systems (which is what brought me to Electric Power Research Institute). I have also enjoyed teaching at all levels, from freshman to Ph.D. students.

During the last 20 years, I have not been very vocal about my faith. I have only shared my faith in small ways with individual students. I do, however, hope that part of my witness is that I have been more moral as a Christian than I would otherwise have been. I also hope that I have been salt and light in a number of other ways. I have concentrated on career and family matters and am now reaping the fruits of this. My family is a great source of joy (not always of course!). Now perhaps it is time to give back

Often, I wonder why I have been as silent as I have been. I think it is partly (at least) because I fear being put in a “fundamentalist” box without a chance to defend myself and partly that I don’t have confidence in some of the responses I give to questions. I also worry about living consistently with my stated faith when there are so many temptations around. And, I also honestly continue to struggle with doubt

I am a convinced theist, and am very strong in this because I cannot live with the thought of the consequences of being an atheist I am sure that it leads to despair. Going beyond that to exactly how God interacts with us has always been difficult for me. I sometimes feel that Mark 9:22-24 describes my Christian life rather well. Here a father requests help from Jesus for his son.

*“..Ifyou can do anything, take pity on us and help us.” “Ifyou can?” said Jesus. Everything is possible for he who believes. ” Immediately, the boy’s father said, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief}”*

I have found the book *Disappointment with God*, by Phil Yancey, to be a favorite of mine. I identify with those in the book who have desired but not experienced unambiguous evidence of God’s presence and yet continue to believe and serve. Despite these doubts, I identify with Peter in John 6: 66-68.

*No one can come to me unless the father has enabled him. From this time, many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. “You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the twelve. Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to who shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ”*

Let me add just a few further comments on my beliefs. I have no interest in atheism or rationalism. They appear to me to lead nowhere. For example, morality cannot be based on science. What *is*. is not the same as what ought to be. Without God, there is no morality. This is one theme of Dostoevsky. For example, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, one of his characters said, “If there is no God, all things are permissible.”

*Humanism* (while on the surface appealing) appears to be solidly grounded in mid-air. I don't understand how I can simultaneously say that we are the product of nothing but time and chance and yet infinitely valuable. I also have no interest in many of the more modern religious ideas. It seems to me that the basic idea is to find a concept of God with which you are comfortable and to adopt it. This circumvents the issue of truth. If there is a God, then the fact that I believe something has very little, if anything, to do with whether it is true. God is to be discovered-not invented.

Robert G. Olsen received a BS degree in electrical engineering from Rutgers University in 1968, and the MS and Ph.D. degrees in the same from the University of Colorado, Boulder in 1970 and 1974. He presently serves as Boeing Distinguished Professor of Electrical Engineering at Washington State University (WSU) in Pullman, WA. During his service at WSU he has been a visiting scientist at GTE Laboratories in Waltham, MA and at AEB Corporate Research in Vasteras, Sweden, a Visiting Professor at the Technical University of Denmark. During the 1997-98 academic year, he was a visiting scientist at the Electric Power Research Institute in Palo Alto, CA. Prof. Olsen has published more than 65 refereed journal articles on many topics, including electromagnetic interference from power lines, the electromagnetic environment of power lines, electromagnetic compatibility and electromagnetic scattering. He is a Fellow of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) and presently serves as chair of the IEEE Power Engineering Society Corona Effects Fields Working Group, as Associate Editor of the *IEEE Transactions on Electromagnetic Compatibility* and as US National Committee representative to the Conference Internationale des Grands Reaux Electriques & Haute Tension (CIGRE) Study Committee 36.

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## In This Issue

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## About this Issue

Jacques Ellul lived in the public arena. He was an academic who mentored doctoral students, lectured, fulfilled university assignments and wrote scholarly treatises. But his defining orientation was public life as a whole. His thinking was geared to citizens, church members and consumers. Intellectuals were especially vulnerable, in his view, because they prized their independence and magnified their critical powers. His prophetic voice engaged the community.

Those influenced by Ellul's work continue to make public space their home. Some are scholars in the traditional sense, but most have a special heart for everyday life and the non-specialist. They write in magazines, work in social services, participate in public organizations, build activity centers, or preach. *The Ellul Forum* this time gives us some illustrations of the way our technological civilization can be discussed and critiqued among general audiences.

Andrew Goddard is a Tutor in Christian Ethics at Wycliffe Hall and a member of the Oxford University Theology Faculty. He presented this address at Wycliffe Hall's Open Day festivities on June 9, 2000. Each year the Hall invites former members (most of them ordained Anglican clergy), council members who govern the college, local clergy, the staff and others who help the college, to an open house. As the newest staff member, Mr. Goddard was asked to address them and he chose to introduce them to Ellul.

Rev. Dr. Randall Otto is the pastor of the Deerfield Presbyterian Church in New Jersey. He is also an adjunct instructor in philosophy and religion at Cumberland College and an instructor at the Eastern School of Christian Ministries. His tongue-in-cheek essay identifies trends in contemporary culture that seem to lead ineluctably to the

virtual Christianity of the Internet. His incisive critique and calls for reconsideration make *The Ellul Forum* an obvious home.

Phillip M. Thompson sets Ellul in the context of Thomas Merton, kindred spirits nourishing each other for everyday life outside the academy and monastery. Mr. Thompson has two degrees in law and a PhD. in the History of Culture from the University of Chicago. He is currently the Director of the Center for Ethics and Leadership at St. Edwards University in Austin, Texas. In that capacity he works at the interface of the university and public life. A different version of this article appeared earlier as "Full of Firecrackers: Jacques Ellul and the Technological Critique of Thomas Merton," in the *Merton Seasonal* (Spring 2000), pp. 9-16. -

Clifford Christians Editor

## Jacques Ellul: 20<sup>th</sup> century prophet for the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

by Andrew Goddard

I want to begin with a pattern I will return to at the end - to give you a sense of Ellul by letting him speak for himself. We open with two passages from the book *The Presence of the Kingdom* which we will focus on in this lecture. These passages make clear why both Ellul's style and content have led many to classify him as a prophet. They also sketch out the task he set for himself in all his writing.

The will of the world is always a will to death, a will to suicide. We must not accept this suicide, and we must so act that it cannot take place. So we must know what is the actual form of the world's win to suicide in order that we may oppose it, in order that we may know how, and in what direction, we ought to direct our efforts. The world is neither capable of preserving itself nor is it capable of finding remedies for its spiritual situation (which controls the rest). It carries the weight of sin, it is the realm of Satan which leads it toward separation from God, and consequently toward death. That is all that it is able to do...Our concern should be to place ourselves at the very point where this suicidal desire is most active.. .and to see how God's will of preservation can act in this given situation...We are obliged to understand the depth and the spiritual reality of the mortal tendency of this world...

Then, picking up the language of God's will which the Christian must seek, Ellul also writes,

The will of the Lord, which confronts us both as judgment and as pardon, as law and as grace, as commandment and as promise, is revealed to us in

the Scriptures, illuminated by the Spirit of God. It has to be explained in contemporary terms, but in itself it does not vary.

Those two passages demonstrate the two-fold structure of Ellul's work and its prophetic style. On the one hand, there is a challenge to the world and its false religions. On the other, there is a challenge to us as the people of God to be faithful and fulfil our calling in the world. For the majority of our time I want to fill out those twin challenges and explain why Ellul can be viewed as a 20<sup>th</sup> century prophet who still speaks to us today at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. First, however, I would guess that for many here, Jacques Ellul himself is rather a mysterious figure, and so before exploring that theme a brief introduction to his life and work may be helpful.

Perhaps the first sign that Ellul may be classed as a 20<sup>th</sup> century prophet is found in his own life story. Born in Bordeaux in 1912 and dying in the same city in 1994 he lived through most of the main events and developments of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. And yet, he was someone who was ill at ease with and constantly critiqued the path that the world (and to a large extent the church) was taking throughout this period. It was the crucial decade of the 1930s which in many ways made Ellul the person he was. Historically, of course, this was the period of the rise of Fascism and Nazism, the firm establishing of communism in Stalinist Russia, the growth of liberal democracy in Europe and North America, and the crisis in international capitalism. These ideologies and the reaction against all of them by small groups of personalist thinkers in France shaped Ellul's life and thought decisively. Personally, this was also when Ellul came to living Christian faith and made his spiritual home in the minority Protestant French Reformed Church. There he was to be shaped theologically not just by the broader Reformation heritage but by Kierkegaard's thought and the work of Kari Barth. While his analysis of the world was developing through his involvement in personalist groups and his discovery of Kari Marx, Ellul was also completing his legal studies at Bordeaux University. His first teaching post - at Strasbourg - was interrupted by the Nazi invasion of France and after returning briefly to Bordeaux he and his young family then fled to the countryside where he was involved in the Resistance.

During the war years Ellul drew on his reflections in the previous decade to plan out what would become his life-work. By his death this amounted to 50 published books and hundreds of articles. While obviously his writing responded to events, his work was undoubtedly conceived as a whole from the start. He himself said in 1981, "It is true to say that I haven't written books but rather 'one' book of which each is a chapter."

In particular the structure of this work was carefully thought through from the beginning. There were to be two strands of writing in a dialectical relationship with each other. These two strands are reflected in the quotations with which we began and the structure we will follow shortly - the will of the world and the will of the Lord. On the one hand there are books which study the structure and development of the social, political and cultural world - the will of the world. These often show no sign

of any explicit Christian commitment on his part. On the other hand there are books which seek to discern and explain the will of the Lord. They do so through biblical studies, theological reflections on important themes (the city, money, faith, hope), and the developing of a Christian ethic. These tracks in broad terms can be classed as sociology and theology. Though they often seem to run in parallel, these two tracks are actually in dialogue with each other throughout.

During the five decades which followed the planning of his work Ellul was not just thinking and writing. He was also living out his thinking. Employed as Professor of the History and Sociology of Institutions in the Law Faculty at Bordeaux University and Professor in the Institute of Political Studies he was also active in many other spheres. As a lay Christian he was active in the World Council of Churches and French Reformed Church, leading a local congregation, editing a major theological journal, and contributing in the highest levels of church government, including reform of theological education. After a brief period as Bordeaux's Deputy Mayor at the end of the war, he continued political involvement but more from the margins than within the established structures. Locally he supported groups defending his Aquitaine region from development plans and initiated major work with young delinquents.

In *The Presence of the Kingdom* Ellul defines a prophet as "not one who confines himself to foretelling with more or less precision and even more or less distance; he is one who already lives it, and already makes it actual and present in his own environment" (p. 38). Although time prevents further details of his life, they would I think provide further confirmation that he was indeed, on his own definition, a 20<sup>th</sup> century prophet.

It would be impossible in the time we have to do justice to Ellul's massive corpus of writing and the intricacies of his thought. I will therefore introduce him and what he may still have to say to us today through the book which he later confessed he realised "could be the introduction to the complete work" (x). Indeed on re-reading it at the end of working on my thesis I was astonished at how often I found a sentence or paragraph which gave the heart of one of his later books.

Known in English as *The Presence of the Kingdom* it was first translated in 1951, and its reissue in 1967 and again in 1989 demonstrates its continuing significance and relevance. As Daniel Clendenin writes in the new introduction to the 1989 edition,

The book deserves a wide readership not only because it is the necessary primer for all Ellul study (it is the first book one should read by him), but because it examines issues that remain . perennial problems in church and society...Ellul demonstrates in this book a timeless quality in his ability to examine issues far ahead of his time in a creative way. Despite its having been written a generation ago, *The Presence of the Kingdom* will provoke new dialogue today (xxxviii).

In getting a sense of this importance and the purpose of the book, the French title is perhaps more informative - *Presence au monde moderne*. While we may today think our task is to be present in the monde post-moderne, Ellul's subtitle was not only radical at the time of its publication in 1948 but highlights the deeper truth about our world



than whether it is modern or post-modern. The work was subtitled, "Problemes de la civilisation post-chretienne". It was this sense as early as the 1940s that our civilization must now be understood as post-Christian which was truly decisive for Ellul. It shaped both his analysis of the world and his vision for the church.

The book originated in 4 talks he gave in 1946 to the World Council of Churches Ecumenical Institute in Bossey on the theme of the "Christian in modern society". Ellul took as his guide a biblical passage which remained a favourite throughout his life - "Do not be conformed to this present age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern the will of God, what is good, what is pleasing to him, and what is well done". What, he asked himself if we are to take this seriously, might the stand and attitude of the Christian be in the world?

Rather than trying to offer a detailed chapter-by-chapter account or critique of this short work, I want simply to highlight some themes to give you a flavour of its contents and what I believe is its prophetic character and continued relevance today. I will take the two subjects outlined in the opening quotations, likewise the two strands of Iris later writing - the will of the world and the will of the Lord. I want to pinpoint in each of these four challenges we still need to hear today over 50 years later.

As our opening quotation said, "The will of the world is always a will to death, a will to suicide". What, then, can we say about the world in its contemporary post-Christian situation?

First, Ellul stresses that we need to face the reality of the world. Here is, of course, a standard prophetic challenge that we are dangerously deluded about the state we are really in. That we think things are not as bad as they are. That we think and even proclaim that there is peace when there is no peace. Ellul sees this as a real problem in our world: "In the sphere of the intellectual life, the major fact of our day is a sort of refusal, unconscious but widespread, to become aware of reality" (82). This is - and here we find a common theme in Ellul's sociological analysis - a totally new situation. We free it because of a combination of the world's complexity and the forms of communication within it. We are left, he says, oscillating between the surface phenomenon - the presentations of the world given by the media - and the explanatory myth which seeks to give people coherence in the face of confusion. Personally I find it amazing that in the 1940s - half a century before CNN and 24 hour news - Ellul could write of how "every day modern man learns a thousand things from his newspaper and radio". He speaks of how the average person is "submerged by this flood of images which he cannot verify" and "news succeeds news without ceasing". As a result we are unable to master all we are given by the media. So we must either drown in confusion or grasp for some explanatory myth or failsafe ideology - the Islamic threat, the conspiracy of multinationals, the attack on traditional values - which gives us some handle to make sense of the world. The first challenge Ellul then gives us is the challenge to reflect on our own experience of reality, to face up to it in all its complexity and its negativity, and to seek to understand it. This is a challenge we particularly need to hear today in

our churches - do we really encourage and equip God's people to think critically and deeply about God's world?

Secondly, Ellul highlights one particular cause of our blindness in relation to our world. We refuse, he says, to question the way our world is because of our respect for facts. We will not judge a fact. We just accept it. And this, he argues, is nothing short of a new form of religion in our day and age. We feel bound to adapt ourselves to the fact which becomes in effect divinised. So Ellul writes that "Anyone who questions the value of the fact draws down on himself the most severe reproaches of our day: he is a reactionary, he wants to go back to 'the good old days'...".

In his time, the great example of this was the atom bomb. We did not, would not stop and refuse to develop or use it, or question this fact and the demands it made on us. We became instead dominated by it. It became, in biblical terms, an idol, one of the principalities and powers which rule our lives.

Today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the atom bomb is perhaps less of an obvious and pressing issue. But does our world not show the same subservient attitude to facts? What about the fact of globalisation or the supposed power of the market? It is claimed to be simply impossible to question certain economic policies no matter how destructive they are. What about the fact of reproductive technologies? Can anyone seriously question this established project to produce human life? What, more recently still, about the fact of cloning? Again and again we can see the accuracy of Ellul's analysis today. We seem to have developed a refusal to consistently and persistently challenge what is presented to us as a fact. We have shown a constant unwillingness to ask of such alleged facts whether they are themselves good or bad. We refrain as a society from rejecting or even questioning what claims to be unchallengeable facts.

The third area to which Ellul draws attention is illustrated by some of these examples of facts. It is the area for which he became most famous but is also one where he is often misunderstood. Perhaps Ellul's most famous book is *The Technological Society* which appeared in English in 1964. It originally appeared in French in 1954 as "*La Technique*" but received little attention. This French title is significantly different, for technique of course goes much wider than what we usually think of when we speak of technology.

In *Presence of the Kingdom* Ellul discusses what he later analysed as Technique in terms of "means". Chapter 3 is called "The End and the Means" and argues that our world has been overtaken by "means" and we have lost any sense of concrete "ends". Tied to this, he argues, is our fixation with efficiency and usefulness in all spheres of life.

On re-reading the book for this lecture I found the following passage which I must confess I had totally forgotten, but again perhaps illustrates the prophetic insight Ellul has here. He wrote,

Anything that does not serve some purpose must be eliminated or rejected, and in matters that concern men and women the same view prevails. This is what explains the practice of euthanasia (for old people and incurables) in the National Socialist State.

Anyone who is not useful to the community must be put to death. To us this seems a barbarous practice, but it is simply the application of the universal predominance of means, and to the extent in which this feat is developed we may expect to see the introduction of this practice into the whole of civilization (53).

One can imagine the outrage such an extreme claim must have caused in 1946! Yet we have already seen changes in the law in the Netherlands and parts of the USA and Australia and doubtless these will soon be picked up and support for legalised euthanasia grow in this country. When they do, Christians will rightly challenge them but perhaps what we also need to do is learn from Ellul to look deeper. We should see and question the more fundamental driving spiritual forces such as the exaltation of usefulness and efficiency which make such views so acceptable to our culture.

Perhaps closer to home we need to ask whether the church has not also bought into this great concern of the world with means, efficiency and usefulness. One may think of the effort put into marketing the gospel effectively or restructuring church institutions. More controversially there is the highly technical mindset driving various contemporary evangelistic programmes such as Alpha and parts of the church growth movement. That is a challenge to which we will return later when we look at Ellul's counter-proposal.

Finally, in relation to the world, Ellul argues that what the world needs is nothing short of a revolution. This theme runs through his work from the 1930s onwards and, although influenced by Marx, is not simply Marxist analysis. There is rather a sense that the world being formed, the world we today have inherited, is destructive of human beings and genuine civilization. In typically purple prose he writes,

If this revolution does not take place, we are done for, and human civilization as a whole is impossible. At the present moment we are confronted by a choice: either a mass civilization, technological, "conformist" - the "Brave New World" of Huxley, hell organised upon earth for the bodily comfort of everybody - or a different civilization, which we cannot yet describe because we do not know what it will be; it still has to be created, consciously, by men. If we do not know what to choose, or, in other words, how to "make a revolution", if we let ourselves drift along the stream of history, without knowing it, we shall have chosen the power of suicide, which is at the heart of the world (31).

As we look around Britain and Western Europe as a whole today with the quest for economic growth, greater material goods, more and more technological gizmos, do we not, in that striking phrase, "hell organised upon earth for the bodily comfort of everybody" hear something which still speaks to us? Are we not challenged as Christians to face up to the need for a real deep-seated revolution in our world?

Here then, I suggest, are four prophetic words which Ellul spoke back in 1946 concerning the world, words we still need to hear and heed today:

- Face up to reality and seek to understand it
- Don't be afraid to challenge what are asserted to be simple facts of life

- Don't get obsessed with means and technical efficiency
- Recognise a major revolution is needed in our world

Alongside this fourfold challenge in relation to the world and its false religions there is also a prophetic fourfold challenge to us as God's people to be faithful and to fulfil our calling. This begins where we ended a moment ago with Ellul's emphasis on revolution. In the title of his second chapter Ellul calls for "Revolutionary Christianity". The revolution that we have seen Ellul believes the world needs is one which Christian faith offers. This is not, of course, a political revolution but something much deeper. And it depends not ultimately on us but on Christ at work in us and through us. We are called to be His ambassadors and representatives in this alien world and as such we will be revolutionaries in the world.

Ellul vividly draws out the implications of various biblical images here.

In the world, the Christian belongs to another, like a man of one nation who resides in another nation... .A Chinese residing in France thinks in his own terms, in his Own tradition. He has his own criterion of judgment and of action... .He is also a citizen of another State, and his loyalty is given to this State, and not to the country in which he is living...The Christian stands up for the interests of his Master, as an ambassador champions the interests of his country...From another point of view he may also be sent out as a spy...to work in secret, at the heart of the world, for his Lord; to prepare for his Lord's victory from within (33-4).

If that is how we as the church understand ourselves, if that is how we live, then the faithful Christian must be revolutionary. I wonder how many faithful, committed Anglicans have really come to terms with the fact that, in Ellul's words, "in consequence of the claims which God is always making on the world the Christian finds himself, by that very fact, involved in a state of permanent revolution" (36-7).

The second insight is intimately connected with this revolutionary Christianity. It is the need to focus on and understand rightly the place of the Christian in the world. This is the title of Ellul's first chapter and in one sense the theme of his whole book. We are called to be in the world but not of the world. It's a phrase we all know well but one we perhaps too often fail to take seriously.

Ellul fills out its meaning by reference to three New Testament images. We are to be the salt of the world which, interestingly, he reads as an allusion to Leviticus 2:13 pointing to our calling to be a sign of God's covenant with the world in Jesus Christ. We are to be the light of the world, removing its darkness and giving meaning and direction to its history. We are - in an image we perhaps less often think about - to be sheep in the midst of wolves. Not a nice situation to be in. An image which speaks of sacrifice and refusal to dominate. An image which reminds us that, to use Ellul's terms, we are called as Christians to an "agonistic" way of life, a life of tension and suffering.

One of the aspects of that tension and agony is that in the world the Christian is torn between two truths - "on the one hand it is impossible for us to make this world

less sinful; on the other hand it is impossible for us to accept it as it is" (9). That insight itself speaks volumes about Ellul's own prophetic position, reflecting as it does the anguish and pain of the situation in which the biblical prophets found themselves. And yet surely he is right when he warns us, "If we refuse either the one or the other, we are actually not accepting the situation in which God has placed us... We are involved in the tension between these two contradictory demands. It is a very painful, and a very uncomfortable situation, but it is the only position which can be fruitful for the action of the Christian in the world, and for his life in the world" (10).

We may and do try all sorts of escape from this calling. Sometimes we separate the spiritual from the material and focus simply on the interior life. Sometimes we work away to moralise and supposedly Christianise our world. Both Ellul warns us are serious errors. We need instead to engage fully in the world of death as witnesses to the God of life.

And this focus on the Christian in the world means, thirdly, that Ellul emphasizes the centrality of the lay Christian in the Church's mission. This is a biblical truth which we probably feel the church has rediscovered in the decades since Ellul wrote. "Every member ministry" is now in theory and often in practice something the church acknowledges and encourages. And yet even the phrase itself points to the danger. Have we simply been clericalising the laity, getting them to do things on Sunday and in and for the church which traditionally the clergy did? Ellul - himself not ordained - bitingly comments, "there are no 'laymen' in our churches; because on the one hand, there is the minister, who does not know the situation in the world, and on the other hand, there are "laymen", who are very careful to keep their faith and their life in different compartments. ..." (11).

A cruel caricature perhaps. Aren't many prophets guilty of that too? But how often in our churches do those at the cutting edge of life in the world get the opportunity to share and reflect in depth on what it means to be a Christian in business, in a union, in education, or wherever they are called to live the agonistic life of being in but not of the world? Where do lay Christians find guidance and practical support in their calling to be salt, light and sheep among wolves? If we undertake it seriously this task will not be an easy one. Ellul himself discovered that. Following these talks he set up various Protestant Professional Associations to try and meet these needs. After initial success all the groups gradually died because the task was too hard and people lost interest or lacked the time to make the groups work. Yet, in our 21<sup>st</sup> century post-Christian world surely Ellul is still right, that we need to be equipping and encouraging lay people to be the presence of God's Kingdom in the world.

Fourth, Ellul warns us against thinking that all this simply requires us to develop techniques which enable us to do certain things effectively and in Christian ways. He insists that all this is more a matter of being than of doing - not something easy in our activist culture, including our activist evangelical culture.

Ellul roots this call to be in a theological challenge to our society's fixation with means and efficiency. Christ he says is our end and He is also our means by making

that end present to us now. Means and end are therefore united in Him. We do not therefore as Christians have to find means which will secure our end for us because both means and end are God's gift to us in Christ. Ellul therefore urges the Christian to have a different attitude from the world.

It is not his primary task to think out plans, programs, methods of action and of achievement. When Christians do this.. it is simply an imitation of the world, which is doomed to defeat... It is not our instruments and our institutions which count, but ourselves, for it is ourselves who are God's instruments... We, within ourselves, have to carry the objective for which the world has been created by God... Christians have received this end in themselves by the grace of God (65).

So then four more specific challenges to us as God's people at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

- We are to be revolutionaries in a world requiring revolution
- We are to be truly in the world and yet quite different from it • Lay Christians are therefore central in the mission of the church
- It is who we are rather than what we do which is crucial.

In conclusion, I want to draw these various challenges together and again let Ellul speak for himself through three somewhat longer quotations taken from the book's final chapter. They can be summed up in three words - calling, lifestyle and community.

FIRST, Ellul challenges us to realise our Christian calling our difficult calling, our prophetic calling as God's people in His world.

We cannot give everything into the hands of God (believing that God will open the eyes, ears, and hearts of men), until we have wrestled with God till the break of the day, like Jacob; that is, until we have struggled to the utmost limits of our strength, and have known the despair of defeat. If we do not do this, our so-called confidence in God and our "orthodoxy" are nothing less than hypocrisy, cowardice and laziness. All that I have already written will be useless unless it is understood as a call to arms, showing what enemy we have to confront, what warfare we have to wage, what weapons we have to use. Then, in the heart of this conflict, the Word can be proclaimed, but nowhere else. When we have really understood the plight of our contemporaries, when we have heard their cry of anguish, and when we have understood why they won't have anything to do with our disembodied gospel, when we have shared their sufferings, both physical and spiritual, in their despair and desolation, when we have become one with the people of our own nation and of the universal church, as Moses and Jeremiah were one with their own people, as Jesus identified himself with the wandering crowds, "sheep without as shepherd", *then* we will be able to proclaim the Word of God - but not till then! (116).

SECOND, to fulfil this calling Ellul insists we need to develop a certain way of being in the world, a Christian lifestyle.

In order that Christianity today may have a point of contact with the world [it is necessary] to create a new style of life. It is evident that the first thing to do is to be faithful to revelation, but this fidelity can only become a reality in daily life through the creation of a new way of life: this is the “missing link”...There is no longer a Christian style of life. To speak quite frankly, without beating about the bush, a doctrine only has power (apart from that which God gives it) to the extent in which it is adopted, believed, and accepted by men who have a style of life which is in harmony with it...The whole of life is concerned in this search. It includes the way we think about present political questions, as well as our way of practicing hospitality. It also affects the way we dress and the food we eat...as well as the way in which we manage our financial affairs.

It includes being faithful to one's wife as well as being accessible to one's neighbour... Absolutely everything, the smallest details we regard as indifferent, ought to be questioned, placed in the light of faith, examined from the point of view of the glory of God. It is on this condition that, in the church, we might possibly discover a new style of Christian life, voluntary and true (119-20,122-3).

THIRD, we can do all this only in Christian community. And here is perhaps a particular challenge for us who lead parish churches or who will be leading them in the near future.

It is impossible for an isolated Christian to follow this path...It will be necessary to engage in a work that aims at rebuilding parish life, at discovering Christian community, so that people may learn afresh what the fruit of the Spirit is...We shall need to rediscover the concrete application of self-control, liberty, unity, and so on. All this is essential for the life of the church, and the function of Christianity in the world. And all this ought to be directed toward the preaching and the proclamation of the gospel (124).

We stand, today, over fifty years later, facing the real challenges of living as God's people in a post-Christian, postmodern world. Surely we can discern in Ellul's challenge to make God's Word known, the words of a 20<sup>th</sup> century prophet to us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, being faithful to our calling, creating a Christian lifestyle, and building Christian communities.

Like all prophets, Ellul's words confront and challenge us. They may disturb, perhaps even run the risk of disheartening us. He knows that. He was often enough accused of being a hopeless pessimist in his writing! And so it is only proper to end as he ends his book - with words of hope and encouragement:

The enemies of the church seek to turn it aside from its own way, in order to make it follow their way; the moment it yields it becomes the plaything of the forces of the world. It is given up to its adversaries. It can only have recourse to God in prayer, that he may teach it his way, which no one else can teach it. This means not only the way of eternal salvation, but the way which one follows in the land of the living, the way which is truly impossible to find unless God reveals it, truly impossible to follow with our human power alone. The problem is the same in the social and the individual

sphere. From the human point of view this way of the church in the world is foolish, utopian, and ineffective, and we are seized with discouragement when we see what we really have to do in this real world. We might throw the whole thing up, were we not sure of seeing the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living: but we have seen this goodness, it has been manifested, and on this foundation we can go forward and confront the powers of this world, in spite of our impotence, for “in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8.37-39) (126-7).

## The Trend Toward Virtued Christianity

by Randall E. Otto

In his article “Welcome to The Next Church” (*The Atlantic Monthly*, August, 1996), Charles Trueheart summed up the megachurch phenomenon: “Seamless multimedia worship, round-the-clock niches of work and service, spiritual guidance, and a place to belong; in communities around the country the old order gives way to the new.” Regardless of whether they are megachurches, many congregations today are incorporating mass marketing methodology such as an entertainment orientation, slick packaging, multi-media imaging, a variety of options, along with a minimization of history and an accent on anonymity. The question remains, however, whether this methodology will ultimately be self-defeating. Is it possible that contemporary American pragmatism will find all of these elements more fully realized in the electronic Christianity of the Internet? Perhaps the virtual Christianity of electronic churches such as The First Church of Cyberspace and the Virtual Church of the Blind Chihuahua is “The Next Church.”

### *The Entertainment Orientation*

Walt Kallestad, pastor of the Community of Joy church in Arizona, says, “If Jesus Christ were alive today, I’m certain he’d be using every form of entertainment that’s out there to make God relevant and practical in people’s lives.” Most young people today want an entertainment orientation. Because many churches are targeting Baby Boomers and Generation Xers who have grown up on the visual stimulation and slick packaging of television and special effects movies, their worship has a fast pace and lots of entertainment allure. While often architecturally non-descript, contemporary “worship centers” are loaded inside with the technology for maximum visual stimulation, with screens for the projection of chorus lines as well as the faces of those on the stage, whom one can otherwise hardly see. Recently, as I worshiped from the balcony of a large church in Arkansas, I found myself looking steadily at the screen for the images of those little people down on stage who were giving testimonies, singing, or preaching. It



was almost like watching them on TV! In fact, I wonder if my worship experience would have been much different had I stayed home and watched a service on my television screen. True, watching anything on a screen can make the experience seem distant and objectified, as preaching and prayer on television sometimes appear theatrical and almost silly, but that's the price of good entertainment!

The transmission of images via the screen is fundamental to modern religion. When Billy Graham's evangelistic sermons are broadcast throughout the world, he is visible to all but a relative few only on a screen, even if they are in the same venue—yet thousands respond to his preaching. God speaks to people through the screen! When the thousands of men at a Promise Keepers convention in Washington are linked via an audio-video hookup to another convention meeting simultaneously in a stadium in Atlanta to sing a chorus together, it is a virtual taste of heaven. A couple decides to get married and arranges a legally valid wedding in which the participants are at remote locations and the vows are typed in via computer keyboards. Having observed in some non-traditional religious groups' computerized rites of passage “something close to an actual neopagan congregation, a community of people who gathered regularly to worship even though they had never seen each other face to face,” Stephen D. O'Leary says that there is little difference between the Christianized form of computerized screen relationships and the neopagan form, save for institutional approval. In “Cyberspace as Sacred Space: Communicating Religion on Computer Networks” (*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Winter, 1996), he says that Christianized forms “are not fanciful predictions of what is to come; they have already taken place. They are no more or less ‘unreal’ than than [sic] the neopagan gatherings on CompuServe, insofar as the criterion is considered to be physical presence.”

The entertainment orientation of many contemporary churches advances to a new level in the cyberchurch. What can happen on its screen is virtually limitless. The First Church of Cyberspace (<http://www.godweb.org/index1.html>) offers a number of options, all instantly available at the click of a mouse. One can listen to inspirational music and hymns, pick from a variety of sermons by different religious leaders, look at art from the Vatican and the Sistine Chapel in Gallery One and Rembrandt and Byzantine art in Gallery Two, with options to link to other religious sites, discussion forums, and reviews of religious books, movies and more; there is even Java Theology! Now this is *really* a church with options and high quality entertainment! One can choose from the music of J. S. Bach to a Congolese mass and read “sermons for every season” while enjoying famous art from around the world, all at any time in the convenience and comfort of one's own home.

The cyberchurch not only has greater entertainment appeal than any contemporary church; it also has a greater consumer value to the church shopper. Shoppers can stay as long as they wish and leave whenever they want. Virtual Christianity might possibly satisfy the interest level - as well as efficiency of time and resources - of the technology icon himself, Bill Gates, who has said (*Time*, January 13, 1997), “just in terms of allocation of time resources, religion is not very efficient... There's a lot more I could

be doing on a Sunday morning.” Were he a virtual parishioner in the First Church of Cyberspace, Gates could do whatever he wanted on Sunday morning and surf in for a virtual religious “hit” whenever it seemed convenient. He could come *-whenever* and *however* he’d like. The “come as you are” approach of the contemporary church still requires casual apparel generally suitable for public display. In the virtual church, Gates, well-known for “dressing down,” could come in literally anything (or nothing) at all!

More of today’s young people want to be like Bill. In actuality, they are increasingly being created in Bill’s image. As Wendy Murray Zoba notes in “The Class of ’00” (*Christianity Today*, February 3,1997), studies show that teens today are:

- bombarded by frequent images, so that they need continual “hits”
- sufficiently aloof that the remote control symbolizes their reality
- so engrained in consumerism that they take it for granted
- a cyber-suckled community

If so, the consumer-driven and entertainment-oriented contemporary church must eventually make a transition toward the virtual Christianity of the cyberchurch or risk losing its market share of today’s youth.

In 1996 the Roman Catholic Church in Germany failed to take advantage of these new technologies and so improve market share. A new software program entitled “Confession by Computer” marketed by the Cologne-based Lazarus Society, offered sinners the chance to confess to their computers from a list of 200 foilings, a list which, as the Reuters report noted, could be “customized for especially original sinners.” “As soon as the sin is selected on the basis of the Ten Commandments, the computer searches out an appropriate penance,” the program’s promotional literature stated. The program would then display or read out audibly the words to the prayers “Our Father” and “Hail Mary,” with suggestions on to how to get in touch with a priest or minister on the Internet.

To these technological innovations, which could have electrified repentance and streamlined priestly duties, the Church issued a stalwart and predictably passe rejection. A spokeswoman for the German Conference of Bishops said, “You cannot have sins forgiven by the push of a button.” Surely the Church has not recognized that Jesus himself urged *ease* in the pronouncing of absolution! When chastened by the scribes for telling a paralytic he had just healed that his sins were forgiven, Jesus responded, “Which is *easier*, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your pallet and walk’?” (Matt. 9:5).

The non-sacramental character of many contemporary churches may further impel them toward virtual Christendom. Their general perception of the sacraments as mere memorials means no Real Presence is involved in Holy Communion; and, since baptism

is typically administered in private gatherings at someone's pool, little real presence is involved there either. In fact, computerized simulations can create images so real as to make the technological community "come to life." As Erik Davis (*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Winter, 1996) observes of neopagan communities meeting on the Internet:

The technopagan community comes to life with the creation of performative rituals that create their virtual reality through text, their participants interacting with keyboards, screens, and modems. This is certainly odd for those who conceive of ritual strictly in terms of situated *actions*, as a drama involving chant, gesture, and props such as chalices, bread, wine, incense, etc.; yet in the entire experience as revealed in archive files at least, such elements are replaced by textual simulations.

Moreover, with advances in CD ROM, video morphing, and virtual reality technology, simulations may appear almost indistinguishable from real-time events. Besides, in the postmodern world, signs no longer imitate or duplicate the real, but simply substitute for it. The sacraments are merely signs pointing to something unseen anyway.

Ease of *approach*, well-packaged *entertainment*, and multiple *options*—these *key-words* of many contemporary churches are taken to an enhanced level in the virtual church.

#### *Transcending Denominations*

Another emphasis of many contemporary churches is the transcending of denominations. Although many contemporary churches are in theology and polity simply independent Baptist churches, they avoid sectarian bias by dropping any denominational affiliation from their name. For some, the hope of gaining greater market share means not just dropping a denominational identification, but also dropping any reference to Jesus Christ himself. A church in California decided it might have broader appeal by changing its name from Church of the Master to Church in the Foothills. Location, location, location! The important thing is that the consumer can find the church's *physical* location, not that the church have any *theological* location.

People don't care much about theology anyway. They just want to attend someplace where they can feel good and where everybody gets along. For this reason some contemporary church pastors demur from preaching on divisive social issues. As Trueheart observes, "Like the mainline denominations, though perhaps with more success, new, large, independent churches attempt to live with intense divisions among their flock over abortion and homosexuality."

The cyberchurch, however, is equally savvy in being nondescript and broad in appeal. The Virtual Church of the Blind Chihuahua (<http://www.dogchurch.org/narthex.shtml>) combines in its name the appeal of the non-descript with comic relief. How many would dare name their church *after a dog*? Yet its outrageousness almost guarantees youth appeal! As "a sacred place in cyberspace named in honor of a little old dog with cataracts who barked sideways at strangers because he couldn't see where they were," the Virtual Church of the Blind Chihuahua has maintained that humans relate to God in the same way, "by making a more or less joyfiil noise in God's

general direction with the expectation of a reward for doing so.” The church’s creed is extremely simple and ostensibly Christian: “We can’t be right about everything we believe — thank God, we don’t have to be.” This creed certainly transcends all denominations and includes virtually everyone. It has great market appeal! It is simple, much easier to remember than the Apostles’ Creed and truly a basis on which people can get along.

The Virtual Church of the Blind Chihuahua grapples with divisive social issues, though inconclusively. The pastor of the church posts an *irenica* position on a bulletin board in which he encourages all sides to come together in moral discourse taken from the realm of politics. The value of the cyberchurch approach is that everyone has access to the pastor and can post his or her thoughts without fear of acrimony, since the writer need not leave an actual name. The anonymity in much of contemporary church life is in the cyberchurch turned into a positive good.

The cyberchurch not only transcends the parochial, the doctrinal, and the denominational; it transcends both time and history. While some lament the a-historical nature of computer technology, the cyberchurch is utilizing an approach already at work in postmodern society. While undoubtedly driven by an interest in having the broadest appeal possible, the present concern among some churches to transcend denominational affiliations is also a tacit acknowledgment of their a-historical nature. Denominational affiliations typically describe the doctrine and history of a particular church body. Lutherans, for example, have their origin in the historical context and doctrinal formulations of Martin Luther and his successors. Presbyterian and Reformed churches have theirs in the context and formulations of John Calvin and his theological heirs. Such churches tell the prospective worshiper what their historical and doctrinal moorings are.

Many contemporary churches intentionally avoid any reference to church history, the theologians, and doctrinal formulations of any branch Of Christendom. Their intention is to be broad in scope, but the effect is clearly a-historical. The average contemporary church consumer probably has no more notion of who Martin Luther and John Calvin are than the most avowed atheist, despite the fact that Luther and Calvin have provided the theological groundwork for what many of these churches believe, such as justification by faith. These churches thus build on borrowed capital, and state as their theology (and of course, the theology of the Bible) what is actually derived from someone in time and history who shall likely forever remain nameless. After all, namelessness is part of the appeal in many churches.

The cyberchurch again takes this impetus to a new level. A-historicity is an admitted part of the on-line environment, an extension of what contemporary society desires, the here and now, not the then and there. Howard Besser has observed, “the on-line environment of the fixture is the logical extension of postmodernism. Everything is ahistorical and has no context” (*Resisting the Virtual Life: The Culture and Politics of Information* [San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1995]). The cyberchurch recognizes the a-historicity of postmodern humanity and gives opportunity for every voice to

be heard and every idea to be shared, provided, of course, that the voice is electrified in the form of an on-line message.

#### *Who We Are*

Numerous assumptions of the contemporary church are enhanced in the cyberchurch, suggesting its transitional nature to electronic Christianity. The *residual* element hindering this transition remains the insistence on bodily meeting as the form which its community will take, be it in the relative anonymity of the megachurch auditorium or in the genuine personal interaction of the small group. This insistence on physical togetherness is a holdover from those primitive days when human beings were considered a combination of body and spirit, a psychosomatic union. Along with this lingering belief remains the occasional interest in personal touch, hearing voices, and feeling the warmth of another close by. However, these are fading memories of a bygone era, the silly sentiment of “the good ol’ days” when people met together on the front porch just to chat. If, as Douglas Groothuis says in *The Soul in Cyberspace* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), “much of the technological imperative finds its restless energy in the desire to lessen or eliminate the agonies of embodied existence,” then decrying the decentered self and the fluidity of personal identity concomitant with this technological imperative as “Gnostic” will mean little, particularly to an a-historical mindset. The future, virtually deified by the German theologian Jurgen Moltmann as “the mode of God’s being,” is calling us. The communications and information age of the future bid us live in a different, disembodied world.

Computer scientists inform us that the future will be virtual. Professor Nicholas Negroponte at MIT says in *Being Digital* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf 1995), “computing is not about computers anymore. It is about living.” In the future, he writes, “you will be able to purchase personality modules that include the behavior and style of living of fictitious characters.” In other words, we will be able to be someone else, live a virtual life. David Gelemter, computer science professor at Yale, says in his *book Mirror Worlds* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) that reality will be replaced, piece by piece, by a software imitation, and that human beings will live inside that imitation. This is the virtual world that lies ahead. In order to adapt to this new world and maximize its role in it, the contemporary church will have to make the transition to the virtual Christianity of the cyberchurch.

Making this transition, therefore, requires that humans recognize they are really thinking machines. MIT sociologist and psychologist Sherry Turkle says in *The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), “We cede to the computer the power of reason, but at the same time, in defense, our own sense of identity becomes increasingly focused on the soul and the spirit in the human machine.” In other words, the more we enter into the virtual world the more we will realize our true selves. As an MCI advertising campaign not long ago said, there are no bodies and there are no ages, genders, or infirmities—only minds. Each one of us is a mind and the closer we coalesce our minds to that of the computer, the more we will realize who we really are: minds that can be united with one another through the

online community of virtual Christianity in an artificial world. The Virtual Church of the Blind Chihuahua says it “is all in your mind. If your mind is real, that’s good enough for us.” If artificial reality is the authentic postmodern condition, the market-driven church must meet its seekers on those terms, in the authenticity of artificiality.

Once the mind-body problem is overcome in the Greek recognition and Idealist sublation that we are mere minds, the transition may continue to the *virtual community* of which Howard Rheingold has spoken (*The Virtual Community* [New York: Harper & Row, 1993]). Some may resist the virtues of the virtual, such as James Brook and Iain A. Boal, who say in the Introduction to *Resisting the Virtual Life: The Culture and Politics of Information*, “virtual technologies are pernicious when their simulacra of relationships are deployed society-wide as substitutes for face-to-face interactions, which are inherently richer than mediated interactions.” To these curmudgeons we may reply: If these personal encounters are so much richer, then why are they so much less pursued? The postmodernist impulse has been set by developments in science and technology: the world is understood to be relative, indeterminate, and participatory; it is not composed of stuff but rather of dynamic relations. The twentieth-century process philosopher Alfred North Whitehead described the world not in terms of substances, i.e., things, but in terms of events, i.e., temporal units of relatedness. This is the vision of the world in which dynamic temporality rather than static substantiality is the central factor for life and relationships. Our critics are much more to the point when they admit that the cyberspatial way of life “seems to represent a crypto-religious ideal of our society.” And if it is the religious ideal of our society, then the entertainment-oriented and consumer-driven church of tomorrow must adapt or lose market share. The transition must be made to the virtual church.

Of course, for those churches that refuse the entertainment-oriented, market-driven approach there can be little hope. Their failure to adapt has already cost them a significant segment of the religious market. Those that remain resolute against the impetus to change and adapt to cultural pressures will become increasingly insignificant. As Neil Postman says in *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Vintage, 1992), technopoly is totalitarian technocracy which eliminates alternatives to itself by making them invisible and therefore irrelevant: “It does so by redefining what we mean by religion, by art, by family, by politics, by history, by truth, by privacy, by intelligence, so that our definitions fit its new requirements.” Irrelevant and laughable will be the one who refuses to see the new metaphysical status of information and the virtual deification of the virtual. Postman notes that the phrase “The computer shows ...” is technopoly’s equivalent to “It is God’s will.” Silly and simple will be those who continue to believe in a historical creed of an historic church and meet with other such obscurantists to interact personally on a Sunday morning in resistance to culture, to sing old hymns and hear lengthy sermons declaring objective truth. The world will be busy surfing the Net.

Why bother with Sunday? A culture that demands convenience and ease of accessibility requires that it be viewed as a day like any other. Those few who remain from the

historic and traditional church, who continue to meet together personally for Sunday worship, must then serve to remind us that *Sunday morning is who we as human beings really are*. It is the day of Christ's resurrection, the central tenet of the Christian faith, the firstfruits of the resurrection of all to eternal life or condemnation, body and soul. To gather together on Sunday morning means we humans *are indeed a psychosomatic union*, our souls will live in eternal joy or torment after death *and* the bodies integral to who we are will rise. To fail to meet together to worship on Sunday morning means that we do not consider our bodies essential to our experience, that we have already imbibed the disembodied disdain of physical relationships involving personal touch, love and care. As George Lakoff says in *Resisting the Virtual Life*, "The more you interact not with something natural and alive, but with something electronic, it takes the sense of the earth away from you, takes your embodiment away from you, robs you of more and more of embodied experiences. That's a deep impoverishment of the human soul." To lose the "sense of the earth" is to lose sense of who we are, for *humans* came from the earth (*humus*) and to the earth will return, though only till the resurrection.

Who are we? If mere minds or machines, we may continue toward the virtual illusion of actual Christianity. If we are made in God's image, however, we are soul and body rooted in time and history to know, worship, and serve God and one another together.

## Jacques Ellul's Influence on the Cultural Critique of Thomas Merton

by Phillip M. Thompson

*The Context of the Ellul and Merton Connection*

Simone Weil described the West as a "motorcar" that is "launched at full speed and driverless across broken country."<sup>92</sup> The reckless and dangerous trajectory of Western culture also troubled the Trappist monk and writer, Thomas Merton (1916-1968). Merton's cultural critique of technology, and most importantly the mentality developed and affirmed in technology, lacked a certain depth and coherence until it was annealed by his close reading of contemporary social critics, particularly Jacques Ellul.

Ellul might seem a curious choice for inspiration. Generally, the ellipses of the man Martin Marty labeled the "quintessential Protestant" and other Catholic intellectuals crossed infrequently.<sup>93</sup> Those Catholics expressing an opinion have offered mixed reviews. There is a general consensus that Ellul adroitly adumbrated the reach and

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<sup>92</sup> Simone Weil, *Oppression and Liberty*, trans. Arthur Wills and John Petrie (Amherst University of Massachusetts Press, 1955), 111.

<sup>93</sup> Martin E. Marty, "Creative Misuses of Jacques Ellul" in Clifford G. Christians and Jay M. Van Hook, eds., *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 4.

impact of technology on contemporary culture.<sup>94</sup> Some Catholics have viewed Ellul not only as an accurate prophet of doom, but as offering a Christian “hope” that offers a breach, a “heteronomy in a closed age.”<sup>95</sup>

For other Catholics, Ellul’s Augustinian dualism in the political realm is suspect. It appears to reflect a profound pessimism about human influence in the realm of social and political action. This perspective can initiate a self-fulfilling prophecy.<sup>96</sup> In addition, while Ellul correctly discovers a comprehensive techno-scientific system in the West, he fails to concede that it has positive and negative values. Catholics have not discounted elements of truth, verification, and rationality in technology and science.<sup>97</sup>

From Ellul’s side of the table, he is — not surprisingly — leery of certain elements of Catholic teaching. In *Le Fondement Theologique du Droit* (1946), he denounced the lack of Biblical grounding in the revival of the natural law tradition. The natural law tradition was then at the height of its revived influence in Catholic theological and legal circles.<sup>98</sup> There were also institutional problems in the structure of the Catholic Church. They had mistakenly adopted the pagan forms of the Romans.<sup>99</sup>

Despite his firm beliefs and polemical style, Ellul is too subtle to be trapped indiscriminately into any mold, including that of a Protestant crusader. For example, he expressed appreciation for the creativity and spontaneity of John Paul II. He also graciously recognized the value and insight of some Catholics whose position was relatively sympathetic to his own. An entire issue of his journal *Foi et Vie* was devoted to Charles Peguy.<sup>100</sup>

The mild interest in the French sociologist among Catholics primarily occurred after the fall of 1964 when a copy of *The Technological Society* was sent to a hermitage in the woods of Northern Kentucky. Merton was thrilled to discover in its first pages someone who shared his deep distrust of a technical mentality exemplified by the machine. A personal journal records the impact of the new find.

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<sup>94</sup> John Eudes Bamburger, O.C.S.O., “Defining the Center A Monastic Point of View” 20 *Criterion* (Spring, 1981), 4-8. Bamburger was a Trappist monk at Gethsemani with Merton; David W. Gill, “Jacques Ellul: Prophet in the Technological Wilderness” *Catholic Agitator* (October, 1976), 3,4.

<sup>95</sup> Vincent A Punzo, “Jacques Ellul on the Technical System and the Challenge of Christian Hope” 70 *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* (Supp., 1996), 17-31.

<sup>96</sup> Douglass D. McFerran, “The Cult of Jacques Ellul” 124 *America* (Feb. 6, 1971), 122-124; The comments of McFerran are relatively mild compared to some Protestant writers. See Jean Bethke Elshtain, “The World of Narke Christ, Christianity and Politics” *Katallagete* (Spring, 1989), 16-21.

<sup>97</sup> Jean-Michel Maldame, O.P., “Science et technique: Les Impacts de la science et de la technique sur la culture” 78 *Revue Thonriste* (October-December, 1978), 634-656; See also Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* in David J. O’Brien and Thomas A. Shannon, eds., *Catholic Social Thought* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992), 168,169.

<sup>98</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Theological Foundations of Law* (New York: Doubleday, 1960).

<sup>99</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 37-40.

<sup>100</sup> Jacques Ellul, “Celui qui est toujours ailleurs...” *Sud-Ouest Dimanche* (August 14,1983), 2; Jacques Ellul, “Rehabiliter Peguy” *Foi et Vie* (1982), 9-27.



Reading Jacques Ellul's book, *The Technological Society*. Great, full of firecrackers. A fine provocative book and one that really makes sense. Good to read while the council is busy with Schema 13 (as it is). One cannot see what is involved in the question of "The Church in the Modern World" without reading a book like this.

I wonder if the Fathers are aware of all the implications of the technological society? Those who resist it may be wrong, but those who go along with all its intemperances are hardly right.<sup>101</sup>

The timing of Merton's reading was fortuitous. In the midst of the Catholic Church's aggiornamento (opening) to the world, the book was a prudent warning. Why the monk was so smitten by this book, however, goes beyond the immediate timing of the reading and requires at least a cursory understanding of his perspective in relationship to his more general cultural criticism.

Merton devoted a couple of articles, a lecture to his novices, and a fair portion of *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* to the issue of technology. The main body of his thinking regarding technology is derived, however, from fragmentary and episodic explorations in journals, letters and other writings. All of his writings reflect his search for a spiritual orientation that seeks reality and meaning amidst a disorienting century. This yearning for meaning could be exceedingly naive or excessively enthusiastic about a momentary concern. Nonetheless, Merton's insights provide valuable "clues as to how we might live and how we might view the world even when we find ourselves in circumstances quite different from his own."<sup>102</sup>

On the perimeter of his society and imbued with the values of a monastic regime, there is a peculiar freedom to assess the impact of scientific and technological advances. As a Christian, he "takes up a critical attitude to the world and its structures" and declares that the claims of the world are often fraudulent. In this prophetic resistance, each "witness" must shoulder "the 'burden' of vision that God lays upon him."<sup>103</sup>

Contrarily, the prophet in the contemporary context can not impose a spiritual 'pattern of thought' To participate in the dominant secular discourse, he or she must address religious concerns within the language and understandings of a post-Christian culture. This approach is acceptable, since a Christian assumes that this world, for better or worse, is the scene of our redemption and our creative response to God's love.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Thomas Merton, *Dancing in the Water of Life* (October 30, 1964) in Robert E. Daggy, ed., *The Journals of Thomas Merton* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997), vol. 5, 159,160; Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1964).

<sup>102</sup> "Thomas Merton, *Learning to Love Exploring Solitude and Freedom*. Christine M. Boehen, ed., *The Journals of Thomas Merton 1966-1967*(San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1997), vol. 6,125; Thomas Merton, *Thomas Merton in Alaska* (New York: New Directions, 1988), 150; Lawrence Cunningham, "The Monk as Critic of Culture" 3 *The Merton Annual* (1990), 189.

<sup>103</sup> Merton, *The Asian Journals of Thomas Merton* (New York: New Directions, 1968), 329; Thomas Merton, *Disputed Questions* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1960), 222,223.

<sup>104</sup> Merton, "The Christian and the World Preliminaries" (May, 1966) in *Merton Collected Essays* (Louisville: The Thomas Merton Center, Bellarmine College), vol.6,48-50.

*The Journey from the Monastery to the World*

An extended engagement with the scientific and technological culture of the external world would be advanced in Merton's social critique of his later years. The seeds of tins engagement were first sown in an internal dissent against the intrusion of technology into monastic life in the 1940's and 1950's.

The assumptions that were brought to the Abbey of Gethsemani in 1941 are not easily ascertained since the evidence is slight. A few random comments suggest some awareness of the corruptive possibilities in technology. There was admiration for Aldous Huxley's *EndsandMeans*, in which the Englishman asserted that evil means such as violence and war, even in a just cause, corrupts the user by asserting the primacy of material and animal urges. Each individual must reassert their mind and will through prayer and asceticism.<sup>105</sup>

Following his entry into the strict asceticism of a Trappist monastery, it is not surprising that his early pronouncements advocated a *fuga mundi*, a "total rejection of the business, ambitions, honors, activities of the world." Years later, he described himself in this period as having "Thoreau in one pocket, John of the Cross in another, and holding the Bible open at the apocalypse."<sup>106</sup>

Tins apocalyptic and isolationist perspective was reinforced when the monastery was besieged by a "small mechanized army of builders" in the 1940's and 1950's in order to meet the physical needs of a flood of new postulants. The intrusions of the machines often shattered the solitude of the contemplative life.<sup>107</sup>

While Merton vented personal frustrations about such intrusions, he was more concerned about the technological mentality abetted by the machines. In order to make the abbey secure and prosperous, the brothers departed for their work assignments "like a college football team taking the field." Many monks were "restless and avid for change and new projects" and after operating machinery had difficulty adjusting to silence.<sup>108</sup>

Where many machines are used in monastic work ... there can be a deadening of spirit and sensibility, a blunting of perception, a loss of awareness, a lowering of tone,

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<sup>105</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Ends and Means* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1937); Judith Anderholm, "Thomas Merton & Aldous Huxley" 16 *The Merton Seasonal* (Spring, 1991), 8,9.

<sup>106</sup> Thomas Merton, *Entering the Silence* (March 11, 1947), Jonathan Montaldo, ed., *Die Journals of Thomas Merton* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996), vol. 2, 44. Thomas Merton, "Is the World a Problem?" (April, 1966) *Aferton Collected Essays* (Louisville: Thomas Merton Center, Bellarmine College), vol 6,91.

<sup>107</sup> Thomas Merton, *Die Sign of Jonas* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1953), 5; Thanas Merton, *A Search for Solitude* (March 3,1953), Lawrence S. Cunningham, ed., *The Journals of Diomas Merton* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), vol. 3,37.

<sup>108</sup> Merton, *A Search for Solitude* (December 6,1959), 352,353; Thomas Merton, "Letta-to Dorn Gregorio Lemercier" (October 23,1953), Brother Patrick Hart, ed., *The School of Charily* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990), 69; Moton, *The Sign of Jonas*, 41.

a general fatigue and lassitude, a proneness to unrest and guilt which we might be less likely to suffer if we simply went out and worked with our hands in the fields.<sup>109</sup>

The mentality fostered by continuously adopting novel and faster methods at the monastery was hostile to a consciousness of spiritual conversion where rapidity and efficiency are not possible. The contemplative life cannot be mass produced, sold or quantified. Moreover, the technical mentality advanced the false belief that proper techniques in the form of rules, regulations, etc. could achieve salvation. The success of this mentality of progress reflects a failure in the monastic ideal and a failure to build a proper understanding of the ascetic life. In its place there was a false individualism, an accommodation to the American myth of progress.

By the early 1960's Merton's heightened interest in social concerns could not ignore issues of science and technology. Increasingly, there was a distressing capitulation to the primacy of man's desire to better himself and his world by science." He feared that the "...lack of balance between technology and the spiritual life is so enormous that there is every chance of failure and accident."<sup>110111</sup>

The Mertonian cultural critique thus assumes that technology is an inevitable — but potentially dangerous — aspect of human life that can wound or even destroys its maker. The objective, therefore, must be "to save modern man from his Faustian tendencies, and not become a sorcerer's apprentice while doing so."<sup>112</sup>

In searching for sources of insight on technology, he was frustrated within his own tradition. With a few exceptions, Merton believed the Catholic Church was inattentive to the dangers of the technological revolution in the West. The relatively few Catholics who addressed the issue of technology either completely embraced or rejected it. Finding the cupboard of tradition relatively barren, he turned to scripture. In Genesis, there appeared to be an anthropological explanation of the source of the problem. Adam's Fall, in part, is an attempt to improve the "wisdom and science" of the Garden of Eden. Humanity, through Adam, exchanged a "perfectly ordered nature elevated by the highest gifts of mystical grace for the compulsions, anxieties and weaknesses of a will left to itself..."<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> "Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (New York: Image Bodes, 1966), 25.

<sup>110</sup> "Thomas Merton, "Technology" in *Merton Collected Essays* (Louisville: Thomas Merton Center, Bellarmine College), vol. 6, 53-55. These are notes for an oral lecture to the novices on technology. Merton, *A Search for Solitude* (August 22, 1956), 72; This idea is also partly drawn from Hannah Arendt, *Die Human Condition*, Thomas Merton, *Turning Toward The World* (June 12, 1960), Victor A. Kramer, ed., *Die Journals of Thomas Merton* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), vol. 4, 11; (August 13, 1961), 150, 151.

<sup>111</sup> "Merton, "The Christian and the World" (May, 1966) *Merton Collected Essays* (Louisville: Thomas Merton Collection, Bellarmine College), vol 6, 49; Thomas Merton, "Letter to Elbert R. Sisson" (February-March, 1962) in Thanas Merton, *Witness to Freedom*, William H. Shannon, ed. (Harcourt Brace & Co., 1994), 38.

<sup>112</sup> Merton, *Dancing in the Water of Life* (April 15, 1965), 228.

<sup>113</sup> Merton, *The New Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1961), 110, 111.

It is worth considering Ellul's similar view of Genesis. He objected to any exegesis that justified a regime of constant technological fine tuning of the divine creation. Nature, in its preFallen state was "perfect and finished." God had finished his work and it "was good." Human beings were and should be the passive receptors of this beneficence. Human beings work within, but should not complete or expand creation. As was true in Merton's analysis, Adam participated in the fullness of the wisdom of God. This wisdom did not need to subordinate, exploit or utilize nature.<sup>114</sup>

For Merton, the consequence of the Edenic Fall and a search for a more complete "wisdom" was a devotion to a false humanism, i.e. for some ideal other than the love of God. This disobedience to God results in an "orgy of idolatry" which has polluted much of contemporary life. An idolatrous devotion to the works of humanity produced a fractured and consuming devotion to activity which never integrates the spiritual and the physical. Technology abets a relentless quest for money and status as an anodyne for the human predicament. This Pascalian "divertissement" attempts to hide the reality that such actions are idolatrous diversions and not true ends.<sup>115</sup>

Merton's Biblical and other occasional speculations on technology were complimented and extended by the insights of contemporary social critics in the early 1960's. The works of Lewis Mumford, Rachel Carson and Jacques Ellul provided some depth and breadth to an instinctive distrust of a technological mentality.<sup>116</sup>

#### *The Impact of Jacques Ellul*

Merton was introduced to Jacques Ellul in 1964 at the recommendation of his friend, Wilbur Feny, at The Center for Democratic Institutions in Santa Barbara, California. Ferry had arranged a translation of *The Technological Society*. Merton may also have heard of Ellul from another contact, Will Campbell, the editor in chief of *Kattalagete*, who was a fervent supporter of the French writer.<sup>117</sup>

Whatever the source, Merton delighted in finding a kindred spirit on technology who clarified many of his positions. Ellul's analysis of technology was "entirely convincing" with a "stamp of prophecy which so much writing on that subject seemed to lack." He immediately recommended *The Technological Society* to friends and even theologians at the Second Vatican Council.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Jacques Ellul, "Technology and the Opening Chapters of Genesis" in Cari Mitcham and Jim Grote, eds., *Theology and Technology* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1984), 120-126.

<sup>115</sup> Thomas Merton, "Letter to Henry Miller" (August 7, 1962) in Thomas Merton, *The Courage for Truth*, Christine M. Boehen, ed., (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1993), 277; Merton, *The New Man*, 118; Merton, *Disputed Questions*, 178, 179.

<sup>116</sup> Thomas Merton, "The Christian in a Technological World" (Louisville: Thomas Merton Center, Bellarmine College). This is a tape recording of a lecture given to the novices at Gethsemani in the early 1960's.

<sup>117</sup> Thomas Shannon, "Can One be a Contemplative in a Technological Society" 22 *The Merton Seasonal* (Spring, 1997), 13; Victor Kramer and Dewey W. Kramer, "A Conversation With Walker Percy About Thomas Merton" in Lewis Lawson and Victor Kramer, eds. *Conversations With Walker Percy* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1985), 313.

<sup>118</sup> Thomas Merton, "Letter to Pere Herve Chaigne" (December 28, 1964); (April 21, 1965), in Merton,

From his reading of *The Technological Society*, Merton posited the source of the contemporary cultural errors to a mentality of progress and change, a “technique” that has trumped all other ideological or institutional principles. Technique had become both an instrument and an ethic. With efficiency as the regnant ethical principle, technique imprisons humanity “in a gigantic inhumane machine.”<sup>119</sup>

The “Calvinism” of Ellul may be “too pessimistic” for Merton, but it correctly illuminated the fundamental reality that the West was being dominated by a technological mentality that has corrupted any alternative humane vision.<sup>120</sup> For example, the primacy of technique abets the contemporary delusion that each person is an autonomous creature capable of constant personal improvement. Paradoxically, the result of this quest for personal freedom through “technique” is often bondage, not liberation. Indeed, the truth is

...technology alienates those who depend on it and live by it. It deadens their human qualities and their moral perceptiveness. Gradually, everything becomes centered on the most efficient use of machines and techniques of production, and the style of life, the culture, the tempo and the manner of existence responds more and more to the needs of the technological process itself.<sup>121</sup>

The totalizing discourse of “technique” must “serve the universal effort’ (of continual technological development and expansion).” Ellul warned that “Technique has no place for the individual; the personal means nothing to it.” Assuming this mandate, the hermit will soon be an anachronism since no person can be disengaged from the manifold obligations of efficiency and progress.<sup>122</sup>

If religion and ultimate principles are circumscribed, however, then what are the ethical foundations for this brave new world? Morality becomes allegiance to progress. If more effective means of production are possible, they are deemed necessary. There is minimal reflection on the consequences or humanity of the system and “there seems to be at work a vast uncontrolled power which is leading man where he does not want to go in spite of himself... .”<sup>123</sup>

Technique coarsens human relations by a movement from religious to market values. The market orientation of contemporary society presumes that human, beings are “biological machines endowed with certain urges that require fulfillment.” Love becomes

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*Witness to Freedom*, 109; Thomas Merton, *Dancing in the Water of Life* (October 30, 1964), 159,160; (November 21,1964), 161.

<sup>119</sup> Thomas Merton, “Letter of Thomas Merton to Bernard Haring” (December 26, 1964) in Thomas Merton, *The Hidden Ground of Love*. William Shannon, ed. (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985), 383,384. In this letter, Merton recommends to the Council Fathers of Vatican II Jacques Ellul’s “monumental work” *La Technique*; Merton, *Dancing in the Water of Life* (November 2,1964), 161.

<sup>120</sup> Merton, “Letter to Hernan Lavin Cerda” (October 5, 1965) in Merton, *The Courage for Truth* 205,206; Merton, *Dancing in the Water of Life* (November 6,1964), 163.

<sup>121</sup> Merton “Letter to Hernan Lavin Cerda” in Merton, *The Courage for Truth*, 205-207.

<sup>122</sup> Merton, *Dancing in the Water of Life* (November 6,1964), 163; Ellul, *Die Technological Society*, 286.

<sup>123</sup> Thomas Merton, “Una Sociedad que Esta Peligrosamente Enferma” 11 *Punto Fina* (September 75,

a deal and emotional needs are fulfilled through a negotiated exchange, a *contract*. The primary desire of each consumer is to constantly upgrade the product and no transaction is final. There are always more deals and new customers. The terms of the deal are determined by shifting market values.<sup>124</sup>

We unconsciously think of ourselves as objects for sale on the market. We want to be wanted. We want to attract customers. We want to look like the kind of product that makes money. Hence, we waste a great deal of time modeling ourselves on the images presented to us by an affluent marketing society.<sup>125</sup>

This consumer version of love is problematic in other ways. The deal is often based on momentary considerations of the potential packages without any consideration of the lasting effects. It is emotional strip mining. The object is not love, but the effectiveness of the deal.<sup>126</sup>

The problem with this consumer approach is that “love is not a matter of getting what you want.” Loving is about giving; it is about sacrifice, not exchange. It is thus a form of worship which responds to “the full richness, the variety, the fecundity of living experience itself: it ‘knows’ the inner mystery of life.” The individuals participating in this mystery are transformed into a new entity through the conversion of love. This conversion confirms our deepest spiritual identity.<sup>127</sup>

The corrupting mandates of technique, exhibited in the contemporary example of marriage, have the potential for massively altering the psyche of the human species. There is the very real possibility of a serious “depersonalization of man in a mass-technological society”. Technique has increased and improved the range of options, but it has also ceded individual creativity, authentic experience, and choice to technocrats and processes. There are profound symptoms of alienation such as “boredom, emptiness, neurosis, psychoanalytic illnesses, etc.” To avoid these symptoms, humanity occupies itself with endless forms of diversion.<sup>128</sup>

The rudderless system of “technique” absorbs the individual into a mass society. The individuals drawn to this system can not accept the challenge of discovering within themselves the “spiritual power and integrity which can be called forth only by love.” They are instead molded and shaped for the ends of a greater social, economic or

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1967), 14-16; Moton, “Letter to Bernard Haring” (December 26, 1964) in Merton, *The Hidden Ground of Love*. 383,384.

<sup>124</sup> Merton, “Love and Need” (September, 1966), *Merton Collected Essays* (Louisville:

Thomas Merton Center, Bellarmine College), vol. 6,264-266. It is worth noting that this essay was completed as Merton’s own ill fated love affair with a nurse was ending.

<sup>125</sup> Thomas Merton, “Love and Need”, 264,265.

<sup>126</sup> Merton, “Love and Need”, 266-268.

<sup>127</sup> Merton, “Love and Need”, 267-272.

<sup>128</sup> Merton, “The Other Side of Despair” (July, 1965) *The Merton Collected Essays* (Louisville: Thanas Merton Collection, Bellarmine College), vol 5, 205; Merton, “Technology”, 55; Merton, *Learning to Love* (January 27, 1967), 188; Merton, *A Search for Solitude* (November 25, 1958), 232; Ellul sees diversion in media, particularly film and spots; Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 375-384.

political entity. In these mass movements, they are easy targets for those with wealth and power who wish to “crush and humiliate and destroy humanity”<sup>129</sup>

The computer is a perfect instrument for this manipulation. Merton’s cybernetic ideas were influenced by a paper entitled, “The Triple Revolution”, from The Center for Democratic Study. This pamphlet received in the same year as *The Technological Society* explored the social consequences of cybernation. “The Triple Revolution” contended that the cybernetic revolution would unleash immense capacities by combining thinking and action in a single machine, the computer. The result would be an almost unlimited potential for productivity.<sup>130</sup>

The computer is dangerous, because it has no independent capacity for thought or judgment and yet it can engage in very sophisticated and rapid calculation. If it is not balanced by any humanistic or religious principles, it can be employed on behalf of “technique.” Human complexity is reduced by IBM cards to labels such as “priest”, “Negro” or “Jew.” To demonstrate the danger of cybernation, Merton sketched in one of his journals a story line about the mindless efficiencies of a computer. The story is centered on the diary of a machine still operational after a nuclear apocalypse. The computer comments on the nothingness around it, but does so “brightly, busily, efficiently, in joyous and mechanical despair.

There are many other examples of broader social problems in the mass society developed by a technological hegemony. The more technique attempts to control all processes, the more nature rejects its control. The result is an unprecedented ecological disaster. Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* illustrates the capacity of nature to resist human exterminators through the survival of insecticide resistant insects. This situation is rendered even more destructive because preexisting ecological controls have been eliminated by insecticides.<sup>131 132</sup>

The destruction of nature is more than matched by the rising violence of the technological war. The productivity of military machinery is measured by predation and effectiveness and not by a cost/benefit analysis. Ellul asserts in *The Technological Society that*

Nothing equals the perfection of our war machines. Warships and warplanes are vastly more perfect than their counterparts in civilian life. The organization of the army—its transport, supplies, administration—is much more precise than any civilian

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<sup>129</sup> Merton, *Disputed Questions*, 127-134; Merton, “Letter to Rosemary Radford Ruether” (March 19, 1967) in Merton, *The Hidden Ground of Love* 505-508; Cf. Merton with Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 278, 284-291.

<sup>130</sup> Shannon, “Can One Be a Contemplative in a Technological Society”, 14. Ellul’s interest in cybernation was largely focused on its immense capacity for calculation. Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 16, 89, 163, 356.

<sup>131</sup> Merton, *Die Courage for Truth* (January, 1964), 282; Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (March 2, 1962), 207; Merton, *Dancing in the Water of Life* (January 31, 1965), 200, 201.

<sup>132</sup> Merton, “Technology”, 54; Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Crest Books, 1962), 217-231.

organization. The smallest error in the realm of war would cost countless lives and would be measured in terms of victory or defeat.<sup>133</sup>

The consequences of applying technique to the military is not lost on the monk listening to tire distant volleys of tanks at Fort Knox. On the very first day that he was reading *The Technological Society*, Merton records that a SAC (Strategic Air Command) bomber swooped near his hermitage. In frustration he heralds the plane as another dangerous example of “the technological socity!”<sup>134</sup>

The Vietnam War, however, was the greatest example of the technological sodety engaged in a process of asserting power without clear or coherent ends.

His book [*The Technological Society*] was not liked in America (naturally) but for that very reason I think there is a definite importance in his rather dark views. They are not to be neglected, for he sees an aspect of technology that others cannot or will not recognize: it does, in spite of its good elements, become the focus of grave spiritual sicknesses... To begin with, the folly of the United States in Vietnam-certainJy criminal-comes from the blind obsession with mechanical effidency to the exdusion of all else: the determination to make the war machine work, whether the results are useful or not.<sup>135</sup>

Cliches about liberty, frith and an adherence to material prosperity are advanced to disguise the “essential emptiness” ofwar aims. The embracing of this emptiness allows for the creation and spread of a “motiveless violence.” The weapons and strategies in Vietnam, such as napalm, burring villages, etc., are not the responsibility of evil sdentists, but the result of a “moral ignorance and callousness” in the very “fabric” of the technological sodety which places a priority on effidency.<sup>136</sup>

This “motiveless violence” and “moral ignorance” was personified in Lyndon Johnson’s Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, who was trained at Ford and was brought to Washington to effidently direct the machineries of death. He is typical of the modem bureaucrat who has “incredible technical skill and no sense of human realities.” Such men are lost in “abstractions, sentimentalities, myths, delusions.” The war is thus the product of ”good ordinary people” whose ”surface idealism” and ”celebration of warm human values” mask an unreflective technological paradigm of capacities and progress.<sup>137</sup>

Why would a society accept the violence and dehumanization of “technique” which can end in a military or environmental catastrophe? It is a Faustian bargain which cedes

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<sup>133</sup> Ellul, *Die Technological Society*, 16.

<sup>134</sup> Merton, *Dancing in the Water of Life* (October 30,1964), 160.

<sup>135</sup> Merton, “Letta: to Pere Herve Chaigne” (April 21, 1965) in Merton, *Witness to Freedom* 109.

<sup>136</sup> Merton, “Letter to James Douglass” (May 26, 1965) in Merton, *The Hidden Ground of Love* 161,162; Merton, “Letter to Bernard Haring” (December 26,1964) in Merton, *The Hidden Ground of Love*, 383; Merton, “The Church and the ‘Godless World’” (December, 1965, January, 1966); *Merton Collected Essays* (Louisville: Thomas Merton Collection, Bellarmine College), vol. 5,294-298.

<sup>137</sup> Merton, “Answers for Hernan Lavin Cerda”, 5-9 in Merton, *The Courage for Truth*, 205,206; Merton, *Learning to Love* (April 16,1966), 41.



moral authority and principle for the lure of unprecedented powers. This bargain is reminiscent of Prometheus' pride. Prometheus is to be pitied, because, like Adam, he did not have to steal the knowledge. It was always there as a gift.<sup>138</sup>

The Faustian bargain is also the consequence of the modern penchant for a "systematic" application of what had formerly been an occasional capacity to create objects. This capacity becomes a new religion, the "sect" of the product. As a result of the preaching of advertisers, there results a fevered "acceleration" of this process which results in a "technological revolution." The problem with these breakthroughs is that they result "in a climate of practicality for its own sake and a contempt for value and principle." Pragmatism vitiates any moral standard, preferring intellect instead of reason. The intellect distinguishes between the possible and the impossible, while reason distinguishes between the sensible and the senseless. The only remaining questions for the triumphing intellect are "will this work" and "will it pay off?"<sup>139</sup>

If a society is guided by intellect, then it will not have the mental resources to constrain technology. Merton affirms with Ellul that "technique" will then subordinate the individual to its ends. The machinery of this system becomes autonomous while man, the "biomechanical link", is gradually eliminated. There is no compromise with this agenda and the citizenry must "take it or leave it" Most Americans do not opt out of the system because the prosperity resulting from the productivity are "signs of election," a divine blessing.<sup>140</sup>

#### *Conclusion*

It was only in 1964 and 1965 that Merton specifically references Jacques Ellul in his letters and journals. As with many of his enthusiasms, Ellul faded before new readings and issues. Still, the impact of the contact continued as many of the insights in *The Technological Society* were fully assimilated into the Mertonian perspective on technology and culture. The Frenchman provided invaluable ballast for an honest and constructive assessment of technology.

Indeed, this leavening impact can be observed in Merton's subsequent analyses of war, ecology, personal relations, computers and many other areas. The potential fecundity of the Frenchman's ideas was recognized during the initial reading of *The Technological Society*.

I am going on with Ellul's prophetic and I think very sound diagnosis of the Technological Society. How few people really face the problem! It is the most portentous and

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<sup>138</sup> Merton, *The New Man*, 23-29.

<sup>139</sup> Merton, "Technology", 53,54; Merton, *Turning Toward the World (July 9,1962)*, 230; Merton, "Answers for Hernan Lavin Cerda" in Merton, *The Courage for Truth*, 205,206; Ellul, *Die Technological Society*. 133-149 (the system of technique); 406-408 (advertising).

<sup>140</sup> Merton, "Technology", 54; Merton, *A Search for Solitude* (December 7, 1958), 234; Merton even before reading Ellul had recognized the onerous effect of the regnant ideal of process in Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition*. Merton, *Turning Toward the World* (June 12,1960), 11; Ellul, *Die Technological Society*, 79-94.

apocalyptic thing of all, that we are caught in an automatic selfdetermining system in which man's choices have largely ceased to count.<sup>141</sup>

This enthusiasm was only slightly diluted by a recurring note of hesitation about Ellul's excessive pessimism. This hesitation was only tentatively held. In one journal entry, Merton notes that Ellul is "excessively pessimistic", but then countered in the following sentence that he was "not unreasonably" pessimistic. Merton, unlike some other readers, intuitively hesitated to label the Frenchman as only an inveterate pessimist.<sup>142</sup>

This intuition was merited. The corpus of Ellul's writings clarifies that he never wished "to maintain that technology was to be deplored." Technique provides an opportunity for either progress or destruction. Humanity can "steer", "alter" or "frustrate" this mentality. In the best scenario, technique is demythologized and new avenues of communication reopened. Each person must reassert his or her essential freedom. This objective is assisted by separating technique from ideology and decentralizing state power.<sup>143</sup>

While there are some reservations about *The Technological Society*, Merton clearly sides with Ellul against those espousing a "new holiness" of a technological cosmos. A dash of Calvinist pessimism is preferable to the excesses of an evolutionary optimism as exhibited in his fellow Catholic, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. There is "impiety" in Teilhard's "hypostatizing of mechanical power as something to do with the Incarnation, as its fulfillment, its epiphany."<sup>144</sup>

intimately, Merton holds that the positive achievements and capacities of technology must be balanced by spiritual values. In this balanced judgment, each person should gratefully accept the positive impact of the techno-scientific world and they must also demand an accounting of the ethos of progress. This was the ultimate lesson of *The Technological Society*. The reflective individual must carefully, but firmly, reject the "universal myth that technology infallibly makes everything in every way better for everybody. It does not."<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Merton, *Dancing in the Water of Life* (October 31, 1964), 161.

<sup>142</sup> Merton, *Dancing in the Water of Life* (February 1964), 163.

<sup>143</sup> Jacques Ellul "Technique et Civilization" 7 *Free University Quarterly* (August, 1960), 166-177; Jacques Ellul, "The Technological Revolution and Its Moral and Political Consequences" in Johannes Metz, ed., *The Evolving World and Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1967), 100, 107; Jacques Ellul, "Between Chaos and Paralysis", trans. Cecelia Kings 85 *Christian Century* (June 5, 1968), 747-750; Jacques Ellul, "Technique et developpement" in C.A.O. Van Nieuwenhuijze, ed., *La perspecdve occidentals du developement* (The Hague: Mouton, 1972), 258-295; Jacques Ellul, "Search for an Image" 33 *Humanist* (November-December, 1973), 22-25.

<sup>144</sup> Merton, *Dancing in the Water of Life* (November 16, 1964), 166.

<sup>145</sup> Thomas Merton, "Circular Letter, Lent, 1967" in Thanas Merton, *The Road To Joy*. Robert F. Daggy, ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1989), 98.

# About the Ellul Forum

## History

*The Ellul Forum* was first published in August of 1988. Two issues are produced each year (in January and July). The goal of the *Forum* is to honor the work of Jacques Ellul by analyzing and applying his thought to aspects of our technological civilization and by carrying forward the analysis and critique of technological civilization in new directions.

The *Forum* is not intended to be a vehicle for true disciples. The whole thrust of Ellul's work has been to encourage others to think for themselves and invent their own responses to the challenges of a technological civilization. Although we do review and discuss Ellul's work, it is not our intention to turn his writings into a body of sacred literature to be endlessly dissected. The appropriate tribute to his work will be to carry forward its spirit and its agenda for the critical analysis of our technical civilization. Ellul invites us to think new thoughts and enact new ideas. To that end we invite you to submit essays on appropriate topics.

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Original manuscripts and manuscripts responding to essays in previous issues should be sent to Clifford Christians, Editor, *The Ellul Forum*, c/o Institute of Communications Research, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 228 Gregory Hall, Urbana, Illinois 61801. Hard copy and a computer diskette should be sent together, indicating software used, including version number. End notes should be typeset as text and end note numbers in the text itself should also be typeset as text. Length may vary from five to twenty double spaced pages. Suggestions of themes for future issues are also welcome.

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**Issue #26 Jan 2001 — Jacques  
Ellul and Bernard Charbonneau**

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## From the Editor

As we enter the 14th year of *The Ellul Forum*, it has the same mission as always, but now in partnership with the International Jacques Ellul Society. You can read about this new home on the back page of this issue. UES is the English-language sister-society of the Association Internationale Jacques Ellul. (See its website for full information: [www.ellul.org](http://www.ellul.org)). For those who become members of UES, *The Ellul Forum* is sent without cost. I applaud David Gill and others who have taken the leadership in forming this society.

And I am grateful to Joyce Hanks for serving as guest editor for this issue. It is immensely informative, and opens new vistas on Ellul and Charbonneau as lifelong friends and academic colleagues.

Clifford G. Christians, Editor

## About This Issue

I find it an immense privilege to serve as guest editor for the first issue of *The Ellul Forum* to publish information about the newly-formed Societe Internationale Jacques Ellul/International Jacques Ellul Society, which should be legally incorporated by the time you read this. All of us involved in the *Forum* and the Society hope that you as a reader will freely send us your comments, suggestions, and criticisms as we launch this new venture.

Bernard Charbonneau's intellectual journey with Ellul forms the core of this issue of the *Forum*. We would all do well, I think, to reflect on their friendship as a pattern for us. Neither thinker could have made his contributions without the original stimulus and continual input and criticism of the other. Their work forms a whole in ways not always recognized. In his personal reflections on what Ellul meant to him as professor and mentor, Patrick Chastenet mentions the Ellul-Charbonneau teamwork. In my article, I try to show the influence they had on each other, but also the consistent respect and honor they gave to each others' ideas and work. Jean-Louis Loubet del Bayle's article contains information not widely available in English that is foundational to their early thinking as well as to their later development.

For further information on Charbonneau, scheduled for 2001, see the published form of Daniel Cer6zuelle's final lecture in a series of six given at Colorado School of Mines during the school year 1999-2000: "Nature and Freedom: Introducing Bernard

Charbonneau" (forthcoming in *Colorado School of Mines Quarterly Review of Engineering, Science, Education and Research*, vol. 101). Thanks to Carl Mitcham for this information.

Also in this issue, note two book reviews: Carl Mitcham reviews briefly (I hope we will see a more extensive review in these pages at a later date) an important new book by Willem H. Vanderburg, *The Labyrinth of Technology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000). And David Gill reviews my *Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works* (Stamford CT: JAI Press, 2000). This bibliographic volume replaces my earlier bibliography (1984) and updates (published in 1991 and 1995), as far as works by Ellul are concerned. Volume 2, the bibliography listing books, articles, etc., on Ellul, should come out in 2002 or 2003.

Joyce Hanks, Guest Editor  
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## About the Ellul Forum

### History & Purpose

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civilization and carry forward both its sociological and theological analyses in new directions.

While *The Ellul Forum* does review and discuss Jacques Ellul, whom we consider one of the most insightful intellectuals of our era, it is not our intention to treat his writings as a body of sacred literature to be endlessly dissected. The appropriate tribute to his work is to carry forward its spirit and agenda for the critical analysis of our technical civilization. Ellul invites and provokes us to think new thoughts and enact new ideas. To that end we invite you to join the conversation in *The Ellul Forum*.

*The Ellul Forum* is an English-language publication but we are currently exploring ways of linking more fully with our francophone colleagues.

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## Jacques Ellul and Bernard Charbonneau

by Joyce Hanks

Traditionally, when someone outlines the primary human influences on Jacques Ellul's thought, Karl Marx, Soren Kierkegaard, and Karl Barth head the list. In terms of historical influences, most scholars would find it hard to argue with the importance

of those three names. When it comes to contemporary thinkers, however, Bernard Charbonneau must receive the credit for helping Ellul see the significance of certain ideas that became central to his life's work: freedom, nature, and Technique. Ellul frequently praised Charbonneau's insights, and claimed to owe him an immense personal and intellectual debt, especially for his input during Ellul's formative years.

These two lifelong friends met in secondary school in Bordeaux, according to Ellul, but began to have serious conversations during the period when Ellul studied law at the University of Bordeaux, during the late 1920's and early 1930's. Charbonneau, something more than a year older than Ellul, had reached firm conclusions about trends in society he considered dangerous, and gradually convinced Ellul of many of his views. He and Ellul disagreed throughout the rest of their lives, however, on most spiritual issues, and continued to enjoy extremely lively debates as a result

Along with many of their contemporaries, Charbonneau and Ellul sensed that their world had begun to come crashing down around them. Nothing seemed to work right anymore. People's driving concerns were grossly misplaced, and the means they used to achieve their ends were unthinkable. Many members of the generation coming of age in the early 1930's in France felt that the civilization they had known was rapidly coming to an end.

A typical North American view of the crises in twentieth-century France would certainly include two world wars, a depression and a cold war, but might omit the early thirties, at least until the delayed effects of the American depression began to affect European economies. In fact, however, these early years of the 1930's constituted some of the most agitated of the century for French society. Especially for the generation coming to maturity in this period, but also for many of their elders, civilization seemed to be undergoing a fundamental crisis.

If we oversimplify, we can trace almost all the apparent causes of this sense of a crisis of civilization to the "nothing works anymore" syndrome. Values seemed to have disappeared, swallowed up by encroaching materialism; confidence in the future had come to an end with World War I and its aftermath; French politics, in pendulum swings back and forth between right and left, had become so unstable that many felt ready to try something new—almost anything—to see if somehow an end could be brought to a cycle of do-nothing governments.

Although far from the Parisian center of power, Charbonneau and Ellul and some of their friends were not about to let their world die a quiet death. Disgusted with feeble national attempts to "put France back together again," they felt a need to start over from scratch. Civilization was crumbling, and would have to be reinvented, piece by piece. Everything had to change. Significantly, this view of civilization and the way society is organized, this sense of a need to reinvent the whole, remained central to Ellul's thinking for the rest of his life. For him, it was no passing notion. As late as 1981, in *Changer de revolution* (Paris: Le Seuil), Ellul spelled out in some detail how society would have to undergo fundamental, overall change if it was to avert approaching

disaster. Many issues remained constant for him, in spite of the many changes since the 1930's.

Ellul and Charbonneau were not subject to any delusions of grandeur, and harbored no dreams of bringing everything right by themselves. But they believed it was essential to analyze the situation and to begin righting what they could, where they were. Thus they called together small groups of young people in the Bordeaux area for times of reflection and discussion. Some of these groups associated for a time with the *Esprit* movement, and they had contact with *Ordre Nouveau* leaders as well (see Jean-Louis Loubet del Bayle's article elsewhere in this issue of the *Ellul Forum*).

These groups met in natural settings, in camps in southwestern France, in homes and church-related meeting places—anywhere they had the freedom to gather as a small group. By 1935, Charbonneau and Ellul had spent enormous amounts of time camping in southern France and elsewhere (a new experience for the citified Ellul!), usually taking with them other young people interested in studying societal issues. In recent years I have had the privilege of interviewing some who attended, and they attest unanimously to the powerful effect of these and subsequent camping trip discussions. The format was free and open: participants who wished to present their ideas for evening discussion were invited to inform the leaders of their topic in advance of the camp. Mornings and afternoons were often spent hiking in the Pyrenees.

Charbonneau and Ellul also wrote. Ellul's confidence in the power of the word, both spoken and written, comes through clearly in much of his subsequent work, especially *La parole humiliée* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1981; English translation, *The Humiliation of the Word*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985). But as early as the 1930's, Ellul and Charbonneau believed it important to issue a written call to action. One of their first joint efforts produced a statement of 83 ideas intended to help other thoughtful French people in their revolt against society as constituted in the 1930's. They called it "Directives pour un manifeste personnaliste" ("Outline for a personalist manifesto," first circulated in mimeographed form in 1935 or 1936, and recently published for the first time, with notes by Patrick Troude-Chastenet, in *Revue Française d'Histoire des Idées Politiques*, no. 9,<sup>146</sup> pp. 159-177; see also Troude-Chastenet's article, "Jacques Ellul: Une jeunesse personnaliste," pp. 55-78 of the same issue). It begins with these words:

A world was organized without us. We entered it as it was beginning to lose its balance. It obeyed deep-seated laws we did not know, which were not like those of earlier Societies. No one took the trouble to ferret them out, because this world was

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<sup>146</sup> Such rules are designed to create "affiliation" between the customer and the business. Personnel are recruited, selected, and retained in part on the basis of being willing and able to display this "positive affect." (There is, of course, a technical term for the technical effort: "Emotional labor.") D. Wagner et al., "Driving It Home: How Workplace Emotional Labor Harms Employee Home Life" 67 *Personnel Psychology* 487 (2014); J. Allen et al., "Following Display Rules in Good or Bad Faith?: Customer Orientation as a Moderator of the Display Rule-Emotional Labor Relationship." *Psychology Faculty Publications*, Paper 90 (2010).

characterized by anonymity: no one was responsible, and no one attempted to control it. Each person simply kept to the post he was assigned in this world, which came into being by itself, through the interplay of these deep-seated laws.

Thus we also found our place marked, and we were obligated to obey a kind of social determinism. All we could do was to play our role well, unconsciously assisting in the interplay of the new laws of Society. Faced with these laws, we were disarmed—not only by our ignorance, but also by the impossibility of changing this anonymous product. Humanity was completely impotent as over against Banks, the Stock Market, contracts, insurance, Hygiene, the Radio, Production, etc. We could not struggle, one person against another, as in previous societies, nor could ideas challenge one another directly.

In spite of our impotence, however, we felt the need to proclaim certain values and to incarnate certain forces...

These few lines give the flavor of Charbonneau and Ellul's sense of revolt, their utter rejection of the society in which they found themselves, and their determination to begin anew, constructing a fresh, completely different society, one that would be ready to replace the old civilization whenever it died a natural death. They felt the need to understand and oppose a long list of contemporary societal ills: lack of human freedom, lack of justice, materialism, excessive profits, idealism, fascism, communism, growth of the state, totalitarianism, propaganda, growth of cities, growing anonymity, reliance on Technique, use of human beings as means to various ends, etc.

The last paragraph of their fifteen-page "Outline" challenges the reader to participate with them in the "personalist revolution" they are undertaking in spite of themselves: "Let all those who believe they have a role to play in the coming Revolution, against a civilization that sustains its life only by means of our death, begin their inner preparation. Then, let them come and help us."

Charbonneau and Ellul did not simply sit and wait for others to join them in their effort, however. They sought out the *Esprit* movement led by Emmanuel Mounier, who shared many of their ideas. In a June 1996 interview, I asked Henriette Charbonneau, the widow of Bernard Charbonneau, why she believed Ellul and her husband found themselves so strongly attracted to the young personalist movement in *Esprit*, traveling to Paris to contact it, in spite of their strong sense of provincial identity. Her response was three-fold: because of the movement's emphasis on the person, because of its refusal to fit in with existing political categories (including its search for a "third way"), and because elsewhere in society, people were asking the wrong questions. In a separate interview, Charbonneau's son, Simon, suggested that his father felt drawn to the personalist movement because it shared his conviction that the worship of progress was essentially dehumanizing. My own view is that the personalist movement's concerns and views coincided remarkably with Ellul's and Charbonneau's, including the importance of small, independent groups meeting all over France to reflect on the current crisis and take appropriate action. Political philosophies of the time tended to negate the importance of the individual, reducing people to their role in society or

the economy. Drawing on their experience, and only secondarily on their already vast knowledge derived from reading, Charbonneau and Ellul felt moved to challenge this state of things.

On the basis of such affinities, and after initial contacts in Paris, Charbonneau and Ellul decided to affiliate with the *Esprit* movement. But important differences of emphasis, if not of belief, soon surfaced: Mounier clearly preferred to give priority to reflection, rather than action, contrary to the Bordeaux groups' insistence on attending to both. In addition, Mounier concentrated on the journal *Esprit* (first published in October 1932), the mouthpiece of his movement, rather than on the small groups spread here and there around the country. He conceived of the groups as support structures for spreading the personalist message rather than as loosely federated groups, each with its own regionally-based agenda and emphases.

Other differences contributed to the cleavage: Mounier's strong Catholicism (as over against Ellul's strong protestantism, and Charbonneau's reticence with regard to organized religion), and his use of the word "person" to refer to the community rather than the individual. Charbonneau and Ellul sensed that they had failed in their effort to midge the national personalist movement in the direction they believed to be essential—that of a revolution coming up from below, rather than one organized from the top down. Mounier and other personalists seemed generally to prefer a gradual, reformistic approach to a simultaneous revolution across the whole of society. Other differences moved them still farther apart: Mounier proved too nationalistic, too inclined to approve current ideologies of progress and Technique, and too authoritarian to suit Ellul and Charbonneau. Finally, in early 1937, they and the groups they sponsored in southwestern France resigned from the *Esprit* movement.

World War II of course put most of their projects on hold, along with Ellul's university teaching post, which he lost through his refusal to cooperate with the Vichy government (although the pre-war camping trips took hold again after the war). He spent the war years farming in order to feed his family, and helping Jews and others to hide and escape the German dragnet. Charbonneau did not participate actively in the Resistance, nor did he share Ellul's hope that the confused aftermath of the war might possibly offer an opportunity for the birth of a new civilization along the lines they had dreamed of. Ellul's hopes for a such a revolution following World War II were dashed when he saw how quickly old loyalties and desires for revenge took over after the Liberation.

Neither Charbonneau nor Ellul, however, gave up the revolutionary convictions they had arrived at together in the early days of their friendship. After the war, they failed in their attempts to establish a kind of "parallel university," in which students could pursue their interests without concern for bureaucratic requirements. But several strands from their 1930's proposal eventually came together in the birth of the French ecological movement. Although widespread concern for the environment in France is commonly considered to have begun after the events of May 1968, its roots can be traced to Charbonneau and Ellul in the 1930's, in their opposition to the cult of

progress, their concern over the rapid advances of technology, and their insistence on the importance of nature (see Roger Cans, "La France 'ecolo," *Le Monde*, 10 June 1992, p. 14).

These concerns moved them to organize a local movement in opposition to the national government during the 1970's. Charbonneau appears to have initiated their mammoth effort to resist bureaucratic designs for "developing" the Aquitaine coast as a magnet for tourism. But Ellul soon joined his friend in the struggle, uncovering and heading off unpublicized plans before they could become realities, exposing faulty "studies," and encouraging the populace to withstand the government's illegal maneuvers. A glance at Ellul's articles published during the 1970's and early 1980's gives some idea of the effort he put into this resistance, which for him epitomized the principle he had long espoused: "think globally, act locally." I well remember how my earliest interviews with Ellul, in 1981, were frequently interrupted by telephone calls asking for his advice and help on matters related to opposing this government project, which would have ruined the coastal environment and local fishermen, had it succeeded. Ellul consistently gave credit to the economic crisis of the early 1980's for the defeat of the "mission" to develop the Aquitaine coast. But it remains clear that he and Charbonneau played a major role in publicizing and thwarting attempts by centralized government to outwit local citizens.

Charbonneau and Ellul's collaboration extended to making each others' work known, each through his own writing. The earliest Ellul review of a book by Charbonneau I have found dates from 1952, on *L'Etat* {*The State*; in *Le Monde*, 16 Dec. 1952}. Originally published privately by Charbonneau, this book got a chance in the late 1980's for wider circulation when a Parisian publisher agreed to give it a second edition, if Ellul would simultaneously agree to allow publication of a second edition of his *La Technique*, which was sure to attract buyers. Ellul, who had never understood why Charbonneau's books did not manage to get published and sell at least as well as his own, readily agreed. In 1974, Ellul reviews two of Charbonneau's books, one on ecology {*Notre table rase*, Denoel, 1974) and one criticizing development {*Le systeme et le chaos*, Anthropos, 1973), and in 1980, he reviews *Jefus* (another publication by the author, 1980). Finally, Ellul publishes a 13-page "Introduction to the thought of Bernard Charbonneau," including a fresh review of *L'Etat* {*Ouvertures*, no. 7, Jan.-March 1985).

Over the years of his editorship of *Fol et Vie* (1969-1986), Ellul repeatedly publishes articles by Charbonneau (especially the series "Chronicle of the year 2000"), and also arranges for some of his friend's articles to see the light in *Reforme*, a Protestant weekly. For his part, Charbonneau includes Ellul in a seminar he hosted on ecology in 1972, and publishes two of Ellul's papers in the proceedings of that meeting. When he and Edouard Kressmann found "Ecoropa," a continent-wide environmental group, they include Ellul.

Finally, six months after Ellul's death, Charbonneau publishes a long obituary in which he traces their friendship, their intellectual journey together, and their influence

on each other (*Combat Nature*, no. 107, Nov. 1994, pp. 36-39). Charbonneau claims that each halfway "converted" the other, Charbonneau convincing Ellul of the importance of the impact of science and technology on human freedom, Ellul helping to nudge Charbonneau away from atheism. Charbonneau says he finally realized, after the war, that his love of nature and freedom had its source in Christianity, and that this, together with Ellul's disillusionment with certain aspects of the institutionalized church, drew them closer together. According to Charbonneau, one shares pleasure with most friends, but not the meaning of life, whereas he and Ellul shared "what gives value and content to life." He survived Ellul by less than two years, dying on 28 April 1996, shortly before a conference in Toulouse probed his thought, his relationship with Ellul, and his legacy (see the proceedings: *Bernard Charbonneau: Une vie entiere a denoncer la grande imposture*, ed. Jacques Prades; Toulouse: Eres, 1997).

## Bernard Charbonneau and the Personalist Context in the 1930s and Beyond

By Jean-Louis Loubet del Bayle

"We must try to crush all the forms of centralization crystallized by the blind forces of Technique and money."<sup>147</sup>

Bernard Charbonneau, "Journal intime," *Esprit*, 1936.

"Both of us, at that time, were very attracted to politics. Bernard, for that matter, was much more advanced than I in knowledge of the social, sociological, and political structures. His criticism of society seemed to me to go further than Marx's, and what I still find extraordinary, he made a global interpretation of society. When today I reread his writings of that period, I am stupefied by their timelessness. [. . .] We had formed some small groups in the southwest of France. [. . .] And we looked for a home for our revolutionary yearnings. The adventure of *Esprit* took place in this setting. We both went to a meeting of *Esprit* in 1934. Bernard was, by the way, extremely skeptical. To begin with, the word *esprit* seemed ambiguous to him, allowing the greatest possible misunderstanding and embracing all sorts of compromise. But we met some people there who had conducted the same criticism of modern society that we had in our little group in the southwest. It was therefore a very important encounter. [...] And all the more so because at about the same time, we met Alexandre Marc, Denis de Rougemont, and their group, *Ordre nouveau* [The New Order]. Bernard and I were between the two positions."<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> [Translator's note: originally published as "Bernard Charbonneau, le contexte personaliste des annees trente et sa posterite," in *Bernard Charbonneau: Une vie entiere a denoncer la grande imposture*, ed. Jacques Prades (Toulouse: Editions Eras, 1997; ISBN 2-86586-464-2), pp. 23-34. Translated by Joyce M. Hanks, with the permission of Jean-Louis Loubet del Bayle and Editions Eres].

<sup>148</sup> Jacques Ellul, *In Season, Out of Season: An Introduction to the Thought of Jacques Ellul*, based on interviews by Madeleine Garrigou-Lagrange, trans. Tani K. Niles (New York: Harper & Row, 1982),

These recollections of Jacques Ellul, in his book of conversations with Madeleine Garrigou-Lagrange, suggest very explicitly that we situate the development of Bernard Charbonneau's thought in these years with respect to two groups: *Esprit* and *Ordre Nouveau*. More broadly, we can trace Charbonneau's thought as it relates to what we might call the "nebula" of non-conformist groups of the 1930's or the "nebula" of the personalist movement of the 30's.

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Setting aside the details behind our analysis for the moment, we can distinguish three tendencies within this nebula:

1) the first group is that of the journal *Esprit*, which clusters around Emmanuel Mounier beginning in 1931. Some people today are tempted to reduce 1930's personalism to this group;

2) the second group is *Ordre Nouveau*, created through the organizational drive of Alexandre Marc. This group centered on a doctrinal corpus based primarily on the theoretical thought of Arnaud Dandieu, whose work was brutally interrupted by his death in 1933;

3) finally, at least until 1934, we must leave room for a third trend, which Mounier called the "Young Right." It consisted of young intellectuals in disagreement with *Action Française*<sup>149</sup> to some degree, who centered especially around Jean de Fabregues and Thierry Maulnier.

This outline applies to what we could call the early appearance of this movement, between 1930 and 1934. We will not embark at this point on a complete and detailed analysis of the stands taken by each of these groups, but the following rather brief reference points will serve to situate their tendencies.

First, very importantly, the thought of these groups developed within the framework of a typical complex problem which we might call a "problem of civilization." All these groups in fact shared the feeling that they were living through a "crisis of civilization"; that is, an all-encompassing crisis which called into question *all* aspects of human existence. This crisis concerned the relationship of people with each other and with their destiny, as well as with their social or natural environment.

This overall set of problems led to a certain number of consequences which we can summarize rather briefly:

1. First, an extremely *critical* attitude toward the *liberal society* of the time, in its political manifestations (a criticism of mass democracy, parliamentary government, and the party system) and in its economic forms (a criticism of capitalism and the "reign of money"). At the beginning of the thirties, this tendency especially took the form of a virulent questioning of "Americanism" and the Americanization of modern societies.

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pp. 33-35. See also Jacques Ellul, *Jacques Ellul on Religion, Technology, and Politics: Conversations with Patrick Troude-Chasteney*, trans. Joan Mendes France (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), Chapter VI

<sup>149</sup> [Translator's note: for background on *Action Française*, See Eugen Weber, *Action Française: Royalism and Reaction in Twentieth-Century France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1962)].



2. In addition to challenging political, economic, and social structures, this criticism also claimed to be *moral and spiritual*. The three groups mentioned above called into question a tendency they perceived in modern society toward *rationalism, productivism, and materialism*, which were becoming more and more stifling. These trends were seen as condemning people to a kind of mutilation, coming from both above and below, that reduced persons to an abstraction whose flesh-and-blood roots and spiritual personality had been amputated.

3. At the same time these groups lined up in opposition to this "established disorder," they challenged other contemporary movements that also claimed to offer "total" answers to the crisis (namely *communism* and *fascism*), denying that such movements were truly revolutionary. They were not revolutionary because, rather than combatting the drift of modern societies toward governmental control, totalitarianism, and materialism, they exacerbated these tendencies.

4. To remedy this crisis of civilization, these groups declared that they were *revolutionary*, using and abusing what some people ironically labeled their "neither-nor-ism." Critics used this term because these groups, in their frequent refusal of antithetical solutions, tried to find a hypothetical "third way" in most areas. As a result, they often used such slogans as "neither right nor left," "neither communism nor capitalism," "neither governmental control nor anarchism," "neither individualism nor collectivism," "neither idealism nor materialism."

5. They wanted this revolution to be *all-encompassing*-, that is, not just an institutional revolution that would modify societal structures, particularly political and economic structures, but also a "spiritual revolution." They wanted to transform individuals' values and mentality—a simultaneous transformation of people and things.

6. This "total," "spiritual" revolution was to find its foundation in a philosophical approach they called "personalist." This reference to the idea of the "person" seemed especially appropriate as a means of challenging philosophically the idealist/materialist antithesis, and as a way to challenge the individualist/collectivist divide on political and social grounds. Over against any "monistic" materialism or collectivism, these groups intended to maintain and safeguard the spiritual and unique transcendence of the person in relation to each individual's biological or social conditioning. At the same time, they took care not to separate the person from each one's existence as incorporated within society and history.

7. This "personalism" especially entailed an approach to political and social problems that was characterized by very anti-statist positions, which were declared "decentralizing," "corporatist," or "federalist." These positions had in common an emphasis on the importance of "intermediate bodies"—*spontaneous* forms of organization in civil society, as opposed to the drift toward governmental control seen in modern societies, be they democratic or totalitarian.

8. Finally, this "personalism" expressed itself in the idea of a "personal revolution," which implied the notion of *commitment*. Militants were expected not only to engage in an "outward" action in order to transform the world and society, but also to make

an individual effort to embody in their daily life the values and the "lifestyle" of the future "personalist" revolution.<sup>150</sup>

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Until 1934, the relationships between the three groups we have outlined were not idyllic, but outside observers were conscious of similarities in the stands they took. The most striking evidence of their resemblance was the October 1932 publication of a special issue of the journal *Nouvelle Revue Française* dedicated to them. In it Denis de Rougemont, who coordinated the special issue, asserted that he saw a kind of common front taking shape among these groups, resting "on a basic similarity of standpoints."

On the other hand, however, this embryonic common front did not survive the shock of the events of February 1934 or their ensuing consequences.<sup>151</sup> Under the pressure of events, the groups had difficulty escaping their traditional habits. In particular, they experienced within their ranks the resurgence of earlier references to the division between right and left, from which they had tried to free themselves. Based on this development, we might be tempted to end their story at this point. But that would surely be a mistake, since this movement, which emerged at the very beginning of the 1930's, as we have seen, had a posterity and later a significant ideological and intellectual influence, in France and beyond.

Nevertheless, it is not easy to analyze this influence, for two reasons that are somewhat connected. First, because their influence was based more on personal commitments and relationships and on phenomena of intellectual cross-fertilization than on the existence of institutional affiliations. Second, because this influence was therefore *diffuse*, running along different paths. In the course of these twists and turns, personalist ideas flowed together with other currents, influencing them, but also being influenced by them. In other words, we can say that the growing reach of the influence of these ideas exacted a price in return: the diluting of the identity of personalist concepts to some degree.

This particular kind of influence, which surely stemmed in part from the intellectual nature of personalism, and in part from circumstances, seems to have been well summed up by a phrase coined by Gabriel Marcel. When someone asked him about the influence of these groups, he answered that it had been "a pointillist influence"; that is to say, diffuse and partly *subterranean* in its advance.

To clarify this advance, it seems wise to take three dates as reference points: 1934, 1940, and 1945. At each of these stages, we find both growth and diluting of personalist influence, compared to what we found at the previous stage.

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The first reference year is 1934. During the period that follows, from 1934 to 1939, institutional reference points remain, since the previously established groups continue

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<sup>150</sup> For more on these points, see Jean-Louis Loubet del Bayle, *Les non-conformistes des années trente: Une tentative de renouveau de la pensée politique française*, ed. (Paris: Le Seuil, 1987).

<sup>151</sup> [Translator's note: for details, see Eugen Weber, *The Hollow Years: France in the 1930s* (New York: Norton, 1994; ISBN 0393036715)].

to exist, more or less, especially as evidenced by the continuing publication of their respective journals. But the pressure of events forces them to engage in alliances or political redefinitions that isolate them from each other. They also lose some of their originality in this way:

1. The "Young Right" continues to express itself by means of publications like *La Revue du XX siecle* and *Combat*, but it takes stands on current events that tend to relegate it to the fringes of the far right and *Action Francaise*. After 1934, it is clear that in the mind of Bernard Charbonneau or Jacques Ellul, the "Young Right" is not associated with the type of thought that *Esprit* and *Ordre Nouveau* represented for them.

2. During the same period, *Esprit* also undergoes the pressure of events. Just as the "Young Right" drifts towards the political right, the *Esprit* group is also led to become political. Beginning in 1934, it gives up its "neither right nor left" slogan, and adopts a stance of critical association with the left. This development will have repercussions on the relationship of *Esprit* with Bernard Charbonneau and his friends in 1937 and 1938.

3. Only *Ordre Nouveau* seems to have resisted this movement toward politics, but it did so at the price of a doctrinaire hardening in the expression of its positions. Thus it became increasingly isolated, and this fact is related to the disappearance of its journal in 1938.

Movement of the "Young Right" or *Esprit* toward the more traditional circles of the right or left resulted, however, in some penetration of these circles by the ideas that each of these groups continued to defend. In addition to the influence of their publications, we must take personal influence into account. For example, although *Ordre Nouveau* as a movement remained aloof from very politicized commitments, some of its leaders and rank and file became involved in efforts of the right or left to renew the terms of political debate. Thus they found themselves working alongside people of the *Esprit* movement or representatives of the "Young Right." *Ordre Nouveau* members might be working on the left with members of Gaston Bergery's *frontiste* movement and its weekly *La Fleche*, or with leftist Catholic publications such as *Sept* or *Temps present*. On the right, this phenomenon took place, for example, in certain circles associated with the "leagues," around 1935 and 1936, especially with the *Croix de feu* [Fiery Cross] and its affiliate, the *Volontaires nationaux* [National Volunteers]. Also on the right, members of *Ordre Nouveau* sometimes worked within the framework of the first *Parti populaire fran ^ais* [Popular French Party], in 1936 and 1937.<sup>152</sup>

To all the above we must add a more or less identifiable influence in the study groups that continued to spring up until the beginning of World War II. Usually short-lived, these groups had rather hazy ideological identities (*La Lutte desjeunes* [Youth Struggle],

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<sup>152</sup> [Translator's note: for further information on these movements, see Robert Soucy, *French Fascism: The Second Wave, 1933-1939* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995; ISBN 0300059965), and Eugen Weber, *The Hollow Years: France in the 1930s* (New York: Norton, 1994; ISBN 0393036715)].

*L'Homme reel* [True Man], *L'Homme nouveau* [New Man], *La Justice sociale* [Social Justice], *Travail et nation* [Work and Nation], *La Croisade* [Crusade], *Communautd* [Community], *Le pays reel* [The True Country], etc.).<sup>153</sup> During these same years, at the juncture of the influence of *Esprit* and *Ordre Nouveau*, the nucleus of a movement forms around Bernard Charbonneau and Jacques Ellul. Christian Roy calls it "Gascon personalism."<sup>154</sup>

Out of these phenomena emerges a diffuse influence that Mounier will refer to rather bluntly in these terms in 1939: "Several new words that we now see floating around just about everywhere." In this way, the defense of the "eminent dignity of the human person" and the struggle for "spiritual values" became some of the watchwords in the antifascist struggle, whereas the nationalistic leagues and the *Parti populaire frangais* of Jacques Doriot appropriated such slogans as "neither right nor left" and "neither communism nor capitalism." In brief, the upshot of these years can be seen in the mutual permeation at the fringes of the traditional right and left, and in a somewhat influential presence in the more or less successfull attempts of both right and left to modernize the terms of political debate. Another result was a certain number of international contacts between *Esprit* and *Ordre Nouveau*.

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France's collapse when attacked by Germany in 1940 redealt the cards, so that personalist influence could be found both on the side of the Vichy government and with the Resistance. Two significant reasons explain each of these associations. On the one hand, we see the generalized desire to break with the society of the Third Republic. On the other, a generational phenomenon appears: the thirty-five and forty year olds, who had previously been the "youth of the 1930's," begin to move into leadership positions. This generation had been more or less influenced by the currents of ideas that surfaced in the pre-war period.

In the Vichy government, mainly during the early period,<sup>155</sup> we can see traces of personalist influence in the circles close to the secretariats of Youth and of Information. Sometimes, living under the same governmental "roof," amidst much conflict, one could find former adherents of the "Young Right," *Ordre Nouveau*, and *Esprit*. They might be thrown together in the movement of the *Compagnons de France* [Companions of France], in the cultural association *Jeune France* [Young France], working on the journal *Iddes* [Ideas], or in the schools for leaders, like Uriage.<sup>156</sup> But in such situa-

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<sup>153</sup> See Pierre Andreu, *Revoltes del'esprit* (Paris: Editions Kime, 1991).

<sup>154</sup> See Christian Roy, "Entre pensee et nature: Le personnalisme gascon," in *Bernard Charbonneau: Une vie entiere d denoncer la grande imposture*, ed. Jacques Prades (Toulouse: Editions Erfes, 1997), pp.35-49.

<sup>155</sup> [Translator's note: from 1940 to 1942].

<sup>156</sup> [Translator's note: for background on tire *Compagnons de France*, see Eugen Weber, *The Hollow Years: France in the 1930s* (New York: Norton, 1994; ISBN 0393036715); for Uriage, see Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944-1956* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992; ISBN 0520079213)].

tions the influence was based on a personalism warped by communitarianism and the authoritarian tendencies of the Vichy regime.<sup>157</sup>

In the Resistance, the first networks to organize were often no kinder than the partisans of the Vichy regime in their analysis of what they considered the decay in French society during the years preceding Germany's easy victory in 1940. For this reason, the Resistance also experienced the reappearance of themes and men from the personalist groups of the thirties. This happened, for instance, in Henri Frenay's movement "Combat," in *Defense de la France* [Defense of France], *Liberer et federer* [Liberate and Federate], and in the movement *Temoignage chretien* [Christian Testimony].<sup>158</sup> In these contexts, personalism was induced to compromise with the principles of the republican tradition, and became tinged with a degree of socialist and marxist influence.

Besides those who made such direct, instant commitments, there was the additional influence of those who moved somewhat rapidly from one tendency to the other, from Vichy to the Resistance. Mounier furnishes us with an example, when he ends up back in "Combat" after a very brief interlude with Vichy. Or the School of Uriage, which swung over to the Resistance in 1942. We should note that Uriage was a milieu where personalist influence touched young men who would launch their careers after the war, such as Hubert Beuve-Mery, the future founder of *Le Monde*, and Paul Delouvrier, an important figure in the upper echelons of the Gaullist administration of the Fifth Republic.<sup>159</sup>

Our third period opens in 1945. After the Liberation, the most easily spotted heirs of personalism are divided into two branches. The first is formed by the European federalist movements, which favor both the idea of a united Europe and the federalizing of the European nation-states. Many of the driving forces behind the 1930's groups (such as Robert Aron, Daniel Rops, Jean de Fabregues, Alexandre Marc, Thierry Maulnier and Denis de Rougemont), come back together again after the war. First they come across each other in the *Union europeenne des federalistes* [European Union of Federalists], and later in the context of the *Mouvement federaliste francais* [French Federalist Movement] or the *Mouvement federaliste europeen* [European Federalist Movement].<sup>160</sup> It is important to note that these bodies brought in men who in some cases came directly from the Resistance, whereas others had more or less flirted with some of the circles related to Vichy that we have mentioned earlier. It is also within this European framework that Jacques Ellul and Denis de Rougemont started a network of ecological study groups in the 1970's, related to the association *Ecoreupa* [Ecoropa, acronym for "Ecological Europe"].

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<sup>157</sup> See Michel Berges, *Vichy contre Mounier* (Paris: Economica, 1997).

<sup>158</sup> See H. Michel and B. Mirkin Guetzevitch, *Les idées politiques et sociales de la Résistance* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1954).

<sup>159</sup> See B. Comte, *Une utopie combattante: L'école des cadres d'Uriage* (Paris: Fayard, 1991).

<sup>160</sup> See A. Greilsammer, *Les mouvements fédéralistes en France de 1945 à 1974* (Nice: Presses d'Europe, 1975); *Du personnalisme au fédéralisme européen: En hommage à Denis de Rougemont* (Geneva: Editions du Centre Europe & de la Culture, 1989).

The second branch of the heirs of personalism after 1945 is the *Esprit* movement. Although some former members of *Esprit* were to be found as individuals in the European context, the journal itself, with Emmanuel Mounier, remained aloof, especially because of the anti-communist tendency which commitment to Europe seemed to entail. This stance calls into question the personalist identity of *Esprit* during the immediate post-war period, in spite of what Michel Winock has called its "philocommunism,"<sup>161</sup> a term that applied to the journal primarily between 1946 and 1949. In spite of this reservation, it is nevertheless true that *Esprit* was one of the great intellectual journals of the period just after the war, and that it has remained so to some degree until the present. Thus it constitutes one of the contemporary elements of the legacy of 1930's personalism, even if its identity as a personalist journal has been somewhat diluted as a result of the ups and downs it has suffered in recent decades.

Along with the *Esprit* networks, we must also mention the importance of the *Vie Nouvelle* [New Life] movement, which had connections with *Esprit*. Standing where social and religious commitment meet, *Vie Nouvelle* was founded by Andre Cruizat, who had come up through the Boy Scouts and the Vichy-related movement of the *Compagnons de France*. Both networks, *Esprit* and *Vie Nouvelle*, contributed to the continued presence of personalism in the intellectual left and in left-leaning Catholicism.<sup>162</sup>

We can consider that beyond this first circle, and through it, but also arriving by means of other routes, certain elements of personalist philosophy also had a rather profound influence on the overall landscape of French politics. In this way personalism has been one of the intellectual reference points of the popular republican movement, and thus of the Christian Democratic tendency, since the end of World War II. Etienne Borne, the intellectual spokesman for this movement, has never hidden his philosophical closeness to *Esprit*. Through some of its themes (participation, for example), and, more widely, through some of its social aspects, Gaullism also has some relation to personalism. This is all the more true considering that some intellectuals close to General de Gaulle came from the circle of *Ordre Nouveau* (such as J. Chauveau, A. Ollivier, and Daniel Rops, who was one of De Gaulle's first editors with Pion publishers). And before the war, De Gaulle himself was a reader of *Temps present*, the weekly that replaced *Sept* in 1937. There was a certain social liberalism, allied with the Christian Democratic movement in the centrist tendency of the Fifth Republic, in which we can also recognize some relationship with personalist inspiration.

Finally, through the role it played in the development of left-leaning Catholicism, personalist influence had an impact on the evolution of the French political left. This influence took two different routes: on the one hand, it came through trade unionism,

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<sup>161</sup> Michel Winock, *Histoire politique de la revue "Esprit" (1930-1950)* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1975; ISBN 2020026791); 2nd ed., *"Esprit": Des intellectuels dans la cite, 1930-1950* (Paris: Le Semi, 1996; ISBN 2020282224).

<sup>162</sup> *Le personnalisme d'Emmanuel Mounier, hier et demain. Pour un cinquantenaire* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1985).

with the evolution of the *Confederation Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens* (CFTC), and then with the creation of the *Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail* (CFDT). On the other hand, personalism had an impact by means of politics, through certain clubs for political thought, such as Jacques Delors' *Citoyen 60*,<sup>163</sup> and through certain circles within the *Parti Socialiste Unifié* (PSU). Going on from there, we can consider that personalist influence contributed to the emergence of what the 1980's called the "Second Left."<sup>164</sup> Personalism also surely contributed to softening up the statist Jacobinism of the traditional left, by emphasizing the importance of such themes as decentralization, community life, and joint worker-management control.

This personalist diaspora spans the period from just after World War II until the present. We can illustrate it somewhat anecdotally by means of two quotations. The first comes from Charles Millon, who was at the time leader of the representatives of the UDF party (*Union pour la démocratie française*) in the National Assembly. He declared the following, in an interview with *Le Monde*, speaking of what he called the "personalist family": "I am a child of this family, and I believe all the more strongly that it is the path to follow at this time when our society is adrift"<sup>165</sup> At about the same time, we find in a book by J. F. Kesler on *La gauche dissidente et le nouveau parti socialiste* ["The dissident left and the new socialist party"], a statement by Michel Rocard saying that he owed the bulk of his early intellectual formation to three influences: Marx, Jacques Pirenne, and Meunier.<sup>166</sup>

To finish this survey, we must also mention the influence of personalism on what we could call "conciliar Catholicism," through French personalist intermediaries, but also through personalism's international influence. For example, the first post-communist head of government in Poland, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, was an avowed personalist. Furthermore, he contributed to the spread of personalist ideas with his journal *Wiercz*, before he became Solidarity's adviser.<sup>167</sup> We can also note that this Polish influence poses a question that goes well beyond Poland, namely that of the relationship of personalism with the political and social thought of Pope John Paul II, who was a personal friend of Tadeusz Mazowiecki when he was Archbishop of Cracow.<sup>168</sup> More generally, we may add that in the course of the last fifty years, international references to personalism have been found in various and sometimes surprising contexts, from the Diem regime in South Vietnam to the Bathist party in the Middle East, from the

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<sup>163</sup> See B. Maris, *Jacques Delors, artiste et martyr* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1993).

<sup>164</sup> See H. Hamon and P. Roatman, *La deuxième gauche* (Paris: Ramsay, 1982), and J. F. Kesler, *De la gauche dissidente au nouveau parti socialiste* (Toulouse: Privat 1990).

<sup>165</sup> *Le Monde* (19 Nov. 1990). See also *Le Monde* (17 Sept 1991).

<sup>166</sup> In an interview with J. F. Kesler, *De la gauche dissidente au nouveau parti socialiste* (Toulouse: Privat 1990), p. 437.

<sup>167</sup> See J. M. Domenach, "L'internationale personaliste," in *Le personalisme d'Emmanuel Mounier, hier et demain: Pour un cinquantenaire* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1985).

<sup>168</sup> See John Hellman, in *Le personalisme d'Emmanuel Mounier, hier et demain: Pour un cinquantenaire* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1985), p. 129. See also, in the same volume (p. 176), the testimony of J. M. Domenach: "The influence of *Esprit* touched Cardinal Wojtyla; he told me so himself."

Lebanese Falangists of Pierre Gemayel to Pierre Trudeau's journal *Cite libre* in the 1950's in Canada.

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This personalist influence has been genuine, but it has also been a *diffuse* influence, diluted through its coexistence with other currents of thought. We can wonder about the reasons for this influence, and may be tempted to find two basic causes for the attraction people have found in it:

1. The first seems to lie in the "problem of civilization" we spoke of earlier; that is, in personalism's comprehensive approach, which tends to consider humanity in all dimensions of its existence. Humanity is called into question by the evolution of modern societies, and not just by some political or economic dimension. If there is a crisis of modernity, it concerns our entire personality.

2. The second is more ambiguous, and seems to stem from what we can call the temptation of the "third way"; that is to say, from the concern to escape from the constraints of choices between two alternatives. Such alternatives, experienced as mutilating, have often seemed to be imposed by the realities of twentieth-century life: left/right, capitalism/communism, individualism/collectivism, idealism/materialism.

In this second perspective, part of personalism's appeal has probably been its ability to attain a synthesis beyond the usual pairs of options. It has allowed people to satisfy and reconcile aspirations that seemed at first to be contradictory. But here lies the problematic question of whether this dimension of synthesis has not sometimes amounted to a syncretistic dimension, the expression of a certain eclecticism.

This question seems all the more justifiable in the light of what we have observed, which we might call the "plasticity" or "polymorphism" of personalism: its ability to adapt on occasion to contexts with considerably different characteristics and orientations. This may lead some to wonder if we should use the singular or the plural: whether we should speak of "personalism" or "personalisms." The philosopher Jacques Maritain asked this question right after World War II, and history since that time has not diminished its relevance: "Nothing would be farther from the truth than to speak of 'personalism' as a school or doctrine. It is a phenomenon stemming from reaction against conflicting errors, an inevitably mixed phenomenon. There is no personalist doctrine—just personalist aspirations. There are at least a dozen personalist doctrines, and often all they have in common is the word "person." Some of these doctrines lean toward one of the opposing errors between which they place themselves. There are personalisms with a Proudhonian slant, personalisms tending towards dictatorship, and personalisms tilted towards anarchism."<sup>169</sup>

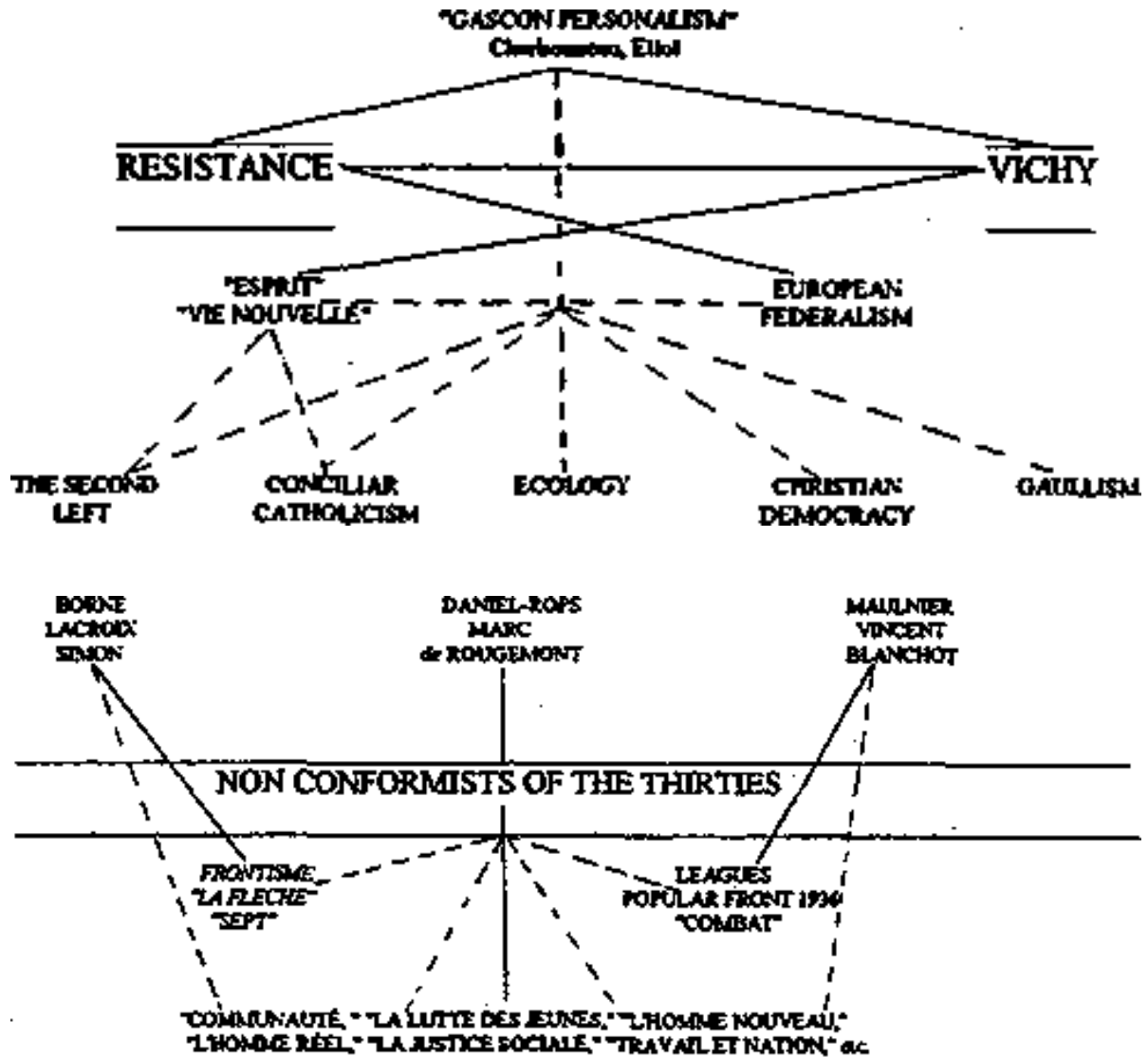
Even if we do not necessarily share all the points of view expressed by Maritain in this quotation, his words offer a particularly interesting basis for reflection on the extent and the ambiguities of the later influence of the personalism of the 1930's, as

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<sup>169</sup> Jacques Maritain, *La personne et le bien commun* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1946), pp. 8-9.



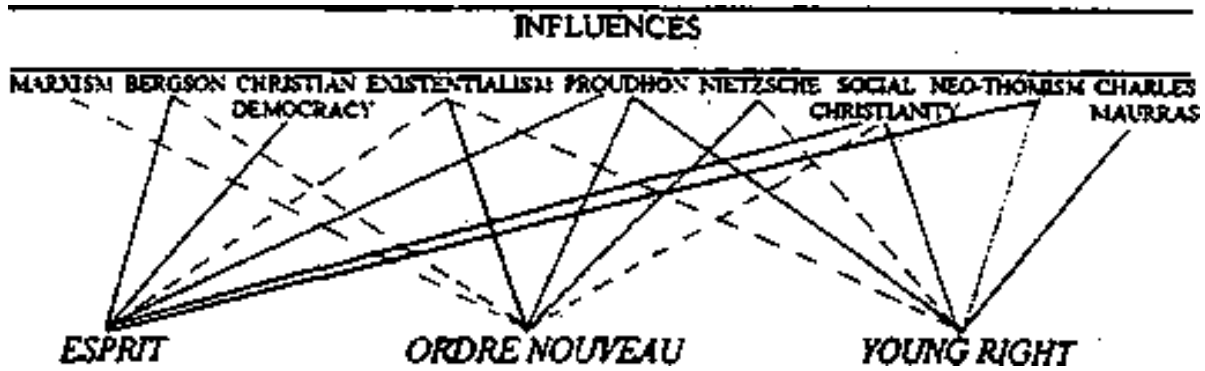
we have examined it, especially when we add to Maritain's various "personalisms" the "ecological personalism" or the "personalist ecology" of Bernard Charbonneau.



## Patrick Chastenet Remembers Jacques Ellul

"It is not possible to build a just society with unjust means. It is impossible to create a free society based on slavery. These assertions lie at the heart of my reasoning."<sup>170</sup>

<sup>170</sup> [Translator's note: these originally untitled lines were written shortly after Ellul's death in 1994, and intended for inclusion in the *Ellul Forum's* commemorative issue (no. 13, July 1994), but were inadvertently not included. Since that time, the author has received the coveted "Agregation" degree,



- Patrick Troude-Chastenet, *Jacques Ellul on Religion, Technology and Politics: Conversations with Patrick Troiwe-Chastenet*, trans. Joan Mendes France; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998, p. 28.

My first encounter with Jacques Ellul must date back to the fall of 1974, on the Talence campus of the University of Bordeaux. I had just turned 19 years old, and I was a second-year student at the Institute of Political Studies of Bordeaux at the University. Right from the first meeting of Ellul's course, my fellow students and I were struck not only by the size of the class, but also by its unusual makeup. The "lower hall" was full to overflowing (having no other way of distinguishing the Montesquieu Auditorium from the Siegfried Auditorium, we had taken to calling them the "lower hall" and the "upper hall." That terminology caught on, and is still in use).

About thirty American students, easily recognizable by their backpacks (not yet common on French campuses at that stage), crowded around to hear him. In the first rows, we could also see a blind man using a tape recorder to record the master's words<sup>171</sup>, and several austere gentlemen who looked like pastors who would have seemed more at home attending classes for senior citizens.

Even before hearing him speak, we said to each other under our breath that we were going to be dealing with an unusual professor. I was not yet acquainted with the work of Ernst Junger, but later, I could not help seeing something of the Ellul I had known in this character in *Eumeswil* (1977): "Vigo is one of those prophets who enjoy a wider reputation abroad than in their own country. His name is a byword among those in the know, from Beirut to Uppsala, provoking secret anger among his colleagues. And explaining why listeners come from afar are always found at his lectures.

The first course of Ellul's that I attended was called "The Philosophy and Thought of Karl Marx." I have just looked up my notes from those lectures for the purpose of writing these lines. As I reread them, I cannot find a trace of one of his remarks, deeply engraved on my memory, which went more or less like this: "It does not really matter

having moved up the academic ladder from Assistant Professor ("Maitre de Conferences").

<sup>171</sup> Only Willem Vanderburg could say if he was the person in question.

to me if you are marxist or anti-marxist. In either case, I want you to be what you are for good reasons; that is, knowing what you believe and why.”

A concern for objectivity should be the most basic rule for every teacher. And we know, at least since Max Weber, that we must distinguish value judgments from judgments of fact, and that the scholar’s vocation differs from that of the politician. But in the area of the social sciences, especially in the 1970’s, university lecterns sometimes turned into veritable political grandstands.

In what context did Ellul expound Marx’s thought? Valery Giscard d’Estaing had just begun his seven-year presidential term. The political right was in power. But although the Socialist candidate Francois Mitterrand had been beaten again, the political left held sway over people’s minds. Most intellectuals’ thought was leftist, and marxism and its various permutations dominated the social sciences as a whole. On the local scene, the Law School of Bordeaux remained very conservative, whereas the majority of the students in “Sciences-Po” (the Institute of Political Science) had leftist convictions.

As for me, I had several Trotskyite friends, but I was moving more in a situationalist and libertarian direction. I will always remember the disappointment of a fellow student, a Maoist leader of the PCMLF (Marxist-Leninist Communist Party of France), as we left one of Ellul’s lectures. Although this student had admired for weeks our Wednesday professor’s presentation of marxist philosophy, suddenly he charged Ellul with betraying Marx. But I had not noticed any change of direction in Ellul’s tone or in his method.

Was this professor objective? As much as a person can be when treating such a subject Beginning in 1977,<sup>1</sup> I had cause to re-read, and to learn, the content of this course. I had been given the responsibility of assisting Ellul by giving some of the oral examinations his students had to take. Between file two of us, we had 250 students to evaluate. At the same time, I had the job of instructing the American students who took courses at the Institute of Political Studies. In this role I supervised about 30 students every year from universities in California and Colorado. It was my job to explain Ellul’s course to them, and I found real pleasure in doing this usually unrewarding job of tutoring.

It goes without saying that in both the oral examinations of French students and my instruction of the Americans, I made it a point of honor to respect scrupulously the vision of Marx given by the author of *The Betrayal of the West* (French, 1975; English, 1978), even if my own ideas at that time were somewhat different. Ellul, for example, considered that Lenin was not the successor of Marx, but that Marx was the precursor of Lenin. Was it “objective” to assert that Lenin was already contained within Marx, or to claim that if Hitler had won the war, marxism would have disappeared off the face of the earth?

As for the rest, Ellul demonstrated admirably that marxist thought constituted a veritable system, from which it was impossible to detach any one of its elements without the risk of distorting it. Thus it was impossible to separate its method and its

content, or to try to eliminate materialism from the theory as a whole. A warning to Christians who find the author of *Das Kapital* appealing!

Ellul avoided speaking explicitly of this in his classes, but at the time, both the Communist Party's "politics of the outstretched hand" and the Church of Liberation Theology were in fashion.. Bookstores were inundated with books of encounters between the principal communist officials (such as the ineffable Georges Marchais) and Christian leaders enamoured of dialogue with the officially recognized defenders of all the damned of the earth.

At the end of the 1970's, within this context, when part of the Church was flirting with the Communist Party, Ellul published *Jesus and Marx* (French, 1979; English, 1988). In this book, Ellul again went against the stream, as he showed the radical incompatibility between the Biblical message and marxist doctrine. For Ellul, both the Old and New Testaments lead one to dispute all forms of political power. For this reason, as he wrote in his books (although he never said so in his classes), one should choose Bakunin over Marx.

Ellul's various stands, always unusual, finally had the Parisian intelligentsia placing him in the category of "rightist thinkers," the abomination of abominations on any campus! I was unaware at the time that starting in the mid-1930's, with Bernard Charbonneau, and prompted by "Gascon" leanings within Personalism, Ellul had refused to submit to the very reductionist and very French distinction between left and right.

Rereading just now my notes from another of Ellul's courses, "Marx's Successors" (1977-78), I reflect on the fact that 20 years have passed, and that I am now Assistant Professor at Montesquieu University and at the Institute of Political Studies of Bordeaux, where I teach political science. Which of my present students would be capable of handling the examination questions I used to assign to Ellul's students: revolution and strategy in Bernstein; economic and tactical criticisms addressed by Kautsky to Bernstein; Rosa Luxembourg's explanation of the economics of imperialism; Lenin's responses to the criticisms formulated by Kautsky?

Although it enjoyed hegemony for a long period in French universities, marxism had already fallen from fashion when it failed to survive the implosion of the Soviet regime. Ellul, however, taught me to distinguish the "vulgarization" of Marx's thought from the work of Karl Marx, and, above all, I believe, an ethic that consists of presenting ideas one does not agree with as faithfully as possible . This is a matter of "scientific" honesty of the most elementary sort, but primarily a question of respecting the freedom of the individual that lies dormant within each student.

Going well beyond marxism, Ellul also taught me to be on my guard against any thought structured in the form of a system. Freedom of thought implies giving up all forms of intellectual complacency.

In a more personal vein, Ellul only increased my distrust, which has grown over the years, concerning all forms of political power. He believed in relativizing politics; that is, in refusing just as vigorously both the political illusion and its symmetrical opposite: apolitical smugness. Relativizing politics means recognizing the adversary in

my enemy, and the neighbor in my adversary. In other words, putting politics back where it belongs.

Much later, I began to read the theological side of Ellul's work, in preparation for writing my book *Lire Ellul: Introduction a l'oeuvre socio-politique de Jacques Ellul*.<sup>172</sup> I discovered that, although perhaps I could not be *leaven*, or a bit of that *salt of the earth* the Scriptures speak of, I could at least act as the "sentry" called for by the prophet Ezekiel. In this way, at my humble level, I could join with the long cohort of watchmen magnificently exemplified by another . famous Aquitanian: Etienne de la Boetie. The "watchman" is the one who lives not isolated, but *at a distance* from the struggles of the City.

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<sup>172</sup> [Translator's note: Reading Ellul: Introduction to die socio-political work of Jacques Ellul." Published in French at Bordeaux: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 1992; ISBN 2-86781-129-5].

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4 November 1989 Judaism & Christianity after Auschwitz & Hiroshima

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3 June 1989 Eller and Ellul on Christian Anarchy

"Be Reconciled" (Jacques Ellul); "Response to Michael Bauman" (Jacques Ellul); "The Paradox of Anarchism and Christianity" (Jacques Ellul); "Ellul's Crowning Achievement" (Hu Elz); "Christian Anarchy" (Vemard Eller); review of Jacques Ellul *Anarchic et christianisme* and Vemard Eller *Christian Anarchy* (Katherine Temple); review of Jacques Ellul, *Jesus and Marx* (Daniel Clendenin); Bibliographic report on some recent British discussions regarding Christianity and technology" (Carl Mitcham).

2 November 1988 Ellul's Universalist Eschatology

Review of Willem Vanderburg, *The Growth of Minds and Cultures* (Katherine Temple); Review of Jacques Ellul, *Jesus and Marx* (Michael Bauman); "The Importance of Eschatology for Ellul's Ethics and Soteriology: A Response to Darrell Fasching" (Ken Morris); "A Second Forum Response to Fasching" (Marva J. Dawn); "Fasching's Reply to Morris and Dawn"; "Bibliographic Notes on Theology and Technology" (Carl Mitcham and Jim Grote).

1 August 1988 Debut Issue

"Welcome" (Darrell Fasching); Review of Daniel B. Clendenin, *Theological Method in Jacques Ellul* (Marva Dawn); "Freedom and Universal Salvation: Ellul and Origen"; "The Ethical Importance of Universal Salvation" (Darrell Fasching); "A Visit with Jacques Ellul" (Marva Dawn).

# Book Reviews

## **The Labyrinth of Technology by Willem H. Vanderburg, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000**

Willem H. Vanderburg's extensive (476 + x pages) new volume has just appeared. In his own words, he has been influenced by the "assistance of many people, including my French mentor, the late Jacques Ellul, who taught me the dialectical method for doing interdisciplinary research" (p. xvi). In an analysis that has extensive implications for, especially, engineering education, Vanderburg examines preventive approaches to technological problems (part one); mapping the ecology of technology, upon which he argues the development of preventive approaches depends (parts two and three); and applying preventive approaches (part four). According to Vanderburg, "modern civilization is lost in a labyrinth of technology created by its social and environmental implications." His effort to map this terrain is thus an effort to find a way out.

Reviewed by Carl Mitcham, Professor of Liberal Arts, Colorado School of Mines, Golden, Colorado.

## **Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works by Joyce Main *Hanks***

*Research in Philosophy and Technology*, Supplement 5. Stamford CT: JAI Press, 2000. xiii., 206 pp.

This is the fourth major bibliographic work on Jacques Ellul published by Joyce Main Hanks (Professor of French, University of Scranton). The earlier volumes were also published in the *Research in*

*Philosophy and Technology* series (1984, 1991, 1995). The current effort is confined to Jacques Ellul's own works (books, articles, reviews, interviews) and omits the secondary literature about him.

With the corrections and additions Joyce Hanks has made to this version, it is the most accurate and comprehensive bibliography of Ellul's work ever available. The listing by itself is a monumental achievement of tenacity and detective work in several languages. But this volume is further enriched by a fine three-page biography Of Ellul

and by Hanks's helpful annotations on all fifty of Ellul's books and most of his thousand articles and reviews. Because of these annotations all Ellul scholars and students will find great pleasure in browsing each page. One learns a great deal about Ellul just from this volume. The annotated bibliography runs to 140 pages (not 99 pages as the errant table of contents suggests). It is followed by a thirty page "select subject index" and a thirty-three-page list of Ellul's publications in alphabetical order.

I thought I found a mistake and an omission when I first looked over this book—and that would hardly be a shock in view of the mass of details on its pages. However, when I checked again, more carefully, I discovered the bibliography was right after all. The only mistake I could find was on the table of contents pagination!

Bibliographic work like this is not very glamorous and does not make any best-seller lists but its value to scholars and students is impossible to praise sufficiently. We are once again, more than ever, indebted to Joyce Main Hanks for a wonderful effort and to Carl Mitcham and *Research in Philosophy and Technology* for their support.

Reviewed by David W. Gill, Carl I. Lindberg Professor of Applied Ethics, North Park University, Chicago, Illinois.

## International Jacques Ellul Society

### *Berkeley, California*

#### ☒ **an association of scholars and friends**

The UES links together scholars and friends of various specializations, vocations, backgrounds, and nations, who share a common interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), long time professor at the University of Bordeaux. Our three objectives are (1) to preserve and disseminate his literary and intellectual heritage, (2) to extend his penetrating social critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) to extend his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

The DES is the English-language sister-society' of the French-language *Association Internationale Jacques Ellul*. Together, we maintain a web site—[www.ellul.org](http://www.ellul.org)—as our common communications link for announcements and news of interest to our members, and as a resource for anyone with an interest in Jacques Ellul.

From time to time we announce meetings, lectures, and conferences (small or large, formal or informal, sponsored by the DES/ADE or by others) related to Ellul and his concerns.

#### ☒ **preserving a legacy**

Jacques Ellul published more than fifty books and nearly a thousand articles and reviews. Our mission is to preserve and make broadly available this great legacy by

- (1) completing the publication of Ellul's work in French (several works remain),
- (2) completing the English translation of his work and encouraging translations in other languages,

(3) republishing (in electronic as well as print formats) works that are no longer available,

(4) publishing a critical edition of Ellul's complete works in both French and English,

(5) maintaining a current, comprehensive bibliography of works by and about Ellul,

(6) organizing and making available the audio and video recordings of Ellul's lectures and interviews,

(7) making available an accurate biography of Ellul.

**☒ extending a critique**

Jacques Ellul is best known around the world for his penetrating critique of "la technique"—of the character and impact of technology on our world. The forces and institutions which shape 21<sup>st</sup> century life and which pose the greatest challenges to the health and future of humanity and nature were Ellul's critical interest. Our mission is to encourage continued research and critical thought in this tradition, with a special focus on technology but also including politics, economics, globalization, education, art, language, communication, religion, and popular culture. The UES is not an antiquarian society interested only in a reverent inspection of Jacques Ellul's works; it is, in the spirit of Ellul himself, a movement to encourage the extension of a serious critique of technological civilization.

**☒ researching a hope**

Jacques Ellul was not just a social critic but a theologian and activist in church and community. Because of his profound faith in the "Wholly Other" breaking into human history, he refused to become a pessimist about the predominantly negative social trends he studied. He insisted that he was above all a man of hope and freedom and searched for signs of hope in Holy Scripture and in history. Our mission is to encourage continued theological and ethical research on hope and freedom, with a special focus on the Jewish and Christian Scriptures.

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Anyone and everyone is welcome to become an DES member— on two conditions:

(1) agreement with the society's statement of purpose

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DES membership automatically confers membership in the French ADE.

**Contact the UES**

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**post: DES, Box 1033, Berkeley CA 94701**

**Support the UES**

The major publication projects which the DES is undertaking require substantial funding. The DES pursues such funding from charitable foundations, grant-making

organizations, and publishers, but this is a long and unpredictable process. However, with the generous support of DES members and friends, we can achieve a great deal together. Please contact us by e-mail or letter if you would like more detailed information on our budget, plans, and giving opportunities.

The DES is a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation. All gifts are taxdeductible for U.S. taxpayers.

## **UES Activities**

Please forward any news or announcements relevant to the members and friends of the DES. We want to do whatever we can to promote the discussion of Jacques Ellul and the extension of his critical interests.

We encourage the formation of study groups and sections of scholarly societies devoted to Ellul studies. We are currently exploring the best strategies for organizing annual gatherings in North America to discuss Ellul's sociology and his theology and ethics.

With the Association Internationale Jacques Ellul we are currently exploring how best to organize a series of international colloquia.

## **UES Leadership**

The International Jacques Ellul Society and L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul have been founded by a group of long-time students, scholars, and friends of Jacques Ellul, with the counsel and support of Jean, Yves, and Dominique Ellul, and as a French-American collaboration.

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**Issue #27 Jul 2001 — Ellul and  
Social Theorists**

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For the Critique of Technological Civilization  
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## From the Editor

Ellul is often listed with the great intellectuals of the 20th century in which he lived. As an indication of his stature, he was debated by the leading academics of his era. Ellul disdained elitism, for himself and others. He disapproved of cultic attention. However, he did engage the theorists of his time—social philosophers, political scientists, economists, theologians, and historians. He knew that ideas matter, and held his own with integrity and passion.

This issue of *The Ellul Forum* sets Ellul in the intellectual context of his contemporaries. Antonio Gramsci continues to be widely cited in the scholarly literature. This issue compares his notions of hegemony and civil society with Ellul's *la technique* and the technological order. Calvin Troup argues for including Ellul among the academics who dominate courses in rhetorical theory and criticism at today's universities—Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Frederic Jameson, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Jurgen Habermas and others. Troup challenges his colleagues to take Ellul seriously even though he questions many of the sacred assumptions of their academic heroes.

This issue only introduces a tiny fraction of the important issues at stake. How Ellul's ideas compare with and contradict those of other influential scholars has a host of important dimensions. Over its 14 years, the *Forum* has dealt with many of them and will continue to do so in the future. In the process, the *Forum* recognizes that Ellul himself worked in a large public arena not confined to academics. As described in Issue #25, Ellul's "defining orientation was public life as a whole. His thinking was geared to citizens, church members and consumers." He had a heart for everyday life and the non-specialist. His prophetic voice engaged the community.

And this larger framework we capture in the *Forum's* subtitle, "For the Critique of Technological Civilization." Coming to grips with the technological society and living distinctively within it is our common and public obligation as citizens. It requires collaborative work, international and cross-cultural understanding, and interdisciplinary thinking. The *Forum* is not limited to Ellul but a roundtable on the challenges of the technological order.

Clifford G. Christians, Editor

Henriette Charbonneau, the widow of Bernard Charbonneau, kindly offers two corrections for the article "Jacques Ellul and Bernard Charbonneau" by Joyce Hanks in the January 2001 issue (326) of the *Forum*. First, contrary to Hanks' statement that Charbonneau and Ellul broke with the personalist movement "in early 1937" (p. 4), Mme.



Charbonneau correctly states that this rift took place after the 28 July-1 August 1937 personalist congress held in Jouy-en-Josas. She adds that Ellul and Charbonneau began to consider their project of a “free university” during the summer of 1938 rather than after World War II (also on p. 4 of Hanks’ article).

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## About the. Ellul forum

### History & Purpose

*The Ellul Forum* has been published twice per year since August of 1988. Our goal is to analyze and apply Jacques Ellul’s thought to aspects of our technological civilization and carry forward both his sociological and theological analyses in new directions.

While *The Ellul Forum* does review and discuss Jacques Ellul, whom we consider one of the most insightful intellectuals of our era, it is not our intention to treat his writings as a body of sacred literature to be endlessly dissected. The appropriate tribute to his work is to carry forward its spirit and agenda for the critical analysis of our technical civilization. Ellul invites and provokes us to think new thoughts and enact new ideas. To that end we invite you to join the conversation in *The Ellul Forum*.

*The Ellul Forum* is an English-language publication but we are currently exploring ways of linking more fully with our francophone colleagues.

### Manuscript Submissions

Send original manuscripts (essays, responses to essays in earlier issues) to:

Clifford Christians, Editor, *The Ellul Forum*  
Institute of Communications Research  
University of Illinois  
810 S. Wright Street, Suite 228  
Urbana, IL 61801 USA

Please send both hard copy and computer disc versions, indicating the software and operating system used (e.g., Microsoft Word for Windows 98). Type end notes as text (do not embed in the software footnote/endnote part of your program).

Essays should not exceed twenty pages, double-spaced, in length.

Manuscript submissions will only be returned if you enclose a self-addressed, adequately postaged envelope with your submission.

*The Ellul Forum* also welcomes suggestions of themes for future issues.

## Books & Reviews

**Books.** *The Ellul Forum* considers for review books (1) about Jacques Ellul, (2) significantly interacting with or dependent on Ellul's thought, or (3) exploring the range of sociological and theological issues at the heart of Ellul's work. We can not guarantee that every book submitted will actually be reviewed in *The Ellul Forum* nor are we able to return books so submitted.

**Book Reviews.** If you would like to review books for *The Ellul Forum*, please submit your vita/resume and a description of your reviewing interests.

Send all books, book reviews, and related correspondence to:

David W. Gill, Associate Editor, *The Ellul Forum*  
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A subscription to *The Ellul Forum* is included in the annual membership fee for the International Jacques Ellul Society. To become a member (and receive *The Ellul Forum*) send a check payable to "IJES" in the amount of \$20 (U.S.). Checks or money orders must be drawn in U.S. funds. Send check with your name and complete address to

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### Back Issues

Back issues of *The Ellul Forum* are available for \$5.00 each, postage included. Send your requests, with your complete mailing address and a check or money order drawn in U.S. funds for the correct amount, to

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## Ellul versus Gramsci

By Clifford Christians

Radical scholarship today appeals often to Antonio Gramsci. His ideological hegemony is widely considered a framework of unusual power. For many, Gramsci sets the standard for critical theory and propaganda studies.

But this essay contradicts the conventional wisdom by contending that Jacques Ellul has actually given the totalizing view its most sophisticated formulation. While likewise critical, covert in inflection, and all encompassing in his assumptions, Ellul centers the problem on the technological order and thereby offers a more surehanded direction for social change.

*Gramsci's Civil Society*

The workers' movement in northern Italy failed after World War I. No insurrection against Fascism developed among the laboring class of western Europe, and Antonio Gramsci had a prison lifetime to account for the defeat.

During student days at the University of Turin he joined the Italian Socialist Party, and wrote for the socialist newspapers *Il Grido del Popolo* and *Avanti*. In 1919 he founded the weekly journal, *L'Ordine Nuovo*, interpreting the Russian Revolution for

Italian factory councils and aiming to build working class power.<sup>1</sup> He developed into a formidable commentator whose influence extended far beyond the ranks of the party itself. From 1922-24 he collaborated with the Comintern in Moscow and Vienna, all the while believing the urban and rural poor would unite in rebellion against capitalism.<sup>2</sup> Upon his election to the Italian Parliament in 1924, Gramsci returned home, took control of the Italian Communist Party, wrested it from sectarianism, and molded the ICP toward a mass-based revolutionary force.

But by 1926 the Fascist police had conquered, sentencing him to twenty years behind bars. Doctors had earlier attempted to cure his malformed spine by suspending him for long periods from a ceiling beam; but the treatment left him hunchbacked, and barely five feet tall. Gramsci suffered with nervous disorders and precarious health. He never met his second son born soon after his jail term began, and his wife's nervous breakdown destroyed family contact forever. Prison censorship and the unavailability of books or archival resources crippled him too. Only when Mussolini intervened was he moved terminally ill to the Formia Clinic midway between Rome and Naples where he died a few months later of a cerebral hemorrhage at forty six. Meanwhile, his sister-in-law Tatiana Schucht and cellmate Trombetti had smuggled out thirty-three notebooks via diplomatic bag to Moscow - 2,848 handwritten pages, published posthumously in seven volumes with arguments impacted on each other, but guaranteeing that this national anti-Fascist hero had become an original Marxist theoretician of historic importance.

To account for the absence of a revolutionary consciousness, Gramsci centered on the profound political transformations of monopoly capitalism. Politics can no longer be understood as a specialized and separate activity, but as a struggle for power permeating social life on all levels. A narrow, legal-institutional state apparatus coercing the masses is inverted in Gramsci's political theory to a protracted "war of position" over occupying civil society as a whole (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 108-10, 229-39).<sup>3</sup> And the instrument for mobilizing public support into a power bloc Gramsci identified as ideological hegemony. He launched the concept already before imprisonment, but brought it to precision in the isolation of his cell:

What we can do, for the moment, is to fix two major superstructure! levels: the one that can be called "civil society," that is the ensemble of organisms commonly called private, and that of "political society" or the State. These two levels correspond on the one hand to the function of hegemony which the dominant group exercises throughout

---

<sup>1</sup> Turin was a sophisticated laboratory for Gramsci's writing and analysis during this period. It was home of Italy's most advanced industry-automobiles, airplanes, and Fiat tractors. More than *Vi* million of its population were factory workers in 1918, and the city was rocked with labor revolts between 1912 and 1920.

<sup>2</sup> Q. Hoare and G. N. Smith (Gramsci, 1971, p. xlvii) conclude: "Until more is known about Gramsci's life and activity in Moscow (May 1922 - November 1923) and Vienna (December 1923 - May 1924), it will not be possible to reconstruct fully his political biography for these crucial years."

<sup>3</sup> For elaboration, see Gramsci's (1971, pp. 206-276) essay "State and Civil Society." For a review of the ambiguities in his use of this distinction, see Anderson (1977). For detailed autobiographical accounts, see Ellul (1981b, 1982, 1989).

society and on the other hand to that of direct domination or command exercised through the State and juridical government (Gramsci, 1971, p. 12).

By *Prison Notebook 4* hegemony assumes its classic Gramscian dimension as a fusion of economic, moral, political, and economic objectives through ideological struggle. A hegemonic class, in other words, absorbs the value systems of other social groups into its own. Previous ideological terrain is transformed when a common worldview emerges as the "unifying principle for a new collective will" (Mouffe, 1979, p. 191). "Politics thereby ceases to be conceived as a separate specialist activity and becomes a dimension which is present in all fields of human activity ... There is not one aspect of human experience which escapes politics and this extends as far as commonsense" (Mouffe, 1979, p. 201). A nation-state is not fundamentally a political order but a social system.

Gramsci defines ideology as a conception of the world "which becomes a cultural movement, a 'religion,' a 'faith,'" implicit in all "manifestations of individual and collective life" and producing practical activity. Given this definition, "the problem is that of preserving the ideological unity of the entire social bloc which that unity serves to cement and unify" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 328). And Gramsci insists that a power bloc in advanced capitalism does not merely impose its ruling ideology on the subservient. An extensive struggle is essential to forging control, "first in the ethical field and then in that of politics proper" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 333). Whereas coercion may be the province of the State apparatus, hegemony in civil society is an ongoing and historically contingent process of containment, of mobilizing diverse ideological elements into a coherent discourse and common set of practices. For Gramsci, in its normative meaning, hegemony is the "political, intellectual and moral leadership of the working class over all anti-capitalist sectors" (Mouffe, 1971, p. 15). But that normative sense cannot obscure historically contingent and unpredictable outcomes in constituting social power.

Hegemony is not the always, ever-present, guaranteed position of dominance of a ruling class or a dominant social bloc. Rather it represents the struggle of such a bloc to articulate a variety of social and ideological practices within a "structure-in-dominance" so as to achieve a dominant social alliance to exert leadership, direction and authority over a whole social formation, including over the dominated classes within it (Grossberg and Slack, p. 89).

The road to hegemony is creating consensus by a revolutionary dialectic of disarticulation and rearticulation - coopting rival hegemonic principles and colonizing the popular consciousness into a controlling worldview. Intellectuals who organize the web of beliefs which infuse civil society are particularly crucial as a social force, and intellectuals were Gramsci's (1971, p. 5-23) starting point in the prison notebooks. Through intellectuals, broadly understood, the ideology that wins the war of position becomes exercised through all available hegemonic apparatuses: schools, churches, the media, art and architecture, the legal system, economic activity, and even the name of the streets (Mouffe, 1971, p. 187). The hegemony of a particular historical bloc occurs when there is intellectual and moral unity on the fundamental questions that drive the

struggle, thus creating the dominance of “a fundamental social group over a series of subordinate groups” and constituting an organic popular unity for the life of the state as a whole (Gramsci, 1971, p. 182).

In recapturing a non-instrumental and permeating politics, Gramsci contributes substantially to theoretical debates in Marxism. Orthodox Marxism defines ideology as false consciousness directly determined by relative class position. Rather than reducing hegemony to inculcation by an already constituted class power, Gramsci understands it as a terrain on which social groups acquire consciousness of themselves. Thus he rejects a unified ideological subject — for example, “the proletarian with its ‘correct’ revolutionary thoughts or blacks with their already guaranteed anti-racist consciousness.” He favors instead “a multifaceted... complex, fragmentary and contradictory conception” of pluralistic selves (Hall, 1986, p. 22) Moreover, in the Marxist tradition Gramsci develops a total and radical critique of a mechanistic, shrunken economism in which a society’s economic foundations alone are determining. The Second International presumed that capitalism’s collapse followed inevitably from economic contradictions; believing in economism, Gramsci concluded, was the root cause of the massive worker defeats.

As an alternative to such reductionism in which political and ideological factors become epiphenomena, Gramsci substitutes a philosophy of praxis. In hegemony a national popular culture becomes dominant, with ideological superstructures primary and the economy determinant in the last instance. Likewise, Gramsci’s hegemonic collective renounces a strict corporatist conception of “class-belonging aimed at cultivating pure proletarian values.” As a result, “Gramsci has left us much more than a theory of politics: in fact his legacy to us is a new conception of socialism” (Mouffe, 1971, p. 15). He was a political journalist lacking the general theoretical scope of Emile Durkheim or Max Weber, but without him “Marxist theory cannot adequately explain the complex social phenomena which we encounter in the modern world” (Hall, 1986, p. 6). Gramsci is a major starting point for critical theorists who integrate the culture-politics relationship. His enlarged state combining a system of coercion plus consent has opened the way for understanding how power operates in the social order. Chantal Mouffe (1971, p. 188) insists that the *Prison Notebooks* anticipated Althusser: “The material nature of ideology, its existence as the necessary level of all social formations and its function as the producer of subjects are all implicit in Gramsci.” Mouffe’s post-Marxist theorizing with Ernesto Laclau (1985, p. 4) “goes far beyond Gramsci,” yet they rank Gramsci “of capital importance” nonetheless. Raymond Williams (1977, pp. 108-14) devotes a chapter to him. *Policing the Crisis*, a key text in the history of cultural studies, represents Stuart Hall’s return to Gramsci. As Hall characterizes it, cultural studies had been struggling over two dominant paradigms, the one semiotic or intersubjective (represented by Raymond Williams) and the other structuralist in character (represented principally by Althusser). Gramsci releases us from a dead-end debate, enabling us to identify power conceptually while deeply grounding it in concrete historical conditions. As a practical consequence for Hall, Gramsci’s hegemony

brings ethnicity and gender decisively into our analysis. Todd Gitlin (1979) has organized his understanding of entertainment and news around Gramsci. John Fiske (1987, pp. 40-41) quarrels with some of the applications, but does not question hegemony's conceptual power.

In order to critique Gramsci adequately, this expanded body of work with all its trajectories ought to be included in the assessment. But given his seminal role and in order to deepen the argument, I concentrate on Gramsci's framework itself. He is clearly a heavyweight in Marxist political theory regarding the modern state. Every serious critical theory of public opinion formation finds hegemony inescapable. But Gramsci also serves as a philosopher of social transformation, and in this arena I find his framework fundamentally flawed.

For all of his sophistication in integrating power, politics, and discourse, Gramsci includes no philosophy or sociology of technology. His social theory does not radically account for the impact of twenty-first century technology on ideological formation.<sup>4</sup> And it is this lacuna that Jacques Ellul fills in a distinctive manner without sacrificing political vibrancy.

#### *Ellul's Technocratic Culture*

Ellul's political activism matches the intensity of Antonio Gramsci. He participated briefly in the Spanish Civil War, joined the Paris riots against the Fascists, and openly opposed the Vichy government in 1940 until he was dismissed from his professoriate at the University of Strasbourg. During World War II, along with Camus, Malraux, and Sartre, he was a leader in the French Resistance, operating from a small farm outside Paris. After liberation, Ellul worked for three years as the deputy mayor of Bordeaux concentrating on commerce and public works. On the national scene, he spearheaded a group of intellectuals who forced the French government to withdraw from Algeria.

While Gramsci's crusades landed him in prison, Ellul spent the bulk of his career (1947-1980) as a Professor in the Institute of Political Studies at the University of Bordeaux - specializing in the history and sociology of institutions, Marxism, Roman law, technology, and propaganda. Ellul's assessment of political involvement becomes integrated with his historical and theoretical analyses of social institutions, leading him to a different conclusion about twentieth century culture than Gramsci's. Instead of the latter's civil society, Ellul focused on technocratic culture.

Ellul developed the argument that the technological phenomenon decisively defines contemporary life. We can no longer divide society into capitalists and workers as Gramsci did; the phenomenon is completely different and more abstract. We now have technological organizations on one side and all humanity on the other — the former driven by necessity and human beings demanding freedom. Ellul insisted that we read the world in which we live, not through the window of capitalist structures, but in terms of the technological order. From Ellul's perspective, we have now entered a tech-

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<sup>4</sup> For the general failure of ideology theory to anticipate fully modern technology, see Gouldner (1976).

nological civilization. Technology is not merely one more arena for philosophers and sociologists to investigate, but a new foundation for understanding the self, human institutions, and ultimate reality. A society is technological, Ellul argues, not because of its machines, but from the pursuit of efficient techniques in every area of human endeavor. Unlike previous eras where techniques are constrained within a larger complex of social values, the pervasiveness and sophistication of modern techniques reorganize society to conform to their demand for efficiency. Scientific techniques are applied not just to nature, but to social organizations and our understanding of personhood. Civilizations across history have engaged in technical activities and produced technological products, but modern society has sacralized the genius behind machines and uncritically allowed its power to infect not just industry, engineering, and business but also politics, education, the church, labor unions, and international relations.

Ellul's concern is not primarily with machines and tools but with the spirit of machineness that underlies them. In his view, modern society is so beguiled by technical productivity that it unconsciously reconstructs all social institutions on this model. Because of their extraordinary prowess, modern techniques tend to subordinate all other, less efficient values to their requirements. As a result, all appearance of change created by techniques remains fundamentally an illusion. In this sense, for Ellul, finding freedom in a technological civilization is in essence a religious problem. Unable to establish a meaningful life outside the artificial ambience of a technological culture, human beings place their ultimate hope in it. Seeing no other source of security, and failing to recognize the illusoriness of their technical freedom, they become slaves to the exacting determinations of efficiency. The transition to a technological society is for Ellul (1989, pp. 134-5; cf. 1980) more fundamental than anything the human race has experienced over the last five thousand years.

#### *Critical Consciousness*

The absence of a critical consciousness is the enemy for Ellul as it was for Gramsci. But rather than resistance in the face of political coercion and consensus, Ellul centers on defying the technological imperative. He is not calling for opposition to technological products, but to technicism. He is not a medievalist, a neo-luddite, or an anti-technologist. The issue is the psycho-political imaginary universe which humans constitute and reinforce. A critical consciousness entails that we desacralize technology, and we free our language from technological metaphors. Those empowered with a critical consciousness condemn technicism. The essential condition for social transformation, is destroying technicism as unacceptable worship of a modern god. The empowered resist the idolatrous attitudes, intentions, and aims that drive technology forward. They condemn unqualified worship of the technological enterprise for its own sake. Against an overweening technocratic mystique that ridicules the spiritual as invalid, a culture must be developed in which questions of meaning, life's purpose, and moral values predominate. To demythologize technology effectively means to sever at its root the blind faith that technological prowess will lead to one achievement after another. It drives home the contrast between a technology touted as ~ humanity's best



hope for the future and one of limited means to achieve particular ends, between a technology that becomes an end in itself and an instrument in achieving chosen ends. Ellul (1964, p. vi) castigates the mind-set that is "committed to the quest for continually improved means to carelessly examined ends." He opposes the powerful phenomenon of machineness as a dehumanizing force and exposes it as contrary to the norms of love and justice.

Technicism in politics insists on direct participation as the catchword for effective government. Through sophisticated communications technology, everyone can share in the decisionmaking process and finally achieve in practice the popular democracy long heralded in theory. Electronic hardware, we are assured, can provide accounts so detailed, swift, rich and accurate that at last people will bring their "intelligence to bear on resolving the central problems of society" (Westin, 1971, p. 1). In that spirit, technicians anticipate a vast decentralization of political authority made possible by mechanized information networks. By contrast, Ellul regards direct democracy—in all its variations—as a dangerous delusion which actually resolves nothing since the fundamental issue lies elsewhere, embedded in the nature of technology itself.

Being liberated from technicism is not merely a question of message, but of the medium as well. There can be no isolated, neutral understandings of technology as though it exists in a presuppositionless vacuum. Instead technology proceeds out of our whole human experience and is directed by our ultimate **commitments**. Technology is value-laden, the product of our primordial valuing activities as human beings. It not only arises as technology interacts with political and social factors, but emerges from the basic fact that technological objects are unique, not universal. Any technological instrument embodies particular values which by definition give to this artifact properties that other artifacts do not possess.

Gramsci's social theory, sharpened in the teeth of Italian Fascism, generates a rich conceptual capital: hegemony, traditional and organic intellectuals, civil society, passive revolution, historical bloc, and transformism. These motifs invigorate socialist theory across a broad spectrum; but they are still centered on political transformation within monopoly capitalism. On the other hand, Ellul's technocratic culture, situated in terms of the broad patterns of history, forces advanced industrialism to the forefront. Even if Fascist hegemony were replaced by progressive democracy, Ellul (1971) would argue, or Stalinism by enlightened socialism, without a radical reversal of the technicism in those political orders, the revolution is illusory. And in the process of orienting the debate around technology, Ellul builds up a repertoire of crucial distinctions about technology and its role in the body politic.

Ellul is thus more detailed and precise than Gramsci regarding the enemy identified by a critical consciousness. And while both emphasize resistance, Gramsci's opposition involves an ongoing struggle without guarantees. Ellul's resistance is as stridently oppositional but aims in a normative direction. One label for Ellul's (1969) strategy is radical nonviolence, a careful decision to withhold some vital part of self, a conscientious exclusion of all physical and psychological violence. The critical matter for

Ellul, as it was for Max Weber (Mayer, 1943, p. 128), is withstanding a pre-emption, protecting oneself from "the parcelling out of his soul, from the supreme mastery of the bureaucratic way of life." Ellul does not advocate ideological or pietistic pacifism, but our taking deliberate exception to today's monolithic apparatus. He (1967b, p. 221) does not recommend that we abandon all interest in the *res publica*, "but on the contrary... achieve it by another route, come to grips with it again in a different way, on a more real level, and in a decisive contest." Pre-emption is the initial phase, not the conclusion.

Ellul places himself in that powerful tradition of moral philosophy, self-realization ethics, where effectiveness emerges only from opinions fundamentally altered, lives nourished deeply at a fresh source, reordered patterns not under *la technique's* tutelage. However, Ellul is very careful here. Our choices are always existential ones, their precise content freely determined at each new moment of decision. Any prefabricated programs may simply be another realm of necessity which prevents our liberation. Thus Ellul does not construct a fixed model, always insisting instead that we think out for ourselves the meaning of our involvement in the modern world.

Certainly we should be concerned about cataloguing various forms of oppressive power — sexual, economic, psychological, and political. However, Ellul continually asks how we can empower people instead. He understands how easily we make people cannon fodder for our own self-styled revolutions. He deals with personal issues, but not at the expense of structural ones. He merely insists that we must first fill our own political space before our revolutionary action can mean anything. Ellul presents a theory of non-oppressive praxis, but it is systemic, too. The question is how we develop a process of social transformation that is totally opposite in character from *la technique*.

The revolutionary axis is at the interstices of institutions. While most social institutions are oppressive and warrant confrontation, Ellul believes that for any groundswell to continue we must build a new culture. The revolution can only be nurtured in the open spaces, that is, within voluntary associations, among families and neighborhoods and tribes not completely bureaucratized by the political and economic elite. It is futile to presume an entire restructuring of the political-industrial system in the absence of vital insurgency at the interstices. Only an infrastructure autonomous from dominant power will develop the appropriate conscientization — as long as it is not seen merely in negative terms as retreat or a hostile barricade. Ellul is concerned that sub-groups be agents of activism and not just centers of contemplation or protest. To argue against action at the interstices rather than at the institutional center, Ellul believes, entails fullscale destruction and bloodshed, and may even be a misguided primitivism.

#### *Conclusion*

A cultural shift is evident currently in the humanities and social sciences, though the axis on which a theory of culture turns remains in dispute. Is it hegemony or technicism? Or could it be ideology (Stuart Hall), meaning (Clifford Geertz), the public (James Carey), symbol (Ernst Cassirer), moral order (Robert Wuthnow), the dialogic

(Paulo Freire), liminality (Bernard Lonergan), or interpolated self (Louis Althusser)? While not defending technology as the central problematic of culture vis-a-vis its competitors, this essay at least exemplifies how cultural theory with a technological epicenter operates.

My intention has not been to treat Gramsci and Ellul in evenhanded terms. I indicate Gramsci's central influence among those with a totalizing view, but do not elaborate on the ways his disciples have applied and patched up the theory. Nor should I be misunderstood regarding Ellul's legacy. His weaknesses in detail and with sub-units are obvious, and I have shared elsewhere in articulating the criticisms myself.

Yet I have entered enough of the argument to indicate how the technological imperative can be integrated into our theories of culture. The failure to do so becomes particularly obvious when a solution is articulated. I believe Ellul gives us a solid framework within which to plot our future course. Gramsci indicates the contradictions in capitalist societies, while Ellul brings all technological cultures — capitalist and socialist — under the same urgency to confront technicism. Gramsci saw his task as reconstructing political philosophy. In Ellul's scheme, our compelling need at present is not merely a political theory but a theory of technology which encompasses politics in its philosophical purview.

It would be appropriate to conclude that these two paradigms represent antinomies in the sense that both sides can be justified independently as internally consistent. No mighty fulcrum or grand experiment stands outside of them to render a final judgment. Yet Ellul's focus on technicism—in contrast to Gramsci's ellipsis between economism and statism—avoids three crucial weaknesses.

First, Gramsci leaves us trapped in the distributive fallacy. He places intellectuals in the vanguard, though Gramsci's broad scope includes all clearthinking humans across the social spectrum and not merely the academic bourgeoisie. But such admirers as Alastair Davidson (1977, pp. 254-5) have noted an increasing elitism in Gramsci's appeals, especially after 1930. On the other hand, Ellul (1965, pp. xvi-xvii, 110) maintained that intellectuals are even a readier mark for sociological propaganda than ordinary citizens. Their self-styled superior discernment beguiles them into the subtle trap of *la technique*. Nothing in Gramsci's social philosophy precludes it from the distributive fallacy where one strategic slice of the social structure represents the whole. Even though for him every normal person is rational— hence an intellectual, broadly speaking—only some of them actually have an intellectual function. What in Gramsci's ideological hegemony guarantees that his enlightened cadre, or, if not them, a revolutionary working class, or a persecuted minority, or a panoply of protestors—violent and benign—are not made universal by a faulty logic of substitution?

Second, Ellul brings the media technology literature into our calculus, while Gramsci unwittingly sides with those who presume technology is neutral, merely a tool which can be applied rightly or wrongly. I find that definition deficient in scope; technology is a cultural activity driven by our ultimate commitments (Christians, 1989). If technology does not exist in blank space but arises from our worldviews, then an ethical

framework becomes a self-evident need for orienting the technological process responsibly. Ellul puts a theory of normative technology squarely on our agenda, and that is a scholarly task the ideology and hegemony literature tragically undervalues. Ironically a value-saturated view of technology is more compatible with Gramsci's hegemony than the neutral view which he adopts by default.

Third, Ellul opposes technological necessity to human freedom. Thus in communication theory, the radical alternative entails a dialogic model of communication and such a theory is alien to Gramsci. Through language we continually re-enact our humanness and maintain a social order. When our everyday discourse is coopted by technological, mass-mediated symbols, we become complicators in technocratic culture. And as the Russian linguist Mikhail Bakhtin argues correctly in *The Dialogical Imagination*, only oral language under those circumstances represents a dependable source of opposition and struggle.

For Ellul, the technical artifice is decisively new. Thus Gramsci's theorizing, for all its revolutionary intent, is anchored in a previous era. The realities of modern technology create a firestorm of complicated issues at present. Global information systems are redefining national boundaries and economic structures. Ellul's penetrating discourse strikes at the heart of today's conundrums and paradoxes. While we never encounter truth pure, Ellul orders the territory around theoretical insights of the highest magnitude.

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# Include the Iconoclast: The Voice of Jacques Ellul in Contemporary Criticism

By Calvin C. Eroup

Continental theorists of the postmodern era have become “must reads” in courses on rhetorical theory and criticism (Ivie, 1995, p. 266). A common, though not exhaustive, list of theorists and critics who appear in anthologies and syllabi for such courses includes names like Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jurgen Habermas, Frederic Jameson, Jacques Lacan, and Jean-François Lyotard. These thinkers have influenced scholarship in the field of communication and rhetoric, most evidently in the advent of critical rhetoric and what has been termed the “ideological” turn in criticism. The recent debate between critical rhetoric and textual criticism reflects the intellectual authority vested in continental versions of postmodernism among practicing critics and theorists in the field. Work in contemporary rhetorical theory and criticism demands a certain fluency with the ideas of French and other continental postmodernists. Serious rhetoric scholars have read their works.

Contemporary rhetorical theory stands to gain what Kenneth Burke refers to as “perspective by incongruity” (Burke, 1954, pp. 69-70) on the continental postmodern canon of theorists by including Jacques Ellul’s *Humiliation of the Word*, in which Ellul argues against many of the basic assumptions of postmodernism, calling poststructuralism an error. In this essay I raise the question about Ellul: Can and should we include such an irreverent voice in any canon of contemporary rhetorical theory? Theorists we venerate, he considers as colleagues to be engaged and challenged; he addresses their ideas as idols for destruction.

Ellul’s perspective integrates two decisive factors. First, his novel sociological ideas on technique and the technological system offer a radical reorientation to ideological, social, and cultural issues and to that which drives them. Second, he advocates human speech as a continuing paradigm for language, an ancient assumption in a postmodern context. From these axiomatic commitments, Ellul presents us with a novel incongruity: he suggests that poststructuralists are not revolutionary but are in ideological lock-step with the forces of technological society-bureaucracy, domination, and oppression.

## *Canonicity, Textuality, and Absence*

A number of ironies emerge from the status of postmodern theorists among communication scholars. First, to canonize the works of people considered “canon smashers” is no small paradox. Barthes and Foucault have provided some of the most elegant arguments proclaiming the anonymity of texts and the demise of “authority” (Barthes, 1989, p. 716; Foucault, 1989, p. 724). Furthermore, the canon of postmodern thinkers is just as certainly imposed by people in authority (professors, publishers, 8

editors, etc.) and just as effectively excludes texts that might rightfully be included, as any canon of literature (or speeches) that has ever been authorized. Scholars still argue about the value of the chosen theorists’ contributions and debate the comparative

quality of interpretations in the secondary literature. Today, the portion of our work in contemporary theory and criticism that deals with postmodernism-especially - French postmodernism-oriens itself to language based on thinkers who concentrate primarily on writing and literary texts, paying little attention to spoken public discourse (Davis and Finke , 1989, p. 718). While French masters give us a diversity of perspectives and places from which to theorize and criticize discourse, on the question of the relationship of speech and writing they share a predisposition to prioritize the written text over the spoken word.

In the “Father of Logos,” among other places, Jacques Derrida makes a case for giving precedence to writing and textuality over speech. Although Derrida may be the most explicit apologist for the superiority of the written word, the ascendancy of textuality has already been mentioned as commonplace within the canon of French postmodernist intellectuals introduced at the beginning of this essay. Derrida, the father of deconstructionism, argues in “The Father of Logos” that writing need not come to speech “like a kind of present offered up in homage by a vassal to his lord” to have its value assessed by speech (pp. 750ff.). Indeed, textual discourse emerges as the only means of assessing the value of speech, which Derrida correlates with fatherhood. Speech (the father) presents itself as speaking from a point outside language, “But the father is not the generator or procreator in any ‘real’ sense prior to or outside all relation to language” (p. 753). Roland Barthes, similarly, states that the limit condition of human language is the written word, not the spoken word. In *S/Z*, Barthes lays out his assumptions about language in reference to semiotics, saying that the science of semiology must finally acknowledge itself as “*writing*” (p. 8). In his theorizing, Barthes (1989) concerns himself exclusively with “text,” a two-dimensional field of written discourse (pp. 714-715).

The third irony is the virtual absence of oppositional voices being taught alongside postmodern critics and theorists of discourse to counter the simple equation of all discourse with text and the critical primacy of written over spoken language. In many if not most cases, critics must begin with a text, and in that regard the directives above are entirely unobjectionable. However, the only voice in the textbook quoted above is the voice of the critic. The focus of critical attention is always a “text” The lack of questioning on this point suggests the possibility that when we visit and elevate the canon of French postmodernism in courses on contemporary theory and criticism, we risk assuming the priority of written text over spoken word *without ever explicitly raising the question*, one that has been crucial for our field and throughout the history of rhetoric.

My purpose, in the remainder of this study, is to consider this third irony, and to propose Ellul’s *The Humiliation of the Word* as one voice we could employ as interrogator of some of the most popular works from the continental canon for courses in contemporary rhetorical theory on the distinction between the written and spoken word. Iconoclast or not, we stand to gain much by including Ellul in our theoretical-

critical dialogue, especially when considering the ideas of Barthes, Derrida, Foucault, and Lacan.

*Sacralization and Desacralization*

Debunking, demystifying, demythologizing, and desacralizing are prime critical activities in the modern/ postmodern world. Among postmodernists who hold to post-structuralist views of language (like Barthes and Derrida) such critical moves are the logical outworking of their philosophical commitments about language and meaning. They deny any transcendental meaning, and attempt through critical acts to depose the idea that foundational and essential meaning can ever exist, in language or otherwise (Eagleton, 1983, pp. 130-138). Demythologizing and the other critical activities noted above assume that the sacred emerged to account for the unexplainable, the fearful, and the uncontrollable things in the world (Wennemann, 1991, p. 238). This sociological perspective, which Ellul affirms, considers as sacred “whatever form of power human beings believe themselves to be dependent on for their existence and well being” (Fasching, 1991, pp. 82-83). In this sense, Ellul shares much in common with the postmodern theorists mentioned so far.

However, critics who purport to liberate us from antiquated or oppressive ideas of the sacred often presume that deliverance means escape from the sacred altogether into a rational, non-religious world (Wennemann, 1991, p. 240). Ellul advocates liberation but denies the existence of a non-religious world. He argues that one sacred replaces another and that the desacralizing agent becomes the new sacred (Fasching, 1983, p. 83; Wennemann, 1991, p. 240). Ellul distinguishes between the sacred and the holy. The sacred is a construct of human society of which religion is one manifestation while the holy is Wholly Other than human society. Therefore, critics may “demystify” a traditional religion and replace it with a new sacred-one which may look nothing like traditional religion. But the human cycle of sacralization and desacralization has no effect on the holy. In other words, Ellul critiques the corruption of human religious institutions without relinquishing ultimate, transcendent meaning. Holy and sacred are antonyms for Ellul because people construct the sacred through language, but the holy is not a human construct (Fasching, 1991, p. 88). However, Ellul argues that the successful subversion of religious institutions has not eliminate the sacred or rampant religiosity. Ellul calls the new sacred *La Technique* (Lovekin, 1991, p. 89).

The form of consciousness Ellul calls “technique” circulates around the dual poles of technology and politics, which became sacred in late 20<sup>th</sup> century society (Fasching, 1991, p. 83; Wennemann, 1991, p. 243). Ellul’s critique of technique gravitates toward current questions regarding speech, writing, language, discourse, and symbols in his later work. For example, David Lovekin’s work is based primarily on *The Humiliation of the Word*. In this work, as in others, Ellul (1985) argues that technology and politics have been enshrined in the wake of technique’s desacralizing presence:

Our reality is no longer nature, the gods chosen for us to see are those of the technical and political world. They are the gods of consumerism, power, and machines, and they range from dictators to atomic piles. Now everything is invested with an



extra dimension: it is not lived reality, but since this reality is visualized, it is magnified, idealized, and made sacred, through the symbolization accomplished by the mass media (pp. 228-229).

The *Humiliation of the Word* engages the issue of the impact technique has had on human communication; particularly the study of human language, symbol, and discourse. Ellul focuses his attention throughout his work on the effects of technique on language and meaning. He identifies structuralism and what we refer to as post-structuralism as the application of technique to language and considers their effect on communication and the human communication from this unique vantage point.

*Technique and the Critique of the Structuralisms*

In the *Humiliation of the Word* Ellul raises a crucial issue for rhetorical theory and criticism that we may not be accustomed to thinking about: How do structuralism and/or poststructuralism affect our assumptions about spoken language and speaking? Ellul claims, in a variety of ways, that people who build their theories of communication on structuralist and poststructuralist assumptions hate language and the spoken word and, although they take language very seriously, apply technique in an attempt to subdue it entirely (p. 165).

Ellul moves toward this claim by beginning with the enduring question of the comparative value of speaking versus writing. He comes down squarely on the side of the spoken word (p. 1). Speech is the exclusive and definitive human language, that “ushers us into another dimension: relationship with other living beings, with persons. The Word is the particularly human sound which differentiates us from everything else” (p. 14). By contrast, “The written word is continually repeated and always identical; this is not possible for the true word. Ask the person speaking with you to repeat the explanation he has just given, and it will be different But you can reread a page” (p. 44). The inability of the written word to provoke dialogue signals its secondary status to speech: “The word is, of necessity, spoken to someone... It calls for a response” (p. 16).

The status of spoken versus written language should be a contested issue among rhetoricians in communication departments. By canonizing the likes of Barthes, Derrida, Foucault and Lacan as guides, we may have implicitly adopted a position that works to manufacture reams of text efficiently at the expense of neglecting the dynamics and meaning of human speech in the process. Ellul calls this condition “logorrhea” and suggests that technique demands the decisive rupture between speaker and word, finally accomplished by post-structuralism (pp. 156-157). He says specifically in *The Technological System*:

Language has to take on an objectivity permitting it to correspond to the objectivity of the technological system...The “one,” and “it,” the field (all Lacanism, etc.) is purely and simply magianism-just as incidentally, the style of Lacan, and so many other writers, is-very significantly-sheer incantation. It is a *mechanical* expression of the compensatory reaction by the technological system. But on the other hand, language must itself be integrated into the system in order to play its role. Hence, the

structuralist studies of language, which are precisely characteristic of that technicization; hence, likewise, the trend toward viewing the text as an entity in itself, an object. And the orientation toward focusing on *how* one says something rather than on *what* one says, in order to demonstrate technologically. Here, Roland Barthes is very directly one of the reducers of language to its function of compensating for the technological system (pp. 115-116).

Nevertheless, Ellul does not argue that depositing the word by image is impossible, but that speech in all its once-comprehensive fullness has been emaciated efficiently by the dominance of the image. He further argues that intellectuals, far from defending the human, spoken word, have overseen its demise by unwittingly applying the technical imperative for visualization to language. Ellul identifies the technical imperative as the driving force of technique which insists that “when a technological possibility exists, it must be applied” (1985, p. 148). The application of technique to word is structuralism/poststructuralism.

*The Obedience of Poststructuralists to Technique*

Ellul argues that poststructuralist theories of language are not anti-modern but hyper-modern. They demonstrate technique—a child of modernism—at work. We noted earlier that the authors under consideration tend to privilege written texts over speech. The significance of the assumption in favor of writing is that written text is an image of spoken language that “has placed the word in an ambiguous and defensive position” (Ellul, 1985, pp. 160-161). Technique can arrest, observe, and analyze text, which is impossible with the spoken word.

An advocate for the primacy of written text over the spoken word might dispute the distinction between speech and writing, claiming that the voice is every bit as material as the written word (Eagleton, 1983, p. 130). But a living voice is not material and does not “mean” merely by signs. The human voice is not digital. It may be digitized and analyzed as text via writing, printing, or audio recording—subjected to technological manipulation. But the voice itself and the meaning it carries cannot finally be subsumed under the simple process of “difference and division.” A living human voice cannot be captured. Any honest analyst must contend with the fact that what is being analyzed is only a material trace. The issue rests exactly here: that the voice must be nothing more than material if technique is to control it. The equation of word and text apparently subjects the word to complete human control. If we can control words by techniques, we can then make pronouncements about their meaning or meaninglessness and definitively explain why. As Ellul (1985) comments:

The word has become image: the word made for computers, dominated by writing, inscription, and printing, and changed into a thing, into space and something visible. Now it must be seen to be believed, and we think we have finally fathomed all of language when we apply a semiotic diagram to it (p. 160).

By transposing text for speech as the paradigm for human language, technique sets us up to accept the image as not only real, but also as the truth about language. Then we interpolate the “truths of language” learned from writing back into the realm of

the spoken word and human reality (Ellul, 1985, p. 141). In other words, we analyze an artificial image to examine the realities and truths of human life, neither of which textual analysis can provide as such.

Part of Ellul's iconoclastic tendencies show in his insistence that although post-structuralists may not be aware of it, they appropriate semiotics as the truth about language. He implies that the poststructuralist move is not a bold stroke against the status quo establishment, but a reinstatement of the technical imperative. In the early seventies he was already taking the offensive: "Structuralism is in no sense an intellectual advance, a better way of understanding. It is a reflection of the current human condition in this closed and organized society" (Ellul, 1974, p. 6). In one of his last books, he continues to press the point home:

The word always refers to something beyond it. A phrase apart from the speaker and hearer has no meaning. What gives it value is the secret intention of the speaker and the individuality of the heart. In other words, language is never neutral. We cannot analyze it objectively. It depends on the makeup of those in dialogue, and it is inseparable from these persons. We can engage in as many analyses as we like; the essential point escapes us (Ellul, 1989, p. 27).

He makes his case most clearly in the *Humiliation of the Word* stating that "by making the word an object, we elevate excessive scientism to its highest point;" that semiotic study of language reduces it to an exclusively visual project; and that structuralism is the mode and method consistent with visual images (pp. 153, 159, 165). Much detailed analysis of the intricacies of Ellul's argument with structuralism/post-structuralism could be laid out, however for the purposes of this essay, I will concentrate on the primary issues he raises in his critique of familiar postmodern icons.

#### *Iconoclast at Work*

Ellul states, without hesitation, that the poststructuralist ideological complex fits comfortably within technological society. His project is to rescue the "degenerate" word from the prison house of technique. He argues that language cannot be reduced to a visual code or system of visual signs (Ellul, 1985, p. 4). Further, he posits the direct link between speaker and language, a link that Derrida holds up for derision, as the affirmation of personality and security of the existence of meaning (pp. 24, 39). Language doesn't speak itself, people speak language (p. 16). In all of this, Ellul presents an enigmatic view of language, allowing that how language actually functions is mutable—that the connections of personality and meaning and the way language functions in a society can change and be altered—but he maintains a strict line on the appropriate perspective on and use of language. For instance, in his comments on Lacan's play with language he concludes by saying This [free play with signifiers] is a frightening step to take, and its effects have spread to the entire language: you can do anything, and make words say anything. You can construct any discourse with them: they do not defend themselves. But our very human life—and not only our reason or our intelligence—is profoundly altered by this process (Ellul, 1985, p. 165).

Obviously, Ellul is not concerned, like E.D. Hirsch (1967) might be, that one just cannot do what Lacan does with language (pp. viii-ix). Ellul is concerned with the consequences when society and language get to the point where one can do such a thing, as though it were a liberating activity. Again, he defies the now-conventional wisdom that targets language as the source of oppression and looks to deconstruction, and various other post-structuralist strategies as revolutionary and freeing. He parrots disgust at being bom into language as violating his supposed right to linguistic self-construction, "I am forced to enter a prefabricated scheme; I am taught to speak according to a certain model. Scandalous!" and then continues his parody saying, "Language is an instrument of oppression and alienation used by the ruling class to keep the oppressed classes in bondage" (Ellul, 1985, pp. 173-174). But he dispenses with these commonplaces as "para-Marxist" employing a mechanistic and rigid concept of language and the word, mixed with a certain ignorance of the history of revolutions and the role of language in them. To the contrary, he argues that the expressed hatred of the word accomplishes the goals of the ruling classes-neutralizing challenges and promoting propaganda, which depends on a lack of clear referents to work effectively (1985, pp. 175-177). But he cannot easily shake the pervasiveness of the anti-language sentiment:

We are left with a nagging question: however did these things manage to come into being-this collection of cliches (hollow but thought to be profound!), this hatred of language, and this simplistic equation: "established discourse = ruling class = language"? (1985, p. 181).

In his answer to the question he gestures toward Foucault, "the lunatic's language suddenly seems fascinating because it fails to transmit any idea or continuity." Later he argues more extensively that the fascination with the asylum testifies to "the basic catastrophe of our society: human solitude and the technicalization of relationships" (Ellul, 1985, pp. 181, 372). He lauds the motive of such studies that attempt to open language up and destructure social stereotypes, but judges that they fail because the "passion for the language of mental illness destroys reasonable language" and instead "produces utterly closed discourse" (p. 373). This points to Ellul's primary attack on poststructural theory at its basic, linguistic level. He says, "The rupture between the speaker and his words is the decisive break" (p. 157).

This puts Ellul also directly at odds with Roland Barthes, over the issue of whether or not. language is an open or closed system. Barthes (1974) asserts that no place exists outside of language; Barthes is also a major proponent of the notion that language writes subjects into existence (p. 8). Ellul further denies any importance to meaning, finding the interesting question to be how language works, not what it says (1980, p. 116). Again, Ellul notes how this point suggests that Barthes marches to the beat of technique:

We want to see how a thing works: the process of circulation and deformation. As we indicated above, the process is what matters. It just so happens that this is what

interests the technician. Finalities do not concern him, nor does meaning! Without knowing it, structuralists are possessed by the spirit of technique (1985, p. 170).

Ellul ends up affirming that language is an open system, one that is neither totalizing nor immutable. People speak, and language is more elusive than can ever be captured in writing. Not held captive to technique, it is not subjected to analytical vivisection in the sense that anyone can ever declare it to be meaningless or deconstruct it. Of course a text can be constructed and deconstructed, it simply does not follow that such operations can be performed on language, which is the hope that the word offers to people in relationships of all kinds, including people suffering injustice and oppression. The word Ellul loves cannot be found on a page, it can only be heard.

#### *Inclusion*

In this essay, I have traced some of the basic moves Ellul makes to desacralize poststructuralism as an icon of the sacred technique and have highlighted a few direct connections to a few prominent and influential authors in our canon of contemporary theorists.

That Ellul argues for a radical Word that integrates faith, theology, ideology, and language may challenge students of rhetoric, should they assume that a relationship between faith, language, and rhetoric belongs only in the rhetoric of religion or theology courses. Ellul (1989) himself declares elsewhere that his views of speech, word, and language are grounded in faith in God and the incarnate Word, “because the God I believe in is Word. Hence every human word is for me decisive and irreplaceable” (p. 23). These commitments are deeply intertwined and unmistakable, leading some readers of the *Humiliation of the Word* to declare Ellul a typical protestant iconophobe (Jay, 1993, p. 14). But the reasons for adding Ellul to the canon of contemporary theory are not primarily religious. In fact, in his own way Ellul is more intensely anti-religious than the voices of poststructuralism.

I have attempted to weave together an argument for the inclusion of Jacques Ellul with his poststructuralist colleagues in the study of contemporary rhetorical theory for a few simple reasons. First, he raises the substantial issue of the precedence of speech versus writing and contests the assumption of a number of influential poststructuralist in his stand for speech as paradigmatic. Second, he engages the issue of whether language is a closed, totalizing, universal object-the same in every place and time-from a provocative perspective. Third, he defies the conventional wisdom about the comparative value of certain theoretical authorities in contemporary rhetorical theory and criticism.

Finally, he advocates a robust role for rhetoric that values the word, speech, and its necessary role in rescuing society from the brutalizing grasp of bureaucracy and self-validating technology. He promotes public dialogue and believes it can be meaningful; more and less than a mask for the will to power. He is rigorous in his consideration of theory and a friend of criticism:

Criticism is the preferred domain of the word. In its relations with images, the word is called

on to criticize the image, not in the sense of accusing it, but in the more basic sense of separation and discernment of true and false. This is one of the noblest functions of the word, and discourse should relate to it (Ellul, 1985, p. 34).

Clearly, to include Ellul's *Humiliation of the Word* in the canon of contemporary rhetorical theory and criticism is to risk dialogue with an interlocutor who would question many sacred assumptions and perhaps be rejected as impious. Of course, the benefit is in advocating that good minds should take such risks.

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# Book Reviews

## *Technology as Magic: The Triumph of the Irrational* by Richard Stivers

New York: Continuum, 1999

Richard Stivers provides insights into the practices of magic in the context of technology and its social and psychological consequences. Connecting technology and magic, two disparate phenomena that on the surface seem totally unrelated, makes for a refreshing intellectual journey.

With Ellul's *Technological Society* as his primary inspiration, he constructs a paradigm that juxtaposes the human experience grounded in spiritual ritual with modern and postmodern promises of social, managerial and political efficiency. The result, Stivers fears, is a world falsely enlightened through magical slights of hand with the purpose of adjusting humans, "to a technological civilization, to bring them in line with technical progress" (p. 8).

Illustrating that Ellul's seminal ideas still resonate with twenty-first century problems, Stivers argues in his introductory chapter that today's managerial techniques have social and psychological consequences that result in efficient ordering of our world, an order that for the most part is almost invisible to the unwary observer. Examples include corporate models that are designed to beguile and herd employees with scientific and humanistic management techniques inspired by administrative magic. Citing best-selling authors Robert Greenleaf and Peter Drucker, he suggests that scientific, statistically measurable techniques are, "actually a means of manipulating employees into being servants to their managers . . . Psychological techniques such as these, I argue, are forms of magic" (pp. 10-11).

Stivers does more than simply expose the problems. He provides counterpoints and countervailing arguments. He suggests that human activity that is truly qualitative cannot be measured and predicted. He cites Henry Mintzberg, who goes against prevailing management technique by advising that the most valuable kind of information in organizations is intuitive and holistic, informal and nonstatistical.

By narrowing the term magic to mean "an attempt to influence, predict and control the future" through symbolic means, Stivers does a convincing job of connecting magic with science and technology. Symbolic words and actions of magic "work according to the principles of persuasion, retribution and causality" (p. 42). They provide an "indirect or symbolic link between information and outcome." Here is where Stivers



invokes Ellul's theory of the three milieus: nature, society, and technology. The nature of the magic you practice changes with the milieu you live in, because magic deals with the most powerful force in your milieu. The most powerful force is different in each of the three milieus. In our technological milieu, our magic acquires the image and aura of technology, but the function and effectiveness of a placebo.

The most powerful of magics in our technological milieu is the mass media. In terms of emphasis, Stivers gives more than double the coverage to his advertising critique compared with public relations. He might have given the invisible magic of public relations a more critical examination. Although he addresses its power and influence, he fails to recognize that public relations may be more influential than advertising. Audiences tend to be more skeptical of advertising and they always know its source. In contrast, people readily accept public relations messages as more credible. Indeed, compared to advertising, public relations should have been characterized as the more magical slight of hand because consumers believe most of their daily news is coming from the media rather than from a company or institution.

Stivers makes a convincing argument that advertising symbolically links consumption to happiness. Not only does advertising sell technological products; it promotes the notion of commodification of all things human. It creates a magical Disney-like kingdom of happiness framed in the milieu of consumption. "Advertising's magic is the visualization of the commodity for spiritual consumption. In the process, human beings become objectified as commodities, and as such are equal to their image. Ultimately, human image becomes more important than lived reality itself (p. 121). Stivers transfers this argument to the topic of celebrity as "crucial to advertising, celebrities are themselves first and foremost commodities" (p. 122). Citing Kierkegaard, Stivers questions the ethics of celebrity worship in advertising because it capitalizes on the deadly sin, envy: "envy is the negative unifying principle" in celebrity worship in advertising.

Television and other mass media are less important than advertising in Stivers' view. He proposes that television "programs are ads for advertisements" (p. 40). Television programs also sell the philosophy underlying the technological milieu by focusing on forms of power, sex, and violence.

Perhaps Stiver's most promising critique centers on the magic that emanates from the institutions of higher learning. He laments the humanities that were at one time a preparation for reflective participation as citizens and for intellectual labor. Our evolution into an industrial society is now infatuated with the magic of simulated images and the requirement for high-salary careers rather than soul satisfying intellectual labor or even manual labor. "The public, business, and parents demand technicians, and we give our customers what they want" (p. 208).

Many scholars would agree that the modern university is becoming almost completely technical and magical in its administration, teaching, research, and student services. "Our educational administrators are magicians par excellence as they recycle models and magical practices from the business world, including various assessment and accountability measures and planning exercises" (p. 208). The distressing conclu-

sion is that in our magical, technologically driven universities we give our students the impression that all knowledge can be quantified, precisely measured, and most importantly, reduced to logic and rationalism without the intellectual labor of critical examination.

A key point Stivers revisits throughout his text is that the technological society, with its drive for efficiency in all things, has corrupted language and eroded its symbolic, ritual value. In its place, magical techniques fill the symbolic vacuum by weakening language and they fill it in such a way as to reinforce the hegemony of the technological society, a society that Stivers urges us to resist in his admonitions throughout the book.

On the whole, Stivers does an excellent job of revitalizing the Ellulian premise that people must remain awake and alert to recognize that democracy is elusive, and that it is a human enterprise, not a technologically efficient machine run by untouchable political celebrities. He concludes with an admonition that the struggle is not against technology, but against a technological system of production and consumption. "Without magic, technology would have no fatal sway over us. It is here that the struggle for freedom must begin" (p. 212).

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## *Technology and the Good Life?*

Edited by Eric Higgs, Andrew Light, & David Strong Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000

Critics and theorists who take on the mantle of 'philosopher of technology' do so at the risk of having their best thoughts ignored, certainly within the larger field of philosophy. Editors of *Technology and the Good Life?* illustrate the point by describing a volume that the United Kingdom Royal Institute of Philosophy published on the theme of philosophy and technology. Despite the stated purpose to have respected philosophers address concerns about technology relevant to their work, "there is not one reference in any of the papers in the volume to any of the prominent members of the Society for Philosophy and Technology, and thus, we can assume, to any of the prominent philosophers who have considered themselves doing philosophy of technology" (p. 372). The impacts of contemporary technologies continue to emerge as "the most pressing issue of our age" (p. 2). Yet, those commentators who are specifically committed to forming "discriminating judgments" about the character of technological practices discover that the subfield they have created and advanced is placed "curiously on the sidelines" (p. 5) when visible and influential disciplinary discussions involve their subject matter.

An even more fundamental concern inspires the contributors to *Technology and the Good Life?*. This is the limited success that philosophy, or any other scholarly discipline,

has had in enlarging the current, constricted public discourse that surrounds technology. Albert Borgmann, whose seminal works in philosophy of technology are the subject of the collected essays in this volume, declares a “task for philosophy” that the editors endorse, “to engage the public more broadly in a reflective conversation about matters of great concern to all” (p. 20). The essays assembled here attempt to model for readers what such a reflective conversation about technology should look like as it attempts to address broad questions about human wellbeing. Extending beyond their own project, the editors envision that the eventual dialogue “must be much more widespread than a debate among a handful of academic specialists.” This volume proves to be a fruitful start in this direction.

The goal of active public involvement is a difficult one to achieve. And the contributors’ own reservations must be taken seriously about whether intellectual advances in the “discipline of philosophy” (p. 20) can be made more relevant to the public “task of philosophy,” particularly as it may entail actively intervening in the apparently irresistible trajectory of technological developments within contemporary society and culture. Accordingly, the contributions brought together in this volume are characterized by a shared concern to clear an intellectual space where the limiting preoccupations of mainstream philosophical traditions can give way to more public forms of discourse. The project encompasses a rethinking of technology in its socio-cultural, economic, political, and ecological significance, as well as in its overall impacts on the spirit and ethos of our age. The scope and seriousness of this effort, which inspires the volume, deserves attention and appreciation.

The choice of Albert Borgmann’s work as the thematic focus for the essays was both deliberate and fortuitous. A yearlong series of conferences, workshops, and seminars culminated in a 1995 gathering in Alberta, Canada devoted to the topic of “Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life,” which is also the title of Borgmann’s major treatise on technology. The fortuitous aspect is that the tenth anniversary of the appearance of Borgmann’s book, published in 1984, coincided with the intensified interest in his subject matter that the sequence of programs and discussions occasioned among the relatively small, but dedicated, philosophy of technology community. The chapters of this volume began as presentations at the Alberta workshop and are brought together for publication under five major headings that provide a survey of the field along with appreciative and critical paths into Borgmann’s work.

The first section, “Philosophy of Technology Today,” summarizes a trajectory of work originating with Jacques Ellul, Martin Heidegger, and Lewis Mumford, continuing through the related and often derivative writings of Herbert Marcuse, Daniel Bell, Langdon Winner, Bernard Gendron, David Noble, Andrew Feenberg, Hans Jonas, and Don Hide, to arrive at Borgmann’s “neo-Heideggerian” perspective in *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*, (TCCL). Borgmann’s work, and especially his theory and analysis of the “device paradigm,” are viewed as a crystallization of major themes that have inspired this lineage of thinkers.

Considering the significant disciplinary barriers and public challenges confronting philosophy of technology, Borgmann's work takes on a two-fold relevance for the field. First, he provides an assessment of the philosophy of technology in specific relation to a central question that concerns all of philosophy, namely, the character and quality of the good life. Second, Borgmann frames his philosophical discussion in terms of "extratheoretical questions of practice" (p. 320) focused on "our bonds of engagement with things." Thus, Borgmann points the direction towards greater disciplinary rigor in linking technological themes with broad philosophical traditions. And, most promising from the standpoint of interest in the transformation of technological practices, his philosophy has the potential to "appeal to a very wide audience partly because it illuminates our shared, ordinary everyday life, such as with 14

things and devices, and partly because the issues it probes cut across the full range of the disciplines" (p. 7).

Paul Durbin, in his overview essay, directs attention back to the appearance of Ellul's *The Technological Society* (particularly the 1964 English translation), as a founding moment for philosophy of technology. Ellul provided seminal, systematic treatment at the level of theory of what had begun to worry philosophers and social commentators as practical and political concerns: "negative impacts of nuclear weapon systems, chemical production systems, the mass media and other (dis)information systems" (p. 38). In addition, *The Technological Society* took seriously the call for intellectuals not only to philosophize but also to intervene in the technological formation of a "new milieu" for contemporary society by discovering means to "live out our freedom in the deterministic technological world we have created for ourselves" (p. 39). Reception of Ellul's work was conditioned, as Durbin remarks, by the fact that his was "[a]mong the first broadly philosophical works to say to those early philosophers of technology (myself included) that this might be a difficult struggle" (p. 38). Overlooking the "*dialectical* nature of Ellul's thinking" (p. 39), many were left asking "how can we act, given Ellul's pessimistic thinking?" Durbin leaves open the question of how one should respond to Ellul's position on "technicized society as an unmitigated disaster, inimical to human freedom" (p. 46). However, he supports the case for focusing attention on Borgmann by observing that while "an Ellulian school has persisted for twenty-five years, so far it has produced no other thinker of note" (p. 44). Might Borgmann be that next seminal thinker?

The chapters in part two and part three of the volume, "Evaluating Focal Things" and "Theory in the Service of Practice," explore various ways in which Borgmann's critique of the "device paradigm" and his advocacy of "focal things and focal practices" take up the challenge. The device paradigm is a sensitizing concept that highlights the technological "transformation of our material world" (p. 28) that has occurred since the advent of industrialization. Under the influence of this paradigm, engagement with "things" –which have "ties to nature, culture, the household setting, a network of social relations, mental and bodily engagement" (p. 29) – is replaced by the "*machinery ... of the device,*" which "makes available a particular commodity" in a manner that encour-

ages pervasive concern with “*mere means and mere ends.*” The resulting technological dependencies entail the loss of a capacity to appreciate fully “that practices ... [can be] ... experienced as good in their own right and useful too.”

The focal things and practices that Borgmann wants to recover are cooking a meal; chopping wood for the hearth; fishing for trout; arts and crafts of producing painting and pots; long-distance running over a natural course; backpacking through wilderness; grooming, training, and riding a horse. Contributors take up these themes in chapters that consider the ideal of focal commitments in its broad contours and in specific manifestations.

The discussions often focus on philosophical concerns that could seem overly technical were it not for the authors’ unifying determination to demonstrate how philosophical inquiry can enhance our capacities to evaluate and to make discriminating judgments about everyday tensions between the technological device and the focal thing and practice. For example, Lawrence Haworth’s (pp. 55-69) explication of four different models for understanding how focal practices/things are counterposed to machinery/commodity (“parallelism model,” “guarding model,” “internal goods model,” “synthetic model”) proceeds to evaluate these models in relation to Studs Turkel’s narratives of ordinary occupational lives. Haworth points out how people create layers of meaning for work as a focal practice, often striving “against the odds” (p. 67) that the imperative “to earn a living” can be transformed into a practice “worth doing provided only that it is done right.”

Similarly, Gordon G. Brittan, Jr. directs his reflections on “the two great concepts of moral philosophy, excellence (*arete*) and happiness (*eudaimonia*)” (p. 75) towards consideration of such concrete examples as “the case of the rural doctor whose ‘engagement’ in the practice of medicine is threatened by the use of expert diagnostic systems [which] reduce her role to that of a mere go-between” (p. 85). In common with other contributors who blend theoretical with practical concerns in their essays - e.g., Larry Hickman on the Deweyan model of education (pp. 89-105); Carl Mitcham on how sacraments confer character in Buddhist and Christian traditions (pp. 126-148); Philip Fandozzi on the potential of films to critique devices and to celebrate focal practices (pp. 153-165); Paul Thompson on farming as a foundational, even “salvific” focal practice (pp. 166-181); Jesse Tatum on design as the possibility of choosing focal commitments (pp. 182-194); Eric Higgs on ecological restoration as an instance of such design (pp. 195-212) — Brittan concludes that Borgmann’s work, by identifying the “special hallmarks of our freedom” as our engagement with focal things and practices, displays distinctive value for “reopening” consideration of the conditions of the good life in a “‘devicive’ world” (p. 87).

Part four, “Extensions and Controversies,” views Borgmann’s concepts and examples in the light of contemporary issues raised by feminist thought (Diane Michelfelder, pp. 219-233), postmodern critiques of the ideal of focal realism (Douglas Kellner, pp. 234-255), and cyborg ‘mythology’ with its celebration of irony and ambiguity (Mora Campbell, pp. 256-270). Chapters by Thomas Michael Power (pp. 271-293) and An-

drew Feenberg (pp. 294-315) help to distill the concerns expressed about Borgmann's work into questions about the underlying "fundamentalism" (Power) or "essentialism" (Feenberg) that Borgmann arguably evinces. Power focuses his commentary by means of a response to Thompson's earlier chapter on fanning. Arguing against an "economic fundamentalism" (p. 288) that valorizes what are seen as "quintessential focal practices" such as those that directly support human biological survival, Power argues for a more pluralistic conception of focal values. He emphasizes how "it is within that margin of safety where we are protected against imminent loss of life that our art, thought, play, love, and hope evolve into human cultures" (p. 289). Power acknowledges that here he stands on common ground with Borgmann who advocates "communal celebration built around focal things and practices" (p. 291). But he also raises the further question of how the determination should be made about what it means to commit oneself *appropriately* to focal things and practices. Citing Borgmann's dictum that "In a finite world, devotion to one thing will curb indulgence in another," Power urges a broader critical perspective on how social institutions "structure the choices so that only the truly heroic and saintly can afford to make the right choices" (p. 292). \_ If our "moral failures" are aided and abetted by the economic and social institutions that provide context for actions, then we need to comprehend the processes at work and to challenge them politically so as not "to lash at ourselves and our neighbors as we sink into the cynicism and sullenness Borgmann rightly decries."

Andrew Feenberg carries critique of Borgmann further, arguing that "Borgmann's conclusions are too hastily drawn and simply ignore the role of social contextualizations in the appropriation of technology" (p. 301). Among the examples Feenberg cites is the "Prodigy Medical Support Bulletin Board devoted to ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis or Lou Gehrig's disease)" (p. 302). Carrying discussion back into the deep thickets of philosophy of technology and the lineage of thinkers that the book began with, Feenberg questions how the Heideggerian position from which Borgmann's work derives would account for such contemporary instances where the technological medium "opens doors that might have remained closed in a face-to-face setting." Feenberg concludes that "[w]hen modern technical processes are brought into compliance with the requirements of nature or human health, they incorporate their contexts into their very structure, as truly as the jug, chalice, or bridge that Heidegger holds out as models of authenticity" (p. 313). On the basis of this claim, Feenberg envisions the possibility of technological support for "reskilled work, medical practices that respect the person, architectural and urban designs that create humane living spaces, computer designs that mediate new social forms." Feenberg concludes with a note of skepticism about whether Borgmann's philosophy is adequate in itself to point the way "from essentialism to constructivism," which is the path that Feenberg believes we must follow towards "general reconstruction of modern technology so that it gathers a world to itself rather than reducing its natural, human, and social environment to mere resources."

Borgmann has the opportunity to respond to Feenberg and other contributors in a Postscript, which includes the editors' "Afterword" (pp. 371-374) and Borgmann's "Reply to My Critics" (pp. 341-370). This valuable chapter provides the opportunity for Borgmann to summarize the prospects for reform he envisions in "The Completion of the Philosophy of Technology." Borgmann argues that the rise of technology's promise "is not the transhistorical cause of technology but its first epiphany" (p. 347). Accordingly, technology's mature 'epiphany' must embody a "new cosmology" (p. 369). Conceiving the future as a new Atlantis, Borgmann figures "focal things as islands, once the high country of an ancient continent and still anchored and connected with one another beneath the surface of technology." Will we be able to raise this lost world and make it new again? Will our steps be steady as we travel its terrains with reformed technologies rescued from being mere devices?

It may be too much to expect of a philosophy of technology that it should provide answers to such questions. Nevertheless, the reflections that Borgmann's work has inspired in *Technology and the Good Life?* represent a valuable initial mapping of the world of meaning that Borgmann believes we should conscientiously seek, obscured beneath the depths of our technological involvements.

Reviewed by Wayne Woodward, College of Arts, Sciences, and Letters, University of Michigan-Dearborn.

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Clifford G. Christians, Editor

## From the Editor

Joyce Hanks contacted me in October about an article she was working on from Daniel Cerezuelle about the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington, D.C. Meanwhile, I had read Dan Clendenin's piece, and Andrew Goddard's in *The Third Way*. This issue came together at that moment. The other Contributing Editors of *The Ellul Forum* were contacted, and Patrick Chestenet, Darrell Fasching, and David Gill sent me their reflections shortly thereafter. Several essays recommended for republication by our proactive Board could not be included for lack of space.

Ellul understood the history of ideas and examined with exceptional care the history of socio-political institutions. But he was also an astute observer of ongoing events, one of the keenest inquisitors the 20<sup>th</sup> century West ever knew. Reflection on the tragic events of September 11 and their aftermath

is vintage Ellul. The technological order, violence, political institutions, religions—all of them served as Ellul’s frame of reference, and they are vantage points for our Editorial Board members as well.

Patrick Troude-Chestenet’s carefully wrought essay was not translated for this issue. Since *The Ellul Forum’s* inaugural in 1988, we have consistently translated all contributions into English. But with an expanded issue, and for the sake of precision, the original French is included this time. *The Ellul Forum* is now a unit of the International Jacques Ellul Society, the sister-society of the French-language Association Internationale Jacques Ellul. This two-language number pays tribute to Ellul’s bi-lingual legacy.

## About The Ellul Forum

### History & Purpose

*The Ellul Forum* has been published twice per year since August of 1988. Our goal is to analyze and apply Jacques Ellul’s thought to aspects of our technological civilization and carry forward both his sociological and theological analyses in new directions.

While *The Ellul Forum* does review and discuss Jacques Ellul, whom we consider one of the most insightful intellectuals of our era, it is not our intention to treat his writings as a body of sacred literature to be endlessly dissected. The appropriate tribute to his work is to carry forward its spirit and agenda for the critical analysis of our technical civilization. Ellul invites and provokes us to think new thoughts and enact new ideas. To that end we invite you to join the conversation in *The Ellul Forum*.

*The Ellul Forum* is an English-language publication but we are currently exploring ways of linking more fully with our francophone colleagues.

### Manuscript Submissions

Send original manuscripts (essays, responses to essays in earlier issues) to:

Clifford Christians, Editor, *The Ellul Forum*

Institute of Communications Research

University of Illinois

810 S. Wright Street, Suite 228

Urbana, IL 61801 USA

Please send both hard copy and computer disc versions, indicating the software and operating system used (e.g., Microsoft Word for Windows 98). Type end notes as text (do not embed in the software footnote/endnote part of your program).

Essays should not exceed twenty pages, double-spaced, in length.

Manuscript submissions will only be returned if you enclose a self-addressed, adequately postaged envelope with your submission.

*The Ellul Forum* also welcomes suggestions of themes for future issues.

## Books & Reviews

**Books.** *The Ellul Forum* considers for review books (1) about Jacques Ellul, (2) significantly interacting with or dependent on Ellul's thought, or (3) exploring the range of sociological and theological issues at the heart of Ellul's work. We can not guarantee that every book submitted will actually be reviewed in *The Ellul Forum* nor are we able to return books so Submitted.

**Book Reviews.** If you would like to review books for *The Ellul Forum*, please submit your vita/resume and a description of your reviewing interests.

Send all books, book reviews, and related correspondence to:

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## On September 11<sup>th</sup>

by Daniel Cereguelle

I was deeply shocked on Tuesday Sept. 11<sup>th</sup>, when I heard about the attacks against the World Trade Center. Of course what makes this tragedy more atrocious than an «ordinary» technological disaster is that it has occurred because some people have decided that it should happen, have summoned all their skills and their spiritual strength to destroy as many civilian lives as they could! But the political dimension is just one aspect of this tragedy. There are other dimensions which should not be neglected.

**The ordinary causes of exceptional disasters: What** Americans and all of us who live in a modern technological environment are reminded of through this tragedy is that the possibility of deadly events of this magnitude is an intrinsic component of the world which we have created. The 1995 Oklahoma City blast is the sign that a technological society provides imaginative, determined and flawed minds with an unlimited supply of powerful destructive devices. As the French philosopher Jean Brun wrote “ *it is in the essence of the tool that sooner or later it can be turned into a - weapon*”. There is no way we can prevent powerful tools used in daily life such as planes, fertilizers, or computers from being turned into powerful weapons.

The World Trade Center attack is a reminder that we live in a technological environment which, independently of evil doings, is by itself a source of danger. Great causes have great effects. Buildings of the size of the World Trade Center are a potential disaster. Their height and bulk result in a huge accumulation of potential energy which is hidden by the counteraction of equally huge bracing forces which impose a static balance to the structure. The dreamy appearance of these buildings makes us forget that at any time those forces can be unleashed by some unexpected accident. The concentration of population which is the mercantile *raison d'être* of such structures makes the human impact of such a collapse as gigantic as the forces which allow it. It is not impossible that a disaster of this type might occur because of some accident. One may answer that the occurrence of such an accident is so unlikely that we take a reasonable risk when we build skyscrapers or huge aircraft. But of course we say it is unlikely as long as we do not know how and why it will happen.

**A culture of denial: A** long time ago, at the beginning of the industrial civilization, the American poet Edgar Allan Poe in his grotesque tale *The angel of the odd*, published in 1844, pleasantly warned us against the metaphysical flaw of our current way of assessing risks: when the probability of occurrence of a dangerous event is low, we believe that we can reasonably neglect this risk, whatever the magnitude of the consequences might be; we are prone to forget that an odd concatenation of seemingly unlikely events remains always possible, as is exemplified by the recent *Concorde* accident. Poe knew that we moderns have such a strong reluctance to acknowledge and take into account the potentially unpleasant consequences of our technological endeavours that only some kind of angel can compel us to do so. History tells that we are often ready to accept huge losses of human lives, provided we do not know in advance which individuals will die; and when we claim afterward that we have been taken by surprise we should not be believed since as social beings we are ready to accept mass killing. We should not forget that today our technological prowess currently results

in technological disasters of a much bigger size than the attack on the World Trade Center: the American transportation system kills almost 50,000 people every year and medical technology around 70,000; but these risks have become socially acceptable because they have grown slowly and their huge impact is spatially dispersed so we cannot see the heap of corpses. Nevertheless, in term of risk assessment, compared to driving or going to the hospital, terrorism is still peanuts. Of course this may change since it is difficult not to think that the next step could be nuclear or biological terrorism which might be easier to organize and as difficult to detect and prevent.

**The grapes of growth:** Terrorism is not an external and unlikely phenomenon which can be eradicated by an appropriate policy; it is -and has been-a normal feature of the modern world. Fascination for destruction and self-destruction has always been an essential component of the human psyche. History provides us with countless examples of individuals as well as entire societies seized by morbid frenzies resulting in mass slaughter or suicide. Education or, more generally, civilization which provides ethical codes and traditional behaviour-patterns reinforced by strong symbolic overtones is a fragile attempt at limiting the power and the seductiveness of this death instinct. Unfortunately what we today call *development* creates not only ecological and technological risk, but also cultural disorganization which is an underestimated factor of risk in our technological world. All over the world rapid technological and economical change has resulted in the large scale disruption of communities, of ways of life. The process of destruction-creation which is essential for a dynamic economy results also in the disruption of the symbolic patterns which organize life and provide a barrier to our violent compulsions. Exposure to the unprecedented power of modern technology not only creates frustration and resentment but also has a dramatic counterpart in the downgrading of spiritual traditions and of established symbolic ethical models. The history of the twentieth century tells abundantly how this predicament has nurtured all sorts of individual and collective neuroses, loss of meaning, perversion of values and of spiritual traditions. Development is a humus on which -among many other venomous flowers-terrorism seems to prosper. The generous but naive ideas of the Enlightenment enticed us into believing that the diffusion of science and technology is a buttress against fanaticism and jingoism; but since Fedor Dostoevski and Joseph Conrad we should know better. As a matter of fact many of the modern terrorists have training in science and technology; significantly they have not been recruited in traditional communities but in modern universities; these *heimatloss*, dreaming of a fantastic fatherland, are typically modern. Not only is it an illusion to believe that rapid economic and technological change will result in peaceful universal brotherhood and democracy but, on the contrary, we can be certain that it will result in various sorts of dangerous social and political pathologies.

**A bad example:** The evil projects of modern terrorists do not stem from some unique wickedness; they are an expression of the modern predicament and of modern culture. We should not forget that everything terrorists do or plan doing to hasten the coming of their own version of the Kingdom of Justice has been already publicly

planned, done and justified during the twentieth century by our so-called rational Nation-States. What is embarrassing is that we have given them the example of what can be done and the tools to do it. During World War I France and Germany gave the world a lesson in mass killing of human beings with gasses. The possibilities of biological warfare were first explored in western (including American) military laboratories and some of the best places where terrorists can go shopping for anthrax and other biological niceties are the military warehouses of “civilized” countries. During World War II, in the name of civilization, the English and the Americans carried out mass bombing of civilians in Dresden, Hamburg and Hiroshima on a much greater scale than the blitz of nazi Germany. Finally, accepting the idea that *everything* should be done to defend a country, western societies, disregarding the teaching that no dominion is eternal on Earth, have built enough atomic bombs to destroy human life on Earth; by so doing Christian nations of the West have in practice turned the Nation-State into an absolute to which all mankind may be sacrificed. But once a State has authorized itself to do so in the name of national sovereignty, it thereby implicitly grants all the other States permission to do the same; why would anyone convinced of the sanctity of his mission resist the temptation of using such means if he could?

**The price of development:** Our belief that thanks to “progress” we could enjoy not only an abundance of commodities and services at a low price but also peace and democracy is dangerously short sighted. Focusing on technological and economic assets we forget too easily that development is a multidimensional process with far-reaching societal consequences. Rapid techno-economic development creates both technological vulnerabilities and scarcity of some essential cultural resources such as symbolic ethical patterns and vigorous traditions. For a long time we have ignored these indirect costs of development. But when the two distinct trends towards technological vulnerability and depletion of strong symbolic guidelines, which characterize the modern world, finally intersect, then the world may become a dangerous place to live in. Limiting the dangerousness of our predicament will be very difficult. So far cultural creation cannot be engineered: the establishment of strong symbolic ethical guidelines is a slower process than their destruction by an ever-changing technological and economical environment; at any rate it is difficult to conceive how such a cultural creation could be achieved without a serious slowing-down of techno-economic development and, obviously, we are not ready for that. Another path to security, more akin to the modern mind, consists of enhancing social control to the same level as we have developed technological power. As Bernard Charbonneau used to say: *The greater our power grows, the stricter order must be.* Today our techniques of social control are lagging far behind the destructive potential of our technologies; in order to obtain security we may devote our energy to overcoming this discrepancy between power and control. But this again is a risky path: not only is it far from certain that this huge task can be achieved at all, but it is likely that it could be achieved only at the expense of individual freedom, as Aldous Huxley warned us in 1921.

The pursuit of development will not be the cure to insecurity; it is part of the problem.

\* \* \* \* \*

## September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001: On Violence, Divine and Human

by Darrell J. Fasching

On September 11<sup>th</sup>, like Americans everywhere, I sat stunned watching again and again as those two planes crashed into the World Trade Center. There was no escaping those images. Every time I changed the channel, seeking relief, the images would reappear. And as I watched the ball of fire repeatedly explode from those towers I could feel the wave of hatred that motivated these acts sweep over America. Thousands tragically died that day, but all Americans knew they were equally desirable targets, although not all were equally accessible. Never in my life had I experienced so unambiguously the reality of being hated by people I didn't know and hadn't ever met.

On the day the bombing of Afghanistan began, a tape of Osama bin Laden was broadcast explaining to us our situation. "These events have split the whole world into two camps: the camp of belief and the camp of disbelief. There is only one God, and I declare that there is no prophet but Muhammad." Bin Laden and the al Qaida, according to a discovered terrorist manual, are clear about the goal: "overthrow of the godless regimes and their replacement with an Islamic regime." This goal, says bin Laden, authorizes Muslims to kill Americans and all unbelievers. The killing of even innocent women and children is not only permitted but religiously required.

At first bin Laden explained his actions as a response to the religious offense of American soldiers, whose very presence in Saudi Arabia during the Gulf War, profaned the land that harbors the most sacred places of Islam. In bin Laden's eyes, it seems, it was the most flagrant sign of the pollution of the sacred world of Islam by the secularity of modern Western civilization. As the conflict escalated, bin Laden widened the scope of his enemies list to embrace all nations who participate in the United Nations including "those who pretend they are leaders of the Arab world and remain members of the U.N." - an organization that divided Palestine in 1947 and "gave the Muslim country to the Jews."

The power of the sacred, Ellul would have reminded us, when left unchecked, always divides the world into two camps, one sacred and the other profane. Such a sacral vision offers war as a ritual of purification by which to cleanse the world of everyone and everything profane.

Nevertheless, if we wish to call into question such sacral interpretations of Islam we had better be prepared to call into question certain sacral interpretations of Christianity as well. We have heard bin Laden's style of dualistic rhetoric before. It has infected

significant strands, not only of Islam but of Christianity and of Western civilization. “Two world’s face one another” said Hitler in *Mein Kampf*, “the men of god and the men of Satan! The Jew is the anti-man, the creature of another god... Today I believe that I am acting in accordance with the will of the Almighty Creator: by defending myself against the Jew, I am fighting for the work of the Lord.” Hitler took his inspiration from many sources, including Martin Luther: “Know Christian that next to the devil, thou hast no enemy more cruel, more venomous and violent than a true Jew.” And the well from which Luther drew goes deep into the past - all the way back to the anti-Judaism of the Gospel of John (Chapter 8) where Jesus is portrayed as saying to “the Jews”: “Do you know why you cannot take in what I say? It is because you are unable to understand my language. The devil is your father, and you prefer to do what your father wants. He was a murder from the start... he is a liar, and the father of lies ... If you refuse to listen it is because you are not God’s children.”

We can no longer afford to indulge in the apocalyptic rhetoric of the cataclysmic struggle between good and evil that infects these sacral visions and permits the “cleansing” of the earth through the “removal” of all who are profane and therefore portrayed as “less than human” or worse “demonic.” The sickness that infects important strands of the biblical religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) is in great part rooted in a vision of God’s “final solution” to the problem of evil as an act of cosmic violence that separates believers from unbelievers, in order to give the world over to the former. As the history of Christian anti-Judaism and the role it played in the Holocaust well illustrates, it is not an unimaginable leap from “the Jews are not worthy of eternal life” to “the Jews are not worthy of life.” This is the kind of leap bin Laden, it seems, has been able to make with regard to both Christians and Jews, from within his Islamic apocalyptic world view.

Jacques Ellul taught us that we are not inevitably locked into a sacral reading of the scriptures, not even of *The Apocalypse* or *Book of Revelation*. Ellul embraced what he called the biblical tradition of the holy that comes to expression in hospitality to the stranger and rightly rejected the interpretation that the final solution to evil offered by the Book of Revelation is through God’s violence. He looks instead to the suffering Christ and Christ’s teachings on love of one’s enemies as the central message and finds in the Book of Revelation, the message of salvation for the whole human race.

The command to welcome the stranger is not only the most often repeated commandment in the Torah it is also the core of Jesus message of non-violence in the Sermon on the Mount, where we are asked to love our enemies and do good to those that persecute us. In the biblical tradition, to welcome the stranger is to welcome either God, the Messiah or an angel (messenger) of God. And to reject the stranger is to turn one’s back on God.

How are we to respond to Islamic terrorists after September 11<sup>th</sup>? I am not suggesting that returning love for hate in any direct way would have any influence on bin Laden and the members of al Qaida. However, I do believe that in the long term only hospitality and compassion can solve the terrorist problem. Two days after the



destruction of the World Trade Center the New York Times took a poll that showed that 85% of those surveyed said we should respond with military violence. Of these 75% said, even if innocent civilians are killed, and of these 85% said even if thousands of innocent civilians are killed. At that moment, Americans showed that they too are willing to become terrorists.

Fortunately, indiscriminate bombing in Afghanistan has not been our policy so far. While it may be possible to win the battle against Osama bin Laden and al Qaida by violence, it is quite possible that we could win that battle and yet lose the war against terrorism. Our response to September 11<sup>th</sup> must not be that revealed in the New York Times poll. To retreat into insular patriotism and see the world as “us against them” is to play into the apocalyptic vision of Osama bin Laden who wants to divide the whole world into two camps as a precursor to an apocalyptic struggle to cleanse the world.

We do not need to give the fire of hatred that spewed forth from the World Trade Center the power to divide us - whether along, religious or nationalistic/political lines. That fire of hatred is best answered with the living flame of love and compassion. Two things happened to Americans after September 11<sup>th</sup> .that offer us this option - an option that undermines the violence of the sacred and embraces the hospitality of the tradition of the holy. (1) For the first time in the experience of many Americans we knew personally and viscerally what it was like to be the object of hatred and prejudice by people who only know us through stereotypes. Many minorities in this country know what it is like to be viewed in that way but most middle and upper class white Americans do not - or rather, did not before September 11<sup>th</sup>. (2) For perhaps the first time in our history, all Americans were perceived as victims and received unprecedented expressions of compassion from countries and their citizens around the world. Far from dividing us, one from another, September 11<sup>th</sup> demonstrated that compassion for victims can transcend international political and religious boundaries.

Knowing what it is like to be the victim of hatred and prejudice and what it is like to receive compassion should awaken in us a compassion for victims everywhere in the world. No longer can we distance ourselves from the suffering found in the world. September 11<sup>th</sup> should move us to engage in those personal, community and public actions and policies that will build an international wall of compassion to circle the world and turn back the wall of hatred and violence that washed over the world on September 11<sup>th</sup>. Only such a wall of compassion can choke out the fires of hatred that motivated the terrorist acts of September 11\* , rendering their stereotypes implausible. Before September 11<sup>th</sup> the Bush administration was pursuing an arrogant international policy of unilateralism (in ecological policy, missile defense, etc) Now such policies should seem to us unthinkable. Now we should know and act on the truth, that *we are members of one another*. Now we should turn our back on the god of violent “final solutions” and embrace the stranger. There is no other way either to God or to peace except through hospitality to the stranger.

# The Dysfunctions of a Global Technological Era

by David W. Gill

Jacques Ellul's writings provide not one but several perspectives from which to view critically the horrors of September 11. Most immediately, perhaps, one thinks of Ellul's discussion of violence and counter-violence. What will be the result of relying on overwhelming force to suppress Al Qaeda? Could American Christians with any legitimacy claim God's support for their military actions against their Muslim enemies? Is it possible to break the cycle of violence? What would it take? Ellul's answers to such questions would not be likely to please large numbers of people.

Ellul's thinking about religion is also pertinent. He was very critical of various aspects of the Muslim tradition (cf. *Subversion of Christianity*, 1984; Eng. trans.1986; ch. 5 "The Influence of Islam") including its legalism, repression of women, and its support for slavery, colonization, and holy war. One wonders where Muslims and non-Muslims could possibly find common ground for peaceful co-existence after reading Ellul (and his longer book-length study of Islam was never published because the French publishers thought it politically too hot to handle!).

But it should not be thought that the critique of Islam ends the discussion of religion for Ellul. He was tougher still on Christians for selling out their unique witness for an unholy political/cultural/economic replacement faith that in practice worships money, power, and technology. The outrage that many Muslims feel toward the West and America is most emphatically not due to the "offense of the Gospel" or the "scandal of the cross" as the New Testament puts it. It is not the suffering, redemptive love of the cross but the blustering, arrogant greed of corporate and cultural imperialists that has won the west and now is a stench in much of the world's nostrils.

Ellul's views of revolution, revolt, and social change would also provide interesting lenses through which to view the rise and character of Muslim Fundamentalist movements like the Taliban and the Iranian leadership. Are these mere revolts in protest of a juggernaut technological development? Or do they have genuine revolutionaiy potential?

Nevertheless, what interests me most in thinking about Ellul and 9/11 is his description of the irresistible "universalism" of Technique (cf. *Technological Society*, 1954; Eng. trans.1964; pp. 116-133). In our contemporary terminology, globalization is inevitable: all parts of the globe will be conquered by technology and technological rationality. In all parts of the globe, distinctive, traditional values, habits, and techniques will yield to a common technological platform.

Wherever technology invades, it conquers and replaces old cultures. Ellul argues that religion is receding before technology. Buddhism and Hinduism are collapsing. He does not mention Islam or Christianity but he clearly intends us to think that they too must yield to technological development.

September 11 demonstrates this triumphant universalism of technology in several ways. It is globalized technology that has invaded Afghan societies, arming them to

fight against the Soviet Union in the 80s. It is global technology that brings an increasingly homogeneous and aggravating media diet into homes and neighborhoods around the globe. It is global technology that enabled the organization of Al Qaeda and it was advanced technology that was used to bring down the World Trade Center. Our lives are thoroughly interwoven by technology. And, of course, the anti-terrorist response is also carried out on the most advanced global technological platform. The whole experience will knit us more tightly together technologically than ever. Commerce and war were the great drivers of technological universalism in the past, Ellul argued. Looks like little has changed there.

But we must come back to Islam. For it appears that Islam is not so easily disposed of or coopted by technological society. Ellul criticized technological society as being ultimately meaningless and dehumanizing, and so it is. But isn't this why Islam has such an appeal? It is a powerful counter-narrative of history and meaning.

Can a fundamentalist Muslim civilization stand up to and overcome technological civilization? I doubt it. But I also doubt that it will take "No" for an answer from the global technological society. A succession of progressively more destructive "revolts" and rebellions (in effect "suicide bombings") is probably in our future, more so after the bombing of Afghanistan than before, because of the inexorable laws of violence.

Unless! In the face of what looked like technological determinism, Ellul was steadfastly a man of hope throughout his life. He believed in a Wholly Other" God breaking into human history in surprising ways. He believed that individuals and small communities could have tremendous long-term impact if they stopped trying to manipulate and calculate such impact and instead gathered intransigently and wholeheartedly around truth and then lived out that truth in the midst of the world's reality.

## Something Still Stands

by Andrew Goddard

The terrorist attacks on New York and Washington DC released a welter of emotions, from horror to grief to rage. But is there an authentic Christian response?

For those first few hours on the 11th September, as live pictures streamed into our homes and offices, silence seemed the only proper response. So many powerfull feelings were stirred up - horror, incredulity, shock, anger, grief, fear, pain, vulnerability - words failed us. Even now, after the explosions have been endlessly replayed, we struggle to find language, for each of us personally, for our society, for our world, that enables us to make some sense in the face of such non-sense. That enables us to think and act and live aright in response to great evil.

Christians, too, must find a language with which to speak. If we are to do that our vocabulary must express a perspective shaped by God's revelation in Jesus and in scripture. We must beware of just using the same words everyone else is using.

Unless we are discerning and critical, we run the risk of repeating what is, in effect, propaganda, hiding the truth rather than speaking it in love.

As we continue to mourn with those who mourn, almost everyone, whatever their nationality or religion, concurs with two basic truths: first, that the acts of the hijackers and of the men who directed and financed them were wholly wicked, and must be totally and unreservedly condemned. In cold blood to murder thousands of human beings, and terrorise millions! No suffering, however cruel, no end, however just, could ever legitimate such acts of violence by anyone.

Second, we must also speak of signs of grace and hope - the courage and self-sacrifice of thousands in response to such horror, the countless acts of human love in the face of such unspeakable human evil.

But here we are on the brink of falling into the first trap. We have divided those involved in this affair into those who have done great evil and those who have done good - and those who have done evil this time are those who are most different from us, while those who have done good are those who are most like us.

Two days after the attack, the headline in the *Times* read: 'Good will prevail over evil.' That as it stands is a vital message of hope with which all who believe in a God who raised the crucified Jesus from the dead must agree.

We may then think that we will prevail. But we must never identify any nation, or any political or economic system, with 'good' and with the work of God in the world. Nor can we subscribe to the view that good achieves its victory over evil through military and economic might.

In the immediate aftermath, other words fell easily from many lips. The language that was used was revealing, and needs to be examined. The attack, we were told, was not only evil but 'cowardly.' But why is it cowardly to be so devoted to one's goal (however wicked) that one is willing to die to achieve it? Is it not more cowardly to wage war by dropping bombs from miles up in the sky, secure from enemy fire, or by firing cruise missiles from a safe distance?

Again, we have been told repeatedly that this was an attack upon 'civilisation.' But this is at best only half true. Inasmuch as the Pentagon has developed weapons of mass destruction and given funding and training to both military regimes and violent insurgents, it is hardly a symbol of civilisation.

Perhaps more than anything else in the immediate aftermath we heard the opinion expressed that 'the world will never be the same again.' And yet the scale (at least) of this horror is sadly not unparalleled. As I stood watching the live pictures, someone, struggling to find words, said: 'Surely no major city has ever seen anything as sudden and destructive as this?' To which the obvious response was one unsettling name: Hiroshima.

One does not need to go back to the war to appreciate that such a massacre is not unprecedented. What about the seven thousand Muslim men and boys murdered in the 'safe haven' of Srebrenica? Or as many Tutsis killed in a single church in Rwanda? What of the 'turkey shoot' of fleeing Iraqi forces - mostly conscripts - on the road to

Basra at the end of the Gulf War? Or even the slaughter of 1,800 Palestinians in the Sabra and Chatilia refugee camps?

So, why does what we have just lived through feel qualitatively different? In part, it is because the cameras were there and so we saw it happening. In part, because they were people like us, living like us, who were terrorised and killed. We all feel, 'It could have been me on one of those planes, in one of those offices.' And so it makes us feel vulnerable in a way those other, distant atrocities never could.

Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Wales, who was in Manhattan at the time, spoke of this experience of powerlessness and observed that it is a real and frighteningly regular experience for millions of people. We have, in our emotional response to this horror, been provided with an opportunity not for vengeance but for grace. We have glimpsed what it would really mean to identify with victims of war and terrorism and oppression around the globe. We have sensed what it would really mean to 'remember ... those who are being tortured as though [we ourselves] were being tortured' (Hebrews 13.3).

It is crucial that such feelings are not overwhelmed by the (understandable) popular reaction that talks of being unbowed, of getting back to normal and of inflicting punishment or seeking revenge. Perhaps the particular calling of Christians now is to find a distinct language that can express those feelings and assist reflection to shape a different response.

Scripture gives us various examples. The Book of Lamentations reminds us how Israel reacted to the destruction of Jerusalem, and offers a pattern of prayer and worship which is sadly missing from so much of our church life, but is essential in times like these.

Job, struck suddenly and devastatingly by enemies, 'arose, tore his robe, shaved his head, and fell on the ground and worshipped'. He did not deny his weakness, but acknowledged, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord' (Job 1.201).

That peaceful attitude of humility and prayerful dependence not on one's own resilience but on God is also expressed in many of the psalms:

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea...

'Be still, and know that I am God!

I am exalted among the nations,

I am exalted in the earth.' (Psalm 46. If & 10)

It is when we come to God in this frame of mind that we may begin to discern a deeper reason why this particular massacre seems so different - seems, indeed, to have changed the world. We are already aware that the strength of our reaction is not simply explained by how many were killed, and how suddenly and publicly. It is also because of where it took place. This was an assault not only on civilians but also on

the great symbols of the economic and military might of the world's one remaining superpower.

On the Sunday following the attack, the church I attended found its own alternative to the media's response in the words of a great hymn of trust in God, 'All my hope on God is founded.' Its second verse suddenly had new depths of meaning:

Pride of man and earthly glory,  
Sword and crown betray his trust;  
What with care and toil he buildeth,  
Tower and temple, fall to dust.  
But God's power,  
Hour by hour,  
Is my temple and my tower.

Even secular commentators, without recognising its significance, have compared the World Trade Center to the tower of Babel. That ancient skyscraper represented the zenith of human power and achievement and the urge to make a name for ourselves and dominate the world (Genesis 11.4). How many people, witnessing the 'apocalyptic' scenes that Tuesday afternoon, thought of the disturbing words of Revelation 18: 'Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!'

There, in that chapter, may we not find another reason why this attack on the US mainland has been so shocking to so many?

'In her heart she says,  
"I rule as a queen;  
I am no widow,  
and I will never see grief'...'

And the kings of the earth ... weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning; they ... stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say,

'Alas, alas, the great city,  
Babylon, the mighty city!  
For in one hour your judgment has come'  
(Revelation 18.7b & 9f)

The Book of Revelation is notoriously difficult to interpret. Many have sought to read into it a literal timetable for future world politics, reducing its bold language of the imagination to a crude code for particular states and events. I do not think we should ever use God's word in that way. Nevertheless, the possible implications for our present situation of this difficult and much abused part of scripture are extensive and uncomfortable if we allow it to give us a glimpse behind the veil of human history.

Its graphic account of a sudden, devastating attack on a secure and confident economic and military power, and its traumatic global repercussions, bears powerfully on what we have just witnessed. It suggests that we can only really make sense of what has happened within the framework and through the language of a biblical theology of principalities and powers and the rise and fall of empires.

But, like the hymn, this passage calls us above all - as individuals, societies and nations - to examine ourselves and the way our pride and power represent a lack of trust in God that distorts and destroys human lives, and indeed the whole world.

Jesus' response to people's struggle to make sense of lives cut short by falling masonry and murderous intent is unsettling. His warning is simple: 'Unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did' - and he supplements this with a vivid story of a fruitless vineyard being given its last chance (Luke 13.1-9).

When we are confronted with our frailty and our powerlessness in the face of great evil, the temptation is to focus on what has attacked us. But scripture calls us instead to concentrate on God. The fundamental responses it seeks to elicit from us are those of lament, penitence for our own sin, humility, patient prayer and worshipful trust in God. The good news of the Book of Jonah is that when these, rather than retaliation and revenge, are our response, even the rebellious imperial spirit of a superpower (then, the Assyrians) can be truly vanquished, not by human violence but by divine grace.

But what of justice? Was this evil not an act of war that requires retribution? Christians find themselves unable to agree on a common language here. Some believe that the teaching and example of Jesus demand that we must always oppose all forms of violence. Others think there are circumstances in which a political authority can, and sometimes should, use coercive military power against others.

But even Christians who subscribe to this latter, just war' theory must be cautious about its application in the present situation. At its heart is the belief that the pursuit of justice God requires of political authorities (see, for example, Romans 13.1-7) cannot be limited solely to actions within the geographical boundaries of their jurisdiction or restricted to the normal juridical means of legal processes. In the fight against injustice and oppression in this world, such an authority may under certain conditions properly use what the apostle Paul called 'the sword' outside its own legislative realm.

There is absolutely no doubt that a monumental act of injustice and inhumanity has been perpetrated on US soil, against citizens of the United States and many other countries. It is therefore incumbent on all those with political and judicial power - particularly the US government - to seek to bring to account anyone who survives who planned this dreadful crime and to prevent any more such atrocities.

However, only actions whose aim is to secure that specific and limited end - and that have a reasonable prospect of achieving it - can ever be justified. Only actions that distinguish between the guilty and the innocent can ever be right. Only actions that are controlled and constrained by the goal of ensuring justice are legitimate. Such stringent conditions distinguish just war from terrorism.

In struggling to understand what had happened and the mentality of those involved, Jack Straw, the British Foreign Secretary, was quick to condemn the terrorists for being trapped in a psychosis in which their ends justified any means. It is frightening, and sadly ironic, that much of the subsequent discussion about how we are to respond has betrayed signs of exactly the same psychosis. How many voices have we heard saying that we must, or shall, 'do everything in our power'? We must insist that there may

be technically and politically possible means to secure a just end that ought never to be used because they are morally wrong.

In fact, describing the assault on Manhattan and Washington DC as an 'act of war' is highly debatable, on both technical and moral grounds. The language of war is best used for conflicts between political authorities that claim legitimacy as representative leaders of an identifiable political community. It may, therefore, be better to consider those attacks in terms of crime (though their ferocity and scale could justify speaking of a private war).

This crux of definition draws attention to another fundamental, and frightening, problem we now face in seeking to enact justice. Since the perpetrators lack any public political function and any established political and military structure, it is very difficult to wage a just war against them. A real danger then arises that, in a reversal of George Bush's claim, war waged against terrorism ceases to be just, as it can itself now only take the form of terrorism. Some of the more belligerent responses that have been suggested would appear, under the cover of a justified war, to amount to a form of mass societal torture.

It is vital that, whether we are pacifists or committed to the 'just war' tradition, Christians should find a language that is truthful about our response to this evil and that discerns what is right and what is wrong. If we do not, we face the real and terrifying danger that the governments of the US and Britain and our allies, carried along by their own propaganda, will become like the terrorists they oppose, slaves to an unquestioning belief in their own ideology, and willing to use disproportionate and indiscriminate violence in their cause.

Does this Christian language leave us powerless in the face of such wickedness? In one sense, yes. Political rhetoric that promises that we will not rest until we have eradicated evil from our world represents a fundamentally godless politics which, because it no longer believes in the final judgment by God, thinks that such a judgment can and must somehow be enacted by us. But when we exert human power in the face of great evil we run the risk of allowing evil to triumph even more through our own actions, and thus finding ourselves under God's judgment.

Instead, the biblical response acknowledges that when we ourselves are powerless, evil is not victorious, because God is God and he will judge:

O Lord, you God of vengeance, you God of vengeance, shine forth!

Rise up, O judge of the earth...

O Lord, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked exult? (Psalm 94. Iff)

We not only await God's future judgment of evil but look back to his past judgment of it in Jesus. Here is the event - a demonstration of the power and wisdom of God which is so momentous that we may truly say the world will never be the same again.

We have, quite rightly, heard much talk of our enemies; but Jesus called us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5.43f). His enemy-love, his turning the other cheek, led him to the cross - and there he reconciled us to each other and to God, and there he overcame the principalities and powers. He achieved this



by having his body broken and his blood poured out. He suffered the terrorism of the cross, sharing the fate of the zealots who sought to defeat Rome by violence - and it was, amazingly, in this way, while we were his enemies, that God showed his love for us.

And that past judgment is something in whose light we must now live in the Spirit of Jesus. It gives us an understanding of God, and of our own sinfulness in the face of great evil, that does not leave us powerless but, rather, grants us the wisdom to make sense of these difficult times, the language with which to speak and help others to speak, and the power to respond by living the truth in love.

As Paul urged us: 'Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good' (Romans 12.14-21).

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## **Bombs Bursting in Air**

by Dan Clendenin

This week American and British bombs began raining down upon Afghanistan. Defense Secretary Rumsfeld has declared the skies are now clear for us to bomb 24 hours a day, although some jets now return to aircraft carriers with missiles intact due to a paucity of targets. No doubt the Presidents ratings will spike in the polls.

As a Christian who worships the Lord who loves all peoples and nations, this fills me with deep sadness. Terrorized by the Taliban, devastated by its war with the Soviet Union (1 million deaths, 4 million refugees), Afghanistan, like many places in the world today,<sup>1</sup> is hardly a nation in the normal political sense of the term, What it is is an unqualified humanitarian catastrophe.

I am greatly inspired by the pacifist possibilities proposed by King and Ghandi, but it seems like non-violence as a national policy would allow evil to rule unchecked. So, I believe that some sort of military intervention is called for on our part, just as it was in the Second World War or, more recently, in Yugoslavia. In both of those cases wholesale genocide was taking place and military intervention helped to stop it. There

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<sup>1</sup> See Robert Kaplan, *The Ends of the Earth* (New York: Random, 1996).

is an argument to make, too, that if we had intervened sooner and more forcibly in Europe and the former Yugoslavia, we might have saved even more lives, just as we might have in the Rwandan genocide where we did nothing at all.

Given the apparent necessity of a military response, I nevertheless have tried to identify in my own mind just what it is that disturbs me as a Christian about our war against terrorism. Three matters come to mind: the ambiguous consequences of violence; the inflated sense of national cause to make it almost contiguous with God's cause; and the restricted sense of justice to exclude our opponents' moral claims.

First, violence often begets more violence. I wonder whether the bombings will prevent future terrorist acts (which the Taliban have already promised) or actually provoke even more of them by radicalizing and inflaming the militant fringe, and drawing in even moderate Muslims. Only time will tell.

Further, although I recognize our military response as somehow necessary, I feel very uneasy about calling it morally good. To me the bombings are necessary, regrettable and morally ambiguous. What disturbs me the most is the rhetoric of religious nationalism that is invoked to narrate our cause, namely, the idea that God is on our side in a uniquely special way, that our cause is His cause. Senator John McCain put it this way: "They hate us because we are good and they are evil." Defining the kingdom of God in nationalistic terms, or one's national interests in divine terms, is nothing new. Compare these four examples.

Adolf Hitler stated his case this way. "I believe that I am acting in accordance with the will of the Almighty Creator ... By defending myself against the Jew, I am fighting for the work of the Lord." His rival General Eisenhower used the language of jihad: "This war was a holy war; more than any other in history this war has been an array of the forces of evil against those of righteousness."<sup>2</sup> Now fast forward to the present crisis.

On October 7, 2001, after the United States and Britain launched its attacks on Afghanistan, the Arab television news network al Jazeera broadcast a speech by Osama bin Laden. We don't know exactly when this tape was made, and I have made some slight paraphrases to improve the awkward translation of bin Laden's speech.

America has now tasted only a small portion of the humility we have experienced for 80 years. . In Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq, Sudan, and the like, no one complains when innocent children and civilians are killed. No guilt is attached to this. No one thinks of these as war crimes ... I say that these events have split the whole world into two camps: the camp of the believer and the camp of the infidel ... God has given America back what they deserve ... This is America, God has sent one of the attacks by God and has attacked one of its best buildings. And this is America filled with fear from the north to the south, and east to west, thank God.

Here, America is the great Satan.

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<sup>2</sup> Cited by James Canoil, *Constantine's Sword* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), pp. 256-257,

George Bush likewise invoked divine sanction for our country's actions. In his September 20 speech to the joint session of Congress (viewed by 82 million people, according to Nielsen) he remarked:

Every nation, in every region, now has a decision. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists ... I will not forget this wound to our country, or those who inflicted it.

I will not yield. I will not rest... I will not relent in waging this struggle for the freedom and security of the American people ... The course of this conflict is not known, yet its outcome is certain. Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them ... Fellow citizens, we will meet violence with patient justice assured of the rightness of our cause.

In this instance it is the militant Muslims who constitute an evil empire.

Let me be clear. To me there is no moral comparison between Hitler and the allies, or between terrorist values that turn jets into bombs and western liberal political values enshrined in the likes of the UN Declaration of Human Rights (1948). But all four people above invoke God for their cause and divide the world neatly into the evil infidel and the righteous believer. That makes me nervous. Flying the flag in a church or a mosque, as if to signify either figuratively or literally that the interests of the kingdom of God coincide with the interests of one's country, is a more benign example of the same phenomenon.

Thirdly, sometimes our sense of justice is truncated, tailored to serve our own narrow cause while myopically ignoring our enemy's moral claims. Having traveled in numerous countries of the two-thirds world, I must say that I get frustrated when Americans fail to appreciate why many people around the world "hate us."

I resonate with some of what bin Laden says about the political humiliation, economic exploitation, military domination, and overall "cultural colonialism" that nations like his feel. What about the the moral filth we export around the world for a handsome profit, from movies by Madonna and Schwarzenegger to MTV (which, as the world's largest television network, can now be viewed in 342 million households in 140 countries).<sup>3</sup> Does our sense of justice weep as much for the 100,000 Iraqis killed in the Gulf War (1991) as for the 148 allied casualties,<sup>4</sup> as much for the one million deaths in the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88) as for our 44 Americans slain in Mogadishu (1992)? Bin Laden's terrorist response is tragically flawed and will do his cause harm; but his analysis has at least some merit. From the vantage point of the world's disenfranchised, western triumphalism is not a pretty picture.

Bombs are not a quick fix and may, in fact, cause not only collateral damage but unintended consequences. The kingdom of God is something far different than a national

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<sup>3</sup> Benjamin Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism are Reshaping the World* (New York: Ballantine, 1995). See also Thomas Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization* (NY: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> These are the US government estimates; some human rights groups put the figures much higher.

cause. And a consistent sense of moral justice does not know any national boundaries. May God have mercy on our country; and on Afghanistan too.

Essay for 15 October 2001. *The Journey with Jesus: Notes to Myself*. [www.stanford.edu/group/ivfaculty/Essays](http://www.stanford.edu/group/ivfaculty/Essays). Used with permission.

## Terrorisme international et communication politique dans les sociétés techniciennes

by Patrick Troude-Chastenet

”Je n’ai pas l’habitude de faire des amalgames faciles, et je dis donc en pesant exactement mes termes que les terroristes sont des nazis.” Jacques Ellul, *Les combats de la liberté*, 1984

L’Histoire, la grande, nous dira peut-être un jour si nous avons eu raison de faire commencer le XXI<sup>ème</sup> siècle à la date du 11 septembre 2001. Quoiqu’il en soit, si l’attaque terroriste, et surtout la riposte militaire, a donné lieu aux interprétations les plus contradictoires, personne n’a osé contester l’importance de cet événement inouï, “radicalement nouveau” pour Claude Lanzmann, éternellement pur, “l’éternellement absolu” selon la formule de Jean Baudrillard.

L’ampleur de ce drame ne doit pourtant pas nous empêcher de considérer le terrorisme moderne comme une forme particulière de communication politique dont la signification profonde est inséparable du caractère technique des sociétés contemporaines. Cet “hyperterrorisme” fonctionne à la fois comme indicateur de niveau de vulnérabilité des sociétés techniciennes et comme révélateur de la fragilité intrinsèque des démocraties pluralistes. Il a aussi pour effet de rappeler - par sa brutalité spectaculaire - que la force sinon la violence est toujours et partout le moyen spécifique, l’ultima ratio, de l’action politique.

La contestation armée de la prétention de l’état moderne au monopole de la violence physique légitime, renouvelle partiellement le thème de l’articulation de la politique et de la guerre. Enfin, si le terrorisme “*intrinsèquement mauvais*” selon Jacques Ellul, n’est pas - en soi - une nouvelle forme de totalitarisme mais seulement une arme aux mains de différents groupes ou régimes totalitaires, les solutions employées pour le combattre posent à leur tour la classique question des moyens et des fins.

Sous cet angle, peut-on désormais tirer quelques leçons de la tragédie du 11 septembre 2001 en revenant d’abord sur le film de l’événement tel que nous l’avons vécu, avant d’examiner ensuite ses conséquences, c’est-à-dire la guerre multiforme qui s’en est suivie et les questions, morales et politiques, qu’elle soulève des deux côtés de l’Atlantique?

I. L’événement - l’Amérique attaquée au nom de la Justice

Que s’est-il passé ce jour-là? Si l’on essaie de se reporter mentalement en arrière, comment avons-nous - sur le moment - réagi et perçus cet événement encore inédit?

## 1. Images du pouvoir et pouvoir des images

Au-delà de ce qui a été immédiatement présenté comme une déclaration de guerre à l'Amérique et/ou au monde occidental, voire comme le début de la première guerre du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle, la première interrogation concernait le choix des cibles. Leur nature. Ce qui revenait à poser cette série de questions élémentaires: qui a fait quoi, comment, et avec quels résultats?

Et l'interrogation persistante sur l'identité du ou des auteurs - la question du qui - a eu tendance à eclipser la question du quoi. La question du comment étant littéralement absorbée par l'image - diffusée en boucle - des Boeing s'encastant dans les tours.

Nous reviendrons sur la dimension symbolique des cibles mais il n'a échappé à personne que ce sont des lieux de pouvoir — des représentations, des images du Pouvoir - qui ont été visés. Pouvoir économique et financier: le World Trade Center. Pouvoir militaire: le Pentagone. Pouvoir politique: l'attentat avorté contre la Maison Blanche.

La dimension visuelle est essentielle dans le sens où, de bout en bout, l'affaire a pris la forme d'un spectacle - tragique certes - mais d'un spectacle, et qui plus est télévisé... en direct live.

Le 11 septembre a marqué le retour en fanfare, du temps et de l'image CNN<sup>5</sup>. Un retour, qui s'avérera provisoire du reste, non pas de la chaîne de Ted Turner en tant que telle mais d'un genre si critique, en France du moins, durant et au lendemain de la Guerre du Golfe (1991).

Diffusion universelle d'images provenant d'un émetteur unique, risque de manipulation et de censure, information sous influence, omniprésence des généraux et des experts sur les plateaux de télévision, étouffement de toute voix discordante...

Pendant quarante-huit heures environ des spécialistes en aéronautique, en contre-espionnage et en terrorisme international se succéderont sur les écrans dormant & l'événement des airs de déjà vu, sans pour autant se montrer capables de se hisser à sa hauteur. Le soir même, la question n'était déjà plus de savoir si, mais quand, les Américains riposteraient.

Par le truchement de la chaîne d'information en continu CNN, allons nous revivre cette obscène spectacularisation de la guerre: le ciel de Bagdad illumine par des bombes aux allures de feux d'artifice, les raids aériens filmés sous l'angle d'innocents jeux vidéo?

Mais revenons aux attentats. Qu'avons-nous vu ce 11 septembre? *America under attack*, en direct sur tous les téléviseurs de la planète.

La première frappe (tour nord) a eu lieu à 8h45 heure de New-York (14h45 Paris). Elle n'a été vue par personne<sup>6</sup>. La seconde frappe (tour sud) a eu lieu à 9h06, soit 21 mn plus tard, comme si la fonction de la première attaque avait été, non seulement de

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<sup>5</sup> De façon symptomatique, la chaîne Qatarie d'informations en continu Al-Jazira sera immédiatement qualifiée par les médias français de "CNN du monde arabe".

<sup>6</sup> La scène a néanmoins été filmée par un Français amateur dont les images ont été diffusées par CNN seulement vers minuit heure locale.

commencer par faire des victimes mais surtout d'attirer l'attention des televisions, et des telespectateurs sur le veritable carnage qui allait suivre. Et en effet, l'attaque du second Boeing a pu etre filmee en direct par une camera automatique de CNN, et vue en direct l'apres-midi en Europe et le soir au Proche-Orient et en Asie.

"Ce moment a ete l'apothose de l'ere postmoderne" notera plus tard le romancier Martin Amis. Mais quels ont ete dans l'instant les effets sur nous, spectateurs involontaires et captifs de la catastrophe qui se deroulait en direct sous nos yeux? Oserait-on en la circonstance parler de dommages collateraux?

*Punir l'Occident par la ou il a peche? Le culte de l'image*

Devant la mort en direct & la television, on ne pense pas ou plus, le cerveau en apnee, scotche & l'actualite spectaculaire des images qui defilent en boucle sur nos ecrans. L'enormite meme de l'evenement nous empeche de decoller les yeux du televiseur. On assiste impuissant a la mise entre parenthese de certaines de nos fonctions "vitals", dont la fonction critique.

Comment echapper a la tyrannie de l'image qui hypnotise les consciences. Choc des images, etat de choc... On est submerge par les images de la catastrophe que l'on nous passe et nous repasse sur toutes les chaines. Le "on" designant tous les *heavy viewers* que nous sommes devenus pour l'occasion.

Il y a soudain comme une impossibilite de se defaire de ce drame si telegenique. Aprs la catalepsie, l'addiction? Nous oscillons entre deux maux: le risque d'overdose et l'etat de manque.

La diffusion repetee de ces images qualifiees par tous les temoins d'incroyable, d'impensable, d'inimaginable, finit par crer un besoin supplementaire d'images, comme pour dormir une sorte d'authentification a un spectacle juge "invraisemblable", "hallucinant." Conditionnement, accoutumance, dependance...

La vue de ces Boeing decrasant les tours fait naitre chez le telespectateur indigne par tant de cruaute un nouveau besoin, inavouable, une sorte d'attente inconsciente: celle d'images des preparatifs de la riposte militaire, des avions qui decollent, de jeunes militaires Americains, blancs et noirs, tous unis dans le meme desir de venger leur pays...

Autrement dit, des images heroiques dignes du meilleur (ou du pire) cinema americain.

*L'effet boomerang ou l'arroseur arrose*

En 1998 deja, *Couvre-feu* d'Edward Zwick, mettait en scene une serie d'attentats islamistes visant New-York. En fait depuis plus de trente ans, Hollywood inonde les ecrans du monde entier de ses films-catastrophes.

De *Airport* (1969) a *Couvre-feu* (1998) en passant par *L'Aventure du Poseidon* (1972), *La Tour Infernale* (1974), *Piege de cristal* (1988), *Independance Day* (1996) et *Mars attacks!* (1997), l'Industrie cinematographique americaine deverse un flot ininterrompu de ces productions a grand spectacle.

Le genre a ses lois. La catastrophe opere it la fois comme revelateur et comme moyen de redemption. Elle permet generalement a des timores de se comporter en

aventuriers intrepides, a des medians declares de racheter leurs crimes tandis que de faux courageux tombent le masque et que des gens apparemment biens sous tous rapports se conduisent en parfaits salauds.

Par une ironie dont seule l'Histoire a le secret, les terroristes ont retourné cette arme ideologique, ou ce message culture! contre son emetteur. Conçu a l'origine comme une fiction de divertissement, le scenario catastrophe est brutalement transpose dans le monde reel par les ennemis de l'Amerique. Une sorte de retour -sanguinant-& l'envoyeur

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"Il se pourrait bien qu'ils aient intentionnellement utilise le langage des films americains. Ils ne semaient pas simplement la terreur, ils creaient aussi des images"<sup>7</sup> *This time, the scene was real*. Du coup, les experts de la CIA consultent les scenaristes d'Hollywood pour anticiper la forme de nouvelles attaques.

Au cinema, la catastrophe r?vde aussi le heros qui sommeille dans le *regular guy*, le type ordinaire. Dans la realite, beaucoup d' Americains considrent que La Maison Blanche a ete sauvee du vol 93 de United Airlines, l'avion qui s'est ecrase pres de Pittsburgh, par une poignee de sportifs amateurs.

## 2. Symboles du pouvoir et pouvoir des symboles

Ce ne sont pas des immeubles qui ont ete attaques mais avant tout une metaphore, ou si l'on prefere des symboles. Et pas n'importe lesquels, les symboles de l'hyperpuissance americaine, symboles du pouvoir economique, du pouvoir militaire et du pouvoir politique.

Les cliches journalistiques contiennent toujours leur part de v&ite. "On a vise le cceur de l'Amerique." "L'Am^rique touchee en plein coeur." Les tours jumelles constituaient bien le haut lieu symbolique de la puissance economique et financiere des USA. SituS a quelques pas de la Bourse de Wall Street, la presse ddsignait parfois le World Trade Center come le *Temple du Commerce*.

La connotation religieuse s'applique dgalemment au Pentagone lorsqu'il est qualifiy de *Sanctuaire de la guerre* 1 Quant ii La Maison Blanche, elle symbolisait bien evidemment le siege du pouvoir du chef de l'etat le plus puissant du monde. Autrement dit, un lieu sacre par excellence.

Dans les trois cas, attaquer ces lieux symboliques de pouvoir prend valeur de sacrilege. Par leur gigantisme meme, les *twin* avaient en effet des allures de cathedrales. D'ailleurs, meme si l'aveu ne fait pas necessairement le coupable, on notera que l'inspireateur presume de ces attentats (l'&netteur du "message") est venu confirmer, un mois aprds les faits, ce qui n'&ait encore qu'une interpretation; parmi d'autres possibles. "Les vraies cibles dtaient les icdnes du pouvoir militaire et economique americains."

En utilisant le terme d'icnes, Oussama Ben Laden semble vouloir donner raison a Jean Baudrillard, dont il n'a vraisemblablement jamais entendu parler. "Cette violence terroriste n'est pas 're'eZZe". Elle est pire, dans un sens: elle est symbolique."<sup>8</sup> Selon ce

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<sup>7</sup> Neal Gabler, New York Times, 16/9/2001

<sup>8</sup> Jean Baudrillard, " L'esprit du terrorisme ", *Le Monde*, 3/11/2001

dernier, nous aurions tous revê de cet événement et dans leur stratégie, les terroristes savent “qu’ils peuvent compter sur cette complicité inavouable.” En se situant délibérément sur le terrain de l’inconscient collectif, le philosophe français échappe ainsi à toute discussion mais s’interdit du même coup la moindre prétention scientifique.

Le fondateur d’Al-Qaïda justifie le massacre d’innocents par une rhétorique politico-religieuse tendant à gommer la réalité physique des victimes pour mieux souligner la puissance symbolique des cibles. Ainsi donc, les victimes n’étaient pas visées en tant que telles mais avaient pour seul tort de se trouver au mauvais endroit au mauvais moment. Elles en sont mortes. Et d’une certaine façon Ben Laden les tue symboliquement une seconde fois en leur déniait le statut de cibles véritables. Que lui importe si la destruction de ces prétendues icônes impliquait la mort de milliers de personnes bien réelles, faites de chair et de sang.

Le lendemain du drame, le dessinateur Plantu croquait l’Oncle Sam en géant, marchant au milieu des gratte-ciel new-yorkais, blessé aux jambes par l’impact du premier avion. L’image n’était pas sans évoquer quelques scènes fameuses du film fantastique King-Kong (1933), les *twin* ayant d’ailleurs remplacé l’empire State Building dans le remake de John Guillermin. Mais comment ne pas songer au Colosse aux pieds d’argile ou même au Colosse de Rhodes des *peplums* d’antan.

Précisément, si l’on veut mesurer le pouvoir symbolique de la cible, il faut se rappeler que le colosse grec mesurait seulement 32 m de haut, que les ziggourats de Mésopotamie ayant inspiré la parabole biblique de la tour de Babel mesuraient de 40 & 100 m alors que les tours jumelles atteignaient 420 m de haut.

Pour un religieux fondamentaliste, le *skyscraper* américain n’est-il pas l’équivalent moderne de la tour de Babel? “Une tour dont le sommet pénètre les cieux” (Genèse, 11). Une sorte de défi lancé par l’homme Prométhée à Dieu pour affirmer sa puissance. Le gratte-ciel considéré comme gratte-Dieu? L’épisode biblique de la tour de Babel évoque bien une faute de mesure.

D’ailleurs, pour des chrétiens ultra-conservateurs comme pour des musulmans intégristes, New-York c’est Babylone ou Sodome et Gomorrhe. Une ville cosmopolite aux mœurs décadentes qui mérite destruction et chatiment divin.

Serait-ce faire injure à la psychanalyse que de la mêler à un lieu commun? Les tours comme représentation de la puissance sexuelle, le gratte-ciel comme symbole phallique? Dans cette perspective, l’attentat équivaudrait à une sorte de castration, architecturale et urbanistique. L’Amérique atteinte dans sa virilité, émasculée en direct par un ennemi encore inconnu mais forcément sauvage.

*Statue ou idole de La Liberty?*

À la une du quotidien *Le Monde* daté du 13 septembre, sur le tiers gauche de la photo, on ne voit plus que la Statue de la Liberté. En arrière-plan, on observe une épaisse fumée noire. Comme si l’effondrement des tours jumelles du World Trade Center faisait resurgir le symbole même de la liberté.

De son côté, le numéro spécial de l’hebdomadaire *TIME* consacré à la tragédie montre en couverture recto les deux tours en flamme, et en “quatrième” au verso,



la Statue de la Liberté en premier plan, tendant haut le bras, silhouette étincelante au milieu d'un rideau de fumée noire. L'image de cette statue intacte contemplant impavide un champ de ruines fait naître une curieuse impression.

Au lendemain des faits, il existe au moins deux "lectures" possibles de cette nouvelle *skyline*. En l'absence de revendication immédiate, la célèbre statue apparaît dans le ciel new-yorkais comme une sorte de signature. Un attentat commis au nom du droit à l'indépendance? La libération des territoires occupés, la libération des Lieux saints, l'arrêt des bombardements américains en Irak, la libération de tous les opprimés du monde! Preuve qu'il fallait détruire le temple du mercantilisme occidental pour replacer à l'horizon le symbole même de la liberté.

A contrario, on peut considérer qu'elle illustre l'échec même des terroristes qui ont détruit des immeubles et tué des innocents sans parvenir à écorner l'essentiel, l'immatériel, l'âme de l'Amérique, son principe, ses valeurs, symbolisées par cette statue célèbre dans le monde entier. D'ailleurs, si la liberté est la véritable religion des États-Unis, la sculpture de François Bartholdi en constitue la première icône, c'est à dire une "représentation symbolico-hypostatique," une simple image conductrice et l'origine qui, par nature, risque toujours de susciter l'idolâtrie.

De ce point de vue, la statue de la Liberté aurait constitué une cible autrement plus symbolique que les Twin ou le Pentagone. L'objectif était sans doute plus difficile à atteindre et le message risquait de devenir plus confus. Car si l'on prend au sérieux le discours d'Oussama Ben Laden, le terme d'icône peut conduire à penser que la cible des attentats n'était pas l'Amérique en soi mais le module inavoué qu'elle incarne aux yeux d'une poignée de leaders corrompus du Moyen-Orient, à commencer par ceux de son pays d'origine l'Arabie-Saoudite.

Enfin, on notera que la découverte de citoyens américains parmi les combattants talibans n'est pas le premier ni sans doute le dernier paradoxe de toute cette affaire. De même qu'on a pu qualifier le milliardaire terroriste, expert en circuit financier, de "secret de famille de l'Amérique" ou de "double noir de son président" (A. Roy), on peut se demander si les pirates de Fair kamikaze qui avaient séjourné aux États-Unis suffisamment longtemps pour se fondre dans la masse n'étaient-ils pas, eux aussi, par leur mode de vie et surtout par leur culture technique, un peu Américains?

### **3. Techniques de communication et communication de la technique**

Qui pourrait nier que les États-Unis représentent l'archétype, sinon la matrice, des sociétés techniques? À l'heure du cyberterrorisme, l'attaque terroriste du 11 Septembre permet de poser la question plus générale du rôle de la technique dans les sociétés modernes.

#### *La communication Internet*

Internet passe pour être une invention d'ingénieurs américains utilisée à l'origine par l'armée puis par les universitaires américains désireux d'échanger plus rapidement des informations avec leurs collègues à l'étranger. L'enquête policière tend à établir que les organisateurs de l'opération ont privilégié cette technique de communication pour assurer la coordination des attentats.

Plus discret que le telephone, le courrier yielectronique permettrait la dissimulation de messages par une combinaison de ciptologie et de *steganographie*. Les messages seraient au pr^alable codds puis dissimul^s (dans la partie grise non visible a l'oeil humain) au milieu de photographies d'apparence anodine (notamment les images les plus banales sur la Toile, c'est a dire des photos pomos) et transmis sous la forme de fichier attach^.

Selon, Ron Dick, directeur adjoint du FBI, non seulement les pirates se servaient d'Intemet, mais ils "s'en servaient bien."

#### *Le choix des armes*

La dimension paradoxale de l'vlnement ne pouvait ychapper personne. Alors que le president George W. Bush tentait d'imposer son projet de "bouclier antimissiles" cense transformer le sol am^ricain en sanctuaire, en le prot6geant des "Etats voyous/Rogue States," ce sont de banals cutters que Fon retrouve a la base de ce d&astre.

De meme que le danger n'est pas venu d'armes nucldaires, pas meme d'armes conventionnelles, mais de simples avions civils transform^ en armes de guerre. Il y a eu dytournement, dans les deux sens du terme: des avions d'ltoum& de leur route et d6tourn6s de leur objet.

Mais il y a eu aussi un retournement ou un "effet Frankeinstein." La technique a bel et bien yty retoumde contre son inventeur ou promoteur. Des avions am^ricains, des Boeing 767, jugds parmi les plus stirs du monde en raison meme de la complexity de leur systdme de commande et de regulation. Des compagnies americaines 6galement prestigieuses: United Airlines et American Airlines. Des pirates de Fair formas par des pilotes am6ricains, sur du materiel americain et sur le territoire americain (ecoles de Floride).

Quant a l'argent, nerf de la guerre, on se contentera de rappeler deux elements trop connus pour etre developpes. Si le regime des talibans a persecute les cultivateurs de pavot, une partie non negligeable de la fortune d'Al-Qaida provient du trafic d'opium. Ou comment s'enrichir en empoisonnant les infiddles? L'heroTne consommee par les toxicomanes americains provient majoritairement d'Afghanistan alors qu'en meme temps l'administration Bush finance la lutte antidrogue dans ce pays. Qui parlait de vendre aux capitalistes la corde pour les pendre?

Second paradoxe: le r6le pour le moins ambigu des banques americaines travaillant regulierement pour le compte de richissimes hommes d'affaires de la peninsule Arabe ou du Golfe Persique. Avec un peu plus de curiosite sur l'identite exacte de ses clients, la Citibank aurait peut-etre pu se dispenser de financer les pilotes kamikazes installs en Floride. Au moins depuis les attentats contre les ambassades americaines en Afrique de FEst et le dernier en date visant *l'USS Cole*, on pouvait s'attendre a un minimum de vigilance. Or Moustappa Ahmad, le tresorier d'Al-Qaida, n'a eu semble-t-il aucune difficulte pour transferer des fonds au chef des commandos, FEgyptien Mohammed Atta, par le truchement du siege new-yorkais de la Citibank.

#### *Ambivalence de la puissance technicienne*

L'attaque terroriste contre le World Trade Center et le Pentagone est à replacer dans le contexte global des sociétés techniques. Il y a dix ans presque un demi-siècle, Jacques Ellul a montré que le phénomène technique se caractérisait notamment par l'unité et la totalisation<sup>9</sup>.

La technique fonctionne comme un réseau de ramifications complexes qui vient bousculer les distinctions traditionnelles opposant la forme au contenu, ou le civil au militaire. Qui peut garantir, par exemple, l'usage pacifique de l'industrie nucléaire, pharmaceutique ou chimique? À part la couleur de la bache, qu'est-ce qui différencie un camion militaire d'un camion civil?

Si les terroristes utilisent désormais des fournitures scolaires dans leur panoplie (les cutters), ils savent aussi transformer un avion de ligne en arme de guerre. On retrouve cette unité d'un système composé d'éléments interdépendants dans le phénomène des factions en chaîne déclenchée par l'attaque du 11 septembre: krach boursier, faillite des compagnies aériennes, licenciements dans l'industrie aéronautique et dans le secteur du tourisme, réduction des budgets de communication, baisse de la consommation, récession économique...

En outre, la spécialisation implique une totalisation. Chacune des parties compte moins que le système de connexions les liant entre elles. Ce qui fait la force du système technique mais aussi sa faiblesse. La structure par réseaux augmente la fragilité de sociétés techniques rendues vulnérables du fait même de leur haut degré de sophistication.

Pour les terroristes modernes, les cibles ne manquent pas. On pense aux virus sur la Toile, aux maladies transmises par voie postale (on a recensé en France une moyenne de 100 fausses alertes par jour au bacille du charbon), & l'empoisonnement du réseau d'eau potable d'une ville ou au système de climatisation d'un grand hôtel ou d'un hôpital sans parler des *nodes de communication*: aéroports, gares, centrales électriques ou nucléaires.

Les tours géantes où l'on concentre la population d'une ville moyenne sont l'illustration parfaite de la fragilité de ce que Alain Gras<sup>10</sup> nomme les macro-systèmes techniques.

Les auteurs de l'attentat du World Trade Center ne s'y sont pas trompés, se payant le luxe de passer auprès d'une partie de l'opinion internationale pour les nouveaux David terrassant le Goliath américain.

Dans nos sociétés modernes, la technique est ambivalente car elle libère autant qu'elle aliène. Elle crée des problèmes aussitôt qu'elle en résout et s'accroît d'elle-même par les solutions — techniques — qu'elle apporte. De nouveaux équipements sont déjà à l'étude pour renforcer la sécurité des transports aériens. Ils seront déjoués un jour par une nouvelle génération de terroristes qui suscitera à son tour de nouvelles parades.

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<sup>9</sup> Jacques Ellul, *La technique ou l'enjeu du siècle*, Armand Colin, 1954.

<sup>10</sup> Alain Gras, *Grandeur et dépendance, Sociologie des macro-systèmes techniques*, Puf, 1993.

Mais le progrès technique a un prix qui n'est pas seulement financier. Ses effets négatifs sont inséparables des effets positifs et ce progrès comporte toujours un grand nombre de conséquences imprévisibles. Il est sans doute du devoir de nos gouvernants de chercher à tout prévoir. Il est non moins certain que la prudence nous invite à garder à l'esprit la part de risques inhérents à toute société fondée sur la puissance technique.

Il est également sage de se méfier de tous les discours promettant de concilier sécurité et liberté à l'intérieur de l'état comme de tous ceux prétendant combiner la guerre et la justice à l'extérieur. À cet égard, le nom de code de la riposte militaire, *Infinite Justice* puis *Liberty immutable*, peut être interprété comme le titre du film de propagande projeté par le gouvernement américain sur le grand écran mondial.

## II. La riposte: l'Afghanistan bombarde au nom de la liberté

La guerre est-elle "la continuation de la politique par d'autres moyens" ou au contraire, Michel Foucault a-t-il raison d'inverser la formule de Clausewitz en faisant de la politique la continuation de la guerre? En l'occurrence ici, on a pu dire - non sans quelques raisons - qu'elle était "l'absence de politique par d'autres moyens."<sup>11</sup>

Dès l'après-midi du 11 septembre, commence la guerre des images et des mots. Plus tard, George W. Bush qualifiera l'action militaire engagée en Afghanistan de "bataille de la civilisation."

### 1. Guerre des mots et mots de la guerre

La communication est sans doute à la propagande ce que la publicité est à la réclame mais si l'habillage change, l'objectif demeure. Jacques Ellul a démontré que, contrairement aux idées reçues, l'information (domaine du Bien et de la Vérité) ne se distingue pas si facilement de la propagande (instrument du Mal et du mensonge). Loin de s'exclure l'une l'autre, l'information est la condition d'existence même de la propagande. En outre, la propagande est une nécessité pour les gouvernants comme pour les gouvernés. Elle répond à une volonté de participation politique et rassure en simplifiant une réalité rendue plus complexe par la multiplication de l'information. Le discours politique du Président Bush constitue une excellente illustration de ses thèses.

"La lâcheté sans visage s'en est prise ce matin à **la liberté**, et **la liberté** se défendra. Je veux rassurer le peuple américain," déclare George W. Bush le mardi 11, "les États-Unis poursuivront et puniront les responsables de ces viles attaques."

Au-delà du recours à la classique figure de rhétorique de la personnification, le discours présidentiel se situe immédiatement au plan moral, pour mieux évacuer la dimension politique. La lâcheté (terroriste) s'oppose à la vertu (américaine). Ce n'est pas un État, ce n'est pas une superpuissance voire ce que certains nomment aujourd'hui une *hyperpuissance*, qui a été attaquée, pas même un pays, c'est une valeur, et la plus belle, la plus noble: La Liberté (incarnée par l'Amérique).

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<sup>11</sup> Jean Baudrillard, artcit.

Ici les "blancs" du discours comptent largement autant que les idées exprimées. Le Président ne prononce pas un seul mot sur la politique étrangère de "l'Empire le plus puissant de l'Histoire" (Amo J.Mayer), sur ses intérêts stratégiques dans le monde ou sur ses alliances au Moyen-Orient.

Le soir même, en direct du bureau Ovale, il poursuit sur le registre de l'omission:

"Ces meurtres en masse visaient à effrayer notre nation et à la plonger dans le chaos et le repli. Mais ils ont échoué. Notre pays est fort. Un grand peuple s'est levé pour défendre une grande nation."

Parler de meurtre est encore une façon de dépolitiser en criminalisant l'adversaire. Il s'agit là aussi de rassurer la population en réveillant la fibre patriotique. Grand peuple, grande nation. Les variantes sont destinées à marteler la même idée. La redondance est volontaire. Bush utilise à nouveau la personnification: L'Amérique s'est levée comme un seul homme ! Dans ce contexte de crise majeure, le Président cherche à renforcer le sentiment d'unité nationale.

"Aujourd'hui notre pays a vu le mal, ce qu'il y a de pire dans la nature humaine. Nous y avons répondu par ce qu'il y a de meilleur en Amérique: l'audace de nos sauveteurs, les soins portés à autrui. (...)

George W. Bush reste sur le registre de la personnification: voir le Mal. Comme s'il s'agissait -du mal absolu, et comme s'il était tout entier contenu dans les images de l'attentat. Le pays a vu le mal comme on dirait "il a vu le diable." Au pire, on répond par le meilleur. Le Président exprime la une représentation manichéenne du monde. La noirceur de l'âme humaine oppose à un concentré de vertus américaines. Il s'agit d'une symétrie factice dans la mesure où l'aide aux victimes constitue une obligation dans le cadre des sociétés modernes (Etat-Providence et/ou Etat Zorro) et que la véritable réponse viendra plus tard, sous la forme de représailles militaires.

"Ce sont la liberté et la démocratie qui ont été attaquées," déclare-t-il le mercredi. "Ce sera [a monumental struggle of good versus evil] un combat monumental du Bien contre le Mal. Mais le Bien l'emportera."

George Bush père comparait Saddam Hussein à Adolf Hitler. Son président de fils ressuscite la terminologie Réaganienne de *l'Empire du Mal* désignant à l'époque l'URSS et traduit - inconsciemment? - sa vision simpliste pour ne pas dire infantile du monde. À croire qu'il annonce un nouvel épisode de "Starwars" ! Le 13 septembre enfin, il lâche le mot de "croisade" au moment où l'on redécouvre les thèses de Samuel Huntington<sup>12</sup>, terme particulièrement mal choisi pour quelqu'un voulant éviter l' amalgame entre Islam et terrorisme.

On pourrait multiplier à l'envi les déclarations où le manichéisme se dispute au simplisme binaire: le Bien contre le Mal, la Démocratie contre l'archaïsme, la Civilisation contre la Barbarie, la lumière contre les ténèbres, le Bon contre le Méchant... Oussama Ben Laden jouant à merveille le rôle du croque-mitaine, de génie du Mal, un chef du *Spectre* version James Bond converti à l'islamisme radical.

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<sup>12</sup> Samuel Huntington, *Le Choc des civilisations*, Odile Jacob, 1997, (*The clash of Civilizations*).

Comme en echo du lapsus (?) presidentiel, sur le meme mode manicheen opposant l'Oumma (la nation musulmane ou la communaute des croyants) au reste du monde, les dirigeants d'Al-Qaida lui repondront le dimanche 7 octobre, moins de deux heures aprs le debut des frappes americano-britanniques sur le sol Afghan.

"La guerre des croisades promises par Bush a effectivement commence," affirme le porte-parole de la secte politico-religieuse. Aprhs avoir appele au djihad, il evoque ces "milliers de jeunes qui veulent autant mourir que les americains veulent vivre."

Le musulman authentique est decrit par ces "fous de Dieu" comme celui qui tient plus au respect de sa foi qu'a sa propre vie (ici bas). Le thme est recurrent dans le discours de l'islamisme radical: la cause mdrite que l'on sacrifie sa vie pour elle et les moudjahidin n'ont pas peur de mourir. Les propos de Ben Laden s'inscrivent dans cette logique.

"Voici l'Amdrique frappee par Allah, dans son point le plus vulnérable, dytruisant, dieu merci, ses edifices les plus prestigieux, et nous remercions Allah pour cela. Voila l'Amerique remplie de terreur, du nord au sud et d'est en ouest, et nous remercions Dieu pour cela."

Tout au long de sa declaration, Ben Laden se rdfere a **l'Amerique** et non pas a un pays particulier, les Etats-Unis. L'Amerique non comme continent mais comme entite maiefique. Outre l'omnipresence des references a Dieu, il est question de "point le plus vulnérable" (le talon d'Achille ou le colosse aux pieds d'argile) et d'edifices "prestigieux" (prestige, honneur, humiliation: confirmation que les cibles etaient bien avant tout des symboles). L'Amerique "remplie de terreuf": divine bien sur!

"Ce que l'Amerique endure aujourd'hui ne constitue qu'une infime partie de ce que nous [les musulmans] endurons depuis des dizaines d'annees."

Le procede rhetorique de legitimation consiste a presenter l'attentat sangiant du 11 septembre comme un juste retour des choses, et encore, la souffrance causee serait infiniment moms grande que la souffrance subie. Il s'agit de faire passer la victime pour le bourreau, de justifier auprds de l'opinion publique - musulmane en particulier mais pas exclusivement - l'operation consistant a faire payer a des employes de bureau anonymes, a des gens ordinaires y compris des musulmans, les consequences de la politique internationale du gouvernement americain.

D'ou l'importance du recours au terme generique d'Amerique. La personification permet ce tour de passe-passe. Ce ne sont pas des milliers de citoyens americains qui ont ete tues, blesses, endeulies, ou seulement traumatises... mais **l'Amerique**, un etre abstrait et maiefique selon la thematique du "Grand Satan" utilisee naguere par l'Iran de l'ayatollah Khomeini.

"Notre nation [*Oumma*] subit depuis plus de 80 ans cette humiliation ; ses fils sont tues et son sang coule ; ses lieux saints sont agressees sans raison."

"Notre nation." Ben Laden s'adresse & cette nation encore imaginaire qu'il s'agit precisement de construire. Il parle en son nom. Il parle d'elle, a elle, et a ses ennemis. Ce

faisant, il commence à la faire exister réellement... dans les esprits ou les représentations mentales. "Quand dire, c'est faire."<sup>13</sup> Il s'agit de passer de la nation potentielle (plus d'1,2 milliard de musulmans repartis dans le monde) la nation réelle. Si l'on accepte de définir le nationalisme comme l'adoration de la société par elle-même, n'oublions pas que ce ne sont pas les nations qui engendrent les nationalismes mais le nationalisme qui crée les nations<sup>14</sup>.

"Dieu a dirigé les pas d'un groupe de musulmans, un groupe d'avant-gardistes, qui a détruit l'Amérique, et nous honorons Allah d'élever leur rang et de les recevoir au paradis."

Conformément à la stratégie habituelle du réseau terroriste Al-Qaïda, l'attentat n'est pas expressément revendiqué. Ben Laden se félicite du succès de l'opération sans toutefois s'en attribuer la paternité. Il entretient le doute en privant l'ennemi d'aveux circonstanciés. On peut y voir le respect de la ligne suivie dès l'origine de la confrontation opposant le régime des Talibans au gouvernement américain: arguer de l'absence de preuves pour justifier le refus de livrer Ben Laden.

L'argument servira d'ailleurs de leitmotiv en terres d'Islam: "Si Oussama est bien le responsable des attentats du 11 septembre, pourquoi l'Amérique n'en donne-t-elle pas les preuves?" "On peut aussi interpréter cette absence de revendication à la lueur de l'information selon laquelle le fondateur d'Al-Qaïda ne serait qu'un "scélérat d'oprette," manipulé par un "gouvernement international de l'Islam" commanditaire de l'assassinat du Commandant Massoud et des attaques terroristes ayant ensanglanté les États-Unis<sup>15</sup>.

Mais la thématique des aveux et des preuves formelles vise surtout l'opinion publique occidentale et elle fait sens dans le cadre d'une justice humaine. Or le message a ici un second destinataire: l'opinion publique musulmane qui s'adresse à l'information principale: le véritable instigateur de l'attentat du 11 septembre n'est autre que Dieu lui-même ! Ben Laden, en la circonstance, n'étant que son humble porte-parole ou son modeste interprète.

"Quand ils [le groupe de musulmans] ont riposté, au nom de leurs fils opprimés et leurs frères et sœurs en Palestine et dans beaucoup d'autres pays musulmans, le monde entier s'est indigné, comme Pont fait les mécréants et les hypocrites."

Le verbe "riposter" vise à légitimer l'attentat. Il s'agissait après tout d'un acte de légitime défense. Les musulmans sont opprimés par les Américains, il est normal qu'ils se défendent. La référence à la Palestine - très récente dans son discours - vise à étendre son potentiel de sympathie. Depuis la création de l'état d'Israël, l'antisémitisme constitue un puissant vecteur d'unification de l'opinion publique musulmane, bien au-delà du Proche et du Moyen-Orient. Il a touché la corde sensible comme en

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<sup>13</sup> John L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words*, Oxford University Press, 1962.

<sup>14</sup> Ernst Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford, 1983

<sup>15</sup> Alexandre Khokhlov, *Izvestia*, Courtier International, 31 Octobre 2001.

t^moignera l'explosion de sa cote de popularity auprds de la me arabe et d'une partie de la jeunesse africaine.

Dans le contexte de la seconde Intifada (*the Aqsa intifadeh*), Ben Laden instrumentalise la cause Palestinienne. Il se garde bien de dire que l'O.L.P. a condamnd l'attentat et que Yasser Arafat s'est fait filmer en train de dormir son sang en signe de solidarity avec les victimes amdricaines.

"Les Amdricains sont des ddbauchds qui se sont allids au mal en soutenant le bourreau contre la victime et l'injuste contre l'enfant innocent, et Dieu leur a infligd ce qu'ils myritent."

Aprs une allusion on ne peut plus transparente au soutien des Etats-Unis i la politique israyienne, il martelle Tidde selon laquelle l'attentat est en ryalitd un chatiment divin et que les terroristes n'ont fait qu'exycuter la volonty d'Allah.

"Ces yvynements ont divisy le monde entier en deux parties: ceux qui ont la foi et gont sans hypocrisie, et ceux [qui sont] des mycryants ; que Dieu nous en pryserve !"

Le simplisme du discours contraste avec la complexity du ryel. Le message de Ben Laden constitue le symytrique inverse de celui de George W. Bush: "*Either you are -with us, or you are with the terrorists.*" Mais si le premier prtend combattre l'injustice (au nom de l'Islam) et le second dyfendre la liberty (*immuable*), les discours sont en partie interchangeable. Ben Laden revendique la liberty pour tous les musulmans opprimys et Bush conduit sa guerre de reprysailles pour faire oeuvre de justice.

Au serment du fondateur d'Al-Qaida rypondra, un mois plus tard, celui du prysident americain devant l'Assembiye gynyrale de l'ONU: "L'heure de la justice viendra. (...) Je fais cette promesse a toutes les victimes de ce regime: les jours des talibans qui protegent les terroristes, font du trafic d'heroine et brutalisent les femmes sont comptes. (...) Nous avons l'occasion d'ecrire l'histoire de notre dpoque, celle du courage ddfaisant la cruautd et de la lumiere triomphant des tenebres. "

Les deux locuteurs partagent la meme vision manichdenne du monde. On se trouve en presence d'une veritable relation de rivalitd mimdtique pouvant illustrer la thdorie de Rene Girard. La ressemblance va se nicher dans des domaines inattendus conune celui de la santd. Le president Bush jurant publiquement qu'il n'a pas contracts la maladie du charbon (*anthrax*) , Ben Laden expliquant a la presse pakistanaise que ses "reins vont tres bien."

"Tout musulman doit se **dresser** pour defendre sa religion car le vent de la foi et du changement a souffle pour aneantir **l'injustice** dans la peninsule de Mohamed."

Aux amdricains qui se Idvent rdpondent done les musulmans qui se dressent. La pdninsule arabique est une terre saerde car le prophete est nd et a vecu a La Mecque. Ben Laden reproche aux actuels dirigeants de l'Arabie Saoudite de toldrer la presence d'infideles (militaires amdricains stationnds depuis la guerre du Golfe) & proximitd des lieux saints de l'Islam

"A l'Amdrique, j'adresse des mots comptds. Je jure par Dieu que l'Amdrique ne connaitra plus jamais la securitd avant que la Palestine ne la connaisse et avant que toutes les armdes occidentales athdes ne quittent les terres saintes."



Il y a là comme une figure de construction réciproque du monstre. Dans les heures ayant suivi l'attaque terroriste le nom seul de Oussama Ben Laden a été jeté en pâture à la presse et à l'opinion. La rhétorique présidentielle et médiatique s'est focalisée sur cet épouvantail. L'intéressé collie donc à son personnage avec application et non sans talent. En prophète inspiré d'Allah, il prend complaisamment la pose du justicier défiant l'empire à lui seul.

## **2. Guerre des images et images de guerre**

Au-delà des menaces proférées <1 l'encontre de l'Afrique, ce dimanche 8 octobre, le succès de l'opération de communication réside d'abord dans l'effet de contraste entre nos écrans neigeux où l'on ne voit rien des bombardements (quelques points verts dans la nuit noire) et l'apparition soudaine, à la hauteur du jour, de l'ennemi public N°1, une fois sa diatribe terminée sirotant son thé devant sa cavagne avec la sérénité du prophète.

Si l'on veut s'arrêter quelques instants sur la communication non verbale, la mise en scène audiovisuelle de ce discours ne peut que déconcerter le téléspectateur occidental habitué à d'autres codes. Elle provoque chez lui un sentiment de fascination/repulsion ou pour le moins d'inquiétante étrangeté. A contrario en terre d'Islam, elle contribue à renforcer l'aura du leader charismatique.

Une grotte dans le désert pour seul décor. Les musulmans du monde entier savent que Mahomet s'était caché pendant trois jours et trois nuits dans une grotte près de La Mecque, pour échapper à ses ennemis qui avaient juré sa mort. En son temps, le prophète haranguait la population pour lui demander de renoncer au culte des idoles et d'adorer le Dieu unique. Son clan (des Hachémites) subit alors des persécutions. En proie à l'hostilité des oligarchies et des chefs religieux polythéistes, Mahomet dut alors fuir La Mecque, contraint de s'exiler, en Abyssinie d'abord puis lors d'une seconde migration (L'Hégire) dans l'oasis qui deviendra Médine.

Ben Laden aujourd'hui, comme le prophète jadis, a lui aussi été expulsé de son pays l'Arabie Saoudite (1991), puis renvoyé du Soudan (1996) avant de trouver refuge à Kandahar, chez les talibans. Mahomet avait du lui aussi se cacher avant de faire triompher sa cause par les armes: en 630, à la tête d'une troupe de 10.000 hommes, il était retourné à La Mecque en chef de guerre victorieux.

Les mains croisées, les yeux mi-clos, dans une attitude de méditation Ben Laden est sagement assis sur les talons au milieu de trois autres barbus assis en tailleur. La position du corps est conforme au rite musulman codifiant les cinq prières quotidiennes. Il adopte à la fois la posture du sage et du guerrier. Comme le prophète! Barbe de religieux. Treillis militaire et turban blanc. Une lampe à pétrole est posée sur un rocher, au fond, dans l'alignement de l'égyptien Ayman Al-Zawahri, ex-leader du Djihad islamique, médecin et conseiller de Ben Laden.

Son arme fétiche, le Kalakov (AK-74), prise à un soldat russe à Tisseut d'un combat, posée sur la paroi de la grotte, est visible mais seulement en arrière plan durant une bonne partie de son intervention. Elle est là pour rappeler le Djihad, et peut-être aussi que l'Islam des temps héroïques a triomphé par l'épée. Dans les précédentes cassettes

de propagande, le chef d'Al-Qaïda entretenait sa réputation de cavalier intrépide et de tireur d'élite. Le Kalakov évoque également la guerre victorieuse contre l'Armée Rouge. Message: les musulmans vaincront demain le "tigre de papier" américain comme ils ont vaincu hier le Grand Satan soviétique.

Mais Oussama Ben Laden n'aurait pas pu jouer les *Fantomas* sans la complicité de la chaîne d'information en continu Al-Jazira et surtout sans le suivisme des télévisions occidentales converties à la seule religion du profit, donc de la course à l'audience.

Au nom de la défense nationale, dès le lendemain 8 octobre, les responsables des principaux *networks* américains seront rappelés à l'ordre par le gouvernement après ce moment d'égarement. Sous le prétexte fallacieux que les vidéos d'Al-Qaïda pouvaient contenir des messages codés destinés à déclencher de nouvelles attaques terroristes, la Maison Blanche demanda aux grandes chaînes américaines de visionner, avant diffusion, toutes les images fournies par la télévision Qatarie.

Le résultat a sans doute dépassé les espérances des conseillers pour la sécurité nationale puisque les images de Ben Laden ont pratiquement disparu totalement des écrans. L'autocensure a également joué dans la presse écrite. Alors que dans son numéro du 1<sup>er</sup> Octobre, TIME publiait en couverture la photo de Ben Laden avec pour seule légende: *Target* (la cible) ; il fallait les semaines suivantes scruter attentivement les pages intérieures pour trouver de maigres extraits de sa déclaration de guerre à l'Afghanistan.

Le philosophe Bernard-Henri Lévy a exprimé l'opinion de nombreux Français en qualifiant Al-Jazira de "chaîne de Ben Laden." D'un point de vue occidental, l'accusation n'est pas sans fondements. Elle mérite toutefois d'être relativisée sinon nuancée. Il est un fait que jusqu'à la prise de Kaboul par l'Alliance du Nord, la "CNN du monde arabe" a bénéficié d'une situation de monopole obligeant les télévisions du monde entier à rediffuser ses images affublées d'un large bandeau en indiquant la provenance.

Mais précisément Al-Jazira s'est trouvée en Afghanistan dans une position comparable à celle de CNN durant la guerre du Golfe. Alors que la chaîne de Ted Turner passe toujours aux yeux de l'opinion publique internationale pour un pur produit culturel "made USA" au même titre que Coca-Cola, son correspondant avait été le seul autorisé à rester à Bagdad. Le pouvoir irakien[-]avait ainsi accordé des moyens exceptionnels à Peter Arnett qui jouissait de l'exclusivité en contrepartie de la censure. Parce que CNN montrait au monde entier les dommages causés par les bombardements américains sur la population civile, elle fut accusée de faire le jeu de Saddam Hussein.

Il en est allé de même avec Teyssir Allouni, l'unique reporter autorisé à rester dans la capitale afghane avant l'inversion du rapport de forces militaire. Insistant sur les erreurs de frappes et les victimes civiles, montrant complaisamment des cadavres dans des villages bombardés par l'aviation américaine, donnant la parole exclusivement aux Kabouliens dénonçant cette guerre contre l'Islam, exhibant les propres enfants de Ben Laden armés jusqu'aux dents chantant les louanges de "l'émir des croyants," le mollah Omar, avec pour toile de fond les carcasses d'un hélicoptère et d'un avion

prdtendument abattus par les talibans, le journaliste a rendu Al-Jazira trds impopulaire aupres de Washington.

Accus^e par les autoritds americaines de diffriiser la propagande d'Ai-Qaida, la chaine arabe repondit par une retrospective diffusee en boucle de visages mutilds sur des lits d'hopitaux, d'enfants estropies et de b6bds defigurds au nom de cette pretendue "bataille de la civilization." De son cdte, la direction de CNN contraint ses employes d'assortir chaque image de victimes civiles des bombardements americains d'un rappel en forme de rituel: "les taiibans protdgeht des terroristes responsables de la mort de 5000 personnes innocents."

Si Al-Jazira n'a pas convaincu les occidentaux de sa neutralite en refusant de trancher entre "la guerre contre le terrorisme, comine dit l'Amerique" et "la guerre contre les impies, comme dit Al-Qaida," le pays de la liberty de la presse et du Premier Amendement a battu tous les records en matiere de controle des images. Au nom de la sdcuritd de ses soldats, le Pentagone a meme dtendu son emprise aux documents photographiques. Pendant la moitid du conflit, faute de journalistes ind^pendants sur place, les medias ddsireux d'illustrer la presence amyricaine au sol ont du se contenter des seules images des commandos US prises et sdlectionndes par le departement de la Defense.

La fidvre patriotique ddclenchde au lendemain des attentats ne s'est pas limitee & l'explosion des ventes de bannieres dtoildes. Alois qu'd la difference du conflit vietnamien, la presse amdricaine a plutot pdchd par excds d'autocensure, les journalistes ont dtd accuses de mettre en danger la vie des "Boys " en foumissant d l'ennemi des renseignements trop precis. Proces d'intention quand on sait que les dites informations dmanaient des briefings ou du site web des charges de communication du Pentagone mais ce type de fantasme en dit long sur les attentes d'une bonne partie de l'opinion. Les journaux s'etant risques a publier les images de bdbds Afghans tuds par des bombes amdricaines^ont ete agoni d'injures. Le concept de "dommages collateraux" est acceptable, a condition precisement de rester au niveau d'une abstraction ddsincamde !

Jacques Ellul ne se trompait pas lorsqu'il ddcrivait la relation de complicity unissant le propagandiste au propaganda. Le citoyen de base n'a aucune envie de voir de photos de nourrissons massacres alors que le president Bush en personne lui a parld d'une lutte du Bien contre le Mal, mende par une nation rysolument bonne et pacifique mais dytestye car incomprise. "Le peuple Afghan va connaitre la gynyrosity de l'Amdrique. En meme temps que-nous frapperons des cibles militaires, nous larguerons des vivres et des medicaments" avait-il promis le jour meme ou Ben Laden profyrait ses menaces a la teldvision.

Les petits containers jaunes contenant les rations alimentaires ayant la meme couleur que les explosifs dispersys par les bombes a fragmentation ont enframe bien des apprises, pour employer un euphymisme. Combien de victimes pour combien de vies sauuyes? Le bilan "humanitaire" de ces largages tdlegoniques pourrait s'averer un exercice cruel pour son promoteur. Mais quel ytait l'objectif visy: persuader le monde

de la bonté américaine ou entretenir la bonne conscience des partisans de cette guerre (plus de 80% selon les sondages), déjà ultra-majoritaires dans le pays?

”La parole est seule relative à la Vérité. L’image est seulement relative à la réalité.” Aux consommateurs d’images que nous sommes, devenus boulimiques depuis le 11 septembre, Jacques Ellul nous rappelle que nous aurions tort de prendre le réel pour le vrai. Alors que la parole relève de la vérité - et donc aussi du mensonge -, l’image peut parfaitement coller à la réalité sans jamais être vraie. La vue donne à voir l’évidence, la parole toujours incertaine l’exclut.

### 3. Guerre contre la démocratie et démocratique dans la guerre

La guerre oblige chacun de nous à choisir son camp. Elle oriente notre regard, conditionne notre mémoire visuelle, nous fait voir ce que nous voulons voir et oublier les images qui ne cadrent pas avec nos grilles de lecture. La propagande rassure car elle filtre, ordonne et simplifie. Mais il faut faire montre d’une belle outrecuidance intellectuelle pour croire la propagande (mensongère) réservée au bon peuple et l’information (vraie) aux élites. Il faut pareillement faire preuve de beaucoup de candeur ou de cynisme pour croire au discours de la **guerre juste**. Car il n’y a pas de guerres justes, il n’y a que des guerres nécessaires !

Non, la contre-attaque américaine n’est pas la guerre de **La** liberté contre **Le** terrorisme mais celle d’un Etat - démocratique - défendant légitimement ses intérêts de puissance au nom de valeurs & prétention universaliste.

D’abord, la liberté ne peut pas faire la guerre, même si l’on prétend la faire en son nom. La violence est toujours du domaine de la nécessité, c’est à dire l’antithèse de la liberté. Ensuite, le terrorisme est une notion inévitablement subjective pouvant recouvrir des réalités très différentes. On se souvient que les nazis l’utilisaient pour disqualifier la résistance française durant l’Occupation. On voit bien aujourd’hui l’intérêt d’un Vladimir Poutine à présenter ainsi les indépendantistes Tchétchènes qui risquent d’être sacrifiés sur l’autel de l’antiterrorisme, avec la benédiction honteuse des Occidentaux.

À défaut de pouvoir les empêcher, les organisations internationales se sont contentées de codifier les guerres. Les membres de l’Union Européenne ont défini comme terroriste “tout acte destiné à tuer ou blesser gravement un civil, ou toute autre personne qui ne participe pas directement aux hostilités dans une situation de conflit armé, lorsque, par sa nature ou son contexte, cet acte vise à intimider une population ou à contraindre un gouvernement à accomplir ou s’abstenir d’accomplir un acte quelconque.”

Qui pourrait jurer que cette définition n’englobe pas les bombardements et l’embargo dont souffre la population irakienne depuis dix ans? Comme à son habitude, la critique de Noam Chomsky est encore plus impitoyable à l’égard des puissants: “En pratique, le terrorisme est la violence commise contre les Etats-Unis - quels qu’en soient les auteurs. On aura du mal à trouver à cela une exception dans l’histoire.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Noam Chomsky, Cette Afrique qui n’apprend rien, *Le Monde*, 22/11/2001

L'article 51 de la Charte des Nations Unies reconnaît un droit nature! (*inherent right*) A la légitime défense en cas d'agression armée. Ce droit pose alors la question de la **proportionnalité** de la riposte. Les conventions de Genève distinguent objectifs civils et militaires et tendent à proscrire l'usage disproportionné de la force. Le problème de la proportionnalité ne se réduit pas à sa dimension juridique et pose à l'évidence des questions d'ordre moral.

La stratégie du tapis de bombes adoptée dans le cadre de l'opération "Liberté Immuable" n'est pas sans susciter de malaise au sein des esprits les mieux disposés à l'égard des États-Unis. Les moyens employés en Afghanistan en décembre risquent de susciter des remords chez ceux-là même qui, sous le coup d'une émotion légitime, s'étaient proclamés «tous Américains» en septembre.

Fallait-il brûler la botte de foin pour trouver l'aiguille? Sous prétexte que Ben Laden était aussi difficile à chercher qu'une aiguille dans une botte de foin, avait-on le droit de bruler toute la botte, et une partie du champ? En bombardant à outrance un pays déjà ravagé par la guerre et la famine, on ne fait qu'ajouter des victimes aux victimes. Selon les organisations humanitaires, les tonnes de bombes déversées autour de Tora Bora ont déjà causé la mort de nombreux civils.

Sans oublier ce que cette comptabilité a de sordide, on peut déjà prévoir, dans les mois à venir, une révision à la hausse des «dommages collatéraux» en Afghanistan inversement proportionnelle au nombre des victimes avérées des attentats new-yorkais, évaluée en septembre à plus de 6000 et en décembre à moins de la moitié.

Le président Bush a feint de découvrir récemment le sort atroce réservé aux femmes Afghanes. Sans le savoir, il a employé pour justifier sa guerre - o ironie de l'Histoire - les arguments invoqués à l'époque par Georges Marchais, leader du Parti Communiste Français, pour se féliciter de l'intervention soviétique de 1979: mettre fin à un régime féodal humiliant les femmes.

La violation des droits de l'homme en général et ceux de la femme en particulier, sans parler de la scandaleuse destruction du Bouddha géant de Bamyan, n'ont pourtant pas empêché l'administration américaine de négocier avec les talibans jusqu'en juillet dernier: la livraison de Ben Laden contre une reconnaissance internationale du régime. Avec pour toile de fond le lobby pétrolier, cher au clan Bush, intensifié par les gisements de l'Asie centrale! D'un strict point de vue de Real Politik, l'avenir a montré qu'il eût été plus judicieux d'aider le principal adversaire des talibans: le commandant Massoud.

Pour rester sur le registre de l'hypocrisie et du cynisme, faut-il rappeler que l'instigateur présumé des attentats du 11 septembre fut longtemps un auxiliaire précieux des États-Unis, armé et formé par une C.I.A. prête à tout, - et n'importe quoi -, dans son combat contre le communisme international. En équipant ses troupes, de missiles Stinger notamment, les Américains en ont fait un héros victorieux de la lutte anticomuniste en Afghanistan. Pour des raisons qui lui appartiennent, la réputation s'est retournée contre son créateur à l'issue de la guerre du Golfe. Or l'on découvre que les ennemis de nos ennemis ne sont pas toujours nos amis...

Dans le même sens, le partenariat pour convenances mutuelles unissant Washington à Islamabad a conduit les USA à fermer les yeux sur les violations des droits de l'homme au Pakistan et sur la fabrication illégale d'une arme nucléaire, qualifiée symboliquement de "bombe islamique" par le président Bhutto lui-même. Sans l'aide du gouvernement Pakistanais, sous-traitant les intérêts américains dans la région, sans l'appui de ses "volontaires" et de ses services secrets, les talibans n'auraient jamais pu s'emparer de Kaboul.

Parce qu'ils continuaient de raisonner dans un contexte de guerre froide, les États-Unis ont soutenu les militaires Pakistanais qui ont installé au pouvoir les talibans qui ont ensuite protégé les réseaux de Ben Laden. L'idée était anglaise, le financement saoudien, l'exécution pakistanaise mais la conception de cette bombe fut retardement incombe au gouvernement américain.

Il ne saurait être question ici de faire passer ici une explication historique pour une justification subreptice. Aucun crime, réel ou supposé, du gouvernement des États-Unis ne peut prétendre excuser l'horreur des attentats. Inutile d'invoquer Dilthey ou Weber pour bien distinguer, au plan analytique, les différences entre expliquer, comprendre et justifier.

La meilleure propagande, c'est à dire la plus efficace au plan technique, ne se construit pas sur des mensonges mais à partir d'informations incomplètes ou partielles.

Au nom de l'anti-imperialisme, un certain nombre d'intellectuels se sont empressés de se désolidariser de la riposte africaine en invoquant sa politique inique au Proche-Orient et cruelle à l'égard du peuple Irakien. Or le conflit israélo-palestinien n'explique pas plus l'attaque terroriste du 11 septembre que la crise économique n'explique la Shoah. En outre, on aurait du mal à citer le nom d'un seul chef d'État européen en ayant fait plus que Carter et Clinton pour essayer de ramener la paix dans cette partie du monde. Quant à l'Irak, ceux qui parlent des enfants irakiens morts des conséquences de l'embargo - en gonflant outrageusement des chiffres déjà terribles: 600.000 selon l'UNICEF, de 1 à 1,5 million selon leurs propres statistiques - n'invoquent jamais le sort des 150.000 Kurdes exposés aux armes chimiques et biologiques selon la volonté de Saddam Hussein. En une seule journée, le 17 mars 1988, son armée a gazé une ville du Kurdistan Irakien provoquant la mort de 7000 civils dans une atroce agonie.

On ne peut pas reprocher en même temps aux Américains de ne pas avoir de politique et les rendre responsable de tous les malheurs du monde. Si comme le pensent les belles âmes, le terrorisme est le symptôme et non la maladie, si la crise économique résultant de la globalisation libérale - donc Américaine 1 - en est à la source, alors il faudrait nous expliquer pourquoi Ben Laden est un milliardaire Saoudien et non pas un paysan du Sahel.

Le terrorisme pose un terrible dilemme aux démocraties en les condamnant soit à renier leurs principes vitaux, soit à disparaître sous les coups. Pour résister en tant que régime politique, hier et maintenant, elle n'a pas d'autres choix que de bafouer les valeurs qui la fondent en tant qu'idéal normatif.

Restriction des libertés publiques, chasse aux sorciers dans la presse et pressions sur les médias, arrestations arbitraires, prolongation de la durée de garde à vue des étrangers, mise en place d'une justice d'exception et de tribunaux militaires, fouille des véhicules et des personnes, développement des écoutes téléphoniques et de la surveillance des courriers électroniques...

Y compris dans un cadre légal (loi antiterroriste dite *USA patriot Act* aux États-Unis, loi sur la sécurité en France) et avec l'assentiment d'une opinion publique trop désireuse d'échanger sa liberté contre la promesse du retour à l'ordre, les dérives sécuritaires à l'intérieur contredisent l'esprit démocratique aussi dangereusement que les violations du droit de la guerre à l'extérieur. Une enquête nous dira peut-être un jour dans quelles conditions exactes sont morts les centaines de prisonniers détenus dans la forteresse de Qalae-Jangi?

Cette guerre était sans doute inévitable à défaut d'être aimable mais elle n'était en rien une guerre juste, car s'il existe de justes causes il ne saurait exister de guerre juste.

«Les plus nobles fins assignées à la guerre sont pourries par la guerre» nous rappelle Jacques Ellul pour qui non seulement la fin ne justifie pas les moyens mais pour qui les moyens corrompent les fins. Plus les fins seront réputées nobles, plus les méthodes employées pour les atteindre se révéleront cruelles. Tout le discours du gouvernement américain a consisté, précisément, à justifier l'usage de moyens inhumains en Afghanistan en guise de riposte à une «agression contre l'humanité tout entière.»

La politique n'est pas une industrie fondée en morale. Max Weber cite un personnage des 'Histoires Florentines' déclarant qu'il fallait fléchir ceux qui avaient prouvé la grandeur de leur Cité au salut de leur âme. Machiavel nous a appris qu'en politique la force était juste quand elle était nécessaire. Weber nous a montré qu'en politique on obtenait pas toujours le Bien par le Bien. Ellul n'a cessé, quant à lui, de proclamer que l'on ne pouvait fonder un monde juste avec des moyens injustes, créer une société libre avec des moyens d'esclaves<sup>17</sup>.

## International Jacques Ellul Society

*Berkeley, California*

**an association of scholars and friends**

The UES links together scholars and friends of various specializations, vocations, backgrounds, and nations, who share a common interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), long time professor at the University of Bordeaux. The UES is the English-language sister-society of the French-language *Association Internationale Jacques Ellul*. Together, we maintain a web site— [www.ellul.org](http://www.ellul.org)—as our common communications

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<sup>17</sup> Jacques Ellul on Religion, Technology and Politics, Conversations with Patrick Troude-Chastenet, Scholars Press, 1998.

link for announcements and news of interest to our members, and as a resource for anyone with an interest in Jacques Ellul. From time to time we announce meetings, lectures, and conferences (small or large, formal or informal, sponsored by the UES/AUE or by others) related to Ellul and his concerns.

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Please forward any news or announcements relevant to the members and friends of the UES. We want to do whatever we can to promote the discussion of Jacques Ellul and the extension of his critical interests. We encourage the formation of study groups and sections of scholarly societies devoted to Ellul studies. We are currently exploring the best strategies for organizing annual gatherings to discuss Ellul's sociology and his theology and ethics.

### **IJES Leadership**

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**Issue #29 Jul 2002 — Rethinking  
Ellul's Theory on the Role of  
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International Jacques Ellul Society

Clifford G. Christians, Editor

## From the Editor

In this Issue, Dell deChant uses Ellul to critique American society. He focuses on consumerism in the United States through that fabric of American life known as its annual festivals. While utilizing Ellul to critique a specific culture, the audience and the problem are understood to be far-reaching and multi-national. One country's public celebrations become a laboratory for fulfilling the *Forum's* purpose, that is, critiquing technological civilization.

In previous issues of *The Ellul Forum*, we have used Ellul's framework to reflect on a particular event - September 11, 2001. Through Ellul we have examined Christian anarchy, communications technology, and human rights. In all these case, the particular illumined the general. As with this Issue, the vitality of scholarship in Ellul's legacy becomes transparent.

Dell deChant's essay and Darrell Fasching's response have the added benefit of interrogating the adequacy of a major component of Ellul's theory. DeChant disagrees with Ellul's primacy of technique, arguing for the economy instead. While defending and clarifying Ellul's central thesis, Fasching celebrates deChant's bringing Ellul into the postmodern debate. Members of the University of South Florida faculty in its Department of Religion, deChant and Fasching are both indebted to Ellul—especially his *New Demons*—for demonstrating how to call our age into question.

# About the Ellul Forum

## History & Purpose

*The Ellul Forum* has been published twice per year since August of 1988. Our goal is to analyze and apply Jacques Ellul's thought to aspects of our technological civilization and carry forward both his sociological and theological analyses in new directions.

While *The Ellul Forum* does review and discuss Jacques Ellul, whom we consider one of the most insightful intellectuals of our era, it is not our intention to treat his writings as a body of sacred literature to be endlessly dissected. The appropriate tribute to his work is to carry forward its spirit and agenda for the critical analysis of our technical civilization. Ellul invites and provokes us to think new thoughts and enact new ideas. To that end we invite you to join the conversation in *The Ellul Forum*.

*The Ellul Forum* is an English-language publication but we are currently exploring ways of linking more fully with our francophone colleagues.

## Manuscript Submissions

Send original manuscripts (essays, responses to essays in earlier issues) to:

Clifford Christians, Editor, *The Ellul Forum* Institute of Communications Research University of Illinois  
810 S. Wright Street, Suite 228  
Urbana, IL 61801 USA

Please send both hard copy and computer disc versions, indicating the software and operating system used (e.g., Microsoft Word for Windows 98). Type end notes as text (do not embed in the software footnote/endnote part of your program).

Essays should not exceed twenty pages, double-spaced, in length.

Manuscript submissions will only be returned if you enclose a self-addressed, adequately postaged envelope with your submission.

*The Ellul Forum* also welcomes suggestions of themes for future issues.

## Books & Reviews

**Books.** *The Ellul Forum* considers for review books (1) about Jacques Ellul, (2) significantly interacting with or dependent on Ellul's thought, or (3) exploring the range of sociological and theological issues at the heart of Ellul's work. We can not guarantee that every book submitted will actually be reviewed in *The Ellul Forum* nor are we able to return books so submitted.

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## Religiosity and the Sacred in Postmodern America

by Dell deChant

While it certainly can be maintained that American holidays have become secular events, this paper proposes that it is precisely their "secular" (materialist/ commercial/ consumerist) dimension that makes them most obviously religious events in the context of postmodern/ latecapitalist culture. Rather than being casualties of the struggle between commercial interests and traditional values for dominance in the cultural marketplace, it appears equally plausible that the loss of conventional holiday meanings may actually be the consequence of the inability of older civic and religious institutions to successfully compete in another sort of marketplace — the marketplace of religion.

The theoretical basis for this type of understanding was initially sketched in a paper I presented at the American Academy of Religion in 1996. In that paper, I argued that contemporary American holidays (and Christmas in particular) reveal affinities with festivals of ancient cosmological cultures. In this regard, it can be observed that post-modern holidays have not so much lost their religious or cultural significance as their *transcendental* religious significance and their *traditional* cultural significance. More-

over, what is witnessed here is more of a transference rather than a loss of significance; from transcendental to cosmological,<sup>18</sup> in the case of religion, and from traditional to postmodern, in the case of culture. This line of inquiry represents an updating and slight reconfiguring of an argument first presented by Jacques Ellul about twenty-five years ago.<sup>19</sup>

The premise of this variation of Ellul's argument is that America's late-capitalist, postmodern culture is best classified as cosmological and, if so, America's holidays, as representative religious events of such a culture, necessarily manifest characteristics of a cosmological engagement with the sacred. This paper offers a sketch of the theoretic background for this sort of understanding and how it might be utilized methodologically in the analysis of contemporary culture. Although my particular focus is on American culture, and specifically its holidays, I believe the general approach outlined here is potentially applicable to other postmodern cultures — e.g., those of Western Europe and Japan. A more detailed exposition of my methodology is offered in my forthcoming book, *The Sacred Santa*<sup>20</sup>

The paper is divided into five parts. The first two parts present working descriptions of religion and postmodern culture (respectively) as used in this analysis. Part three brings together the two descriptions to form a theory of religion in postmodern culture. Building on this theory, part four contains an analysis of consumption as a sacred ideal and part five briefly outlines how contemporary holidays may be understood as the functional holy days of postmodern culture. The conclusion specifies the possible implications of this method of inquiry and analysis.

### **Probing the Sacred Ground of Contemporary Culture: What Is Religion?**

The first and perhaps most obvious concept to explicate in the context of studies of this type is the notoriously ambiguous, yet theoretically unavoidable concept of *religion* itself. The understanding offered here is essentially functional, but only in so far as the functional approach is seen as acknowledging the legitimacy of a sacred realm as an object of human intending. The other theoretical issues dealt with in the paper, and the general line of analysis are necessarily related to this working description of religion:

Religion is about power. It mediates our relationship with the source(s) of ultimate (sacred) power by suggesting, teaching, or commanding (1) a *belief* that the ultimate truth and meaning of human life is derived from and related to an order and purpose

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<sup>18</sup> In brief "cosmological" refers to religions and cultural systems that locate the Ground of Being or Ultimate Power in the natural world. Such systems are contrasted with "transcendental" systems, which locate the Ground of Being in a supernatural dimension —literally, a realm beyond and radically different from nature. The use of terms "cosmological" and "transcendental" to distinguish these two types of systems was introduced by Eric Voegelin. See Voegelin *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952) and *Israel and Revelation* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1956).

<sup>19</sup> See Jacques Ellul, *The New Demons* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975).

<sup>20</sup> Dell deChant, *The Sacred Santa: The Religious Dimensions of Consumer Culture* (Cleveland, The Pilgrim Press, 2002).

based on or decreed by the ultimate (sacred) power (e.g. gods, God, nature, cosmic principles, social order). (2) This belief is necessarily shared by a group or *community*. (3) This belief is *maintained* because of (a) the community's participation in certain special and uniquely patterned actions either personal or communal, typically called *rituals*, and (b) special (numinous) narratives, typically called *myths*, which deal with unique persons and/or events related to the sacred concerns and elements. (4) This belief in the foundational truth and meaning of human life is understood by participants in the religion to allow them (as individuals and as a community) a certain degree of *power over material conditions* (in so far as they live and act in harmony with the ultimate power) and to supply them with *answers to ultimate questions* regarding nature and the human condition (such as death, the afterlife, evil, one's place in society, why one succeeds or fails).

Of special note here is the character and function of myths and rituals. Myths are narratives about the sacred and humanity's relationship to the sacred. Typically, these narratives are set in a primordial time of origins and depict the actions and teachings of venerated ancestors, heroes, saviors, and gods. These actions and teachings disclose both the foundational reality of life and articulate the relationship of the believer to this reality. For the believer, myths communicate truths of such profundity that they cannot be doubted; truths so fundamental that even in the face of falsifying material and/or historical evidence the believer accepts the reality of the myth. To the degree that myths lose their radical truthfulness, they lose their primary religious function.

Myths can be divided into three classes: "meta," secondary, and tertiary.<sup>21</sup> The meta-myth is the master story of a culture, which articulates "the true motivating and psychological foundations of [a] civilization... expressions of the very being of the collective and universal civilization in which we are living."<sup>22</sup> Secondary and tertiary myths are narratives that offer more accessible versions of meta-myth, serving to personalize, vivify, and make it immediately relevant to individuals. In their secondary and especially their tertiary forms, myths guide and motivate religious activities. In their most formal sense, such activities are called rituals.

For the believer, rituals are the formal processes through which one participates in or otherwise affirms a proper relationship to the sacred. In this regard, the "texts" that religious rituals follow are the myths of the religion, because these are the narratives that articulate the sacred realm and humanity's relationship to that realm.

In a religious sense, then, rituals and myths are intertwined in such a way that rituals reenact myths and myths illuminate rituals. Through rituals, the believer experiences the sacred realm described in myths and is brought into communion with the

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<sup>21</sup> The specification of three classes of myth is derived, with some modifications, from Jacques Ellul. My meta-myth corresponds to what Ellul refers to as the "basic" or "essential" myth of a culture. My designation of secondary and tertiary myths is derived from Ellul, although, in my deployment, the two are more precisely distinguished from each other. See Jacques Ellul, *New Demons*, trans. C. Edward Hopkin (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), 88-121, esp. 100-110.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

foundational reality of life. In a practical sense, the interrelation of myth and ritual is revealed in the relationship between mythic narratives such as the Exodus story and the ritual of Passover; the narrative of the Last Supper and the ritual of communion; or the narrative of the Buddha's enlightenment and the ritual of meditation. There is, thus, a dynamic nexus when the sacred reality disclosed in myths is fully experienced through the performance of rituals. In an analysis of New Year's festivals in the ancient world, Mircea Eliade uses the term "mythico-ritual" to characterize this synergy.<sup>23</sup> And as argued in *The Sacred Santa*, many contemporary American holidays reveal this same sort of mythico-ritual dynamism.

Although healthy religions routinely reveal the positive dimension of the synergy of myths and rituals, it can also be reflected negatively because the loss of plausibility for one may undermine the meaningfulness of the other. In other words, when believers begin to doubt either the radical truth of the myths or the re-creative power of the rituals, the religious significance of both may decline. Doubt of the truth of the myths leads to a weakening of the meaning and value of the rituals, just as doubt of the power of rituals causes a corresponding erosion in the plausibility of mythic verities. As such doubts become more widespread among participants, religious communities decline.

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This exploration and analysis of myth and ritual is undertaken in the context of what Paul Tillich introduced and first developed under the heading of "Theology of Culture" and as further detailed in Darrell Fasching's contemporary interpretation of Tillich's method as a form of social ethics.<sup>24</sup> There are two crucial elements in this approach. First, as Tillich recognized, "every culture has an inherent religious dimension, even as every religion is shaped by the culture in which it emerges [and] culture is driven by its religious 'substance,' which is the human need for meaning expressed and embodied in its... 'ultimate concerns'"; and second, theology of culture is specified as "a critique of the religious dynamic at work in the diverse autonomous spheres of human endeavor that typify modern culture."<sup>25</sup> I argue that this religious dynamic is found in the myths and rituals of a culture and most explicitly in what Eliade called its mythico-ritual dynamic.<sup>26</sup> Following Tillich's proposal, then, as a theology of culture, my subsequent inquiry into contemporary myths and rituals can be understood as a "theological questioning of all cultural values,"<sup>27</sup> since the myths

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<sup>23</sup> For example, see Eliade's usage of the term in *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1959), 68-70.

<sup>24</sup> See Darrell Fasching, *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia?* (Albany: State University Press of New York, 1993), chap. 4, esp. 134-141.

<sup>25</sup> Tillich as explicated by Fasching in *Ibid.*, 137, 139.

<sup>26</sup> For example, see Eliade's use of the term in *Cosmos and History*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper and Row, Harper Torch Books, 1959), 68-70.

<sup>27</sup> Paul Tillich, "Über die Idee einer Theologie der Kultur," in *Kanstudien* (Berlin: Pan Verlag, Rolf Heise, 1920). Found in translation in *What Is Religion*, trans. James Luther Adams (New York: Harper and Row, Harper Torchbooks, 1969), 165.



and rituals of this culture form the religious "substance" of these values –affirming their basis in truth and allowing experiential interaction with the reality of this truth.

As Tillich understood theology of culture to be a "critique of the religious dynamic at work in ... modern culture," in my application, the critique is of the religious dynamic at work in a postmodern culture, which is seemingly secular. It is also, necessarily, a postmodern critique. What, however, does a postmodern critique of the religious dynamic of postmodern culture look like? I think the jury is still out on this, but to my mind it involves irony, indirection, and no small bit of playfulness and humor — at least those are elements I tried to deploy in developing the critique offered in *The Sacred Santa*. Postmodern critique aside, however, for purposes of this paper, my use of Tillich and Fasching, bring into focus two other terms that require contextual explication: "religious dynamic," and "postmodern culture." Postmodern culture will be dealt with first.

### **Probing the Sacred Ground of Contemporary Culture: What Is A Post-modern Culture?**

My intent here is not to resolve the complex nest of issues commingled in and around the term, postmodern. The term is in extreme flux today, in part due to its magnificent popularity in both popular and academic culture. One of those ferociously alluring labels, postmodern can at once classify an incredibly vast array of cultural phenomena while simultaneously (and necessarily) defying any and all efforts to stabilize its meaning with anything close to precision. It is a term of conjure and conjecture, and ultimately, I suspect, uncertainty for many. This uncertainty may not be diminished here, although it is my hope to approach postmodernism from a new direction that brings into focus an overlooked element in the ever-expanding discussion of its meaning. For this purpose, a helpful place to begin is with Fredric Jameson's explication of postmodernism.

Jameson's theory of post-modern culture follows Ernest Mandel's thesis in his *Late Capitalism*, and in a Marxist reading, Jameson argues that cultural changes follow changes in modes of production and technology. Thus, Mandel's market capitalism corresponds to the cultural period Jameson refers to as "realism"; Mandel's monopoly capitalism corresponds to Jameson's "modernism"; and Mandel's third stage (variously termed postindustrial-, multinational-, late-, or consumer-capitalism) corresponds to Jameson's "postmodernism."<sup>28</sup>

Of primary interest here are Jameson's comments on changes that have occurred in both the modes of and the popular attitudes *toward* consumption in postmodern culture due to the impact of late capitalism's incredible capacity to produce and reproduce both material objects and images. For Jameson, late capitalism or "consumer capitalism ... is the purest form of capitalism yet to have emerged, [which witnesses]

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<sup>28</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 35-36.

a prodigious expansion of capital into hitherto uncommodified areas,” such as the “unconscious” through “the rise of the media and the advertising industry.”<sup>29</sup>

In the postmodern world, “commodity production [is based on the] frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods (from clothing to airplanes), at ever great rates of turnover,”<sup>30</sup> in which there is “an immense dilation of... the sphere of commodities ... a commodity rush, our ‘representations’ of things tending to arouse an enthusiasm and a mood swing not necessarily inspired by the things themselves” (x). The “culture of consumption” is presented as a dynamic force, which when “unleashed” consumes persons “to the point of being unable to imagine anything else” (207). Moreover, “we are *inside* the culture of the market and ... the inner dynamic of the culture of consumption is an infernal machine from which one does not escape by the taking of thought (or moralizing positions)” (206). It offers “an infinite propagation and replication of ‘desire’ that feeds on itself and has no outside and no fulfillment” (206). He notes that “the force, then, of the concept of the market lies in its ‘totalizing’ structure’...; that is, in its capacity to afford a model of a social totality” (272).

Jameson’s reading of consumption as the dominant characteristic of postmodern culture is affirmed and advanced further in the work of Jean Baudrillard. As noted by his critical exegete, Douglas Kellner, Baudrillard interprets postmodern culture as a culture of consumption in which “participation ... requires systematic purchase and organization of domestic objects, fashion and so on into a system of organized codes and models.”<sup>31</sup> In Baudrillard’s words:

We have reached the point where “consumption” has grasped the whole of life, where all activities are connected in the same combinatorial mode... In the phenomenology of consumption, this general climatization of life, goods, objects, services, behaviors and social relations represents the perfected, “consummated” stage of evolution which, through articulated networks of objects, ascends from pure and simple abundance to complete conditioning of action and time and finally to the systematic organization of ambience, which is characteristic of the drugstores, the shopping mall, or the modern airports in our futuristic cities.<sup>32</sup>

Kellner further interprets Baudrillard: “The consumer ... cannot avoid the obligation to consume, because it is consumption that is the primary mode of social integration and the primary ethic and activity within the consumer society. The consumer ethic and ‘firm morality’ thus involve active labor, incessant curiosity and search for novelty, and conformity to the latest fads, products and demands to consume.”<sup>33</sup> Through the

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 36. See also his earlier work, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society,” in Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic* (Port Townsend, Wash.: Bay Press, 1983), 111-125.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 5. Subsequent citations in this section are given parenthetically in the text.

<sup>31</sup> Douglas Kellner, *Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1989), 13.

<sup>32</sup> Baudrillard, cited in Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 16.

acquisition of commodities, "our entire society *communicates* and speaks of and to itself."<sup>34</sup> Finally, and most importantly, Baudrillard "describes the consumer mentality as a form of *'magical thought* which reigns over consumption. It is a miraculous mentality which rules everyday life, a primitive mentality in the sense that is defined as a belief in the omnipotence of thoughts: in this case, belief in the omnipotence of signs."<sup>35</sup>

It is the premise of this paper that Jameson and Baudrillard are correct in their interpretation of postmodern culture as fundamentally a culture of consumption; a culture defined materially and psychically in and through the consumption of objects and images. Moreover, this interpretation should be expanded and further clarified to include the observation that mere consumption does not adequately describe our relationship with objects and images. The association is more complex. Rather than simply consuming objects and images, postmodern culture can be understood as explicating meaning and value through a three-stage process, which begins (1) with the acquisition of items, (2) is clarified in the consumption of items, and finally (3) is fulfilled in the disposal of items. In critical texts, the first and third stages are typically subsumed by the second, as in Jameson, Baudrillard, Miller, and Schor,<sup>36</sup> but the first and third make both logical and psychical claims to equal importance. The first stage is of absolute importance for without it, actual consumption cannot occur. One must first acquire the item before the item can be consumed. In light of this, it is notable that studies of compulsive/ addictive behavior indicate the compulsive/addictive subject is often driven as much (or more) by the desire to acquire as by the actual possession/consumption of objects. The final stage is equally important because it allows the process to begin again, and preferably with a higher quality object or image within a particular class of items. Although researched studies of compulsive behavior have not revealed particular interest in this feature of the process, the satisfaction of disposing of the consumed item may well equal the satisfaction of acquiring it initially, because only when the item is disposed of can the process begin again.

What is largely missing in the interpretation of the process of consumption (or the process of acquisition-consumption-disposition as argued here) is the recognition that the process may be decidedly religious in character. It is here that the work of Jacques Ellul and Eric Voegelin provide the critical hermeneutic machinery.

### **Probing the Sacred Ground of Contemporary Culture: What Is Religion In A Postmodern Culture?**

While there are a number of good ways to go about investigating the religious character of postmodern consumerist culture, the work of Jacques Ellul and Eric Voegelin supply especially reliable theoretical instruments for such an inquiry. Unlike Jameson

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<sup>34</sup> Baudrillard, cited in Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Kellner with citation of Baudrillard, Ibid., 14.

<sup>36</sup> Jameson, Ibid.; Baudrillard, in Kellner, Ibid., Daniel Miller, ed., *Unwrapping Christmas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 18-19; and Juliet B. Schor, *The Overspent American* (New York: Basic Books, 1998).

and Baudrillard, Voegelin and Ellul do not minimize or marginalize the religious dimension of what typically is presented as secular culture. Rather than relegating religion to its classical forms and explicating it in the context of its eclipse or its problematic status in postmodern culture, Voegelin and Ellul allow interpreters to recognize what Tillich calls the "religious dynamic" in the seemingly secular process of acquisition-consumption-disposal. More than a quarter of a century ago, first Voegelin and then Ellul developed theories that designated the religious substance of contemporary culture as something substantially different from what ordinarily passes for religion. In application, their theories recognized that the institutions typically characterized as religion may neither be the dominant material embodiments of contemporary religiosity nor the belief systems that accurately serve to mediate human relations with the sacred.

For them, those material institutions and theoretical assemblages typically classified as religion (namely, classical and modern embodiments and sectarian variations of traditional transcendental' religions [post-Vedic Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam] ), face a serious challenge from alternative forms of religiosity that are at once uniquely contemporary in form and function while also being incredibly ancient in foundational structure. Ellul and Voegelin recognized that these alternative forms of religious expression are not only completely unrelated to the traditional religions with which culture is most familiar, they are the antithesis of such religions. Where traditional/normative religions are transcendental (in their locus of the divine) and anthropological (in their locus of human meaning and value), the alternative religions recognized by Ellul and Voegelin are cosmological (in their locus of the divine) and sociological (in their locus of human meaning and value).

In a description of the cultures of the ancient Near East, Peter Berger offers a helpful summary explication of the term, cosmological, as used in this context. Crediting Voegelin as the source for the term, Berger observes that in cosmological systems:

[T]he human world (that is, everything we today would call culture and society) is understood as being embedded in a cosmic order that embraces the entire universe. This order not only fails to make the sharp modern differentiation between human and non-human (or "natural") spheres of empirical reality, but, more importantly, it is an order that posits continuity between ... the world of men and the world of the gods. This continuity, which assumes an ongoing linkage of human events with the sacred forces permeating the universe is realized (not just affirmed but literally re-established) again and again in religious ritual.<sup>37</sup>

The cosmological worldview is the starting point for Ellul's analysis of religion in contemporary culture. Illuminating the character of the sacred in cosmological cultures, in *The New Demons* he writes: "In a world which is difficult, hostile, formidable, man...attributes sacred values to that which threatens him and to that which pro-

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<sup>37</sup> Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1969), 113. Berger cites Voegelin as the source for the term "cosmological."

fects him, or more exactly to that which restores him and puts him in tune with the universe.”<sup>38</sup> In ancient cosmological cultures, which depended on the cycles of nature and fertility of the natural environment, nature and the natural environment were the ground of the sacred — the ground of ultimate concern, awe and fascination, dread, and enchantment.

Today, however, Ellul argues that technology has replaced nature as the sacred ground and locus of ultimate concern. As he notes: “The novelty of our era is that man’s deepest experience is no longer with nature... Hence [nature] is no longer the inciter and place of the sacred”(100). Instead, “the modern western technical and scientific world is a sacred world” and “technology is the god who saves”(70, 73). In essence, in today’s world, technology has come to occupy a place analogous to that of nature in antiquity. It is the source of ultimate power and ultimate dread, what Rudolf Otto would call the *mysterium tremendus et fascinans*; and so, like nature of old, technology elicits a religious response. Importantly, although Ellul analogizes the sacred power of this era (technology) with the sacred power of traditional cosmological religions (nature), he does not equate it with the sacred power of the traditional transcendental religions of the West (God), at least, not in a conventional manner. While Ellul is correct in his general approach, he may err when specifying technology as the sacred ground. For reasons to be discussed later, the Economy may better embody the sacred in contemporary culture.

As with the cosmological systems of yore, modern cosmological religious expressions seek to relate persons and all of culture to the source of sacred power. Just as the ancient cosmological religions utilized myth and ritual to establish and legitimate this relationship, so too does the modern cosmological religion; but because the source of sacred power has changed, so too have the myths and rituals. In Ellul’s reading, where once the myths told of a sacred time of ancestors and heroes, gods of nature and fertility, today they tell of the sacred origins and mysterious processes of a technological world and one’s right relationship with technology (113). Here again, Ellul’s commitment to technology as the ground of the sacred may weaken his analysis of contemporary myths.

Following his specification of technology as the sacred, Ellul designates the “two fundamental myths of modern man” as “history and science”(98) and the sacred texts of the “secular religions” as *Das Kapital*, *Mein Kampf*, and *The Little Red Book*. Importantly, he also recognizes advertising as “the liturgy and the psalmody of the consumer religion”(146), but he does not quite tell us how the liturgy relates to the myths or the sacred texts. Ellul may be somewhat off the mark in designating history and science as the dominant myths of today and quite a bit off the mark in his designation of the sacred texts (although we can certainly excuse his citation of specific texts that carried more political power in the time of his writing than they do today). He comes closer to the mark in citing advertising as the liturgy of the consumer religion, but his failure to

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<sup>38</sup> Ellul, *New Demons*, 50. Subsequent citations in this section are given parenthetically in the text.

clearly explain how the liturgy relates to the myths points up a fundamental problem in his analysis.

Consumption as a religious expression is not legitimated (mythically) by history and science, and while its liturgy may well be advertising, this liturgy seems significantly disconnected from Ellul's sacred technology - notwithstanding his own observation that it would not be difficult to "show how it [advertising] is planted in the sacred and in the religious structure" (146). Rather than history and science being the dominant myths of today, we might look to narratives that articulate the meaning and order of life in a world dominated by the Economy — perhaps focusing on narratives of economic success and material acquisition. The delivery system for these myths is the mass media, with television being the primary vehicle.

In the case of ritual, for Ellul, it is political activity, for politics is the process through which citizens participate in the sacred work of the state, which mediates their engagement with technology. In fact, in chapter six of *The New Demons*, Ellul offers a rather elegant argument supporting his claim that politics is the religion of the contemporary world. As noted above, the sacred texts of today are political texts; and, looking more closely, Ellul finds messiahs (for example, the proletariat, in Marxism), theories of resurrection (of the race and the Volk in Nazism), millennialism (as with the Chinese cultural revolution), dogmas (Marxist theory), clergy, and heretics. Of course, there is also worship and liturgy; these are the great political festivals, such as those at Munich and Nuremberg or "Chinese assemblies of Tien Am Mem." Curiously, and somewhat inaccurately, I believe, Ellul finds these political religions to correspond perfectly with Christianity (189), and their modification from radical movements to "guarantors of the established order" (circa the mid-1970s) to be analogous to the modification of Christianity when it became politically successful (196-7). Although his primary focus is on totalitarian states, he observes: "there is a sacralizing of all political activity elsewhere, in the liberal democratic, bourgeois and capitalist countries" (197). He does not support or develop this observation, but it seems that this could be done easily enough, following his thesis. Especially keen is his analysis of the ritualistic function of politics in the technological society. As he writes:

The political behavior of the modern citizen makes manifest the sacred of the state, and the fact that the participating citizen is endowed with an exciting grandeur. Politics has become the place of final truth, of absolute seriousness, of radical divisions among men, of the separation of good from evil... In the end it is there [in the political domain] that people experience the deepest conviction that everything is at stake. (198)

Thus, as with the source of sacred power and the myths that illuminate it, the religious rituals that relate persons to this power are decidedly different from those of traditional religion. But is Jacques Ellul correct? I think he is, but only up to a point.

Like Baudrillard, whom he cites, Ellul observes: "Consumption... is no longer a materialistic fact. It has become the meaning of life"(144). And he does recognize a distinctive religious quality to consumption. Still, for Ellul, politics functions as the de-

cisive form of religious expression in technological societies, and these political religions are presented as essentially variations on Christianity, a transcendental religion.<sup>39</sup>

Voegelin, for his part, also sees modern political movements as religions.<sup>40</sup> In his analysis of contemporary culture and his reading of politics as religion, Voegelin, like Ellul, recognizes that the fundamental impulse of such cultures is harmonial and integrative, and like Ellul, he cites Soviet Marxism and Nazism in this regard. What Voegelin does, and Ellul does not (at least not thoroughly or convincingly), is recognize the similarities between these and other contemporary social and political systems and the cosmological religions of antiquity.<sup>41</sup> In his words:

The self-understanding of a society as the representative of cosmic order originates in the period of the cosmological empires in the technical sense, but it is not confined to this period. Not only does cosmological representation survive in the imperial symbols of the Western Middle Ages or in continuity into the China of the twentieth century; its principle is also recognizable where the truth to be represented is symbolized in an entirely different manner. In Marxian dialects, for instance, the truth of cosmic order is replaced by the truth of a historically immanent order.<sup>42</sup> cosmos and the immediate natural environment. It also served to maintain collective unity in the society. In fact, and in distinction to contemporary transcendental religions, religion was not a discrete institution in these cultures. It simply was, and through myth and ritual it affirmed and acted out (in a heightened and intensified sense) the truth that the way things were, was the way they should be. For these cultures, is was ought.

Like Ellul, Voegelin clearly recognizes that contemporary culture evinces this same sort of worldview. He also misdiagnoses the religious character of this culture by looking to politics as the religious institution that typifies this worldview. Again, like Ellul,

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., chap. 6. Ellul notes that he is following Aron and Simondon in his analysis of politics as "secular religion" and this approach may ultimately account for his too-brief depiction of consumption as religion (144-147) and the internal contradiction this depiction sets up with his argument that politics is the functional religion of the contemporary world.

<sup>40</sup> See Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952); *Science Politics and Gnosticism* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1968); and his early work *Die Politischen Religionen (The Political Religions)* (Vienna; Bermann-Fischer, 1938). Curiously, Voegelin interprets "political religions" as variants of ancient Gnosticism.

<sup>41</sup> There are important similarities between Ellul and Voegelin and I think that when used together, as here, they disclose much more than either of them when used independently. Darrell Fasching has done the best job yet of revealing the significant affinities between the work of Voegelin and Ellul and then successfully deploying both their theories, essentially in tandem, to illuminate contemporary ethical dilemmas. See especially, *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima*, chap. 4. In short, Fasching argues that Voegelin's distinction between cosmological and anthropological is the same as Ellul's distinction between sacred and holy, with the latter term in both being essentially analogous to what I have termed "transcendental" and the former term functioning essentially as Voegelin and I (here) have used the term. I think the analogy works well in terms of the sort of ethical analysis Fasching is doing, and could possibly work here to reconfigure Ellul's analysis of political religion. But it would take a *reconfiguration* of Ellul, and this is hardly necessary when Voegelin's theory works perfectly well as a *clarification* of Ellul.

<sup>42</sup> Voegelin, 59-60.

he nicely analyzes the structures of politics and other cultural institutions as religious in character, but then, despite what would seem to be his own overwhelming evidence, he concludes that these institutions are Gnostic — dependent on a mystical sort of salvific knowledge about history and human destiny. This is no more satisfying or accurate than Ellul's efforts to analogize these institutions to Christianity. And although Voegelin labored long and hard to make this argument, ancient Gnosticism itself was, at best, minimally cosmological, while in Voegelin's own presentation, contemporary Gnosticism is clearly cosmological, with myths of history and progress serving to illuminate the sacred realm and political movements serving the religious function of integrating persons and whole societies with this realm. Voegelin's much disputed "Gnostic thesis" is probably the greatest flaw in his far-reaching and highly regarded inquiry into the order and process of history. How much better it would have been had he forgone the problematic Gnostic thesis altogether, and expanded his brief and passing analogies of contemporary culture with cosmological civilizations into a working argument.

Despite their flaws, Ellul and Voegelin, when used together in a complementary fashion, supply what was missing in Jameson and Baudrillard — the basis for an analysis of the religious dimension of contemporary culture. The question remains, however, what is the proper way to interpret this dimension? This is a fundamental question, because if Ellul and Voegelin are correct about the cosmological character of contemporary Western culture (and it is the presumption of this paper that they are), then the religious expression of this culture is cosmological and so the rituals and myths of this culture should reveal characteristics of a cosmological engagement with the sacred. It is here that the Ellul-Voegelin theory seems to fall apart, for although they both seem to strongly suggest that the essence of contemporary culture is cosmological (notwithstanding their clumsy attempts to Christianize or Gnosticize specific religious expressions), they fundamentally misdiagnose the religious dimension itself by looking to politics rather than to a more clearly cosmological phenomenon — consumption. Ellul and Voegelin, thus, need to be linked with Jameson and Baudrillard. This is what I attempt to do in developing a theoretical basis for the study of religion in postmodern culture presented in *The Sacred Santa*. In short, I bring Ellul-Voegelin together with Jameson-Baudrillard - which might well have troubled the former pair of thinkers. How this somewhat paradoxical combination works can now be sketched.

In ancient cosmological cultures, religion functioned to integrate society and internal social structures with the

### **The Idea of Sacred Consumption**

The central problem with designating politics as the religious dimension of contemporary culture is found in the failure of politics to generate sustainable representative myths and associated rituals. If what we are dealing with in the postmodern era is a cosmological culture, politics does not offer a reasonable approximation of religion because the myths and rituals of political reality lack the sort of massive plausibility and culturally unifying dynamic demanded of the religious expressions of such cul-



tures. While Ellul is accurate in recognizing the quasireligious role of consumption, his designation of politics as the process through which moderns "manifest the sacred," experience "exciting grandeur," and find the basis of "final truth" simply overstates the religious function of politics. Today, politics is typically dismissed as a charade at the level of popular culture and its substance (the quest for and maintenance of social power) tends not to generate community-sustaining myths and rituals, but instead, communitydestroying narratives and socially disorienting activities, often of the most disconcerting type.

The search for the religious character of postmodern culture must therefore lead elsewhere, and the elsewhere to which it leads is back to Jameson and Baudrillard and their carefully articulated study of the social function of commodity consumption. Following Baudrillard (and entirely in the context of Jameson), Kellner observes:

[T]he consumer ... cannot avoid the obligation to consume, because it is consumption that is the primary mode of social integration and the primary ethic and activity within the consumer society. The consumer ethic and "fun morality" thus involve active labor, incessant curiosity and search for novelty, and conformity to the latest fads, products and demands to consume."<sup>43</sup>

In this regard (to the degree that he follows Jameson and Baudrillard), Ellul is absolutely correct when he writes that "consumption ... is no longer a materialistic fact. It has become the meaning of life"; but he errs in not recognizing that consumption, as the "meaning of life," is (much more so than politics) revealed to be the basis of ultimate legitimation of individuals and society as a whole. Through consumption, which begins with ritual acquisition, one gains significance in the cosmic scheme of existence by engaging in a sacred activity and actually penetrating the sacred realm itself. Thus, rather than technology serving as the sacred ground of contemporary culture, it is the Economy; and rather than politics serving as the religious mediation of sacred reality, it is consumption, or more accurately, the experience of acquisition-consumption-disposition.

Using the description of religion given earlier as a guide, consumption may now be described as that which relates persons to the sacred (Economy) through the shared myths and rituals of a community, which, in the case of cosmological religion, is an entire culture. Religion is the phenomenon that harmonizes individual and collective activities and integrates culture as a whole with the order and process of the sacred (Economic) realm. In cosmological systems, this phenomenon is not isolated in discrete institutions, but rather, it is embedded in the collective beliefs of the entire culture. These beliefs give order, guidance, and legitimation to culture as a whole and its residents specifically. It is that which articulates one's right relationship with the sacred and reveals the cosmic meaning of existence, which is also the culturally normative way of life and living. The Sanskrit term and Hindu religious concept *dharma* (sacred/social duty), perhaps best approximates this notion.

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<sup>43</sup> Kellner, 16.

Thus, if the order and process (or order-process) of the Economy can be read as the ground of the sacred, then religion in its cosmological form and function is the interrelated, comprehensive, and incredibly complex collection of cultural beliefs and practices that explain and motivate one's right relationship with the Economic order and its process. This right relationship is illuminated and vivified in culturally embedded myths. Such myths must be at once believed as elemental (unquestioned) truths of existence. This, by the way, is true of all myths, whether cosmological or transcendental, but it is not true of Ellul's myths of history and science and Voegelin's similar myths of history and progress, which seem to function mythically only in some sort of abstract, academic manner. Rather than myths of history, science, or progress, the myths that relate postmodems to the sacred realm of the Economy are the much more vital, robust economic narratives of late capitalism.

The paradigmatic model of these narratives can be referred to as a meta-myth.<sup>44</sup> As such, it is the overarching story that communicates the culture's sacred ideal. It is the myth that contains and generates all other myths and to which all other myths in some way refer. In principle and (ritual) practice, the great meta-myth of postmodern culture is the myth of success and affluence, gained through a proper relationship with the Economy, and revealed in the everexpanding material prosperity of society and through the ever-increasing acquisition and consumption of products by individuals. From this meta-myth, all other (more accessible, relative, and domestic) myths derive.

Although the meta-myth is seldom articulated explicitly, the secondary and tertiary myths it spawns are communicated in narratives derived from popular culture and told as much through images as words. Secondary myths are narratives about the masters of business and finance; the stars of movies, sports, and the music industry; persons who win lotteries, make fortunes e-trading, win gameshows—and then "live large" as a consequence of their success. They are the stories of Bill Gates, Michael Jordan, Madonna, Shaquille O'Neal, Tom Hanks, Jody Foster, the person on TV we never heard of who receives the check for millions of dollars, or the one who catches some record-breaking home run ball. Most commonly, secondary myths are spun out in the endless round of talk-shows, sports broadcasts, and to a lesser extent sitcoms and sitdrams. But they also are communicated through news reports, supermarket tabloids, mainstream periodicals, and all the media instruments of culture. Each and all of these stories, in their own way, constantly tell and retell the meta-myth — the myth of material success and achievement, gained through mastery of the mysteries of the Economy. Besides these stories are the wide range of tertiary myths. These generally tend to focus on representative persons from the public at large and reveal how they too participate in the sacred reality of prosperity and affluence through personal rituals of acquisition and consumption.

Like the myths of any era, the myths of contemporary America are the stories its citizens know best, that they listen to most closely, tell to one another, and never tire

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<sup>44</sup> My "meta-myth" is analogous to Ellul's "basic" and "essential" myth. See n. 4.

of hearing. They want to be like the heroes in the myths, they want to experience the world as the stars experience it; see as they see, live as they live, do what they do, and, in some way, consume as they consume. Stories of history, science, and progress are not in this category; they are academic explanations, theoretic maneuvers. Religious myths are much more vital than these. So too are religious rituals.

As noted earlier, rituals engage religious participants with the sacred realm disclosed by the myths. In their most distinctive cosmological form, these rituals are massive collective experiences that enthrall and enchant the whole of culture and serve to integrate persons and the most important activities of their everyday commonsense world with the sacred order. In postmodern culture, the rituals that integrate citizens with the myths are those activities that allow them to experience a degree of mastery over the mysteries of the Economy; activities that are luminous witness to their own material success and achievement. As the recently popular American TV commercial affirmed: "If I could be like Mike [Michael Jordan]," I would consume a particular commodity. So, to be like Mike, I acquire, consume, and dispose of the product. Then, I acquire another. In this way, I am like Mike, the hero of the myth. I hear the narrative of what the mythic heroes acquire, consume, dispose of: houses, cars, boats; I see the clothes they wear and/or advertise; I learn about the foods and beverages they consume. They are consumers too, and the grandest consumers of all. To be like them, to be close to the sacred world they have mastered, I too consume — as often as I can, in as many ways as I can, and preferably I consume products that are like those that they consume, as well. In this way, citizens of postmodern culture are ritually integrated with the sacred order articulated in their myths and, as is typical of cosmological cultures, the highest form of this ritual integration occurs when the entire culture shares in events of consumption.

In the context of this analysis, it can be said that Ellul and Voegelin err not in their designation of certain elements in contemporary culture as cosmological, but rather in their specification of both the sacred realm and the religious dimension of this culture. In short, neither understands it quite "cosmologically" enough.

Technology is not the sacred ground because, to use Ellul's terms, it lacks the requisite capacity to "threaten," "protect," "restore," and "put [us] in tune with the universe." While it is easy enough to grant that technology can do these things to some extent, it does not do so with the same decisiveness, enormity, and grandeur as the Economy. Technology is the servant of the Economy, as is every other institution and enterprise in contemporary culture. When the Economy foils, it brings disorder, even chaos, to every other institution and enterprise of meaning and value-education, science, the media, government, and technology. On a national scale, technological failures are resolved economically. If a nation possesses adequate economic resources, it quickly and relatively easily resolves technological challenges that may be caused by war or natural calamity. On the other hand, if a nation is not economically powerful, technological challenges are considerably more difficult to resolve. This is witnessed by the way in which the USA quickly and effectively responded to the (technological) destruction

of the events of September 11, 2001, and the inability of Serbia to respond to the destruction wrought by NATO bombing, or Turkey to the August, 1999 earthquake. Economic power can solve problems in all other enterprises that might be claimed to have a sacred significance, but those other enterprises do not exercise a similar power over the Economy. They are its servants and it does use them.

The same is true at the personal level. When my personal engagement with the Economy is interrupted (when I lose my job or am laid off, or if I take a cut in pay because my company is "downsized" or acquired by another), disorder and chaos enter my personal life. This disorder is registered in my inability to participate in the rituals of acquisition and consumption that are religiously necessary to my identity as a citizen of the postmodern world. Only when I am again able to ritually enter into the sacred world, mythically disclosed by narratives of acquisition, can I again be a legitimate member of culture.

The role of the Economy in postmodern culture is every bit the same as the role of nature in primal and archaic cosmological cultures — if not more. Its order and process are beyond my grasp, or anyone's for that matter, including the CEOs of giant corporations and the Chair of the Federal Reserve. Its ways are at times capricious, ruthless, sudden and uncompromising; it cannot be controlled. Its interest in me is indifferent at best; it colors all of my activities, even if I am not immediately aware of it. It tells me who I am, what I am, and what I am able to do. It defines my dharma. James Carville was right when he said (regarding the need for Bill Clinton's 1992 presidential campaign to focus on what was most important to Americans): "It's the Economy, Stupid."

By the same token, and I think as a consequence, politics is not the religion of postmodern culture. Politics is simply not a cosmological religion for it is too distinct an institution. It exists as a separate entity in society and is not usually a part of everyday life for most persons; in fact, for many, it is something to be avoided. Hardly an institution that promotes integrative experiences, politics is, at best, a divisive social enterprise. Likewise, technology is not sacred in a cosmological sense for it is too transcendental. It is one of the grand abstractions (even an ideal) of contemporary culture and best understood as a critical explanation for the type of societies that have emerged in the postmodern period. Yet it serves more as a term of analysis and classification of the physical/ material world as we know it than it does a sacred reality that one might experientially encounter in a religious sense.

Remember, in cosmological cultures, and in distinction to those in which transcendental systems dominate, religion is not a discrete institution and the sacred is close at hand. In such cultures, such as America's and others at the postmodern stage of development, religion is indistinguishable from culture itself; indistinguishable from the normative way of life and living, which it legitimates as an expression of the sacred order. Ellul's analysis of politics noted earlier may thus be modified to read:

Consumption by the postmodern citizen makes manifest the sacred of the Economy, and the fact that the consuming citizen is endowed with an exciting grandeur. Consumption has become the place of final truth, of absolute seriousness.

It seems fair to say that many (perhaps most) Americans would grant that they have at times had a sense of this grandeur while engaging in ritual consumption (acquisition-consumption-disposition) and gone about their activities with a seriousness that in earlier times was restricted to religious activity. Still, it is something that most Americans do not think about much. And this is exactly the point. It is just the way things are. What *is* is what *ought* to be. To say otherwise, or to think too hard about it, is not appropriate, not normal, not in harmony with the sacred order and process of the Economy.

This being so, although consumption is ubiquitous, as the specifically *religious* expression of postmodern, cosmological culture, it is nonetheless difficult to find. Moreover, once found, it is hard to distinguish from the rest of culture. Consumption simply is, and through myth and ritual it affirms and acts out (in a heightened and intensified sense) the truth of the cosmic (Economic) order that is already revealed in everyday life. And this truth is that the way things are is the way they ought to be; and the way things are in postmodern culture when things truly *are*, is the way things are when persons consume. Thus, like every other entity in culture, individuals serve the Economy; and when they serve rightly, they prosper. Why? Because of the sacred order and process of the Economy itself. Carville was right and more religious than he could imagine.

In seeking to isolate the religious essence of postmodern culture, our attention should not be directed to discrete, specialized institutions that can be distinguished from other institutions because they are somehow *religious*, but instead to the everyday stories (myths) and activities (rituals) shared by the whole community and communicated and experienced in heightened and intensified ways at specially designated (sacred) times. In these sacred times, we will find what may well be the actual religious phenomena of postmodern culture, and in the finding, discover just how religious it may really be and how hard it may be for its citizens to be different than they are.

### **Holidays and Holy Days**

On the basis of the foregoing, the proposed analysis of holidays as representative postmodern religious events can be briefly sketched. Central to this analysis is the specification of the sacred as the three-fold process of acquisition-consumption-disposition of objects and images; and the specification of religion as the body of myths and rituals that vivify the sacred process for society and individuals.

This being so, and following the socio-economic analysis of Jameson-Baudrillard (and in the context of the religious theories of Ellul-Voegelin), it may be argued that religion in postmodern society is that collection of culturally embedded phenomena that mediate individual and collective relationships with the sacred power of the Economy through acquisition-consumption-disposal. It is not enough to simply acquire and consume objects and images. One must do both and one must also dispose of the objects

and images for the sacred to be experienced. The entire process must be completed, for only then (in the cyclical manner that is elemental to cosmological systems) can the process begin again. The quicker the process is completed and then begun again, the greater is one's experience of the sacred, and hence the greater one's power in the socio-religious system. For this reason, popular culture venerates the person who is able to keep up with the trends in fashion, who is able to acquire a new car every year (perhaps also explaining the recent success of automobile leasing), who buys a *new* house, replaces appliances on a regular basis, installs a new lawn periodically, acquires the most innovative type of computer, and so on.

As is doubtless quite evident, the power of this process has decidedly negative consequences. It leads to waste, the destruction of the natural environment, alienation (in all the old Marxist senses of the word), and dehumanization of others (who themselves may be unfortunate enough for one reason or another to have become commodities). It also helps account for and perhaps best explain the proliferation of addictive "diseases" related to consumption. When thus deployed, the sacred significance of this process reveals such addictions (alcoholism, drug addiction, food addiction, sex addiction, shopaholism, and so on) as not only diseases of consumption, as they are often classified, but perhaps most accurately challenges related to the proper relationship with the acquisition-consumption-disposition process. Perhaps, then, they are expressions of a religious addiction.

This being said, and not to get too far into the sacred-profane dichotomy discussion, if we can specify the religious through distinction from the non-religious (or locate the sacred apart from the profane), then we can speak of it more explicitly. Thus, because the sacred is the Economy, and religion is the process of acquisition-consumption-disposal, which engages one with the sacred through myth and ritual, then the non-religious would be that which disengages one from the process. This would be production. Although this seems a rather rudimentary and perhaps inconsequential note, it is necessary to recognize the distinction because, in this context, it allows for the isolation of the religious experience itself. It also represents an inversion of the old Protestant work-ethic, which vested religious merit in economic production, thereby fueling early and middle capitalism.

Today, the cultural logic is reversed. It is no less religious, but the religious basis is different; rather than transcendental and production-validating it is cosmological and consumption-validating. Because production (labor/work) prevents one from acquisition-consumption-disposal, it is the antithesis of the sacred. Production has thus become functionally profane, where in earlier times, it was functionally sacred; and acquisition and consumption, which were once religiously restricted, if not actually profane, have become sacred. When I am working, I am not consuming, yet my working/profane endeavors bring me the substance necessary for me to consume. I thus sacrifice time and energy in the profane realm for the sake of the Economy; not because I find any particular satisfaction in contributing to production (and certainly not because of any religious merit, *per se*) but because I am equipping myself to bet-

ter perform my religious duty. My sacrifice of time and energy in profane endeavors (labor) rewards me with ritual resources (money), which then allows me to participate in the sacred process of acquisition-consumption-disposal.

This threefold process, as opposed to production (the ideal of early and middle capitalism), defines one's primary religious duty (dharma) in the late-capitalist, postmodern world. As a result, postmoderns sacralize those times and places where they can maximize the experience of acquisition-consumption-disposal, thus motivating them to reduce the realm in which they are engaged in acts of production. From this motivation is spun off popular ideals (and I would say mythic narratives) embodied in concepts such as the "golden years" of retirement, "extended vacations," "saving up 'comp' or sick time to use all at once," and a whole class of ideals related specifically to weekends: "T.G.I.F.," "living for the weekend," midweek "hump-day," the "three-day weekend," and certainly, for some, the "lost weekend." All of these richly evocative concepts express a resistance to activities of production and an idealization of leisure periods when persons can fully immerse themselves in sacred time and space-times when acquisition-consumption-disposal may be fully experienced and spaces entirely divorced from the profane sphere of work/production. What, after all, do most Americans do in leisure spaces, places, and times? While once it might have been relaxing activities or visits with family and friends, every indication is that today what they do is acquire, consume, and dispose. And although leisure time still may include traditional pursuits, such activities are often prefaced by acquisition rituals. In this regard American holidays manifest a genuine sacredness, becoming true holy days when individuals and entire communities can escape the profane realm and reaffirm the sacred truth of their personal and collective existence.

The annual cycle of American holidays, thus, comes into correspondence with a typical cosmological cycle of ritual celebrations: fixed calendric periods that are recognized as particularly sacred and specifically dedicated to mythico-ritual activity. For postmodern culture, these holidays are holy because they liberate persons from the profane realm of work/production, ushering them into the sacred times and climes of uninhibited acquisition-consumption-disposal, and supplying the religious dynamic of postmodernity. The extent to which work/production ceases (in both time [calendar duration] and space [sectors of the productive economy]) suggests the relative sacredness of a given holiday, but the real defining feature is consumption itself -how much is spent at the temples and shrines of retail commerce during holiday periods. On this basis, I used retail spending as a measure of sacred significance and classified holidays into various categories, the greatest of which I refer to as holy days.

Using this method, the three greatest holy days are Valentine's Day, Easter, and Christmas, with Back-to-School functioning as something of a religious festival. Less significant holy days include Super Bowl Sunday, Presidents' Day, and the Fourth of July. These and other holiday-holy days are explored in more detail in *The Sacred Santa*. For now it can be observed that the underlying force behind the sacred significance of postmodern holy days is found in the relationship of myths and rituals — what

Eliade refers to as mythico-rituals. First it can be noted that rituals allow persons to participate in or otherwise affirm their proper relationship to the sacred. They are intertwined with myths in so far as rituals reenact myths and myths illuminate rituals. Through rituals, believers experience the sacred time of the myth and are brought into communion with the foundational reality of life. In ancient cosmological cultures, myths were widely communicated and fervently reaffirmed, and entire communities participated in intense and prolonged ritual celebrations of mythic reenactment — drawing all closer to the primordial reality of the meta-myth, which in archaic cultures focused on Nature and its power.

Consistent with archaic religious festivals, the key to the kinetic intensity of contemporary holy days is their capacity to energize the sacred nexus between myth and ritual. Like those of our archaic ancestors, the holy-day celebrations of postmodern culture vivify the critical sacred linkage of myth and ritual, in this case, drawing all who participate into closer contact with the primordial power of the Economy. This distinctive feature of holy days accounts for a number of other characteristic holy-day elements. It is revealed most strikingly in the proliferation of tertiary myths (advertisements) directly related to a given holiday. Although these are the shortest of all the mythic narratives, they offer powerful and compelling renditions of the meta-myth: success and happiness are gained through a proper relationship with the Economy and revealed in the ever-expanding material prosperity of society and the ever-increasing acquisition and consumption of products by individuals. They also bring persons into closest proximity with the reality of the meta-myth and the threshold of ritual itself.

During holy-day cycles, tertiary myths are widely communicated and fervently reaffirmed; one needs only consider the increased number and size of newspaper inserts on weekends in advance of holidays, TV holiday commercials, and the greater number of ads in the holiday issues of magazines. Additionally, holy-day advertisements (tertiary myths) are acutely focused on the sacred concerns of specific holidays. In these myths persons discover sacred narratives about objects appropriate or simply available for ritual acquisition during specific holy days: lawn and garden tools for Memorial Day, summer foods and beverages for The Fourth, jewelry for Valentine's Day, fall apparel for Labor Day, you-name-it at Christmas, and who-knows-what for America's newest holiday — Patriot Day, to be celebrated on September 11.<sup>45</sup> To the degree that Patriot Day becomes a genuine postmodern holy day, it will generate its own tertiary myths and Americans will respond with rituals of acquisition, for this is what happens on holy days in American culture.

Christmas is, of course, the most vivid illustration of the postmodern sacralization of holidays and the greatest holy-day cycle of postmodern culture. Christmas is, however,

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<sup>45</sup> The U.S. Congress passed Patriot Day legislation in the Fall 2001, initially introduced by U.S. Representative, Vito Fossella (R-N.Y.) requesting that the president "issue a proclamation each year calling for state and local governments and people to observe Patriot Day [September 11] with appropriate programs and activities." See Ellen Gedalius, "Patriot Debate," in the *Tampa Tribune*, August 12, 2002, 1, 5. As of now (October, 2002) there does not appear to be any noticeable movement toward



only the most dramatic and dynamic example of neo-cosmological religiosity. It is thus different from other holy days, not so much in essence or substance as in degree and size. When it comes to cosmological religious celebrations, however, size does make a difference, and accordingly, *The Sacred Santa* devotes a full section to an analysis of the Christmas holy day cycle—including a chapter that focuses on the apotheosis of Santa Claus.

During Christmas and other holy-day cycles, pilgrimages to shrines and temples (stores and shopping malls) are more frequent. Persons may review the tertiary myths more closely and become more focused in their performance of sacred rituals of acquisition; fulfilling their dharma as consumers, reaffirming their primordial relationship with the Economy's sacred power. The nexus of myth and ritual glistens in these times; the connection between mythic narratives and ritual performances becoming more immediate, vigorous, deeply felt, and religiously significant. It is also experienced by more of the population during holy-day cycles, drawing all participants closer to the primordial power of the Economy. Taken as a whole, holy-day myths keenly remind citizens of the sacred significance of acquisition and the opportunity they have to do so in a certain sanctified period—a holy-day cycle. Thus, when one ritually acquires objects depicted in a holy-day myth, the performance is more purposeful, and the dynamic connection between myth and ritual is clearer, more vivid, more vital, and more sacred for the participant. *The Sacred Santa* is interested in this dynamic connection, why it has risen to religious prominence in postmodern culture, and how it may have replaced traditional transcendental religious practices as the functional expression of contemporary religiosity.

\* \* \* \* \*

In conclusion, it is my contention that inquiry into the religious dynamic of postmodern culture, using Jameson-Baudrillard *together* with Ellul-Voegelin, reveals the contours of a cosmological sense of the sacred. Moreover, when attention is directed to the holidays of this culture we may find, as Jack Santino tells us in a wonderful book, they take us *All Around the Year* and really are (adding his subtitle) *Celebrations in American Life*.<sup>46</sup> We may also discover that they are celebrations of American life and its cosmological essence; celebrations that uniquely reveal the religious heart of American culture, and celebrations that are more profoundly sacred than their secular guise suggests. In short, and this is the point of my inquiry in *The Sacred Santa*: When considering contemporary holidays in terms of the method outlined here, they emerge as intensely sacred events; and as such they reveal not only how thoroughly religious postmodern American culture has become but also just how difficult it may be for Americans to cease being the consumers the Economy demands that they be.

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sacralization of Patriot Day, although informational observations revealed a considerable increase in retail sales promotions for patriotic paraphernalia (flag decals and bumper stickers, full-size flags, and apparel with various nationalistic symbols and slogans).

<sup>46</sup> Jack Santino, *All Around the Year: Holidays and Celebrations in American Life* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

## The Two Faces of Religiosity in Postmodern Society by Darrell J. Fasching

It is an occasion for great pride and also a sense of humility when one's student becomes one's teacher. Dell deChant was an undergraduate in one of my courses during my first semester of teaching at the University of South Florida in 1982. From the very first week he stood out as an extraordinary student. He went on to prove his promise, finishing his undergraduate and graduate degrees in our program. More recently Dell coauthored *Comparative Religious Ethics: A Narrative Approach* (Blackwells, 2001) with me. And now he is the author of a book on religion and postmodernity — *The Sacred Santa: The Religious Dimensions of Consumer Culture* (Pilgrim Press, 2002) — that is quite provocative offers Ellul scholars much food for thought.

What does religion have to do with economics, the sacred with the secular, or postmodernity with premodernity? Unlike most who would see only “difference,” Dell deChant sees important similarities. What do modern scholars like Paul Tillich, Jacques Ellul, Eric Voegelin and Mircea Eliade have to do with postmodernists like Fredric Jameson and Jean Baudrillard? Conversant with postmodern intellectual trends, deChant is no slave to current intellectual fashions but rather places historical eras and intellectual styles (premodern, modern and postmodern) into critical dialogue with each other in order to illuminate the religiosity of contemporary postmodern secular culture.

Deeply indebted to the thinking of Paul Tillich, Eric Voegelin and especially Jacques Ellul in the way he asks questions, but not necessarily in the way he answers them, deChant probes the religious dimension of contemporary secular and postmodern culture. He attempts to understand the religiosity of the economy much the way I attempted to understand the implications of the religiosity of technology for global public policy ethics in *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima* (SUNY, 1993). What we share above all, of course, is a deep debt to Jacques Ellul, especially his work *The New Demons* (Seabury, 1975). For it is Ellul who taught us how to put our age into question.

While Dell's interpretation puts us at odds over Ellul's thesis concerning the priority of technology over the economy, I find in Dell's work an intellectual challenge worthy of the highest respect. Dell deChant asks us to see ourselves and our society with new eyes. He helps us understand ourselves and our postmodern culture.

A dominant theme of modern thought in the 1960s was that religion would disappear to be replaced by the secular society of a scientific age. It is commonplace now to observe that a global religious resurgence since the nineteen-seventies has proved that claim false. What is still often missed is that, quite apart from the resurgence of religions, our everyday world of commerce and consumerism is saturated with religious myth and ritual. We fail to see this, says deChant, because we tend to identify religion with the transcendental religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam, where God

is understood as different and distant from the natural world. But the religiosity of postmodern society is closer to the cosmological religiosity of premodern primal and early urban societies (as Ellul pointed out in *The New Demons*) where the sacred manifests itself, as it perhaps does in postmodern culture, through a kind of polytheistic diversity rather than uniformity. In this ancient type of society, religion is not a separate realm within society but an aspect of every cultural activity. To participate in the culture is to be religious.

In such ancient societies human beings saw nature as the overwhelming and all-encompassing environment of powers and forces that governed their destiny. Experiencing themselves as totally dependent on these powers, human beings, overwhelmed by a sacral awe, sought to be in harmony with these forces through the myths and rituals of polytheism in all their contradictory diversity. Today the postmodern world mirrors that pre-modern world, deChant argues, except that now the environment that surrounds us and governs our destiny is the postmodern, multinational, global economy. Here deChant uses Ellul to challenge Ellul's central thesis. It is the economy, not technology, he argues, that has transcended and encompassed nature in its marketing strategies. The economy has desacralized nature and turned its abundance into raw materials for commodification while reorienting society's rituals in order to render consumerism a sacred activity serving the new powers that now govern our destiny. Given that the al Qaida chose the World Trade Center in New York City as one of the sacred centers of our society to be destroyed, Dell deChant's thesis has great plausibility. On the other hand, their other target was Washington D.C. — the political/military center of our society. This too needs to be acknowledged. It appears the al Qaida recognized both as manifestations of what we hold sacred.

Despite Dell deChant's major disagreement with Ellul over the primacy of technique, his argument draws heavily upon Ellul's approach, while substituting the economy for technology. Our problem, says Dell, is that we are blinded to the religious/ritual dimension of our economic life by our identification of religion with transcendental religions, seemingly unaware that cosmological, this-worldly, religiosity has been far more typical and pervasive in the history of the human race. And so, in important ways, we fail to fully appreciate our own actions and the religious rhythms of our own culture, defined by a postmodern cycle of sacred festivals.

In his book, *The Sacred Santa* he analyses the myths and rituals that shape postmodern culture through its eclectic cycle of holidays in far more vivid detail than he has space to do in this issue of *The Ellul Forum*. Through his analysis Dell shows us that the economic rituals of our society bring us into harmony with the powers that govern our destiny, now perceived as the powers of the economy. From the mythic stories conveyed by film, television dramas and mass media advertising, on through the ritual activities of visiting shopping malls as sacred places of intense religious activity, deChant argues for the pervasive economic religiosity of postmodern culture. This postmodern religiosity is an eclectic amalgamation of postmodern myths conveyed by the mass media and the equally eclectic rituals of American postmodern holidays, from New

Years day through Super Bowl Sunday, Presidents Day, St. Patrick's Day, Easter, the Fourth of July and on to the "High Holy Days" of Halloween-Thanksgiving-Christmas, peppered with many secondary festivals along the way.

I think Dell deChant has done important work that both builds upon and also goes beyond Ellul in his analysis of postmodern religiosity and the economy. His work is important for Ellul scholars because he introduces Ellul into the postmodern debate which must surely happen if Ellul's work is to remain relevant. And his work pays Ellul the highest form of compliment, for Ellul did not want disciples but rather encouraged us all to think new thoughts in relation to the unfolding challenges of our technological civilization.

Having said all that, I do have some reservations about the way Dell characterizes Ellul's position and how he places his own thesis in relation to Ellul's work. I would challenge: (1) his argument for the primacy of economy over technology as the bearer of the sacred, (2) his argument for consumerism rather than politics as a manifestation of sacred activity, (3) his use Ellul's typological classification of the three levels of myth to make his case and (4) his account of the relation between the sacred and profane. The intent of these challenges is not to undermine the validity of Dell's critique of consumerism but to suggest that it may not put him as much at odds with Ellul's position as he suggests.

The core of Dell's provocative challenge is his argument that it is the economy and not technology that is the new bearer of the sacred in postmodern culture. To do this he uses Jameson's Marxist analysis of postmodern culture. One would scarcely guess from Dell's account of Ellul that Ellul too thought of himself as a Marxist. As such he certainly considered the Marxist thesis of the centrality of the economy but he came to the conclusion that to be a Marxist in our time one had to recognize that it is no longer the economy but technology that determines human behavior. Does this mean that economics is now unimportant? Of course not, the economy is part of the technological system, rewarding the consumer is how the system makes the necessities of efficiency palatable. But for Ellul the obvious fact of cross-cultural study was that whether societies were organized upon socialist or capitalist models, they tended to function very similarly because all modern societies were organized around technical bureaucracies oriented to using the most efficient means. With the virtual collapse of socialist societies that obvious contrast is disappearing. Consequently, while the role of technique remains pervasive it becomes more invisible while the importance of the economy, hyped twenty four hours a day by CNN and a legion of other media outlets, becomes supremely visible and obvious to all.

For Ellul the issue is the levels at which power operates to shape society and the levels of myth through which a society propagates its way of life. For purposes of sociological analysis, in both cases, one moves from the great abstraction to vivid concreteness. In *Hope in Time of Abandonment* (Seabury, 1973, pp. 280-281) he used the analogy of the ocean to identify levels of power that shape society. At the surface we have waves that can sporadically be stirred up by the wind and become powerful

enough to sink a ship. At the deepest level there is only stillness. But in between are the tides and currents that shape fundamental patterns of the ocean and our weather. Applied metaphorically, the surface level is the realm of concrete events that attract our attention especially through media. The deepest level is the abstract level of undifferentiated power. It is in the intermediate level that power becomes differentiated into the underlying patterns that influence the shape of society in a given era. And it is at this level that critical analysis must occur if we are to understand the powers that shape our destiny. In Marx's time, Ellul argued, the currents and tides that shaped societies were those of economics but then the spontaneous convergence of efficient techniques brought about a fundamental transformation that pushed economic activity toward the surface, guided by the deeper currents of technique.

With regard to myth, Ellul divides his analysis of the myths of the technological society into primary, secondary and tertiary myths. As one moves down the scale, from the first to the third, one moves from abstraction to concrete vividness. Dell challenges Ellul's contention that science and history are the basic myths of our civilization and suggests that we look to the myths of the economy - the stories of success and material acquisition promoted through the mass media. Dell thinks science and history are too abstract to function as myth. But I think he misunderstands Ellul here. The primary myths are meant to be conceptual abstractions of the underlying themes of more concrete manifestations. It is not the science of scientists nor the history of historians but the popular imagination of science and history embodied in the secondary myths like the stories of Marxism and capitalism that move people to action and most of all it is the vivid myths or stories of happiness and success (tertiary myths) propagated by the media that energize people's lives on a day to day basis. The stories and holidays that Dell analyzes belong primarily to the second and third levels of myth but they presuppose science and technique, for the economy is impotent, it cannot fulfill our desires without invention and production. Techniques, like the gods, are both invisible and all pervasive. They only become real through the stories and festivals that structure a society's way of life which occur at the less abstract and more concrete level of economic activity as promoted through the mass media as we move from the intermediate depths to the surface of our society. Without technique there are no products, no glitzy lifestyle to sell and consume.

And this brings us to Dell's third area of critique, namely that Ellul (and Voegelin) are mistaken to identify politics rather than consumerism as the locus of sacred activity in our culture. He points out that politics today is not taken nearly as seriously as consumer activity and he also points out that when Ellul (and Voegelin) talk about politics they both seem to gravitate to the transcendental religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam with their messianic/historical orientations rather than to the cosmological pre-biblical religiosity of the ancient world that most closely parallels the religiosity of postmodernism.

Here I would make two points. First, Dell is writing from a perspective of the post-Cold War era that is barely more than a decade old. Ellul wrote in a world divided

between two political/economic ideologies that threatened global annihilation. In such a world it is hard not to take politics with ultimate seriousness. But of course that is not our situation today, or is it? We may now be entering a new global cold war defined by an age of terrorism. We may not want to take politics with religious seriousness but apparently others do.

My second point, however, is more fundamental. Dell is certainly right that although Ellul identified consumerism as a form of religious activity he did not give it the attention that he gave to politics, and so it remains an undeveloped area of Ellul's thought. Indeed it is an area that Dell deChant has brilliantly developed. Dell is inclined to put himself into an either/or relation to Ellul's work. The issue is not either technology or the economy but rather to see both as part of a comprehensive technical system. The question is: What is the relationship between them? I am inclined to see Dell's work less in opposition to Ellul's as I am as a complement to it, and a further development of Ellul's critique. Dell can be right about the religious function of the economy without Ellul having to be wrong about technique.

When Dell discusses politics and consumerism in relationship to the sacred, he tends to put it in either/or terms. He suggests the Ellul and Voegelin missed the mark by focusing on politics and transcendental religiosity rather than on consumerism and cosmological religiosity. But certainly in the case of Ellul this is not an either/or choice but a "both-and" choice. For Ellul divides propaganda into two categories, integration propaganda and agitation propaganda. Integration propaganda, says Ellul, is the way a society spontaneously advertises its way of life. Its purpose is to integrate individuals into the social order. It is in this category that Ellul places consumerism and economic activity. But the second category, agitation propaganda, has a different task - that of moving people to action.

I would argue, as Ellul did, that the religiosity of our technological society imitates the cosmological religions in integration propaganda organized around consumerism, happiness and fulfillment. But the religiosity of our technological society imitates the messianic/apocalyptic themes of the transcendental biblical religions when it needs to move its citizens to action - a point well illustrated by current apocalyptic rhetoric not only on the part of Osama bin Laden and the al Qaida but also by the "evil axis" rhetoric of the Bush administration (although the political propaganda of the latter does seem a bit inept). Perhaps an even more relevant example is the current Bush administration campaign to make war against Iraq. A cynic might say that because we are addicted to SUVs (and other oil and gas guzzlers) and the other "necessities" advertised (integration propaganda) by our consumer society and made possible by technique, we are prepared to be moved to act upon the administrations apocalyptic rhetoric (agitation propaganda) and make war to protect our sacred way of life. The integration propaganda sets us up for agitation propaganda. Consumerism and politics are two complementary faces of the sacred (cosmological and eschatological/apocalyptic) in a technical civilization.

Dell seems to recognize something like the role of agitation propaganda when he says that “politics tends not to generate community-sustaining myths and rituals, but instead, community-destroying narratives and socially disorienting activities . . .” but takes this as counting against it functioning religiously. However, as Max Weber has pointed out, religion not only serves to legitimate the routine order of society but also, at times, to charismatically upset and transform society.

For Ellul, integration propaganda and agitation propaganda work in dialectical tension with each other, as do the sacred and the profane. Indeed, I would argue that Dell reads Ellul’s position on the sacred dualistically rather than dialectically as Ellul intends. When Dell says that today it is no longer “production” (technique) that is sacred but consumption, and that production is the “antithesis of the sacred” he seems to think he is putting himself in opposition to Ellul’s thesis. But he goes on to say, that the holidays of postmodern cultures “are holy because they liberate us from the profane realm of work production, ushering us into the sacred times and climes of uninhibited acquisition-consumption-disposal, and supplying the religious dynamic of postmodernity.” However, this is exactly how the sacred operates in Ellul’s account of consumerism and advertising, as brief and undeveloped as it is.

For Ellul the sacred cannot operate apart from the profane. The sacred/profane are not opposites. They form a single dialectical complex in which the profane is the permitted break with the sacred that only more thoroughly integrates us into the sacred order. We become slaves to the necessity of technique because it promises to reward our every desire. The technical society, says Ellul, will not be “a universal concentration camp” rather “our deepest instincts and or most secret passions will be analyzed, published and exploited. We shall be rewarded with everything our hearts ever desired” (*The Technological Society*, Random House, Vintage Books, 1964, p. 427). Consumerism is the way in which necessity is inserted into technique. It puts a smiling face on technological necessity and buys off our freedom with the promise of happiness.

In expressing these reservations about Dell deChant’s argument, I hope it is clear that I do not dispute what I consider to be a brilliant and insightful analysis of the religiosity of consumerism. In this regard he has built upon Ellul and gone beyond Ellul in analyzing the nuances of the cosmological religiosity of consumerism. My only dispute has been with his perception that his thesis puts him at odds with Ellul. He certainly is at odds with Ellul in claiming that it is the economy and not technique that is the more fundamental category for understanding our society but when we look at his arguments, many really support and complement Ellul’s thesis rather than discredit it. I view Dell deChant’s essay and his book, *The Sacred Santa*, upon which it is based as both an important contribution and a vital challenge to those of us who study these issues. And for Ellul scholars, perhaps his most important contribution is to bring Ellul’s work into dialogue with postmodernism.

**Issue #30 Dec 2002 — Ellul and  
Utopia**



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## From the Editor

South Korea has mushroomed into the world's thirteenth largest economy. Its new President Roh Hyun Moon speaks of it as "the hub economy of Northeast Asia." It has more broadband electronic technology per capita than any country on earth. Professor Myung Su Yang positions his work on Ellul within these technological realities.

Scholarly work on Jacques Ellul occurs around the world. But Asian scholarship has not been well represented in *The Ellul Forum* before. Professor Yang's essay is excerpted from chapter 3 of his book-length treatment published in Korean, with the title translated as *Homo Technicus: Technology, Environment and Ethics*. His Ph.D. in Theology was awarded by Strasbourg University and he is a Professor in the Department of Christian Studies at Ewha Womans University in Seoul.

Utopia is an important entree into Ellul's work, but a concept with subtleties and unending complications. One of *The Ellul Forum's* Editorial Board members and frequent contributors, Gabriel Vahanian, established this territory with his *God and Utopia* in 1977. Both Myung Su Yang and Darrell Fasching have been Vahanian's students and their ability to deal adequately with utopia in Ellul is an obvious benefit. J. Wesley Baker is a veteran student of Ellul's theological work, with a special interest since his doctoral work on "the hope of intervention" in Ellul.

This issue Number 30 completes fifteen years of *The Ellul Forum*. Founding Editor Darrell Fasching carried the editorial load with extraordinary ability for the first ten years. It is emblematic of his leadership and quality scholarship that he contributes to this issue as vigorously as he did to the first.

Katherine Temple of The Catholic Worker Movement passed away on November 22, 2002, and world class scholar Ivan Illich on December 2. They understood Ellul, Temple having written her Ph.D. thesis on him in the early 70s. With him and through him, they contributed enormously to the "critique of technological civilization." Thanks to Carl Mitcham's leadership, issue Number 31 will be a memorial to their work.

Clifford G. Christians, Editor

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## About the Ellul Forum

### History & Purpose

*The Ellul Forum* has been published twice per year since August of 1988. Our goal is to analyze and apply Jacques Ellul's thought to aspects of our technological civilization and carry forward both his sociological and theological analyses in new directions.

While *The Ellul Forum* does review and discuss Jacques Ellul, whom we consider one of the most insightful intellectuals of our era, it is not our intention to treat his writings as a body of sacred literature to be endlessly dissected. The appropriate tribute to his work is to carry forward its spirit and agenda for the critical analysis of our technical civilization. Ellul invites and provokes us to think new thoughts and enact new ideas. To that end we invite you to join the conversation in *The Ellul Forum*.

### Manuscript Submissions

Send original manuscripts (essays, responses to essays in earlier issues) to:  
Clifford Christians, Editor, *The Ellul Forum*  
Institute of Communications Research  
University of Illinois  
810 S. Wright Street, Suite 228  
Urbana, IL 61801 USA

Please send both hard copy and computer disc versions, ..indicating the software and operating system used (e.g., Microsoft Word for Windows 98). Type end notes as text (do not embed in the software footnote/endnote part of your program).

Essays should not exceed twenty pages, double-spaced, in length.

Manuscript submissions will only be returned if you enclose a self-addressed, adequately postaged envelope with your submission.

*The Ellul Forum* also welcomes suggestions of themes for future issues.

## Books & Reviews

*Books.* *The Ellul Forum* considers for review books (1) about Jacques Ellul, (2) significantly interacting with or dependent on Ellul's thought, or (3) exploring the range of sociological and theological issues at the heart of Ellul's work. We can not guarantee that every book submitted will actually be reviewed in *The Ellul Forum* nor are we able to return books so submitted.

*Book Reviews.* If you would like to review books for *The Ellul Forum*, please submit your vita/resume and a description of your reviewing interests.

Send all books, book reviews, and related correspondence to:

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## **Jacques Ellul and Technological Utopia by Myung Su Yang**

In “Le projet d’une morale sociale, christianisme sociale” Paul Ricoeur (1966) refers to ideology and technology as the most important issues modern socio-ethics must deal with. It is surely true that the “Death of Ideology” has been discussed for quite some time now, and even in Korea parts of the intelligentsia have joined this movement. However, the concept of ideology still remains the crucial issue in that we have to keep observing its impact. Koreans have confronted a particular ideological situation—the division of the country, yet on the whole have consciously or subconsciously avoided mentioning the term “ideology” in spite of this unique situation. It is essential that we equip ourselves with a broad vision that points to the most fundamental but neglected questions regarding ideology, and at the same time indicate clear answers to solve these questions.

Meanwhile, we have never lived in such a technically developed era in world history—in other words, we live in the age of technology. The environmental ground for our daily lives is no longer Nature but technology. This remarkable phenomenon has brought serious philosophical questions to human beings since the 1950s, when technologies began to develop at an unprecedented rate. Moreover, as modern philosophical ideas have been modified, technology seems to occupy a basic ground for new metaphysical questions. In other words, technology is beginning to be considered metaphysics itself, and in that sense is a substitute for the modern metaphysical question of Descartes’ cogito.

In this context, we cannot but raise this crucial but fundamental question: what is technology? In fact, this query arises from worrying about the potential side-effects that technological advance might bring up: 1) a profit-oriented economic system due to the industrialization of advanced technology; 2) the negative impact that the technical development of vehicles has on daily life; 3) the impersonalization and isolation that mechanical ways of thinking provoke; 4) various problems raised in the field of nuclear energy, the environment, and pollution; 5) ethical issues related to the development of genetic engineering; and 6) the growth of our anxiety and apprehension that the extensive power of technology may acquire dominant power over human beings in the near future.

Therefore, current tendencies to analyze technology from psychological, sociological, philosophical, and religious viewpoints are deeply rooted in a critical and anxious

gaze toward technology. Thus disparaging technology may represent criticizing the mechanical way of thinking, or mechanical metaphysics. In *The Decline of the West*, Oswald Spengler warns that Western civilization is destined to decline because it is founded on linear and mechanical ideas of improvement which are only strategies for survival. Heidegger's postmetaphysics claims that we should escape from the category of technological-scientific metaphysics. The French Marxist Henri Lefebvre also denounces the mechanical paradigm of contemporary culture in the name of the "criticism of the quotidian" (*La vie-quotidienne dans de monde moderne*, 1968).

Today, philosophy seems to pay more attention to language than to existence, probably because of the currently critical point of view toward the civilization of technology. Derrida and most of the postmodernists and poststructuralists have insisted that the autonomous signifier takes precedence over the signified; they also put more value on "écriture" — able to be inferred and assuming distance from it — than on "parole." This may represent their attempt to free themselves free from the unilaterality of mechanical language overwhelming the present. For this reason, the continental philosopher Paul Ricoeur's preference for hermeneutics over analytic philosophy is often spotlighted in America and Britain these days.

Contemporary philosophers are not only struggling to find a solution by investigating language as one of the most fundamental factors comprising human life, but they are also trying to repudiate Technological Language. Heidegger insists that modern technology is incompetent to fulfill the demand and desire of language for "zoon logon echon" (*Holzwege*, 1953, pp. 69-105). His postmetaphysics never believes in the absolute certainty of "cogito," in which the objectified and externalized world can be perceived with human senses. In other words, "cogito" assumes that the technological-scientific world can be portrayed like an object in still-life paintings. If the world exists as a passive and submissive object, then this technological-scientific language does not fit the genuine purpose of language—setting the boundaries of human beings and, at the same time, trying to elucidate our humanity beyond the boundaries, Heidegger claims.

Jacques Ellul thinks of technological language as a language of incantation. It is a language of use, both functional and objectified. Through language, we express what we want to express to express something. In other words, through language we express ourselves to express the world. Under these circumstances, language should be a language of symbols and of existence. Technological language excludes these symbols, and does not raise questions of existence. Technological language signifies the loss of language.

The loss of language means losing the possibility of changing the world. It is language itself that makes the imaginative world, which exists beyond the established boundaries, come true. For this reason, dictators will not set language free. Paul Ricoeur insists that the poetic imagination is the most essential among the three levels of symbols. In fact, metaphoric symbols are likely to be more appropriate for capturing and admitting the variation of language than any other kind of symbols, such as the universal symbols focusing on the imagery, or the dream symbols of Freud. We can feel

free only in the surplus world language brings out Symbols enable us to draw a totally different meaning from the habitual language. Through this symbolic language, we can finally imagine the completely new world. Consequently, if we lose our language in this civilization of technology, it means that we forfeit our ability to imagine other worlds different from the one we are living in. And the loss of our imagination prohibits us from seeking other alternatives to technology. At this point, technology is left as the only ideology we can choose. (Here, ideology does not mean a kind of political system or idea but an inclination to maintain and strengthen the present system with false bravado. It is used as an antonym of Utopia.)

Ethics exists where diversity exists. Ethics exists where the possibility of dreaming other worlds is allowed. Ethics comprehends the dreaming of a new world, and pursuing it. New is ethical. Therefore, if there are no possibilities for diversity, no desire to pursue new worlds, no attempt to negate and overcome the present, and no Utopian world that we can find out by going back against the stream of time, then no ethics exists. Without ethics, we will drown in overflowing materials. A society lacking the creative life and the creative person—gained only with creative views—has no ethics. False rumors—false ideologies—might overwhelm it.

I attempt to bring out the negative factors of technology by connecting it with the problems of contemporary theories regarding the philosophy of language. Actually, it is not a simple question to ask, “what is the essence of technology?” Among scholars, there are many different opinions. Some say that technology and humanism cannot exist together harmoniously. Some say that though contemporary technology goes much further than it is supposed to and carries negative results, it might have the potential to come back to its original place and heal itself. And others say that technology should be viewed with a positive and optimistic belief. These positive, negative, or detached attitudes toward modern technology coexist at present.

In my case, I understand technology from a negative point of view. It is not only because most Western philosophers have been on my side, but also because it is really important to know exactly what the negative results of technology can be. Technology has been believed in thoughtlessly in our history. Against this background, I will prove the possibility of utopia, where technology is set free from mechanics and gets closer to human beings. As we know, technology should exist for human beings. Technology should exist for improving human lives. Therefore, seeking its positive effects is as important as knowing its negative side-effects.

Actually, Korea has only a negative impression of technology, regarding it as mechanical and material. It is also true that this negative ideology has been imported from the West. In other words, Koreans have been ignorant of the revolutionary and fundamental spirit of the times when technological development was first initiated. In a way, Korea is following the West’s example; it is heading toward a technological civilization. And this situation cannot be denied. To be aware of this situation is the only way to find a solution for it. Besides, as we will see, this technological civilization might a more humanitarian society possible, make us more humane, and make the world a

better place to live. Within today's seemingly barbarian civilization, there must be these latent, if mostly unrealized, potentials. Thus, we must not forget that our most urgent task is to make these possibilities known to people. Lastly, I will seek the proper roles and responsibilities theology can take under the present circumstances.

Jacques Ellul: Did Technology' Become the Object of Idolatry?

I will begin my discussion on technology with Jacques Ellul. He has a reputation for raising comprehensive questions about the negative qualities of technology. Among his books, *La technique ou l'enjeu du siècle* (1990) and *Le système technique* (1974) are especially well known as keen and discerning analyses of the technological civilization in modern society. He approaches these matters with a religious as well as a social and philosophical point of view. He regards belief in technology as a kind of religious idolatry that manipulates and dominates the modern human consciousness. I cannot completely agree with this point of view, but his attempt to understand the authority of technology with a religious angle looks quite supportable. It might show a possible solution to the struggle for establishing the thesis that the basis of technology is theological.

Ellul provides several possible answers about these problems of technology from various viewpoints. First, he points out that technological development has modified the culture of human society to an enormous degree. It takes us to the society of technology away from the society of nature, to the culture of artificiality from the culture of nature, and thus to an orientation toward technology instead of nature. This transition is such a dramatic and traumatic one that it transforms, not only the content of human culture but also the basic concept of it, into a totally different shape. Before this transition, culture was a term related to nature, but now it reminds us of something artificial, something human-made. Consequently, culture starts to imply artificiality and technology. This change accompanies the modification of humanity itself as well. Now, technology becomes a priori (Marcuse) for human beings, an unconscious superstructure of the human mind (A. Geler), and the new world of human instincts. At present, discussing human nature or instinct by themselves is a futile effort. Rather, we have to pay attention to technology itself that influences both human nature and instinct.

Second, Ellul asserts that this cultural shift is caused by the de-mystification of technology. From this technological viewpoint, everything is explained mechanically. During this process, the aura of things—which is due to their unexplainableness and reconditeness—is fatally damaged. The transition in religiosity from blind worship to rational reception requires demystification of the idol. And, in a sense, this demystification is essential and indispensable for placing Christianity back in its original place. In Christianity, God is not inscrutable mystery, unreachable master, nor prohibited taboo, but love overflowing into human life through a human being in order to set humans free from the captivity of sin.

In history, the 18<sup>th</sup> century was a most dynamic and revolutionary period. Technology had developed at an unprecedented rate, and various social and religious taboos

had been broken and diminished. Since then, we have experienced the sense of alienation from the traditional hierarchy our ancestors established. Technology has infiltrated today's society, shattering and dissipating the traditional system, replacing it with a newly created order.

Ellul is convinced that this new spirit resulting from technological ideology does not mean the death of religion. Though religion has been desacralized, demystified, and demythologized, human beings still remain "homo religious." He believes that the age of technology is as much religious as the medieval age, but in a different way. Therefore it demands a different form of religiosity from the medieval.

One problem is that he regards technology as the modern sacred. The sacred is, so to speak, a primitive form of religion and from a Christian point of view, a religion of idolatry. It is a process of idolizing an image or an object. However, it is surely an attractive concept to people of all times and places. The sacred itself is, in a sense, a religion that human beings have ceaselessly made up in order to protect their social system and keep living in this world of chaos. Authority, which is essential to the social system to maintain its present state, can be created, admitted and secured by being sanctified. And within this legitimated society—whose authority is secured through the acknowledgement of religion—people seize onto a protective feeling that their food and life are kept secure. Consequently, even though the sacred seems to have a dimension of the transcendental, sublime, and unworldly, actually it is closely related to the secular aims of religion that justifies people's pursuit of practical benefits. As Eliade says, the sacred has a pragmatic basis (*Traitee d'histoire des religions*, 1964). In other words, there is no biblical transcendence, or Bultmann's desacralization. Meanwhile, the religion of the sacred assumes the world is divided into two parts—the sacred world and the secular. This religion is always looking at the sacred world rather than trying to save the secular world. Hence, sanctity is not able to present any dynamic solution for transforming the world into a better state. Strictly speaking, sanctity has no sense of ethics. On the one hand, the sacred makes people move blindly toward the sacred world. On the other hand, it allows and justifies people to pursue their secular benefits. It is a poisonous form of religion, a dangerous opiate.

Jacques Ellul also senses the ambiguity and duality of the sacred. R. Caillois, called a scholar of the sacred, conceptualized the term "duality of the sacred" (*L'home et de sacre*, 1963). According to his thesis, the concepts of "le sacre du respect" and "le sacre de la transgression" constitute the sacred. "Le sacre du respect" exists in a sacred place, while, "le sacre de la transgression" creates the concept of sacred time. It is a ritual time for worship. At the festival of the sacred, the sanctified world is profaned and secularized in this ritual, though the time is limited. It is a departure from the realm of the sacred. However, "le sacre de la transgression" is allowed within a limited time span. By being allowed to participate in this ritual of sacred transgression, people have time to feel free from the strict spirit of the sacred. For that reason, the aim of this festival is to preserve the authority of the sacred. Though it is likely to possess an emancipating mechanism allowing one to breakaway from its strictness, sanctity is



actually totalitarian and ideological. It is far from biblical religiosity. Ellul asserts that the sacred cannot find even a small place in biblical revelation.

Hence, Ellul's idea of regarding technology as the modern sacred is different from Christianity. Technology has a tendency to desacralize the sacred, but at the same time it sacralizes itself and tries to occupy the domain of the sacred. The sacred itself never disappears. The object of the sacred is transferred from one to another—in other words, from nature and culture to technology. At present, human beings are sanctifying history through the backing of technology, though sanctifying history as well as nature is strictly prohibited in Christianity. In the modern world, our daily experience is deeply grounded in technology, no longer in nature. As an enchanting magic carrying out the human dream, technology is now worshipped and adored. Therefore, as science plays the trigger role for re-mythologization, technology leads to resacralization, placing itself in the most sacred and religious position.. Modern society then logically remains sacred—not profane and desecrated. Only the object of symbolization is transferred from nature to technology. Consequently, Ellul posits that the recent phenomenon of the resurrection of religion in this secularized modern society is closely connected to the idolatrous and mechanical religion caused by the sanctification of technology.

Thus, the question arises: why does Ellul insist that technology is the object of modern sacralism, and an idolatrous religion? There are several possible answers. To study them, we will look into a scholarly critical viewpoint toward technology.

#### . Technology Is the Will to Power

Like Oswald Spengler, Ellul regards technology as a will to power. The religiosity of sanctity fulfills the will to power. This will to power has a close connection-to the matter of justification.

In fact, Ellul states, technology becomes a combination of the will to power and self-justification (*L'esperance oubilee*, 1972, p. 81). Incantation, the most primitive form of technology, is a good example. Incantation objectifies nature and takes advantage of it with human power. And at the same time, it appropriates the name of God to justify itself with a spell. Thus, the first technology is the outcome of the combination of the will to power and self-justification. According to critics, technology is based on the process of objectification, and this objectification is based on the process of cognition, which itself pursues a dominant power in the end. Objectification accompanies representation. (Here, representation means *Vorstellung*—in other words, the act of putting together everything shattered and fragmented.) In *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant provides a detailed explanation of this concept.

For Jacques Ellul, modern technology is not so different from incantation. The desacralization of modern technology results from our attempt to acquire the right of self-justification with our own hands. Now, technology becomes the agency of justifying activity, and the supreme value in modern society. Ellul says, “the development of technology is basically the expression of the will to power of human beings. The realization of the will to power is the purpose of technology and the attainment of materials is no more than a by-product of it” (*Le systeme technicieri*). People express

themselves through technology because technology is the best tool for pursuing power, satisfying our instinct for power. Therefore, the religiosity of technology is actually a religiosity for justifying our activities and ourselves (casuistry). This is the essence of technology, as Ellul defines it.

Hence, the language of technology is the language of incantation as it was in the primitive age. The language of technology possesses people with a fantasy that they have omnipotent power over everything in the world. In this fantasy, people feel that every conflict and contradiction becomes reconciled and coexistent harmoniously. This is why, as Marcuse insists, technology functions as a kind of ideology in this highly developed society.

Under the name of technology, which controls the target through the process of objectifying it, everything is estimated by its usefulness or functional faculties. The thing itself and its usefulness is so mixed up that it is almost impossible to distinguish one from the other. Persons are also appreciated for functionality. Whether they have the ability to achieve what is demanded of them, determines each person's worth. Finally, objectification gradually expands its territory from nature to human beings so as to dominate them. Technology objectifies the human species and dominates it. Dragged out of the subject's seat, human beings become passive and impersonal objects in this enormously developed mechanical society. Now, technology is the subject. Communication is performed without "parole." Humanity as a subject of communication is erased, and only an anonymous somebody as a tool for communication is left. Ellul says that the reason for the overflowing of language is to compensate for the loss of real language. The loss of real language is a loss of humanity. Because the idolatrous religiosity of sanctity victimizes and objectifies human beings, technology, according to Ellul, alienates them and opens the window for communication only to mechanical and artificial things.

## **Whether Technology Is Autonomous or Not Matters**

The self-justification of the will to power, as described above, assumes autonomy. If technology becomes autonomous, it becomes the supreme authority. And whether technology is autonomous or not really matters in approaching the problem of technology. If technology is autonomous, then it exists beyond our control.

If technology is autonomous, from what is it autonomous? The answer is from human beings. Therefore autonomous technology alienates human beings. Modern technology, set free from human beings, goes its own way. Originally, technology was a tool for achieving some purpose, but now it becomes a purpose unto itself. No one asks what technology can do for human beings' benefits any more because this question is now meaningless. Technology operates independently in terms of its own effectiveness. As Jurgen Habermas regards technology as a system of praxis with a practical purpose, so Ellul does not deny that technology has been instrumental. The point is that the instrument has acquired autonomous independence. The boundary between the subject

and object has become blurred and only instruments remain. The epistemology that insists that the object can exist only through the subject's cognition process, or the ontological claim that beyond the subject there exists an agency which restricts the subject— these questions are voided in modern society. The instrument is the only reality. The subject is dominated by the instrument, and the object is the outcome of the instrument. Therefore, it is not correct to regard the society of technology as a kingdom of the object.

Technology objectifying itself as an instrument is characterized by exclusiveness and inclusiveness. Exclusive technology refuses to get mixed with other things, and rather likes to reign over them. The characteristic of technology is to reign wherever it goes. To the modern human, whether to appropriate technology or not is equivalent to whether to live or die. We have no choice. We are living in the age of inescapable technology. Technology is infiltrating into every domain of our society including culture, religion, politics, and even sex. The structure and the pattern of human activities have become mechanized. Truth disappears and only technical skills are left. Without technology, no race can survive in this modern world. Within a mechanized society, distinctive racial qualities become indistinctive. Social, economic, psychological, family, and industrial systems become technologically patterned. The varieties of each culture vanish as the mechanical and technical world comes into its own.

Within the domination of technology, the humane aspects are completely excluded, and human beings themselves are finally alienated from their own activities. Only producing the mathematically perfect outcome really matters. Machines replace human beings, and labor loses its voice. Thinking and working become separated from each other, and the voluntariness of labor vanishes. Technological rationality conquers every field in this world; everything is dependent on technology. Technocrats even lead modern politics. People seem to have the power for the final decision, but in reality the human mind is already set up and manipulated by technology.

In this technological society, adaptation must be one of the highest virtues. Virtuous people are required to agree to technical development, adjust to a reality grounded in technology, and accept the fact that technology produces without thinking about it. Under the technological circumstances in which “ideologic du fait” controls our daily lives, virtue loses its connection to creativity, and instead becomes related to survival. People do not have the freedom of choice any longer, and are reduced to a mechanical instrument seeking after effectiveness.

The exclusiveness and inclusiveness of autonomous technology eliminate all humane dimensions and secure the power of technology over every domain of human society. In Habermas' term, technology—in other words, instrumental action, one-sided monologue, alienated productive action—gulps down all of the channels of communicative interaction, and the praxis of humanity. Instrumental action becomes the paradigm that produces all categories. Everything is absorbed into a productive movement. Consequently, the Marxian theory of explaining social ideology through a connection between productivity and production relation should be modified. Marx thinks that the

latter is subordinated to the former. But in Habermas, these two terms are replaced by praxis and techne, and thus praxis is subordinated to techne.

According to critics, the fact that techne overwhelms praxis means that technology attains autonomy, and people start to be alienated from their own society—as Habermas predicts this phenomenon. In a traditional sense, technology is something associated with “poiesis,” or production. Here, production means pro-dure, or pro-duct, in other words, “Her-vor-bringen.” It is used not only with an instrumental connotation but also with an epistemological implication in that production here covers the process of seeking after truth. However, in modern society, technology is not a simple productive action, nor is it the action of elucidating something. It contains its own systematic pattern. Modern technology is independent of something it is supposed to elucidate, then establishes its own rules and systems in itself, and finally justifies them.

Accordingly, as Marcuse asserts, “it is technically impossible that human beings can decide their life voluntarily.” If so, the consideration of human responsibility becomes completely unnecessary. In this context, technology seems to bear the anti-ethical. The society of technology is neutral. Therefore we are now living in an anti-ethical society instead of un-ethical one. We cannot recognize the possibilities of the un-ethics that anti-ethics will bring out in our society in the near future. Emmanuel Levinas says it is an inevitable outcome that people start to lose the feeling of responsibility within this modern society.

## **Technology Becomes the Only Ideology**

Sanctity presumes a social connotation, that is, ideology. Ideology works through integration, totalization, and selfjustification. Especially, sanctity shows an incredible ability for self-justification. Some scholars believe that we have to move forward to a post-modern society because there is no alternative for handling the issue of justification in today’s society. But for Ellul, technology is the very alternative that can offer the answer for this problem. The self-justifying ability of technology operates classlessly, so even the proletariat regards technology as an agency of emancipation. Moreover, according to Henry Lefebvre, the technology of self-justification is so deeply rooted in the modern consciousness that we can not feel it as ideology. The ideology of technology is now clad in the armor of science.

Meanwhile, technology performs the integrative function perfectly in organizing a huge societal system. Things anti-technological are regarded as anarchic, and they are not permitted to enter the current society. Only things totalized and centralized are permitted. By computer, everything is thoroughly systematized, and democratization and decentralization become eventually impossible. No negative response can be given to this technological organization where only indiscriminate futility remains. Technology destroys creativity and oversimplifies the rhythm of life.

Henri Bergson says that life is a continuation of new happenings. However, if technology tends to oversimplify the dynamic power of society and bring it to a standstill,

then we cannot have a real life with technology. Everything becomes standardized and normalized. Normality is a virtue. Unexpected departure from conventional, normal, natural things is considered anti-technological. Hence, in the realm of technology, there is no transcendence. Though it seems to progress at an unprecedented rate without recognizing its speed limit, there is absolutely no possibility of 'transcendence. Heinrich Ott calls it "the transcendence of the black." Technology cannot be adventurous. Rather, it is insular and parochial in that at best it can produce other kinds of technology. In human activities, purpose transcends the accumulated tools, while in the case of technology, by contrast, tools dominate purpose.

To sum up, Ellul regards technology as an idolatrous religiosity—in other words, as a sanctity—that controls the consciousness of the human mind in modern society. But another question follows: Is this enough to explain technology? In the next section, we will examine the nature of technology from a utopian viewpoint. Utopia is exactly opposite of sanctity and provides the possibility of emancipation.

## Technology and Utopia

Sometimes it seems that technology is likely to rule all over the world as sacred religion. If so, the secularly of technology would drive out the transcendency of God. Human beings have an inclination to idolize everything, to worship it. Perhaps, things that have an ability to set people free from captivity are reduced to the captivity itself through our foolish mistakes. If technology is reduced to technologism, then, the same thing would happen. If we forget to pray God for his grace, and try to solve all problems technically, then genuine religion could not possibly exist in this society.

However, technology is not always reduced to technologism. Moreover, technologism is, in a sense, a contradictory concept of technology. Generally, it presumes that its instrumental quality is the only attribute technology has. But in fact technology is a method or a manner of living, not simply a tool. In other words, technology is associated with metaphysical questions rather than economic ones. It is a "manner of life," which betrays the truth and possible ways of life, is surely associated with transcendental qualities. Life is internally transcendental, and when this transcendence is represented to the exterior world, it becomes genuinely transcendental. It cannot exist beyond the tangibility and productivity of life. Embodying and producing the transcendence of life, this is art.

Let us call it utopia. Sanctity has religiosity; so does life. It is true that utopia reminds us of a dream world, but in Western thought utopia has been considered the adventurous spirit that pursues new and unknown truth. In *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, Ernst Bloch says the most essential quality of utopia is "novum." Psychologists explain that the utopian spirit lies in the unconsciousness of the human mind latently, and is strongly influenced by accumulated experiences. But their explanation cannot be correct because the utopian spirit is not past-oriented but future-oriented. In other words, it is a kind of pro-consciousness, facing the future.

Utopia differs from metaphysics in that the latter explains things that already exist, while the former recreates the present in order to advance toward a new future. Therefore, “novum”—the utopian spirit—is bound to be critical of the present. It seeks after the possibilities of difference from the present situation. In *Ideologic et utopie*, Karl Mannheim also notes the critical qualities that the utopian spirit implies. Both ideology and utopia, as the outcomes of the social imagination, keep some distance from the present society. But, the ideological imagination is engaged in maintaining and justifying the present social system, while the utopian imagination works toward negating and deconstructing the present, and finally establishing the new system..

The fact that utopia faces toward the new, unknown truth does not mean that the essence of the utopian spirit is daydreaming or preposterous. G. Kapouge, who has studied the history of utopia, says: “Utopians did not dream with their own ideas. They vehemently wished that their idea would be satisfied.” Mannheim thinks of “*Civitas Dei*” as the essence of the utopian spirit. During the Protestant Reformation, the Reformationists longed to establish “*civitas dei*” in the world. They did not wait for the kingdom’s coming, but did believe in its coming. Waiting is passive. It assumes the postponement of the kingdom’s incarnation. But believing in it is more active. Belief makes the incarnation realized in the world. By strong belief, the future comes true at present. Bloch’s and Moltmann’s “hope” is closely associated with this belief. In a sense, belief is hope and vice versa. Utopian spirit, a hope toward the realization of the new world, is dynamic. In this spirit, the new world will come true by earnest belief in its incarnation.

In other words, the utopian spirit consists of a beginning and an ending. It is a desire to live in a new world with a new system and new values. Therefore, the transcendence of utopia is different from the transcendence of sanctity. Sanctity attempts to maintain its sacredness by separating the sacred and the secular from each other, while utopia joins the world with “incarnated transcendence,” never dividing the sacred and the secular. The transcendence of the utopian spirit seeks after a different system in order to build a new kingdom, excluding the ideological qualities of sacred transcendence. Because of the worldliness and tangibility of utopia, Bloch calls it “transcending without transcendence.” The transcendence of sanctity works for each of the selfish desires living upon totalitarian authority, while utopian transcending tends to sacrifice the self for new possibilities. In Gabriel Vahanian’s terms, the former is soteriological and the latter is eschatological. Utopian transcendence is a spirit of ‘*homo viator*,’ the biblical man, who is willing to refuse a stagnated immobility. At the same time it goes beyond ordinariness, seeking to minimize existence at the bottom and maximize ethics at the top.

I now present how technology implies the utopian spirit and takes advantage of it. First, I will propose technology’s newness.

### **2.1 *Technology, the Possibility to Be Different***

With technology, *homo sapiens* become human beings. That means that we have opportunities to be different. Exiting from repetitions and normal cycles is the event

of life. Life is newness. Life is the repetition of newness. Thus, it is mystery. Human beings can be human beings when they become a new person. Technology is crucial in this process. In other words, technology makes human beings as a new species.

Intelligence and culture are two main traits of humankind. Intelligence is a door escaping from the instinctive cycle of nature, and culture is the product of intelligence. Intelligence and culture also relate to technology. Philosopher Henri Bergson pointed out that intelligence is artificiality. For him, artificiality, in particular, means the ability to make tools as tools.

The possibility to be different is culture. The second environment born through technology, the new artificial milieu—that is culture. Technology is also art. By creating culture, mankind can make the environment without being controlled by it. Humankind can change the first nature into the second nature. When humanity did not hold anything in its hand, nature overwhelmed mankind as a nature-god holding supernatural power. Under these circumstances, mankind and nature stand in opposition, and this confrontation yields chaos. However, when mankind holds tools in their hands, they can change nature for the sake of mankind and they live together. The transcendence of “homo technicus” is a new person and a new world. As long as it pursues newness, it is not eternal but eschatological. When we believe that anything surrounding humanity becomes its counterpart through technology, language is the first technology because people look at the world from a humanities viewpoint.

Human beings deny being a part of nature through technology. Human beings are not a part of nature, but a part of a new man. A real person is a new person. Unlike Ellul’s critique, it is not easy to say that the humanization of nature brings the isolation of mankind because it brings denaturalization. The humanization of technology takes a decisive action to escape from an instinctive cycle. Through the de-mystification of nature, technology makes a person to be manlike and nature to be nature. Thus it helps to have a good relationship between mankind and nature.

By creating nature as the de-mystified one, technology shapes nature to mankind, thus making a stage for a new world. Demystification, humanization, and newness exist together. It is the transition from the transcendence of sanctity to the transcendence of utopia. That is also the tradition of the Bible. In the Bible, God made nature. Nature exists in relationship under God. It also means that nature exists in relationship under human beings.

In fact, the responsibility of human beings for nature exists after nature is de-mystified. Technology asks endless adventures and responsibilities of human beings when it asks mankind to go beyond the natural world. For example, artificial insemination should be understood in this context. It is not right to oppose medical insemination because it disrupts existing ethics and thereby ruins mankind. That kind of attitude cannot solve a fundamental problem. In contrast, the problem of medical insemination elicits our sense of ethics and responsibility. It asks us to demonstrate ethics rather than only discuss it.

In the case of medical insemination, the parents are not real parents of children biologically. In particular, the father is not a real father because the mother uses the spermatozoa of someone .else. However, when we see that parents accept the children as their real sons and daughters, we recognize that mankind can construct life with love regardless of the biological family concept. Non-biological parenting awakens a new sense of ethics for mankind. Opening our eyes to a new ethics of love shows the possibility that we can make the world new. Medical insemination asks high-level responsibility based on one-way love instead of the responsibility based on mutual love. It shows the possibility that a person who goes with technology becomes a new human. The technological spirit asks mankind to open its eyes. As Jang Brun pointed out, technology is a human effort to escape. In other words, technology should be understood as a metaphysical philosophy that conquers the current situation of human beings.

In fact, technology itself is the continuation of newness. Several scholars studying the process of the technological development have made clear that it consists of discontinuities. Thomas Kuhn pointed out that the development of science begins with a revolution, consisting of a new paradigm that is totally different from normal science. Technology makes something incessantly, but exists over its creation. From this perspective, language is the first technology. Language designates some events through its symbols. Language, as the first technology, exposes something actualized, but consistently overcomes it. Thus this characteristic should be considered as its substance.

According to this account, Ellul's assertion that technology will eliminate a meaningful

mankind because of its autonomy is too serious. Everything belongs to the hand of human beings. Cybernetics shows this trend well, clearly demonstrating the difference between mankind and technology. The difference is the space that mankind is involved with incessantly. People worry that cybernetics, cutting-edge technology', would rein in human beings by invading their original space. However, according to scientists who examine cybernetics, cybernetics makes clear the difference between mankind and technology.

The cognition of mankind is always overall knowledge, while the program of cybernetics consists only of simple cognition. Even recently developed expert systems are helpless in the face of abruptly occurring events because they act according to pre-made programs. As long as the essence of cybernetics is reappearance, what reappears is important.

Human beings decide what is important. The final decision always depends on mankind. The development of technology therefore does not threaten mankind. It asks more responsibility of us. The self-control of technology is not acceptable. When we accept the self-control of technology, our responsibility will be lost. Schumacher preferred a middle range technology to supertechnology and pointed out as follows: "I believe the new direction for developing technology is that it gratifies the needs of mankind" (*Small is Beautiful*).



Technology is the technology of mankind. Automation is based on patterns following the strategies that mankind pre-made. The most important thing to emphasize at this point is the way in which mankind selects. The process of decision is an ethical decision involving values. The development of technology does not create anti-ethics, but asks for a high level of ethics. In sum, technology makes us know who we are as cybernetics only hints at. And it makes us realize that we are going for a new world ourselves. Technology cannot copy mankind. Humans as beings of language exceed technology and cybernetics.

Pierre Levine, the French cybernetics scholar, points out that human beings are able to know what they do not know. They can go to the unlimited world of imagination. Humankind is not just what we currently are; it is more than that. Technology actually incites this kind of understanding of mankind. With technology, mankind looks upon a man as a real man. The hope of humans is humanity. In Ellul's criticism, humans only know the means of technology without knowing its ends. That is a very good opinion. However, technology is not teleological, but eschatological in the sense that technology is waiting for the appearance of newness. Through breaking down the absoluteness of existing authorities, technology liberates people from social constraints and helps them to deny naturally a given society.

As G. Hottois explains, the world of technological science surrounded by a new environment is totally different from the phenomenological-analytical world or metaphysical philosophy (*Le signe et la technique*, 1984, p. 81). The phenomenological-analytical world tries to evaluate tradition and history in many ways. Metaphysical philosophy focuses on explaining a given world while thinking of nature. The technological society that thinks of transforming things focuses most intensely on the imagination of the future. Hottois expresses well the characteristics of the utopia of technology. For him, the development of technology fulfills through rapid change what we have never expected.

Whether we take advantage of technology, or produce oppression or alienation due to the characteristics of dehumanized technology, depends on our attitude. Technology itself is not the problem. For instance, we have many leisure hours because of the development of technology. Since we have spare time, we can think unusual things that differ from our daily life. Technology is very close to the transcendence of utopia that repeatedly asks new things.

#### . Technology, Realization of Eschatology

Our thought and imagination need technology for their realization. To be concrete something needs technology. Utopia is also realized with technology. Here, we want to examine another dimension of utopia—its eschatological aspect. And eschatology means what Bultmann says. For him, eschatology is to decide something while considering the present as the end. The end is energy to pull the future to the present and embody it. Our belief makes it so.

Imagination must be realized if it is to change the world. Materialization needs technology for effective realization. The materialization of unlimited newness that preempts

the future is technology. The possibility of newness that technology predicts always considers reality. That is the directness of technology. Thanks to technology, newness is always considered as a concrete realization in the world. It is similar to language. The symbolism of language has its meaning under the condition of directness. The imaginary world that technology provides is a preliminary process that fulfills newness in the world. Materialization in the world is the characteristic of the end of technology. Technology always considers realization in a concrete situation, unlike science. Technology is more instinct than science in terms of its power to make human beings humanlike, because technology provides embodiment. With technology mankind gives up the idea of leaving this world and participates in the world.

Hottois has told us that modern philosophy considers language as its subject because it is the opposite of the directness of technological eschatology. Since technological language always directs in a clear way, modern society loses the wealth that the symbols of language bring. Therefore, the main subject of modern language philosophy—without analytical philosophy—is to emphasize that language is not something that controls directly. This trend is clearer in the language philosophy of Derrida's poststructuralism than that of Paul Ricoeur's phenomenology. For Derrida, the secondary characteristic of language is that the true meaning of language becomes blurred because original language is divided into several sub-categories. It is the autonomous signifier in contrast to the significant.

When Derrida talks about the autonomous signifier, some aspects are similar to the opposition of technological language. Marcuse also mentioned the desolateness of technological language spreading throughout today's industrial society. He thought that technical language always tries to fabricate something, so indicates something directly. For him, therefore, language is buried in the immediately correct.

This kind of criticism of technological language exaggerates, although it is true in some sense. Derrida's idea is an overstatement seeking to change modern society in a different direction. In fact, it is useless if language does not indicate the realities of life out of texts. As he pointed out, to be "deconstruction," language should be a thing that indicates something, that is, constructs as well as demolishes. The correctness of technological language should be understood as a directness that realizes certain purposes. It should not be understood as a tool to make our life dreary. The eschatological characteristic of technological language is to make something. Technology does not know the difference between theory and practice because of the character of technological language. However, since technology does not know the planner and the practitioner, it offers a new epistemology and gives unlimited imagination to the world of knowledge.

Because of its eschatological character, a technological view of the world differs from teleology. In the teleological view, the present cannot be new because it has already been designated by the given purpose of the futures. That is what physicists and biologists want to explain. F. Jacob in France speaks of the process of the development of life, rather than the taking apart and assembling of engineering. Jacob borrows Levi-Strauss' vocabularies. Here, engineering is work with a specific purpose. Taking apart

and assembling something indicates directness flowing from fortuity. J. Monod also argues that the development of life was not followed by any sequence made by nature. He says that the development of life fulfills itself through unanticipated new things. A view of the world in the field of physics is neither determinism nor probability. In sum, the world that technology wants to seek is the world that leaves our destiny in our hands. The knowledge of technology is not far from ethics. Instead, it raises ethical questions by insisting on clear responsibility. It does not demolish ethics although it creates new movements in the methodology of ethics.

Thus far, we have studied the spirit of utopia in terms of a technical view of the world that has newness and eschatology as the central concepts. The main interest of technology is not to know, but to change. It does not mean that technology changes the world without knowing the current situation. It means that technology focuses on changing the world while withholding a core knowledge of the realities of life.

. Conclusion

How do we manage these technological phenomena? It is possible when we resuscitate the spirit of utopia in Christianity. Let's answer with several propositions.

## **The Technical Phenomenon Requires Changes in Religion**

The advent of the technological world does not ask for the obliteration of religion, but for new characteristics of religion. As J. Fourastie has pointed out, if religion is a view of the world, the advent of a new view of the world requires a new religious view of the world (*L'église a-t-elle trahi? 1974*). It asks for a new view of God and a new view of the church. Revelation is always related to some time and someone. Therefore, revelation is always open. As G. Friedman argues, the crisis of mankind in technological culture is not temporary, so we need a new religious view of the world. Friedman insists that we have to expect that a new spiritual life will come into full bloom in the new technological environment (*La puissance et la sagesse, 1970*).

In any case, it is important to consider technology as a problem of religion. We cannot replace the achievement of technology with the supernatural aspects of religion. It is necessary to awaken sleeping religion by accepting the new view of the world that technology institutes.

## **Accept the World Fundamentally**

Theology should have an optimistic attitude to the world. The world is not just a place humanity enters. The world is the world of people for people. God should be the final principle for explaining the world and its people. There should be some fundamental acceptances of the world and people. Although the world is evil, although my life and the lives of others are ugly, this kind of belief accompanies the ethical power that conquers the world. Theology persuades the public to avoid pessimistic fatalism. This pessimistic fatalism spreading through churches relates to the struggle

for existence that seeks egoistic selfishness instead of interlocking human responsibility with the sacredness of God. The world is the place of God's love, and the place where the creative responsibility of people is fulfilled. In fact, waiting for a new world without doing anything with this one is equal to giving up on God.

Here, we deny any attempt to divide the area of religion and technology. This kind of attempt is the perspective of several scholars who want to take technology seriously. Their way of thinking is that technology gives learning and religion gives knowledge. In this methodology, technology makes and religion acts. The former gives material abundance and the latter gives the meaning of life. However, if we think that technology consists of modern culture, and the spiritual world of religion is different, it is possible to uphold a fundamentally optimistic attitude toward the world.

The cultural philosophy of J. Maritain does not give us any progressive solution. For him, technology itself is good, though it is important how mankind uses it. He thinks that technology brings material abundance. In other words, for him, technology makes it possible for mankind to escape material poverty, but it is not related to anything spiritual. His logic is that technology is about secular things, so it handles materials, while the arena of spirit belongs to religion. In his philosophy, he divides technology and religion. "The church is holy and the world is secular." There is no fundamental affirmation of the world. There is no effort to see the world as the condition of God.

That perspective loses the power of ethics because the transcendence or newness of the core concept of ethics comes when we affirm the world. That is also a message that the culture and ethics of Schweitzer gives. As he clearly pointed out, eventual optimism is ethics. Affirming the world and life fundamentally and eventually gives birth to the power of ethics that changes current disciplines. "Ethics is no more than fulfilling the idea of affirming the world and life." Unlike the natural philosophy of Hegel, Schweitzer believed that only an optimism affirming the fact that life is originally beautiful makes the current era new.

## The Total Otherness of God

The greatness of God is not in the order of the world, but God participates in the world. Technology left alone seeks a boon, one that falls into historical incoherence because it seeks a total newness. It denies that the de-mystification of nature becomes the link to the sacredness of the history. As Oscar Culmann puts it, "The New Testament does not teach religion over the world. However, it needs to have an eye for denying the current order of the world" (*Dieu et Cesar*, 1956).

The total otherness of God is the source of revolutionary iconoclasm. Thanks to the otherness of God, the people go to a new world with the hope of a new people. Theology should insist on the otherness of God to prevent technology from falling into technological determinism. That is also the spirit which technology embraces.

*From Ch. 3 of Homo Technicus: Technology, Environment, and Ethics by Myung Su Yang (Seoul: Korea Theological Institute, 1995). Translated by Dal Yong Jin.*

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## Ellul and Technological Utopianism

A Response to Myung Su Jung  
by Darrell J. Fasching

### Myung Su Yang's Challenge to Ellul

Myung Su Yang is a kindred spirit, whose paper I read with great interest, for it is clear from reading his essay that we both deeply appreciate two great theological critics of technology, Jacques Ellul and Gabriel Vahanian - the first as an iconoclastic critic of technological utopianism and the second as an iconoclastic advocate of it. Yang's essay is complex and at times even a little confusing, and yet very illuminating. In the first two sections of this response I shall simply try to restate the core arguments as I understand them. In the third and final section, I will try to assess the strengths and weaknesses of his argument.

"Korea," says Myung Su Yang, "is heading toward a technological civilization. ... To be aware of this situation is the only way to find a solution for it." Ellul, we are told, helps us to understand the perils of technological civilization - the autonomy of technology and the dehumanization it brings in its wake. And yet Yang immediately follows this observation with an expression of optimism; namely, that technological civilization also offers new possibilities to create a more humanitarian society. To make people aware of this other possibility, says Yang, is "our most urgent task."

Myung Su Yang makes it very clear that while he appreciates Ellul's pessimistic critique of technological civilization and finds much of it valid, nevertheless he fears that Ellul's analysis tells only half the story. For technology, he argues, deconstructs one understanding of our humanity only to make way for another, more biblical understanding. Yang seems to play Ellul off against thinkers such as Ernst Bloch and Gabriel Vahanian, arguing with the latter that technology has deconstructed an understanding of our humanity based on nature only to open up the possibility of a more biblical or eschatological view. Yang lays out his understanding of Ellul's thesis and then critiques it, in order to offer his more optimistic theological view.

### Yang's Account of Ellul's Thesis

Myung Su Yang is appreciative of Ellul's work for showing that the central problem of a technological civilization, dehumanization, is located in religiosity. This religiosity gives technology its autonomy by "sanctifying" it so that technology comes to be treated with the reverence reserved for the sacred. Human beings come to worship the work of their own hands as if it is something wholly other, and so end up in alienation.

Yang interprets Ellul as following R. Caillois' thesis of the duality of sanctity in which "the religion of sanctification assumes the world is divided into two parts - the sacred world and the secular" in such a way that "the sacred of transgression" is a ritually permitted time of chaos that profanes and secularizes the world so that "people can have a time to feel free from the strict spirit of the sanctity." Such a permitted time of revolt then passes only to more securely reaffirms "the sacred of respect" that legitimates the autonomy of technology and renders choice an illusion. As a result everyone ends up living in a society where people seem to have a choice and yet the autonomy of technology renders these choices irrelevant. It is a world in which technology orchestrates everything and nothing, new and unexpected can happen.

Such a society, says Yang, is not so much unethical as it is 'anti ethical.' What role could ethics possible play in a civilization in which choice is an illusion? And so this technological religiosity becomes the opiate of the people. Finally, as a result of this dialectic of respect and transgression, technology has desacralized the world as sacred order of nature only to resacralize the world as a sacred technological order whose "will to power" is justified not by the "natural superiority" of some over others as by technology and its efficiency.

## Yang's Utopian Critique of Ellul

Having laid out Ellul's analysis and critique of technological civilization, Myung Su Yang asks: "Is this enough for explaining technology?" and proposes to look at technological civilization from another perspective, that of utopia. "Utopia," says Yang, "is exactly the opposite of sanctity and provides the possibility of emancipation."

When technology is sanctified or made sacred, says Yang, it is reduced to instrumentalism or technologism, which has no place for transcendence. But technology need not be reduced to technologism for it is "not simply a tool" it is a "method or manner of living" that embodies transcendence and truth. Recalling *techne*'s root in Greek thought, as an art or skill and its association with *poesis*, meaning to make or produce — this way of life embodies *techne* as the poetic or symbolic skill of imagining and making a new world - utopia.

Unlike metaphysics, utopianism is not so much interested in "what is" as in "what is not" - in making possible something new. So utopianism is "critical of the present." Following Karl Mannheim, Yang asserts that while ideology serves to justify the status quo, utopia seeks to "deconstruct the present" and bring into a existence something new. "Sanctity attempts to maintain its sacredness by separating the sacred and the secular from each other, while utopia joins the world with 'incarnated transcendence,' never dividing the sacred and the secular." Following Gabriel Vahanian, Yang asserts that "the former is soteriological and the latter is eschatological." Technology, in the poetic sense, "makes human beings a new species," an artificial or cultural creature. For culture is our second nature, the one we assume poetically when we transcend nature and realize our unique humanity as linguistic beings.

Language is the first technology, the one needed to create a human world. Technology in demystifying nature opens us up to our humanity as creatures of language and imagination. “Demystification, humanization and newness exist together. It’s the transition from the transcendence of sanctity to the transcendence of utopia” - the same transition witnessed to in biblical eschatology as fallen nature gives way to new creation. The ethical implications of this, says Yang, are exemplified in artificial insemination. An ethic oriented to protecting human nature finds such a practice problematic but an ethic oriented to new creation welcomes it, for our humanity does not reside in our biology but in our poetic capacity to make the child our son or daughter and so “we recognize that mankind can construct life with love regardless of the biological family concept.” In this way technology makes us new creatures and calls us to new levels of responsibility.

In light of such observations Myung Su Yang suggests that Ellul’s assertion that the autonomy of technology is robbing us of our humanity is overstated. The attempt to develop artificial intelligence or cybernetic “expert systems” illustrates the self-limiting character of technologism and the necessity of technology as eschatology and *poesis*. For such systems do not handle the unexpected (the new) well, nor can they decide what is important. For these things human *techno-poesis* is required - the symbolic imagination. Such technology does not eliminate our humanity but calls humans to a more demanding level of ethical responsibility. It is not, as Ellul suggests, according to Yang, a question of “means’ replacing “ends” but of new creation. Technology, says Yang, is not so much teleological as it is eschatological. It is about imagination, embodiment, transformation and the future. It is about utopia and new creation. The theological task, as Yang understands it is to affirm optimism and “avoid pessimistic fatalism” by “interlocking human responsibility with the sacredness of God” and refusing to separate religion from technology or the church from the secular. Yang’s conclusion suggests the influence of Gabriel Vahanian, for Yang argues, using Vahanian’s phraseology, that we must see “the world as the condition of God.” This does not mean we simply affirm “the current order of the world,” but rather understand “the total otherness of God is the source of revolutionary iconoclasm,” which calls this order into question in order to make everything new.

## A Response to Myung Su Yang’s Critique

Myung Su Yang’s paper on “Jacques Ellul and Technological Utopia” is filled with wonderful insights but also with some statements whose meaning seems obscure or, at times, even self-contradictory. Many of these, I suspect, may simply reflect the problem of translation from Korean to English.

*The Sacred and the Holy: A Kev Problem of Interpretation*

However, a serious problem is Yang’s use of the terms “sacred” and “sanctification” interchangeably in describing Ellul’s thought. Ellul would never speak of sacralization as the same as sanctification, nor would he speak of “interlocking human responsibil-

ity with the sacredness of God.” Ellul viewed the sacred and the holy as opposites, antonyms not synonyms. As a result Yang not only confuses the sacred with the holy but the profane with the secular.

Very early in Ellul’s work in *The Presence of the Kingdom* (*Presence au monde moderne*, 1948) he made a distinction between the terms “sacred” (*le sacre*) and “holy” (*le saint*) and then in *Man and Money* (*L’Homme et L’Argent*, 1954) worked out the alignment of the sacred with the demonic and these distinctions then became definitive for the rest of his work. The sacred, for Ellul, is not a term that can be applied to God or related directly to God. It is part of the order of this world, an order which divides everything into the spheres of sacred and profane. The Holy, by contrast, is directly related to God and manifests the power of God to desacralize the world, rendering it, at the same time both secular and holy. An ethic of holiness, says Ellul, can *rehabilitate* the sacred, so that institutions become liberated from the demonic powers that distort the sacred. When this occurs institutions once more reflect God’s will and God’s justice. And whenever that happens, the human city becomes an eschatological anticipation of the city of God. Ellul even goes so far as to claim that the human drive for revolution can be rehabilitated and liberated from the dialectic of the sacred of respect and the profane

(i.e., the sacred of transgression) so as to introduce an apocalyptic moment of genuine change into history.

#### *Ellul on Utopia*

It is striking, given Myung Su Yang’s topic, that he never refers directly to what Ellul has to say about utopia. For most of his career, Ellul considered utopian thought to be the epitome of what Yang defines (following Mannheim) as “ideology” — ideas that, while promising change, serve to maintain the status quo. Indeed, Ellul calls utopianism “a consolation in the face of slavery, and an escape from something one is unable to prevent” (*The New Demons*, p. 117). Ellul is quite blunt about this: “I fail to see a positive value in utopian views. They do humanity no good” (*Search for an Image*, pp. 24-25). Utopianism’s only purpose is to feed humanity false hopes for a better world that are designed to win their allegiance to the technological order that enslaves and dehumanizes them.

For Ellul, it is apocalyptic thought that plays the role that Mannheim ascribes to “utopian thought” - that of breaking with the ideological order of the present and calling it into question so as to bring about a something new and unexpected - a transformation of all things in an eschatological moment of new creation. For Ellul, an apocalyptic ethic has the power to desacralize a technological civilization in order to sanctify it (i.e., claim it for God’s service), rendering it both holy and therefore secular (i.e. no longer claiming to be sacred or to take the place of God.) When God alone is holy, the world is truly secular, that is no longer subject to the dualism of the sacred and the profane.

The paradox here, of course, is that this leads to the conclusion that Ellul’s apocalypticism is, by Mannheim’s definition, is a form of utopianism. In fact, Mannheim



uses Thomas Muenzer's apocalyptic revolt during the Reformation as an example of what he means by utopianism (*Ideology and Utopia*, p.213) Indeed that was what I argued in my doctoral dissertation some twenty years ago, which was eventually rewritten to become the first single-author book ever published on Ellul's work - *The Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Edwin Mellen Press, 1981).

The book was based on my doctoral thesis, written under the direction of Gabriel Vahanian, and argued that despite Ellul's protestations against utopianism, Ellul was a utopian thinker. Implicit in my argument was an attempt to reconcile the positions of Ellul and Vahanian whose rhetoric made it seem that they held polar opposite positions on technological utopianism. This argument was later made more explicit in the opening chapter of my book *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia?* (SUNY Press, 1993). There (on p. 48) I put it this way:

If Ellul is phobic about *utopianism*, Vahanian is phobic about *apocalypticism*, which he equates with an ideological dualism more concerned With changing Worlds than with changing the world. Ellul's work, however, should serve as As reminder to Vahanian (who already acknowledges a large indebtedness to Him) that biblical apocalypticism is not about *changing worlds* but precisely About *changing the world*. Ellul's understanding of the apocalyptic narrative Tradition sounds suspiciously like Vahanian's understanding of the utopian Narrative tradition. The problem is that Ellul fails to appreciate the utopianism Of the very apocalyptic tradition which stands at the center of his thought. By Same token Vahanian fails to appreciate that Ellul's apocalypticism does Really draw on the \_ authentic utopianism of the biblical tradition. Despite their Seeming opposition it does not seem to me that the disagreement between them is substantive. For Vahanian's eschatological *novum* like Ellul's apocalypse of the eschahatan is nothing other than the presence of the Wholly Other in the here and now which calls into question the sacred order of "reality," making all things new.

If I am right then Ellul might be a more constructive resource for Myung Su Yang's theological optimism regarding technological utopianism than Yang is able to envision in his essay.

To my surprise Ellul wrote me (May 2, 1982), after reading the copy of my book that I had sent him, to say that I had given a completely accurate account of the development of his thought and then went on to say: "You are quite right on the subject of Apocalypse and Utopia. That which makes me uneasy is not at all the thought of Vahanian on the subject of Utopia/Technique. On the contrary, that is very convincing. But it is the word itself, on the one hand, in its historical usage and , on the other hand, as it is used by modem intellectuals - not at all the way Vahanian understands it."

What I find underdeveloped in Yang's essay is how we make the transition from technology as our fate to technology as the advent of new creation - technological utopianism. Yang sometimes seems to say that by demythologizing the myth of our "human nature" technology automatically leads to utopianism. It would be more ac-

curate to say that this demythologizing opens up the opportunity for new creation, provided technology itself is demythologized. For Ellul, that is the task of an apocalyptic Christian ethic and for Vahanian that is the iconoclastic task of the church in a technological age. The ideology of technologism has to be unmasked, not just in theory but in practice, before utopian possibilities can be realized or embodied in a new way of life that will be at once both holy and secular.

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## **Utopia and Mope: JLtResponse to Jacques Tdfrd and Mchnotofical Utopia J. 'Westey 'Baper**

For those of us living in the highly technological environment of the Western world, we daily see the advantages technology has brought to our lives. Efficiencies in business, advances in medical diagnosis and treatment, changes in approaches to teaching and learning—these are a part of our everyday lives. As Porat's (1977) analysis first revealed, we have come to this point as our major economic base has moved from agricultural to industrial to informational. Those in the Eastern world, whose economies remained agriculturally-based as the West moved through these transitions, have taken note and have often adopted, as national priorities, goals to move to industrial-or information-based economies as quickly as possible. For all of us, East or West, Ellul's sociological critique of *la technique* is inconvenient. His call for us to examine the values of the technological system and the negative impact they can have stands in the way of an unreserved embrace of a system that produces such evident advantages.

, These are the kinds of struggles that I believe are at the root of Professor Yang's attempt to find a reconciliation through the concept of "Utopia." The Republic of Korea, through an aggressive program of industrialization and importation of technology, has become one of "Four Tigers of East Asia" and its economy is currently ranked as the 13[h] largest in the world. Should it put the brakes on its rapid development until it can consider the potentially negative impact a technological system will have on its traditional society? In face of the seeming impracticality of this, there must be a way

of finding a positive side to technology. This Professor Yang seeks to do through his "Utopian" approach—one in which we recreate "the present in order to advance toward the new future." He suggests that human use of technology can actualize humans ("With technology, human beings become human beings.") and, at a broader level, can open up opportunities for change, creating "a stage for a new world"—"the unlimited world of imagination" or Utopia. His What has made the study of Ellul's position on *la technique* particularly difficult is his refusal to merge the two analyses into a single comprehensive critique (Ellul, 1970, p. 6). Rather than synthesizing them, as a dialectic thinker Ellul played these two tracks against each other, each of his sociological works countered by a theological work. His work as whole, he explained, "has from the first turned on 'the contradictions between the evolution of the modern world [notably the technical evolution] and the biblical content of revelation'" (Holloway, 1970, p. 20; brackets in the original).

In his sociological work, Ellul viewed social development in systemic terms and sought to show us how the technological system would develop apart from our intervention. "I analyze reality," he said. "I see Its most probable course of view is that Ellul's critique masks these possibilities. "Ellul regards technology as an idolatrous religiosity," a position, he argues, that leads to hopelessness in the face of autonomous technology, rather than an acceptance of our responsibility and the possibility of "self-control of technology."

Professor Yang offers a standard criticism of Ellul when he contends, "Ellul's assertion that technology will eliminate a meaningful mankind because of its autonomy is too serious." It is this common reading of Ellul that causes him to look for an alternate view "where technology is set free from mechanics and gets closer to human beings." In this response, I will argue that, when viewed in its totality, Ellul's analysis is not unrelievably pessimistic, but that Ellul presented a hope that is not far from Professor Yang's theological optimism.

To address the question of Ellul's pessimism, let us begin by going back to a written debate between Robert Theobald and Ellul in 1965. Theobald comes to the debate having read *The Technological Society*, so he is familiar with Ellul's statements about the autonomy of technology. Yet, through the exchange, he is taken aback by something Ellul says, something that seems irreconcilable with his assumption of where Ellul stands.

I find Ellul's position on this issue ambiguous: he seems at many points in his book *The Technological Society* and in his reply to deny man's power to influence the technological environment. Indeed, at times, he appears to believe in a rather extreme technological determinism. Yet in spite of this, at the end of his reply, he quite clearly states that man can find "the path to a new freedom" (Theobald, 1965, p. 569).

What Theobald bumped up against is a common stumbling block for many of Ellul's critics—the assumption that his sociological critique of *la technique* is all there is. As I have noted elsewhere, "Ellul's work follows two separate tracks—the more widely

known sociological works and the less well-known, but crucially important, theological writings" (Baker, 1991, p.10).

development, but that doesn't mean I approve of it; on the contrary, what I see is the interaction of blind forces, nature taking its course, and the human role is precisely that of mastering or preventing this chain of events" (Ellul, 1981/1982, p. 46). Thus, *The Technological Society* was written as "a warning of what may happen if man does not come to understand what is happening and makes no attempt to control the situation" (Ellul, 1965, p. 568). But, contrary to the common criticism, this did not lead him to fatalism. He did not "believe in a permanent determinism, in the inexorable course of nature" (Ellul, 1981/1982, p. 106) and "never said that technology was not dependent on anything or anyone, that it was beyond reach, etc." (Ellul, 1977/1980b, p.139). It is only if no action is taken, if people resign themselves to what they see as the inevitable course, that Ellul speaks of things deterministically. "Fate operates when people give up," he says (Ellul, 1981/1982, p.106). With this background, we can now put into context the statement that caused Theobald such consternation:

So long as man lulls himself into thinking his perils imaginary, that ready-made solutions exist, or that others will devise a remedy, he will do nothing but wait. I am still convinced, however, that if we can be sufficiently awakened to the real gravity of the situation, man has within himself the necessary resources to discover by some means unforeseeable at present, the path to a new freedom (Ellul, 1965, p. 568).

To summarize, Ellul's sociological works describe how he viewed the development of the system, but—and in each of these statements he consistently adds this condition (though his critics just as consistently miss it)—that development would occur only if we do not intervene to . change it. Amid his analysis is the hope of intervention.

This hope is the theme of his religious writings which "confront" the sociological analyses. The "path to a new freedom" may be discovered by those who have been awakened to the likely course of the technological system and seek to intervene in its development. But who can intervene into a system that seems so complete and autonomous? The integrating nature of the technological system leads Ellul to argue that no one within the system can provide us with help in breaking the power of the system. Thus he called for an "exterior intervention," a term that goes back to his 1948 work, *The Presence of the Kingdom*. At its core the call is religious.

The possibility of an "exterior intervention," Ellul (1948/1951) argues, "can only come from the admission of a superior authority which is imposed from outside on the mind of man, and gives him a rule, while at the same time it restores to him his genuine function" (p. 135). Writing as a Christian, Ellul (1981) says the "Christian Revelation" provides "the outside vantage point that permits the critique of the system" because God is outside the system which binds us (pp. 100, 102). He contends that "Christians in particular are called" to challenge the system of la *technique* "because it is possible for them to see the true situation of man better than other people, and because, better than others, they can see where this ought to lead, and what is its aim" (Ellul, 1948/1951, p. 143). Rather than, as Professor Yang contends, "sanctifying

the concept of technology," Ellul's religious argument results in what Christians (1989) calls a "prophetic witness" which "confronts technicism and insists on desacralizing it" (p. 137; cf. Ellul, 1980a, p. 247). In sum, Ellul believed that an "exterior intervention" is possible because of a God who is Wholly Other and therefore completely outside the technological system. Surely this is not far from Professor Yang's argument: "The total otherness of God is the source of revolutionary iconoclasm. Thanks to the otherness of God, the people go to a new world with the hope of a new people. Theology should insist on the otherness of God to prevent technology from falling into technological determinism that is also the spirit which technology embraces."

Professor Yang argues for a positive side of technology, that "(t)echnology should exist for improving human beings." Ellul (1972/1973) recognized the positive contributions of particular technologies, as well. He readily admitted that technology (as contrasted with the technological system) does have a place, that "there is a legitimate use when it is put back into the movement of hope. That is the only place from which one might, with a great many difficulties moreover, rethink the whole problem of technology and come up with the true import of man's tremendous discovery" (p. 237). "What we have eventually to do as Christians," he wrote, "is certainly not to reject technology, but rather, in this technological society and at the price of whatever controversy, we have to cause hope to be born again, and to redeem the time in relation to the times" (p. 232).

Although Ellul did not present us with a program for how to accomplish this, he did, in his religious work, provide hope that we can find a "path to a new freedom." "In aiming a certain number of challenges, objections, and basic criticisms at the foundations," Ellul (1981/1982) said, "we can make Technique change its orientation and begin . . . what we might call a new historical period in which it will once again be in its proper place, that of a means subordinated to ends" (p. 208)—a hope, I would submit, that is the same, in spirit, at least, as Professor Yang's "utopian imagination" which "works toward negating and deconstructing the present, and finally establishing the new system."

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## International Jacques Ellul Society

### *Berkeley, California*

☒ an association of scholars and friends

The UES links together scholars and friends of various specializations, vocations, backgrounds, and nations, who share a common interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), long time professor at the University of Bordeaux. Our three objectives are (1) to preserve and disseminate his literary and intellectual heritage, (2) to extend his penetrating social critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) to extend his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

The UES is the English-language sister-society of the French-language *Association Internationale Jacques Ellul*. Together, we maintain a web site—[www.ellul.org](http://www.ellul.org)—as our common communications link and as a resource for anyone with an interest in Jacques Ellul.

☒ preserving a legacy

Jacques Ellul published more than fifty books and nearly a thousand articles and reviews. Our mission is to preserve and make broadly available this great legacy by

(1) completing the publication of Ellul's work in French (several works remain),

(2) completing the English translation of his work and encouraging translations in other languages,

(3) republishing (in electronic as well as print formats) works that are no longer available,

(4) publishing a critical edition of Ellul's complete works in both French and English,

(5) maintaining a current, comprehensive bibliography of works by and about Ellul,

(6) organizing and making available the audio and video recordings of Ellul's lectures and interviews,

(7) making available an accurate biography of Ellul.

☒ extending a critique

Jacques Ellul is best known around the world for his penetrating critique of "la technique"—of the character and impact of technology on our world. The forces and

institutions which shape 21<sup>st</sup> century life and which pose the greatest challenges to the health and future of humanity and nature were Ellul's critical interest. Our mission is to encourage continued research and critical thought in this tradition, with a special focus on technology but also including politics, economics, globalization, education, art, language, communication, religion, and popular culture. The UES is not an antiquarian society interested only in a reverent inspection of Jacques Ellul's works; it is, in the spirit of Ellul himself, a movement to encourage the extension of a serious critique of technological civilization.

☒ researching a hope

Jacques Ellul was not just a social critic but a theologian and activist in church and community. Because of his profound faith in the "Wholly Other" breaking into human history, he refused to become a pessimist about the predominantly negative social trends he studied. He insisted that he was above all a man of hope and freedom and searched for signs of hope in Holy Scripture and in history. Our mission is to encourage continued theological and ethical research on hope and freedom, with a special focus on the Jewish and Christian Scriptures.

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**Issue #31 Spring 2003 —  
Remembering Ivan Illich and  
Katharine Temple**

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### **For the Critique of Technological Civilization**

"I believe that our vocation on earth is to establish a harmony that includes all that we call justice, liberty, joy, peace, and truth. "

Jacques Ellul

"Sheer gratitude has led me to meditate on a spirituality of friendship as one possible orientation to the mystery of God. "

Katharine Temple

"I consider conviviality to be individual freedom realized in personal interdependence and, as such, an intrinsic ethical value. "

Ivan Illich

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## From the Editor

In this issue of *The Ellul Forum* we honor our recently departed friends and colleagues, Katharine Temple and Ivan Illich. Katharine Temple (June 8, 1944 - November 22, 2002) was buried on November 30 at her home parish, the Anglican Church of St. John, Port Hope, Ontario. Ivan Illich was born in Vienna in 1926 and passed away on December 2, 2002 in Bremen, Germany. He was buried in the cemetery of Oberneuland in Bremen. They represent the spectrum of Ellul's influence, from a social activist in the Catholic Worker House in Lower Manhattan to a world class scholar in academia. In their own ways, Katharine Temple and Ivan Illich carried on Ellul's mission as emblazoned on *The Forum* masthead: "the critique of technological civilization."

Katharine Temple wrote her superb 1976 doctoral thesis (under George P. Grant) at McMaster University on "The Task of Jacques Ellul: A Proclamation of Biblical Faith as Requisite for Understanding the Modern Project." Her frequent contributions to *The Catholic Worker* often mentioned Ellul's work and ideas. We honor her memory with a sample of her short essays but Kassie's greatest legacy is her life of joyful, sacrificial service among the poor.

Ivan Illich once said that Ellul was "a master to whom I owe an orientation which has decisively affected my pilgrimage for forty years" (*Ellul Forum* 13 (July 1994): 16). Illich's own brilliance and creativity produced a significant body of work that is a wonderful complement to that of Ellul. Countless new-generation scholars of technology use the books of both side-by-side.

Special thanks are owed to Contributing Editor Carl Mitcham for his work on this special issue. From his numerous contacts around the world, and his unbelievable bibliographic skills, he assembled this material with his trademark collegiality. The obituary Carl wrote in Spanish for the Madrid daily *El Pais* is included here in the original to honor Ivan Illich's Cuernavaca and his mastery of 14 languages.

Associate Editor David Gill, President of the International Jacques Ellul Society, provides the first of a regular series of columns in this issue of the *Forum* (“How Big Is the Tent?” p. 19), along with new “News and Notes” and “Resources” sections that will be of interest to Ellul students.

\* \* \* \*

The focus of the upcoming Fall 2003 issue of *The Ellul Forum* will be the technologies of cyberterrorism and hate. We will also review important new books on Ellul by Andrew Goddard and Jean-Luc Porquet. Our Spring 2004 issue, guest edited by Joyce Hanks, will focus on the tenth anniversary of Ellul’s death.

Manuscripts you wish to have considered for *The Forum* are welcomed by the editor. Material for “News and Notes,” “Ellul Resources” and queries about book reviews should be sent to David Gill.

*The Ellul Forum* and the International Jacques Ellul Society are all-volunteer activities, funded entirely by membership dues and small donations. We appreciate your solidarity and support.

*Clifford G. Christians, Editor editor@ellul.org*

## Remembering Kassie

by Jim Grote

Two characteristics come to mind whenever I think of Kassie—“personally endearing” and “intellectually combative.” One of her most outstanding qualities has been a continual source of guilt for me—she was a great letter writer and I am a terrible correspondent. I first wrote her many years ago because we had a mutual friend, Phil Hanson, who, like Kassie, studied under George Grant in Canada. Also, I had lived at two Catholic Worker houses. I still owe Kassie a letter in response to her letter dated Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> in 1998. She concluded with a comical P. S. about the irony of writing a letter during Lent and on Friday the 13[th.] As Kassie never crossed the Rubicon into the Church of Rome, I’m sure she’s smiling at my Catholic guilt and my five-year delay in answering her letter.

One endearing memory is Kassie hitch-hiking all the way from New York to the hills of Kentucky to attend my wedding, a method of travel I’d used to visit her a number of times. And I can never forget drinking beer together and singing Cab Calloway’s “Stormy Weather” on a number of occasions. The sweet way my children used to pronounce her name in their pre-school years sticks in my mind. Their pronunciation caught something of her inner spirit.

However, when it came to the life of the mind, Kassie was not nearly so sweet! I was always a fan of Simone Weil and Kassie had little tolerance for any criticism of Judaism. I remember going to a Simone Weil conference with Kassie and Carl Mitcham and the two of them getting into a huge argument during the question and answer session (I



can't recall the source of the dispute). On the way home in the car I exclaimed, "I can't take you two anywhere together." Another time at a philosophy of technology conference in Canada, Kassie (who was the only woman in the room) stood up and attacked the speaker for his feminist tendencies, going into a long involved defense of natural law. When I expressed my surprise later about a student of Ellul defending natural law, she smiled and replied, "I just can't resist bashing liberals!"

One final admission of guilt. During a visit to the New York Catholic Worker, I spent a couple days editing a paper of Kassie's, "The Sociology of Jacques Ellul," for publication in an early issue of *Research in Philosophy and Technology*. The manuscript was fifty pages long and true to Kassie's Catholic Worker spirit, it was typed on the back of old donated stationery and there were no Xeroxed copies of the manuscript. I inadvertently lost the paper and begged her to kill me in order to assuage my guilt. She was remarkably light-hearted about the whole affair. Upon eventually finding the paper, after retracing my steps all over New York, I took pause to contemplate both Kassie's forgiving smile and Ellul's theory of universal salvation. The two still go together in my mind.

*February 2003. Louisville, Kentucky*

## **Fascinated by the Instruments of Power**

by Katharine Temple

During a news show, early on in the international military build-up in the Persian Gulf, an Egyptian correspondent opined that Arab populations might not fully support the United States, for they might see this as a colonial war. She was immediately cut off, and the scene switched to the American boys in the desert. Whether or not this was deliberate censorship, presumably it was felt she had overstepped the mark. Presumably, the American audience could not consider that their country (nor its allies, including Israel, which, although not formally part of the coalition, plays a major part in it) could be involved in an imperialist enterprise. This did not go along with the program, the concerted image projected by the media.

If we look to the past, though, there are no grounds for surprise at such a suggestion. As Paul Fussell writes in his introduction to *The Norton History of Modern Warfare*, "One need not be a cynic to understand ... that the modern union of neurotic nationalism and complex technology has defined war in a way unknown before." As for these specific preparations, the friend who sent me the Fussell article put the same point this way. "I guess Bush is determined to wage war on Saddam Hussein. I wonder exactly what is at stake? I suppose oil and national pride. The UN is behaving even worse than usual." And I would add in Mr. Bush's intimate involvement with the CIA and Texas oil money.

It is true that the analysis cannot remain focused on one man and one product. Rather, we should look at the forces they represent, what President Bush himself has called “our way of life”—that union of technology (the material organization of resources) and the state (the bureaucratic organization of the nation and its resources.) This union is the new imperialism, an expansion beyond classical colonialism.

Nor can we blame only one country, for, although U.S. is in the vanguard, the development is worldwide.

In the September 1990 *CW*, we considered these ideas in the thought of Jacques Ellul, especially from his book *The Technological Society*. He sees our whole civilization as being informed by technique, that is, the totality of a technical system, based on the efficient impersonal logic of machines, and all the ways in which, in every area of life, we integrate ourselves into that logic—to the exclusion of any other way. Technique gains strength because we give our allegiance to the streamlined mastery of nature (both human and non-human) as our source for power and security. In their essence, the forces of technique are aggressive, controlling and expansionist in every direction.

In a recent book, *The Technological Bluff* (Eerdmans, 1990) Ellul has said: “We have the existence of the so-called military-industrial complex, which really ought to be called the technico-military-statist complex. The original term applies only to a capitalist organization and even there it is too narrow. Not industry, but the technical system, is to blame, along with the state, which is the engine and primary user of techniques and which organizes the military.” This account may sound abstract, but the reality of the war now going on in the Persian Gulf is anything but abstract.

The war is an all too concrete example of the domination imposed by the technico-military-statist complex, and its symbols are the car, the bomb, the TV, the computer—all essential to the parties in this conflict.

The car is the popular symbol of our needs. It is the outward sign of our highly mechanized and mobile society, whose wheels are kept turning by oil. Without oil, it is believed, the national system would be in jeopardy. Not only would the price of gas and oil company profits be affected, but beyond that, also the whole U.S. financial structure (already nervous because of expansions in information technologies in other countries). And so, if the oil supply is threatened, all other considerations, even an economic recession, back seat in the interest of technological state-power. On the other side, oil is the only leverage, in this game, that Saddam Hussein has at his disposal.

The car may well represent what we are all about, but the Pentagon is the spearhead of technique (in hardware, organization mentality) with its ever-expanding arsenal nuclear and non-nuclear weapons, whose alleged purpose seems thwarted by the end of the Cold War. As someone remarked, “All that might and personnel trained on Eastern Europe has to go somewhere to spread itself out.” If the military complex were to shrink, the whole technical infrastructure could collapse. This is indeed a war economy, thanks to the technical primacy of the military. And a war economy tends to bring about war!

In this instance, the two forces—machines and the military—come together almost to demand a war from the state. The particular geo-political realities in the Middle East (and we cannot forget the further complexities of the Arab-Israeli conflict, which will never be ameliorated until there is an adequate response to the Palestinian *Intifade*) need to be seen in this context. It is a war needed by the technical system, a war desired by both presidents, a war made possible only by complex computer centers (“the mastery of the micro-chip over muscle” in the words of one commentator). It is also a war brought to us by television, which gives facile analyses and an illusion of participation in some strange and titillating way.

All of this adds up to expansionism. No matter what the outcome, it seems it will be a victory for the technico-military-state system and a defeat for the populations subjected, willingly or unwillingly, to it.

To go back to the news show: To suggest that Arabs, who have seen wave after wave of Western commercial expansion for resources, might see this as a colonial war is hardly outrageous. In fact, to deny the possibility adds further layers of anti-Arab racism (whether American, European or Israeli) to the imperialist pie. Probably the most accurate historical, political, economic, military and technical analysis comes in *Hosea* 8:7. “For they sow the wind and they shall reap the whirl wind.” A current sense of the same thing comes from Amos Elon (writing from Jerusalem for *The New Yorker*, Dec. 24, 1990). “The feeling of being beset by blind forces is especially strong ”

But, none of this is openly stated, for it is not material for war propaganda. We simply do not want to hear about it, for it is part of the American ethos to see itself as different from other, wicked nations, as a state that acts only as the righteous, innocent policeman for a dangerous world. George Hunsinger has called this belief the heresy of American exceptionalism. “From the genocide of Native Americans to the incineration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to the open veins of Central America, the myth of our exceptional virtue, backed by the blasphemy of our national divine election, has served again and again to make us tolerate the intolerable, accept the unacceptable and justify the unjustifiable.” (Quoted in *CW* Oct.,-Nov., 1988.) If this war really is an exception, it has yet to be shown. (Sad to say, this is similar to the political critique of the state of Israel—a small nation, founded as a sanctuary against murderous persecution, metamorphosed, in worldly terms, into a technico-military state to guarantee an elusive security.)

#### Means and Ends

The question comes up: Are you so naive as to think that Saddam Hussein is merely an innocent victim? Of course not. The violence he has perpetrated and threatens is what people are talking about when they call this a just war (assuming an acceptance of the theory in the first place, or its applicability to modern warfare). The arguments for a so-called “just war,” however, should be looked at more realistically, in terms of means and ends.

”Some day our children will be taught that this battle ... was fought to protect freedom and democracy. My generation was brought up to believe that Britain, France

and the United States waged war against Nazi Germany to save Jews and other non-Aryans in Central Europe from extinction. Would that we had, but we didn't. The world tolerated Adolf Hitler's internal crimes and his invasions, just as it did Saddam's, until he crossed a line that had little to do with a concern for humanity and everything to do with the balance of power." (Charles Glass, *The Spectator* (London), Aug. 25, 1990). The point I see is that this war has nothing to do with justice. It seems to me, therefore, that we cannot simply hope for some inadvertent justice, such as more freedom for the people of Kuwait and Iraq, or security for Israelis, through an insatiable will-to-power. Furthermore, "the balance of power" is a euphemism for the clash between expanding powers. There are no limits, as the history of modern warfare, modern techniques and the modern state has taught us. Their power itself becomes irrational and all of us are caught up in its whirlwind. Saddam Hussein's own pursuit of technological sophistication and state power, pitched in frighteningly anti-Semitic tones against the Zionist state, will not be overcome by more of the same from the West—raised to the power of "blind forces."

It is not my point to come up with better national policies (though surely there must be some) so much as to strive for clarity about a war that has been veiled and distorted by the powers that be. This war is the way of the state. That's the hell of it. We must learn not to accept those terms, to reject the madness that leads only to further war.

How, then is it possible to proceed? It all sounds so overwhelming, beyond the reach of personal responsibility. Nevertheless, clarification is a requirement and a discipline that requires the greatest attention. Above all, we must learn the art of not being distracted. Not distracted on many levels—not by official versions shot through with lies; not by the electronic media circus which presents these versions to us; not by discussions that suck us into the web of tactics (e.g., whether chemical weapons, a small nuclear bomb, air strikes, a long siege, a simple assassination is "best") that are neither politics nor morality, but only the slippery slope to insanity through a fascination with the instruments of power.

Finally, we must develop habits to prevent us from being distracted from the deadly reality, the dominant drive, of our way of life. In the last section of the *Technological Bluff*, Jacques Ellul talks about the ways we are prone to being "fascinated people," held in thrall to technique by computers, tele-terminals, television, advertising, games, sports, etc. Interestingly, he concludes: "Those who are most susceptible to propaganda (and advertising) are the intellectuals [and on the same page he adds a list of the various shapers of public opinion] while the hardest to reach and budge are those rooted in traditions, whose ideas are fixed, who live in relatively stable environments (like farmers up to the 1950s) or those in structured relations (like members of unions)."

If we want to work to see the war in the Persian Gulf for what it is, perhaps we should take his point to heart as an admonition, and be freed from a fascination with technique. Perhaps those of us who wish to remain rooted in the Christian tradition,

to stand with those not in influential circles, could make the practice of clarification (which, in traditional terms, is the virtue of prudence) our Lenten discipline.

From *The Catholic Worker*, March-April 1991, p.3.

## Capitalist Starbucks

by Katharine Temple

The World Economic Forum (WEF) is an unofficial gathering of 3000 of the most powerful people on earth, a handful of whom must be on scholarship to add a touch of color or class. (Some of them are also religious or literary figures who, at first glance, would seem more likely to appear at the World Social Forum, a counterpart gathering of more grassroots groups who met in Porto Alegre, Brazil at the same time.) Usually, the WEF meets in Switzerland. This year it was in NYC—for reasons that vary with who is asked—at the Waldorf Astoria. On the second night they were in town, as protesters also arrived, we had a discussion at the St. Joseph House dinner about reactions from the city.

Reggie told us how many Starbucks, McDonald's and Gap stores had NYPD in front. We all wondered why. Roger said perhaps the police were getting easy overtime instead of a pay raise. Or, perhaps they thought the protesters, being barred from the hotel, would look for something else to do before their legal demonstration. The hope would be that respect for the NYPD, after September 11, would stifle any questions about anything.

It is true that these corporations, among others, have been highlighted before. I opined that, with or without the WEF, I would be glad to see an organized boycott of these stores. If I had to choose one (and I don't shop at any of them), it would be Starbucks. Someone once asked me why I do not go there, and I replied, "Let me count the ways: prices, anti-union practices, running local coffee shops out of business, involvement in the prison industry, a symbol of what is wrong with the economic system."

The general sense in the dining room was that this heightened police presence was part and parcel of the hype about the war on terrorism. After all, the WEF came on the heels of the president's warnings in his "State of the Union" speech. As the media would have it, fundamentalists abroad are the threat, while anarchists are at home. The revival of this old saw since the decline of communism is fascinating, especially as anarchism was the political ground Dorothy kept going back to, to reclaim it from negative overtones of violence. I guess we, too, have to revisit the terrain in a new context. In either case—whether the authorities were worried or opportunistic—the very visible NYPD made priorities clear: large corporations protected by force.

"This is like a movie, a f i n g movie." Eleanor's refrain

(and she is a beloved NYCW matriarch now of blessed memory) came to me later, as I saw the scene Reggie had described. After a while, you get so used to it that your Pavlovian response is in those terrible mythic terms of “us” vs. “them.” (Another angle on the film triangle is “John Q,” where it is so easy to sympathize with Denzel Washington’s plight that I am a bit surprised this hostage plot got to the theaters.) Also, it gets harder and harder to distinguish between virtual reality on the screen and the suffering in real violence. That, Eleanor knew about.

The second topic at dinner that same night began when Gerry told us how many banks had uniformed guards for ATMs. Although most were from private companies, the impression was the same. (And I do recall seeing a piece about the increasing privatization of even the military!) The question this time: What is this ATM sabotage about? In a nutshell, it would not be about robbing banks, but trying to slow down robbery by the banks.

At this point, Tanya jumped in to question if such sabotage was really going on. More likely, she said, protesters are using ATMs, not making them useless. I had to confess it would be a temptation for me, if I could accept the destruction of property as a nonviolent tactic. The appeal is like the Luddites in nineteenth-century England breaking looms that were the means of their own oppression and displacement. Bank activities in the realms of credit, mortgage and debt are legion. Unrestrained usury (in the sense Marty Corbin talks about in this issue) is at the center of our economic system and is responsible for huge amounts of violence in the world. Nevertheless, this cardinal sin is seldom talked about, at least not in North America, though I gather it was more up front and center in Porto Alegre.

Then, there are advances in financial technology, On the one hand, ATMs represent the closing of small branches, with job losses for bank tellers and other low-paid workers. On the other hand, the technology is crucial for the speedy transactions that make global integration and the current concentrations of power (personified in the WEF) possible. Included in these processes is speculation as the new form of usury. Now, more than 90% of financial transactions are speculation (i.e., making money by guessing what will make money), while a few years ago, the stock market (which I never did trust) was 90% investment, however gouging, in goods and services. What a difference speed and coordination can make.

Cui bono? Look to the major players at the WEF. Cui malo? Look to countries where wars are waged, end with the most current devaluation and debt.

It is a short step to tie together the technology of financial institutions (of which the ATM is the most publicly visible and, so, a temptation for me) with the interlocking military technology—not the least of which is the abstraction in the activity. High-tech maneuvers, like the movies, distance us from results like unsanitized wars, or cut-backs from IMF controls or the destruction brought by huge hydro-electric projects. The machine and its integrated institutions shield us from these human effects. To steer as clear as possible from participation could only be a good thing.

Over the WEF weekend, the alleged threats did not materialize, not even peaceful demonstrations at the stores or banks. (One group did go to the Manhattan headquarters of Enron.) Sad to say, not a lot more talk like our table talk either. Although I heard suggestions for democratic control over corporations, I did not hear a lot about the economy itself. And, although I heard a fair amount about the ravages of capitalism, there was not much about the technological-military complex that is capitalism's hardware.

The next such discussion in the dining room was not until the Superbowl, a fitting entertainment for the fourth day of the WEF. This time, none of the themes was missing, each melded into the others: the economy of consumerism, high-tech and globalization, the pride of patriotism (underlined by shots of the American troops in Kandahar), altogether in a classic movie plot, wrapped up in the U2 half-time show. (I was sure Bono, who is a promoter of debt reduction, would have a heart attack, or else I would!)

Our modest gathering had enough people able to separate the game from propaganda (or, is that, too, self-delusion?), enough people from New England who couldn't care less about the name of their team, enough of us who always root for the underdog (and Jimmie, who supported both teams) that we managed to enjoy ourselves while we waited for the truck with the vegetable donations. It was a great show!

From *The Catholic Worker*, May 2002, p.5.

## Jacques Ellul—the Word of God in a World of Technique

*A Catholic Worker Conversation Between Jeff Dietrich and Kassie Temple*

[Folks at the Los Angeles Catholic Worker have been studying the social analysis and theology of Jacques Ellul for about a year. This spring, Jeff Dietrich got in touch with Katharine Temple at Marybouse, to discuss a three-part series planned for *The Catholic Agitator*, and especially the importance of Jacques Ellul's thought for the *CW*. We then decided on a joint effort, and the result is this conversation between Jeff and Kassie, which also appears (edited and revised slightly differently) in the July 1990 *Agitator*. - Eds. Note]

**JEFF DIETRICH:** I talked to you a while back, and told you how excited I was about the reading I have been doing in Jacques Ellul. I feel like a born-again Catholic Worker, if one can say that. I feel that what Jacques Ellul has done is to give us a consistent, contemporary critique of the culture in which we live, which makes what the Catholic Worker does so pertinent. I feel that sometimes people just dismiss us as "saints," or just nice people. Folks say, "Oh, you do such nice work," "You are such good people." That's not why we're doing it

To have someone like Ellul, who gives you this elaborate perspective to work from, makes me feel liberated, even though I know some people find his perspective rather depressing.

**KASSIE TEMPLE:** While you were talking, I was remembering that I knew some of the writings of Jacques Ellul before I knew much about the Catholic Worker, and I, too, was very taken with his analysis of society and his other writings about what it means to be Christian in the world in which we live. And as I learned more about the Catholic Worker movement, it seemed that its philosophy and theology were the only ones around that resonated with Ellul's kind of understanding.

**JEFF:** I feel that, as the Catholic Worker movement, we really haven't updated our analysis of the culture since Peter Maurin died. And the way Ellul talks about "the technological society," I feel as though Peter, would, if he were alive today, either be saying the same thing, or writing "Easy Essays" about Jacques Ellul.

**KASSIE:** Well, I think that's true. I think the requirement for good social analysis as necessary for social change is one thing they would have in common. At the same time, Jacques Ellul would probably see Peter Maurin's thought as focusing directly on industrial society and what it has become and what it has done to people. Ellul himself, on the other hand, has focused, since 1935, on what he calls "the question of technique." He sees industrial society as having moved to a different phase, and so the analysis would be different.

**JEFF:** What Ellul seems to be saying is that the industrial revolution has come to an end, and that we've entered a new era. For instance, if you believe what Ellul is saying, you would analyze events in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union as having been brought about by technique. They've got to catch and retool, because the world is moving toward a uniform economic and political, technical culture that will include the Soviet Union, Europe, China, and the United States and Japan in a single system. This seems to be exactly what Ellul was saying—that revolution has come to an end, and that we've entered a new era.

**KASSIE:** Yes. Certainly he would see the changes in Eastern Europe as necessitated by the Soviet Union's economy coming into a new world environment. The relationship of production to the political and social forms cannot sustain economic growth. There needs to be change. But I think Ellul would say that it is a mistake to focus on the economic question as the main question. The economics are within this new technicized framework.

I think he would agree with Dorothy Day, who focused on the state and the large bureaucratic institutions. But, for him, even that thinking is perhaps still too much in terms of the Marxist "mode of production." The mode of production has changed and we need to describe that in a way that is more exact.

For instance, the computer shouldn't be shunned simply because Peter didn't like machines. We should examine the role of the computer; what makes them different from other machines?



**JEFF:** It seems to me that Ellul, in *The Technical System*, is saying that the computer as an information processor has brought about a completely different environment. Previous to the computer, the techniques of the state, education, propaganda and various other techniques were separate and could not be coordinated. But now they can be integrated into one smooth-running technical system through the information processing machine.

**KASSIE:** Right. And we need to analyze that, not moving away from our philosophy of what that is doing to people, how it brings about poverty. The whole emphasis on the works of mercy would not change, but rather our analysis of where the enslavement comes from, where the oppression lies; there would be a shift in emphasis to a changed situation.

**JEFF:** So often it looks like these changes liberate people, and people speak of the machines, satellite communications and information processing as personalized, liberating developments, when that's not necessarily so.

**KASSIE:** And I think we need to look precisely at the poverty in Los Angeles, the poverty in New York, at why people come to our doors, how this poverty is being shaped and formed, what this is doing to people.

**JEFF:** You realize the hypocrisy of American politicians, all politicians, who preach family values with one breath, and preach technological growth with the next, and don't recognize that the two are incompatible,

**KASSIE:** And don't recognize that this new formulation of the information society, or the technical society, is depersonalizing. You can't use impersonal means to bring a more personalist way of being.

**JEFF:** In reading Ellul's theology, I felt supported in what the Catholic Worker does in simple living, the green revolution.

Ellul makes this contrast between the "means of God" and the "means of the world"—that God very rarely works directly in the world, that God most often chooses a human medium through which to work. It would follow, then, that God does not work through the technical means of the world, and the more our culture becomes enslaved to technical means, the more difficult it is for God to work in the world.

Also, there are all those metaphors from the Gospels that are so important to Ellul—to be the leaven in the loaf, to be a light unto the world, to be wakeful and watching, the pearl of great price. All of these things are the "little way" of the Catholic Worker.

You so often feel overwhelmed by the means of the world. I know I've always had a tendency to buy into that perspective of "we're not being very effective here." So, you stick with the Catholic Worker way out of a kind of faithful, spiritual perspective.

What Ellul does is give you the ability to look critically at what the technical means are and say "no, you can't use these to bring about the Kingdom of God." You can't use mass elections to bring about the Kingdom of God, you can't use television and radio to bring about the Kingdom. Each person has to have a conversion of the heart and be open to the Word of God, and be ready to be used by the Holy Spirit. That's the only way it works and none of us wants to believe that.

**KASSIE:** That seems a clear summary of what Ellul is saying to Christians, and I think it's a clear summary, perhaps in different language, of what Peter has said. That is, the call is to all Christians, not just a select few, to witness to the way of God, the truth of God, which is different from the powers of the world. But they would both say that we need to do it in the world in which we live, and to know that world.

For instance, when Peter talked about voluntary poverty, not only is that a traditional means in Catholic thought, but ours is also a society that is unusually obsessed, dominated by money. The weight of consumerism is literally killing people, and the Christian is called to open that up and witness to another liberation. You can't be liberated from the power of money simply by spending more money. Peter said you accept voluntary poverty in order to end the enslavement to money.

Or, to take another example, if large-scale bureaucracies are the order of the day, then we need small communities which embody personalist, non-bureaucratic ways of living our lives together.

**JEFF:** This is the whole issue of personalism. It seems when we go out and talk about it or when we write about it in our papers, I feel self-conscious almost because it seems like this is a quaint kind of perspective of the world, and what we really should do is have a massive revolution, or elect Jesse Jackson president or convert the editorial board of the *L.A. Times*. That this personalist perspective of person-to-person action, doing the works of mercy—that's a nice thing to do, and if you want to do it, that's fine, but those of us who are really going to make a difference in the world and bring social justice about, or bring in the Kingdom, we're going to work through these massive means to change the world.

Ellul gives me a way of looking critically at these technological means and saying no, they're not going to work, that's not going to bring about the kind of justice that you want. In fact, these technological means are doing exactly the opposite of what you think they're doing. Fortunately or unfortunately, you have to work on this personalist level.

**KASSIE:** I think another reason we sometimes eschew personalism is that it can look like we're going to retreat into a world of ones and twos. The outside world is so overwhelming that I'm going to look after only my own well-being, that I'll try to make atmosphere where "my own personhood is affirmed," etc.

But that isn't what was meant by personalism, certainly not by Dorothy or Peter. For them, it was a public response in the world.

The means and ends are the same—this is a theme for both Ellul and Peter. If you want a society that is personalist, is communitarian, is based on the well-being of the other, you can't reach that through impersonal, bureaucratic fund-raising means. Dorothy used to quote, "All the way to heaven is heaven," another statement about the question of ends and means.

**JEFF:** And this is exactly why the Catholic Worker espouses an anarchist, non-statist perspective. But again, there hasn't been a strong intellectual groundwork for

an anarchist perspective, and we all get sucked into the cultural ritual of elections and the media surrounding it.

**KASSIE:** We've certainly had many discussions around here about whether people prefer the word "personalist" or "anarchist". But I think the importance of the anarchist critique (certainly in social theory, Ellul gives an anarchist critique of technological society, in distinction to a Marxist critique or a liberal critique) is that the form of anarchism that the Catholic Worker should espouse is a personalist anarchism. It is precisely a critique of statism—that the increasing power of the bureaucratic state is the source of domination. So that in our relationship to the state, we cannot simply say, "Well, we'll take the advantages from the state that we can and it won't have any repercussions on how we run our house." Rather, the state is a key point in our analysis of this society to see where the increasingly monolithic power structure is.

**JEFF:** I was particularly taken with Ellul's introduction in his book *The Political Illusion* where he talks about the French revolution. We tend to think of the kings of France as being absolute, total monarchs, the "Sun King" and all that. Before the French Revolution, though, the king had difficulty creating a standing army, he couldn't raise enough taxes to support a drive for empire. But after the Revolution, once the king was deposed and all people became part of the state and responsible for the state and to the state, then everybody, of course, served willingly. Then, once so-called democracy was there, people voluntarily enslaved themselves and gave themselves over to a taxation system and a system of law that they would never have done under a monarchy.

When you start looking at it that way, the whole idea of people just giving themselves over completely to the state, you need to have a stronger foundation to this anarchist-personalist perspective. I think that's what Ellul gives us.

**KASSIE:** Yes. At the end of that same book he talks about what is needed, and these are just a few little excerpts from that: "It is important, above all, never to permit one's self to ask the state to help us. Indeed, we must try to create positions in which we reject and struggle with the state, not in order to modify some element of the regime or force it to make some decision, but much more fundamentally, in order to permit the emergence of social, political, intellectual, artistic bodies, associations, interest groups or economic or Christian groups totally independent of the state. What is needed are groups capable of extreme diversification of the entire society's fundamental tendencies, capable of escaping the unitary structure, presenting themselves not as negations of the state, which would be absurd, but as something else not under the state's tutelage."

**JEFF:** It sounds exactly like something Dorothy would have written.

**KASSIE:** Yes. I think one of the great strengths of the Catholic Worker is that both Peter and Dorothy had this call to do something else, not just to do the negative, not just to say what was wrong, not just to say "no," which of course is part of it. This idea of communities that would be doing something else, is certainly the essence of the "green revolution," no matter how quaint some of Peter's plans appear.

**JEFF:** Just as you say that, talking about something else, I think one of the criticisms of Jacques Ellul is that he won't tell you what to do. It seems to me it goes to the heart of the differences between the Catholic Worker and Jacques Ellul. While I want to say that Ellul is describing the Catholic Worker, I'm very careful about making that kind of statement.

**KASSIE:** Well, I think there is a great difference between them in terms of Jacques Ellul being Protestant and Peter Maurin being Roman Catholic. It is interesting, and perhaps it is just a sign of our times, that because they are both strongly rooted in their respective traditions, that seems to draw them closer together. The idea that the strongest critique of modern society would come from something pre-modern, makes them seem remarkably similar. This includes the view that, "There is not something a little bit wrong with the world; there's something a whole lot wrong with the world."

On the specific question of their separate theologies—unlike Martin Luther, one of Ellul's favorite books is the book of James which says "faith without works is dead." And so, for Ellul, there can be no Christian theology of grace without incarnation, without works. But I think Ellul sees his particular calling as a Christian—and this is certainly within a Protestant understanding—as that of raising questions about what we are doing. We cannot formulate an alternative unless we are willing and able, through grace, to raise the most serious questions and recognize that this society is not the Kingdom. It is not going to be the Kingdom. At the same time, we must incarnate our faith within this society.

Ellul's refusal to spell out a blueprint is somewhat the difference between a Catholic and a Protestant, but also it comes from the belief that if you give an answer in advance, you have cut off the thing that is most needful for Christians today and that is the raising of the deepest questions. You know that in this society, you can hold all sorts of opinions that people can find interesting or not interesting. But if you raise a serious question on the things that matter most, then there is a complete dismissal.

You raised, for example, the question of the power of the state. You can be as critical of a particular regime as you want, but if you say, "I don't vote because voting doesn't make any difference," that goes too far. The raising of questions is something that is so rarely done, so rarely done among Christians as well.

Some of this thought comes from Jacques Ellul being Protestant. I think that Peter probably thought it was possible to separate from society, in order to build a new one along Christian principles. Perhaps Peter's is the Catholic idea that there is such a thing as a Christian society, or that society can be transformed to be Christian. Ellul, on the other hand, thinks that the Kingdom, the Presence of the Kingdom, will always be hidden, will always be the injection of the Word of God into an alien country And that will be the case until the end time.

From *The Catholic Worker*, September 1990, pp.4-5, and *The Catholic Agitator*, July 1990.

## En memoria de Ivan Illich, un anarquista entre nosotros by Carl Mitcham

Ivan Illich, uno de los mayores criticos sociales del siglo XX, acaba de morir a sus 76 anos en Bremen. Nacido en Viena en 1926, fue ordenado sacerdote en Italia y vivio gran parte de su vida en Estados Unidos y Mexico. Con una prometedora carrera dentro de la Iglesia, renuncio a ella. Rector de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, profesor en Penn State University y en la Universidad de Bremen, fue un viajero y conferenciante incansable. Con multiples licenciaturas y doctorados en ciencias y letras, plurilingue, su trabajo intelectual se puede resumir en un incansable esfuerzo por pensar hasta las ultimas consecuencias las ideas de progreso y desarrollo, tan caras a expertos y politicos.

En la decada de los setenta escribio los primeros libros que le hicieron ser conocido internacionalmente. *La sociedad desescolarizada* es un ataque al sistema educativo moderno, *La Nemesis Medical* analiza la perversion de los sistemas de salud y *La convivencialidad* somete a un despiadado escrutinio los ambiciosos programas de desarrollo de esos anos sesenta. Estos libros inciden sobre las tres “vacas sagradas” mas importantes que una izquierda progresista abandono como camino de modernidad. Carlos Barral, editor sensible y culto, entendio que Illich era uno de los criticos mas lucidos del momento y se encargo de hacer conocer en la Espana franquista y tecnocratica sus textos. *La sociedad desescolarizada* vendio varios millones de copias, se tradujo a unos veinte idiomas, convirtiendose en nuestro pais en un libro de obligada lectura para ensenantes y pedagogos. La perspicacia del autor le permitio ver con asombrosa claridad el futuro, nuestro presente, de una sociedad demasiado confiada solo en sus capacidades economicas. Entre los anos ochenta y noventa cambio el ambito de sus intereses intelectuales. *In the Vineyard of the Text*, comentario sobre el *Didascalion* de Hugo de Saint Victor, le permitio dirigir su atencion hacia el analisis de la vida actual, cada vez mas alejada de los sentidos y de la verdadera amistad. Mucho antes de la moda contemporanea de reflexionar sobre la lectura y la escritura a la luz de las nuevas tecnologí'as, Illich mostro con erudicion de historiador y consideracion critica del filosofo las implicaciones de los cambios culturales que sufre un acto tan cotidiano como leer.

A pesar de la creciente presion economicista de la sociedad posindustrial, trato de buscar los medios para poder volver a vivir una vida que se experimentara en un cuerpo, capaz ademas de aceptar a los otros como tales, como amigos. Esta es su llamada revolucionaria en la epoca de globalizacion hipertecnologizada, en la era de Windows XP. Desafortunadamente, ya no contamos con Barral para que siga ofreciendonos su trabajo en espanol. A veces el desarrollo acelerado produce olvidos significativos. Algunas ediciones como *El Genero Vernaculo* siguieron publicandose en Mexico y es dificil encontrar hoy en dia este hermoso texto sobre la antigua armoni'a entre hombres y mujeres. Tal vez sea este uno de los trabajos mas apasionantes e incomprensidos de Illich,

tal vez por ello fue injustamente marginado. *H<sub>2</sub> O o las aguas del olvido* es una joya. Su maestría de historiador nos gula por un intrincado viaje de del agua entendida como el elemento mágico que nos limpia, nos otorga el olvido, nos remueva, refresca, vivifica y sana para acabar reduciéndola a una molécula química. una abstracción insípida.

Los últimos años de su vida han sido especialmente dolorosos porque, consecuente con su pensamiento y reluctante de las innovaciones médicas, no aceptó los alivios terapéuticos, afirmando su cuerpo y lo que este le trajera. Su gran lección está ahí: siempre consecuente, es uno de los últimos intelectuales donde vida y obra, pensamiento y acción se entrelazan íntimamente. Radical, anarquista, cultivador de la amistad, pero también rechazado, mantuvo alta su talla de intelectual inconformista e insobornable.

Carl Mitcham, profesor en la Colorado School of Mines (EEUU) y coeditor de *The Challenges of Ivan Illich* (2002) / Andoni Alonso, Profesor en la Universidad de Extremadura y autor de *La Nueva Ciudad de Dios* (2002).

El País, martes 10 de diciembre de 2002

## **In Memoriam: Ivan Illich, 1926 — 2002**

by Aaron Falbel

Ivan Illich, a former Catholic priest, philosopher, historian, theologian, social critic, and activist, slipped away without much fanfare on Monday, December 2, at the home of a close colleague and friend in Bremen, Germany. The few obituaries that appeared pronounced him a has-been, a relic from the '60s and early '70s when his writings were briefly in vogue. However, this assessment belies his many important contributions toward a more modest, respectful, just, caring, humane, and peaceful society.

Born in Vienna in 1926 to a Catholic father of aristocratic Dalmatian descent and a mother who was a Sephardic Jew, Illich was forced to go underground in 1941 due to his mother's ethnicity. He escaped with his family to Italy, and, upon completing his university studies and ordination, he came to the United States in 1951. After spending an intense five years as a much-loved parish priest in a Puerto Rican neighborhood on the tip of Manhattan, he was appointed vice-rector of the Catholic University of Puerto Rico, a position he held for another five years until he was forced off the island due to a political controversy there. (He strongly and vociferously objected to church officials using the church's status and authority to meddle in local electoral politics.)

Illich achieved notoriety in 1961 when he opened a center in Cuernavaca, Mexico that served as the main training ground for missionaries and other do-gooders bound for Latin America. The purpose of the center, eventually called the Center for Intercultural Documentation, or CIDOC, was deeply subversive though by no means secretive: to thwart the cultural imperialism and neocolonialism inherent in such missionary initiatives as the American Catholic Church's "Alliance for Progress" and Kennedy's secular analogue, the Peace Corps. In such lectures and essays as "Yankee, Go Home,"

"The Seamy Side of Charity," and "Violence: A Mirror for Americans," Illich tried to dissuade American volunteers from going to Latin America to "help" the "poor." He pointed out that their good intentions would in no way cancel out the inevitable damage they would do by being "vacationing salesmen for the middle class 'American Way of Life,'" — a way of life not only unsustainable in the rich, overdeveloped countries but simply unattainable for the vast majority of people these programs were attempting to "help." Unwittingly, their interventions also "maintained or swept into power military regimes in two-thirds of the Latin American countries" and helped to open Latin America as a massive market for U.S. goods and as a source of cheap labor. "The compulsion to do good," wrote Illich, "is an innate American trait. Only North Americans seem to believe that they always should, may, and actually can choose somebody with whom to share their blessings. Ultimately this attitude leads to bombing people into the acceptance of gifts." In response to such sarcastic criticism, Illich was beaten with chains and actually shot at—actions very likely orchestrated by the C.I.A. Fortunately, the assassination attempts failed. Clearly he had struck a nerve close to the center of power.

Indeed, the forces of power were mobilizing against him. Illich was summoned to the Vatican in 1968 to defend CIDOC's activities and his own religious and political views, but he refused to cooperate. The Vatican responded by placing an interdict on CIDOC in early 1969, banning all religious personnel from attending its classes, lectures, and seminars. The ban had little effect; the place had achieved a magnetism all its own, and Illich had always insisted that CIDOC was a secular organization. Rather than continue to cause a political scandal within the Church, Illich, announced his "irrevocable decision to resign entirely from Church service, to suspend the exercise of priestly functions, and to renounce all titles, offices, benefits, and privileges which [were] due to [him] as a cleric."

In the 1970s, CIDOC became a "thinkery" for broadening this sort of critique by examining the damaging side-effects of modern institutions in general. Illich became even more radical, in the etymological sense of "getting to the root" of things. His conclusions were surprising, even shocking, to many, and certainly controversial. Like Gandhi before him, Illich was a caustic critic of industrial society. He saw dangers not only in the environmental degradation caused by the industrial mode of production but also in a type of social degradation due to an overabundance of services. His critiques of education (*Deschooling Society*), of the medical establishment (*Medical Nemesis*), of technocratic, technological society (*Tools for Conviviality*), of transportation systems (*Energy & Equity*), of the helping professions (*Disabling Professions*), of commodity dependence in a market-intensive society (*The Right to Useful Unemployment*), and especially of development (*Celebration of Awareness; Church, Change, and Development* and *The Development Dictionary*, ed. W. Sachs) ruffled many feathers and earned him many detractors across the political spectrum.

Illich was one of the first to take note of the "paradoxical counterproductivity" of modern institutions when they reached a certain size and level of intensity. This

resulted in schools that made people stupid, hospitals that made people sick, prisons that made people violent, high-speed transportation that created traffic jams and ever-increasing passenger miles, development agencies that created more and more "needy" people, and so on. Once institutions grow beyond a certain threshold, Illich observed, they end up thwarting the very purposes for which they were allegedly established. They tend to become dysfunctional and to incorporate other purposes that actually impede their stated objectives.

Illich decried modern society for becoming more and more machine-like, more automated, more sewn-up, more impersonal, more pervaded by "systems" of one sort or another. Such a society, he argued, cannot help but degrade friendship, love, care, community, hospitality, learning, dwelling, and, ultimately, the art of suffering and dying, by replacing all these human acts with ministrations of professional services, bureaucracies, systems, and techniques. He saw modern society as deeply violent in its essence and not just because of its frequent recourse to military intervention. Again, his words were radically surprising: "[T] he plows of the rich can do as much harm as their swords. United States trucks can do more lasting damage than United States tanks." As before, Illich was critical of those who, perhaps with good intentions, sought to promote peace through economic development.

"Development," he wrote, "has always signified a violent exclusion of those who wanted to survive, without dependence on consumption, from the environment's utilization values. *Pax economica* [or peace through economic development] bespeaks war against the commons." Protection of the commons—from enclosure, from exploitation, from being turned into a "resource," and from the regime of artificial scarcity—was, according to Illich, a fundamental component of *pax populi*, of the people's peace, of true peace, throughout much of history. At times, Illich characterized the industrial age as "the war against subsistence" and culture as "unique arrangements by which a given group limits exchange relationships to specific times and places." Such insights preceded the present anti-globalization movement by several decades.

In the latter years of his life, in the '80s and '90s, Illich moved away from his provocative, sometimes inflammatory critique of modern institutions to explore the historical question of how the mindset and social conditions that gave rise to these institutions came into being. No longer the political gadfly or rabble-rouser, he ceased to have entertainment value for the media and faded from public view. He now divided his time between Germany and Mexico (with short visits to the United States and elsewhere), leading seminars, lecturing, and writing. He once likened his historical method to the motion of a crab in flight: "The crab moves backward, while its popping eyes remain fixed on the object [it] flee[s]. ... I want to explore what happens if I begin to move backwards, with my eyes fixed on the present." As a historian of the Middle Ages, Illich immersed himself in the past in order to see more clearly how radically different and unprecedented our modern times are from any past historical epoch. "And when I come out of the past and enter-the present," he wrote, "I find that most of the axioms generating my mental space are tinged with economics."



From these explorations in the historical archaeology of ideas and perceptions came a number of books: *Shadow Work*, *Gender*, *H2O and the waters of Forgetfulness*, *ABC: The Alphabetization of the Popular Mind*, *In the Mirror of the Past*, and *In the Vineyard of the Text*. In these works, Illich examined various "certainties," "axioms," "necessities," or "needs" with which we live today, and he showed how each of them had an origin in history. And that which had a beginning, as Illich liked to point out, can also plausibly have an end. His historical perspective reveals that the certainties we take for granted today, such as the need for education, medical care, employment, literacy, transportation, markets, energy, police, prisons, news media, etc., were not always so certain. His crab-like journeys into the past serve to loosen the grip that modern certainties have on our perceptions and imagination. The institutional and political realities we live with today are thus neither immutable nor inevitable. This is Ivan Illich's message of hope in these dark times.

In his essays and lectures, Ivan Illich frequently made a distinction between expectation and hope. He once remarked, "I am very pessimistic but hopeful." He was also a man of deep faith. When asked by a student how he defined faith, Illich replied, "Faith is a readiness for the surprise. We must have a sarcastic readiness for all surprises, including the surprise of death." The lockstep, planned, predictable, mechanical aspects of modern society are thus more than just damagingly counter-productive; their *raison d'être* lies in their attempt to wipe out and safeguard us from all the surprises in life. The institutionalization of genuine human acts replaces hope with expectation through attempting to offer us something called "security." But for Illich, such security is an idol we worship at our peril. His life's work dares us to have trust and faith in nature, in our own senses, and in each other. There are no guarantees with such risky, foolhardy trust. But there may be surprises, both good and bad. Are we ready?

December 16, 2002. Amherst, Massachusetts

## A Note on the Death of Ivan Illich

by Barbara Duden and Silja Samerski

On Monday, December 2, 2002, Ivan Illich died. Although he had been preparing for several years, death came as a surprise. He was in the midst of preparation for his seminar on the *corruptio optimi*, the corruption of the best. The seminar was scheduled to occur at the University of Bremen on the upcoming weekend, and Ivan had hoped to reflect with friends and students on his ideas about the ecclesiastical origin of uniquely Western certainties. These historical investigations on the perversion of the Gospel ran like a red thread through the last decade of his teaching in Bremen. With the help of friends he hoped to finish a manuscript on this subject within the next months.

On Thursday, December 5th, we buried him in the cemetery of Oberneuland in Bremen. During the preceding days many people came to his Bremen home for the death watch and to bid him farewell. At the beginning of the funeral Mass in St. Johann,

Wolfgang Sachs read the following text [“The Loss of World and Flesh”], in which Ivan bemoans the loss of the art of dying. It is a letter of congratulations Ivan wrote in 1992 to Hellmut Becker, then director of the Max-Planck Institute for Educational Research in Berlin.

At the end of January 2003, Ivan had hoped to lecture in the second winter term. Johannes Beck is preparing a convocation for February 7-8 at the University of Bremen.

There we will try to spin out further threads from Ivan’s thinking.

December 2002. Bremen, Germany

## The Loss of World and Flesh

by Ivan Illich

Formerly, one left the world by dying; until then one lived in it. Both of us belong to that generation that was still being born “into the world,” but which is now threatened by dying without a foothold in the world. Unlike any other generation, we have lived through a break with the world.

In earlier times, a dropout set off on a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela; or begged for *stabilitas* on the porch of a monastery; or joined the lepers. The Russian and Greek worlds also offered the possibility of becoming not a monk but a fool, and for the rest of one’s life to lodge with dogs and beggars in the atrium of a church. But even for such extreme fugitives from the world, the world remained the sensual frame of their passing existence. The world continued to be a temptation, especially for the one who wanted to renounce it. Most of those who left the world soon caught themselves cheating. The history of Christian asceticism is a record of heroic attempts to be faithful to the renunciation of a world to which every fibre of one’s being adheres. When dying, my uncle Alberto still had them serve him the *Vino santo* that was harvested in the year of his birth.

Today all this has changed. The two thousand-year epoch of Christian Europe is gone. The world into which our generation was born has passed. Not only for the young but also for us, the old, it has become impalpable, incomprehensible. The very old have always remembered better times, but that is no excuse for us, we who were alive during the regimes of Franco, Roosevelt, Hitler, and Stalin, to forget that farewell to the world we lived through.

I remember the day I became senile once and for all. I cannot forget the dark March clouds obscuring the evening sun and the vineyard on the Sommerleite between Potzleinsdorf and Salmannsdorf near Vienna, two days before the *Anschluss*. Until that hour it had been a certainty for me that I would give children to the old tower on the Dalmation Island. Since that lonely walk this has seemed impossible for me. As a twelve-year-old boy, I experienced the disembedding of the flesh from the warp and weft of history, even before a command was issued from Berlin to gas all fools in the Reich.

To talk to each other about this break in the experience of world and death is a privilege of our generation who knew what had been before. Hellmut, I believe I am writing to someone who knew that.

When very young, destiny made me into a colleague, counselor, and friend of women and men several generations older. I thus learned to let myself be cultivated and shaped by people who were too old to take part in the experience of that disembodiment. By contrast, our students, without exception, are offspring of the epoch after Guernica, Leipzig, Bergen-Belsen, and Los Alamos: Genocide and the human genome project; the death of forests and hydroponics; heart transplants and medicide through insurance—all these are also tasteless, without smell, impalpable, and non-worldly. The Feast of Advent from the Erlanger Corpus celebrates the bottomlessness of the worldless non-human. We who are old and yet young enough to have lived through the End of Nature, the end of a world fit for the senses, should be able to die like no one else.

What the past composed can also decompose. Further, the past can be re-evoked. But Paul Celan knew that only smoke remains from the world-dwindling that we have experienced. It is the virtual drive of my computer that serves me as the symbol for this unretrievable disappearance, and through which the loss of world and flesh can be envisaged. The worldliness of the world is not deposited like ruins in deeper layers of the ground. It is gone, like a deleted line of the rain drive.

This is why we, seventy-year-oldsters, can be unique witnesses, not only for names but also for perceptions that no one any longer knows. Many who have stood in this break have been broken by it. I know some who themselves tore their existence to threads before the atom bomb, Auschwitz, and AIDS. Deep in their hearts in the middle of their lives they have become *viejos verdes*, old greens, who pretend it is possible to have fathers in the manageable show that has become a system. What was propaganda in the Nazi period, what could be undermined by hearsay, is now being sold: As a menu with the computer program or the insurance policy; as counseling for education, bereavement or cancer treatment; as group therapy for those at risk. We old ones belong to the generation of pioneers of that non-sense. We are the last of that generation that helped transform the systems of development, communication, and services into worldwide needs. Worldly disembodiment and the programmed helplessness we have propagated exceed by far the fallout that in our generation has been deposited in heaven and on earth, in the stratosphere above and the waters below.

We were in the key positions when TV removed daily life from people. I myself fought so that a university TV station broadcast weather predictions of rain in every village square of Puerto Rico. I did not then know how much this would inevitably reduce the range of the senses, and how much the horizon would be barricaded by administered presentation furniture. I did not consider that soon European weather from the evening news show would discolor the first light of dawn seen through the window. For decades I have been careless in handling unfathomable abstractions like one billion people in a bar chart. Since January, my account statement from the Chase Manhattan bank is decorated with a graphic chart that allows me to compare my ex-

penses for restaurants and office material at a glance. Hundreds of detailed ingratiating services in information, administration, and counselling deliver an interpretation of my *conditio humana*. When I discussed that topic with you, Hellmut, more than twenty years ago, I could not imagine that the integration of the educational enterprise into lifelong everyday life would be so smooth and slick.

Sensual reality submerges deeper and deeper under the coverage of commands on how to see and hear, feel and taste. Education in an unreal construction begins with textbooks whose content has shrunk to subtitles for graphic boxes, and ends with the dying who grasp encouraging test results about their condition. Exciting soul capturing abstractions have extended themselves over the perception of world and self like plastic pillow cases. I notice it when I speak to young people about the resurrection from the dead. Their difficulty consists not so much in a lack of faith, as in the disembodiment of their perception and life through constant distraction from their soma.

In a world that is inimical to death, you and I prepare ourselves not to come to a mortal end but to die in the intransitive sense. On the occasion of your seventieth birthday, let us celebrate that friendship in which we praise God for the sensual glory of the real world through our good-bye from it.

Translated by Barbara Duden and Silja Samerski from Ivan Illich, "Welt -abhanden," in Gerold Becker and Jurgen Zimmer, eds., *Lust und Last der Aufklarung: Ein Buch zum 80.*

*Geburtstag von Hellmut Becker* (Basel: Beltz, 1993), pp. 76-79. Used by permission.

## Ivan Illich: In Memoriam

by Pieter Tijmes

Ivan Illich was an impressive person, at once intimidating, and receptive. He had access to the great of the world and the heroes of the mind, but the less powerful and famous had access to him. He gathered them around him, he associated with them; he inspired and supported them. He was a magician in their company, and he charmed them, even when they did not always understand him. They knew what he said was important even when they were not sure what he was saying. At his funeral in Bremen these friends put in their appearance and bid him adieu, participating in the rituals of church and graveyard.

Two things in the service were noticeable: the open invitation to those present to testify briefly to their relationship with Illich, and the reading of a letter written by Illich on the occasion of Hellmut Becker's 70th birthday. In this letter Illich specifically objected to the modern loss of being able to die one's own death. In his own remembrance service, this reading was an appropriate witness to that for which Illich stood during his entire life.

Ivan Illich was born 1926 in Vienna. After the *Anschluss* of Austria with Germany, the Illich family took refuge in Italy because of his mother's Jewishness. He studied

science and philosophy in Florence, and later theology at the Gregoriana in Rome. He followed the calling to become priest and in the 1950s the slums of New York became his field of pastoral activity. Later he founded the Centro Intercultural de Documentation (CIDOC) in Cuernavaca, Mexico. After extensive debates with the Vatican, he renounced all priestly functions in 1969. This did not reduce his attachment to the Gospel as enduring inspiration in his life.

Intrigued by his permanent rebellion against contemporary political and ecclesiastical affairs, I once asked whether he really believed in God in the traditional Trinitarian terms of the Church's creed. His answer was apodictic, foreclosing all objections: "Of course, God was father, otherwise I (Ivan) could not be your brother, and vice versa." I was reduced to silence, since I did not dare question our brotherhood while a guest in his home. But the point of my question to him, as an "avant-garde revolutionary," came from my puzzlement. His acute appreciation of secularization and the historicity of the Christian faith made me wonder about his view of traditional revealed truth. Then I had to live with his existential answer to my intellectual question. It was an acutely Illichean answer, but not a response to the intention of my original concern.

Ivan Illich can be best described as a merciless critic of culture. He had no fixed station; on the contrary, he had a travelling existence. He taught at universities all over the world, especially in the United States and Germany. His early books, such as *Celebration of Awareness*, *Deschooling Society*, *Tools for Conviviality*, and *Medical Nemesis*, gave evidence of his keen eye for the discrepancies, inconsistencies, and irrationalities of our modern way of life. He designated capitalism as counter-productive. All that glitters is not gold. He wrapped his message in a vigorous and aggressive language. I could not always understand his energy, attacking people who conformed and adapted to our modern technological world. His special attention was directed to the pride of modernity, i.e., technology.

On the waves of the 1970s tide of social criticism, he became known among students. That Erich Fromm wrote a preface for one of his books made it plausible, to the outsider, that Illich belonged to the New Left. But from the beginning there was already an obvious difference in tone. He appreciated premodern ways of living in their particularity, and not just as preparatory trials that took their value from the modernity we achieved.

Let me return to Illich's 1992 letter to Becker. This document, "The Loss of World and Flesh," is representative of the last stage of his criticism of modernity. It mirrors his unremitting resistance, his refusal to surrender to what he saw as the corruption of modernity. He made clear that he had once

known a world he loved, but that he had to live in a world he abhorred. In this love and aversion, he thinks of the world of the flesh, the body and the senses, in contrast with the world today where flesh, body, and senses evaporate and have less and less meaning in themselves. In a dramatic way, he writes about a break in history he had already experienced as a young man of twelve. It was, so to say, a proleptic experience

of a disembodied future in which he found his own corporal existence set aside by history.

In articulating this break, Illich emphasizes the fact that in the modern world people have become different. They may still hear, look, and feel, but they do so no longer with natural bodies. They no longer experience the world in their flesh. This he describes as becoming disembodied or disincarnated. On the basis of his own books and articles, one might add that it is due to technology that our bodies and flesh are no longer what they once were, but are more and more altered by the electronic media with which they engage and their bio-cybernetic transformations. In the letter itself, he does not explicitly examine the cause of the historical break, but only refers to students who are children of the era of Guernica, Bergen Belsen, Los Alamos, and the era of heart transplants, genocide, medicide. These students live on the opposite side of a great historical divide.

The letter is not so much a treatise as a deeply felt response to a friend. Contemporary ills and serious troubles from atom bombs to AIDS are pressed together in one breath. In one way or another these are, in his view, all related. He places himself as a transition figure, one who was born into a world of the flesh and the senses but now lives in a world of non-sense, among people alienated from the world and senses, as part of a generation that promoted the programmed helplessness of people. The abstractions of science and technology have taken over the place of the experience of the world and the self. Abstractions are like cushion-covers that supersede the traditional sensory perception.

Illich's perceived break with the past coincides with the demise of Christianity. In some way, this is involved with the passing bimilleneal age of European Christianity. But his point in the letter is not, in the first place, that the Christian faith is fading away—at least he does not elaborate on this issue. For a deeper understanding of the relationship between his Christian faith and criticism of culture, I have to quote Barbara Duden, for whom "it is impossible to understand his thinking during the last twenty-five years without attention to the flesh." According to Duden, Illich

treats the flesh apophatically, and the clearer this becomes the better I understand that for him the flesh orients one inexorably toward the Incarnation, toward the mystery in the world of his faith, and ultimately toward the Cross [For Illich] the tradition of

Western medicine [cannot] be grasped without reference to the Cross and its denial [since], after all, the rituals fostering the myths of disincarnation - be they medical, hygienic, or other—[must also be] understood as cultural denials of the Incarnation in a society that has grown out of the Christian West. (Barbara Duden, "The Quest for Past Somatics," in Lee Hoinacki and Carl Mitcham, eds., *The Challenges of Ivan Illich* [Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002], pp. 220-221)

The reading of Illich's letter evoked a world full of nostalgia and struggle, and he ends with the words: "In a world hostile to death, we do not prepare for passing away but for dying intransitively. On the occasion of your 70th birthday, let us celebrate

that friendship in which we want to praise God for the sensual reality of the world, even by taking leave of it.”

Ivan Illich had strong views that were often not easily accessible. They were provocative, because they did not harmonize with our knowledge of past and present. Unfortunately, the time is over when we can still ask him for clarification. We have to judge for ourselves about the plausibility of his vision. His contributions to the understanding of our world undoubtedly rest with his observations of trends that have to do with our orientation in the world, and he often speaks as if dichotomies such as embodiment and disembodiment, worldliness and unworldliness, necessarily and always exclude each other. Yet it is the task of philosophy to discover what different experiences have in common. Even theology should, in my view, have a say in this debate. Illich cannot be better honoured than by a critical examination of his historical intuitions. The heritage of his ideas is now a departure for our own reflections on technology and modernity—or, as it may be, post-modernity.

January 2002. Enschede, The Netherlands

## “All Things Considered”

National Public Radio, December 4, 2002

*Carl Mitcham on Ivan Illich*

JACKI LYDEN, host: Ivan Illich, a former Catholic priest and champion iconoclast, has died in Germany. He was 76. Illich’s writings challenged mandatory schooling, even though he was an educator, and the Catholic Church, even though he’d been a priest. In the process of his questioning, he helped remake the sociological map for the baby boom generation. At one time a worldwide intellectual tour de force, Illich’s ideas were much less in vogue in the decades before his death. Carl Mitcham is professor at the Colorado School of the Mines, who’s written about Illich’s sociological theories and his turbulent relationship with the Catholic Church.

Professor CARL MITCHAM (Colorado School of the Mines): He was a radical social critic who, because of his fundamentally radical Christian commitments, saw the Catholic Church as not living up to its own ideals, and felt like he had to try to call it to account. I would compare Ivan Illich, in some ways, with Dorothy Day, who was one of the founders of the Catholic worker movement. She was a loyal member of the Catholic Church, but she felt like that in many instances, the church wasn’t living up to its own Gospel ideals and, therefore, had to criticize it.

LYDEN: But Illich didn’t just talk about the failings of the church in society. He talked about many sociological phenomena that have failed the populous, whether it was science or a more secular notion of education. He said it often made people dumb. And he came to say that hospitals created more sickness than they did health. His ideas seemed to bleed over into becoming provocative almost for the sake of being provocative.

Prof. MITCHAM: But I think that's really a misreading of Illich to say that he was just a radical provocateur for the purposes of being a provocateur. He really identified something which he called 'counterproductivity.' Oftentimes in many areas of our lives, we pursue something to the point where it becomes counterproductive; it doesn't get us what we're after. But because we're so committed to the pursuit of this—which, at one point, was effective—we failed to be able to step back and take a critical look at what we're doing. And he saw this operative in many different social institutions. And I think in a lot of areas, we now almost take some of his insights for granted.

LYDEN: Did you ever meet him?

Prof. MITCHAM: Yes. I've known Illich for 15 years.

LYDEN: And what sort of a person was he? You've undoubtedly had conversations.

Prof. MITCHAM: Well-educated, multilingual, in some sense, autodidact. He loved to have conversations around a dinner table; a little pasta, a candle, good friends, talking. But the conversation would be going on simultaneously in German, in French, in English and in Spanish. And he would be trying to translate for people who were missing things in other languages and yet carrying on the conversation, sort of like a maestro, almost like a music conductor. And at the same time, pushing everybody to think harder, to think more deeply about what they were saying. It was a remarkable experience.

LYDEN: Did he feel, in any sense, Mr. MITCHAM, at the end of his life that history had passed him by?

Prof. MITCHAM: Yes. I think that at the end of his life, he was completely ready to die because he realized that his historical role had been completed.

LYDEN: Well, thank you very much for speaking with us, Mr. MITCHAM.

Prof. MITCHAM: Thank you.

LYDEN: Carl Mitcham is co-editor of the book "The Challenges of Ivan Illich: A Collective Reflection." He spoke to us from Golden, Colorado.

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## **The Death of Ivan Illich: A Personal Reflection**

by Lee Hoinacki

On Monday, December 2, 2002, Barbara Duden called me from Bremen, Germany. Here in Philadelphia where I now live it was about half-past twelve noon, and we were eating lunch. She said that Ivan Illich had died that morning.

Since I had seen Ivan in September, and since we had such a good talk at that time, I was reluctant to attend the planned funeral. Barbara would be surrounded by good friends.



That afternoon and evening I started calling and sending emails to people on this side of the Atlantic. One answer, for example, from Gustavo Esteva, contained a column for the Mexico City newspaper, *Reforma* on Ivan's death; he had already written this!

The next morning, I continued contacting people. In the afternoon a Bremen friend, Antje Menk called, saying that the young people there (Silja Samerski and Matthias Riger, I guess) were insisting that I come, and she was sending a ticket. I was unable, then, to finish going through my list of people to notify.

I called Peter Bohn, another Illich friend in Philadelphia, since we had agreed to meet downtown the next day after a demonstration against the war in front of the Federal Building; I told him I was going to Germany and would not be there to meet him.

He said he, too, would check on a ticket. Later, he called back to say he had a ticket for me that evening to Frankfurt. Then Samar Farage called from Germany to say that they couldn't buy a ticket for me from that side of the Atlantic. I explained that Peter had just bought me an electronic ticket. I had a few minutes to pack and get to the airport.

Arriving in Frankfurt, I took a train to Bremen. In the train station, I was joyfully surprised to find Michael, a young friend, there to meet me. He took a chance that I would come in on that train! We walked to Barbara's home, getting there shortly after 3 p.m.

Michael had seen Ivan early Monday morning, and they talked about a seminar Ivan was to direct on the weekend. Ivan said he was tired and lay down on a futon in the living room. Michael left and, some minutes later Silja, who lives down the street, came in (she has a key to the house), and found him dead. Barbara, who was in Hannover at her teaching job, had spoken to Ivan on the phone about noon.

When I arrived at the house, each person, Barbara especially, warmly embraced me; I felt embarrassed by such a genuine outpouring of affection. I entered the front room and found the body of Ivan resting on the futon where he had died. A burning candle and cut flowers stood nearby ... a symbol of life ... an image of death.

Using the Breviary that contained the Latin Vulgate, the one Ivan and I said each day whenever we were together, I recited some of the *Officium defunctorum*, the office of the dead.

Wednesday evening was a time to greet old friends who had come for the wake and funeral. So many good people, all of whom had been introduced to me by Ivan since the time I first visited him in Germany in 1978 ... some now close friends.

Early Thursday morning we lifted the body into a plain wooden coffin, and the lid was screwed down with finger-nuts.

The large church of St. Johann was nearly filled the next morning for the Mass. Various friends of Ivan participated in the ceremonies, well arranged by Wolfgang Sachs. The pastor, Propst Ansgar Luttel, who had been to see Ivan some days earlier, spoke the homily/eulogy, acknowledging his awareness of who the man, Ivan Illich, was.

Many of those at the Mass gathered in the chapel of the distant cemetery, Oberneulander, for a short service, then proceeded to the gravesite for the burial. I was especially impressed by the ceremony in which each person present went up to the open grave and threw a handful of dirt on the lowered coffin; some also threw flowers.

All were then directed to a hotel for coffee and a bowl of soup. For some, it was the last event of the celebration, since they had to return to their jobs and homes.

My final feeling was one of joy. Various factors together, not in any order, contributed to this feeling. From reports of those persons who were present, the meeting between Ivan and Propst Luttel, some days before Ivan's death, was most cordial and filled with understanding. In the light of this report, I must regard the visit, especially the time the two of them were together alone, as a grace-filled moment for Ivan.

At the church, just before the Mass, a young man came up to greet and embrace me. Almost ten years earlier there had been a serious break between him and Ivan ... from close intimacy to anger, distance, pain on both sides. He and Ivan never again spoke to one another.

Before and after the break, I visited him, stayed with his parents, and tried to be a friend; we had been quite close. Because of his lack of enthusiasm for my visits, several years ago I had stopped traveling to the town where he lived.

He traveled five hours to get to the funeral, and had to return home almost immediately after the ceremonies for his teaching duties the next day. He came back to Bremen to see me on Saturday and Sunday; we had long talks. I think that much of the woundedness that divided him and Ivan is now healed.

Another person, a young woman, was also bitterly estranged from Ivan. She had moved from a close friendship to a kind of smoldering anger. She and I had also been good friends, but I had not seen her for two or three years. While in Bremen, I sent her a greeting card, and received an immediate friendly reply by email (sent to the Illich email address). She was happy to hear from me, and invited me to come visit her and her family.

These three events were beyond what I could have hoped for ... they do not respond to my sense of causality ... they are, strictly speaking, gratuitous gifts, manifestations of merciful Providence.

Well, maybe. They may also represent a kind of higher superstition, that is, my superstition. True, they are signs, but signs of what? I take them to be signs of grace. But the very fact that I interpret them in this way may indicate a superstitious need in me ... I need signs of grace (there's a hard saying in the New Testament in which the Lord rebukes those who seek signs; see, e.g. Mk. 8.12).

I regard these events as a blessing on Ivan's life, as indicating a good far beyond what even the most perceptive eulogists will be able to cite. They indicate the important aspect of Ivan's stance: How he stands before God ... (again, maybe!).

Ivan suffered from physical pain which, as far as I could tell, was constant and almost unremitting ... and this for some years. I think he also suffered certain effects from the opium that he took to help bear the pain, but as I don't know anything about

the physical pain, I know even less about the effects of opium. He was also greatly and increasingly distressed in his attempts to be a friend to different people.

I think, however, beyond all the above, he experienced another terrible pain: the inability to say what he wanted to say: about the *corruptio optimi*, the *mysterium iniquitatis*, the relationship between these two realities, their respective relationships to the world and to the Church, and the interrelationships of all these complex cultural/historical/ecclesiastical, divine affairs.

In our long conversations on these themes, the struggle and frustration were evident ... and awful to witness. He who had said so much so well in his life was now unable to speak. And he was acutely aware of his inability to articulate what he vaguely felt to be the truth.

Given the other pains and sufferings, maybe especially the long-range effects of the opium, it was impossible for him ever to overcome this final confusion. Therefore, I felt it was good that he died sooner rather than later. In a sense, it was already years too late.

David Cayley is now working on some tapes he recorded in which Ivan attempts to make a last statement. I've read most of the transcripts and there are nearly insuperable problems ... of clarity and theological precision. But maybe Cayley can pull off what he did with the life and thought of Simone Weil! From her eminently difficult writings, he put together a magnificent intellectual/witness portrait.

So, my overall feeling is one of immense gratitude. Ivan Illich suffered various quite different kinds of pain in the days, weeks, months, and final years preceding his death. All that is now swallowed up in the fulfillment of his faith.

# In Review

*The Fall 2003 Ellul Forum review section will expand to include regular “re-views” of Jacques Ellul’s books along with other significant works.*

## Harvard and the Unabomber: The Education of An American Terrorist

by Alston Chase. New York: Norton, 2003. 432 pages.

Alston Chase, a writer and independent scholar specializing in intellectual history, was the author of a major article on “Harvard and the Making of the Unabomber” in *The Atlantic* in June 2000. His new book is a brilliant, extremely well-researched expansion of that article. The focus of the narrative is, of course, Theodore Kaczynski, now serving a sentence of life in prison without possibility of parole for his bombs which murdered or maimed several people during his 1978-95 “Unabomber” terrorist attacks on representative leaders of “industrial society.”

By an eerie coincidence, Kaczynski was a professor of mathematics at the University of California, Berkeley, for my final two years enrolled there, 1967-69. I was an odd combination history major and math minor, preparing at that time to be a high school teacher, but had no math classes with Kaczynski and wasn’t even aware of his existence in our huge university, embroiled in a great deal of chaos and protest those years.

More to the point for *Ellul Forum* readers, Kaczynski was a great enthusiast for Jacques Ellul from 1971 or 1972 onward. Kaczynski said about Ellul’s *Technological Society*, “when I read the book . . . for the first time, I was delighted, because I thought, ‘Here is someone who is saying what I have already been thinking’” (p. 92). Kaczynski’s brother David later said that Ellul’s *Technological Society* “became Ted’s Bible” (p. 332). According to author Chase, Kaczynski even exchanged letters with Ellul. Now those would be a fascinating read!

Kaczynski, you will recall, managed to get the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* to print his very lengthy essay “Industrial Society and Its Future” (the “Unabomber Manifesto”) in September 1995 by promising to cease his terrorist killings if they did so. This “victory” led to his defeat because David Kaczynski recognized the author of the text as his brother and blew the whistle on him.

The “Manifesto” did not refer specifically to Ellul (thankfully!) but it is indisputable that Ellul’s concept of “Technique” as a way of thinking (not just a set of tools), as

an ensemble of means that had become an end in itself, ever expanding throughout the world and into every domain of life, having a virtually deterministic, necessary character, was central to Kaczynski's view of the world.

Alston Chase gets three cheers from this reviewer for the understanding of Ellul he brings to his analysis. "Despite corresponding with Ellul, Kaczynski ignored virtually all that the French philosopher had written since 1964 . . . It would seem Kaczynski 'imprinted' on the early Ellul and ignored what followed. . . he did not even own a copy of *The Ethics of Freedom*. Kaczynski's faith in the efficacy of revolution had apparently remained unchanged despite, not because of, the later admonitions of Ellul" (p. 93).

"Curiously, Kaczynski revered Joseph Conrad and Jacques Ellul, both of whom deplored violence and advocated the spiritual life. . . Blinded by scientism and rage, he missed the message of Ellul, Paz, and Conrad altogether" (pp. 363364). Chase shows how Kaczynski's "revolution" illustrated precisely the phenomenon against which Ellul warned in his *Autopsy of Revolution*: a violent, technological response simply reinforces the grip of Technique!

Chase's careful personal and intellectual biography of Kaczynski delivers a read that is not only fascinating but illuminating and persuasive. It offers insights not just into Kaczynski himself but into the broader topic of terrorism. Terrorists use ideas to justify appalling acts of violence but ideas alone do not create terrorists. Families, teachers, institutions, experiences, and, finally, personal choices are all part of the true explanation. Kaczynski emerges not as a clinically insane person but as a brilliantly twisted, deluded, enraged, and evil man. Chase shows how technological society is partly, but not wholly, to blame for the creation of a Kaczynski. A remarkable book.

*Reviewed by David W. Gill*

## **Advert: The Jacques Ellul Special Collection at Wheaton College**

### **A Report from David Malone, Librarian**

Wheaton College, a private liberal arts college founded in 1860, located just west of Chicago, has gathered the most comprehensive collection of Jacques Ellul materials outside of France. In the mid-1980s, Dr. Joyce Main Hanks began to transfer copies of Ellul materials to Wheaton College.

The Wheaton collection now includes nearly all of Ellul's published books, articles, and essays, reviews of his work, as well as various book manuscripts, course lecture notes, public lectures and addresses, and some unpublished material. It includes audio (and some video) materials, such as sixteen taped interviews of Ellul by Joyce Hanks. The most significant recent addition was nearly 200 audiotapes of Ellul's lectures and Bible studies made by Bordeaux physician Franck Brugerolle. We collect as many works

by and about Ellul as possible, regardless of form or language, including master's theses and doctoral dissertations.

Our purpose is not only to preserve Ellul's archives but to encourage the study of his works and ideas. Our hope is for increased awareness and involvement by Ellul scholars, researchers, and academicians. We invite your dialog, encouragement, recommendations, and ideas for additional materials. We would welcome the development of lectures, seminars, and study programs extending the study of Ellul and enhancing the collection's use.

Access an inventory of the Ellul collection at: <http://www.wheaton.edu/learnres/arcs/collects/sc16/> Contact staff at 630-752-5705 or [Special.Collections@wheaton.edu](mailto:Special.Collections@wheaton.edu)

## News & Notes

*Please send any news, announcements, or inquiries of interest to Ellul Forum readers. E-mail to [IJES@ellul.org](mailto:IJES@ellul.org) or mail to IJES, P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705 USA. Deadline for Fall 2003 issue: September 15.*

—**Etienne Dravasa**, Professor Emeritus at the University of Bordeaux, recently wrote: "I was deeply touched to receive a copy of the December 2002 issue of *The Ellul Forum*. Jacques Ellul's work and his legacy deserve the exceptional homage which is paid to him in *The Forum*. It was a great honor for me to be a personal friend of Jacques Ellul for more than fifty years."

—**Grant Shoffstall** ([gwshoff@ilstu.edu](mailto:gwshoff@ilstu.edu)), a graduate student in sociology working toward the M.A. with Prof. Richard Stivers at Illinois State University, will present a paper on Jacques Ellul at the August 15-19, 2003, meeting of the American Sociological Association in Chicago. Grant welcomes contacts with other sociologists interested in Ellul and is seeking information on doctoral level sociology programs and faculty conducive to his further study of Ellul.

—**VIRGINIA LANDGRAF** ([kaencat@hotmail.com](mailto:kaencat@hotmail.com)) successfully defended her Ph.D. dissertation in Christian Ethics at Princeton Theological Seminary, "Abstract Power and the God of Love: A Critical Assessment of the Place of Institutions in Jacques Ellul's Anthropology of Dialectical Relationships" under the direction of Prof. Max Stackhouse. Ginny, a lay theologian active in the Presbyterian Church (USA), spent two years in Thailand with the Peace Corps and has an M.A. from the Graduate Theological Union. She is interested in seminary teaching, preferably abroad.

—**RANDY ATAIDE** ([rataide@MountainViewFruit.com](mailto:rataide@MountainViewFruit.com)) is receiving his M.A. in Theology (supervised by Prof. Mark Baker) from Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in Fresno CA. His thesis was entitled "If We Serve a God of Productivity Is There Room for Jesus? An Analysis and Application of Jacques Ellul's Thesis of Technique in the Agri-Business World." A full-time businessman operating a group of fruit storage, distribution, sales, and marketing companies ([www.MountainViewFruit.com](http://www.MountainViewFruit.com)), Randy completed the J.D. before his M.A., and has been accepted into the Executive Edu-

cation Program for Owners/Presidents of Companies at Harvard Business School in February 2004. He plans to continue making business his primary career but welcomes contacts and opportunities to share his ideas, possibly including the publication of his thesis.

—**MAX KIRK** (maxkirk@canada.com) is a mediator in private practice in British Columbia. He is looking for conversation and dialogue about the struggle within Judaism with the religious challenge of modern technology—and how this struggle may be at the heart of the conflict concerning Jerusalem today. Max had a very brief correspondence with Jacques Ellul and would welcome contacts with others familiar with Ellul's thought.

—**ANDY BAKER** (jesusradicals@jesusradicals.com) and a few friends organized the "Jesus Radicals" web site originally as a tribute to Vieques student protesters who were detained and barred from the base. The site evolved into a place to network, discuss issues, and find resources on radical Christianity and anarchism. Many visitors to the web site are encountering and appreciating Ellul's ideas on anarchy, money, and power for the first time. Andy is headed for the M.A. program at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary this fall and hopes to follow that with a Ph.D. somewhere.

—**KUNIHIDE MATSUTANI** (kuni0070@yahoo.co.jp) is now finishing his Ph.D. in political theory and intellectual history at Tokyo's International Christian University. His doctoral thesis focuses on the development of Ellul's theory of technology in the context of the political and intellectual climate of France in the 1930s, with particular emphasis on anarchism, non-conformism, and personalism. Matsutani earned his B.A. from Massachusetts and his M.A. at ICU (Tokyo) with a thesis on Foucault. A few of Ellul's works have been translated into Japanese but Matsutani's thesis would be the first monograph on Ellul to appear in Japanese.

—**STEVE PEARSON** (brainy pirate@hotmail.com) informs us that a Yahoo discussion group on Jacques Ellul has been intermittently active with discussions of both Ellul's theology and his technology. No guarantees on quality in these free-for-all cyberspace discussions, of course, but if anyone is craving some interaction about Ellul . . . here is a possibility. Steve, himself, is beginning a Ph.D. program in Comparative Literature at the University of Georgia with a focus on the devotional literature of prayer and spirituality. Contact Steve if you are interested in Ellul's take on the spiritual life and in what an Ellulian literary theory might look like.

—**SEBASTIAN LUPAK** (sebastian.lupak@gdansk.agora.pl) is a journalist is Gdansk, Poland, with an interest in acquiring more of Ellul's books—and in meeting or corresponding with other students of Ellul's thought.

—**CARLO CARRENHO** (carlo@carrenho.com.br) has a small publishing company in Brazil and is interested in publishing Ellul in Portuguese. Anyone interested in supporting or participating in this project should contact him.

—**MATTHEW PATTILLO** (matthewpattillo@hotmail.com) will present a paper on Jacques Ellul and Rene Girard at the June 18-21 meeting of the Colloquium on

Violence and Religion in Innsbruck. Others interested in Girard's mimetic theory and its bearing on Ellul's work should contact him.

—**JEAN-LUC PORQUET**, a journalist at the French satirical political journal *Canard enchaîné*, has just published a book entitled *Jacques Ellul: L'homme qui avait presque tout prévu* (Paris: Le cherche midi, 2003. 286 pages). The book can be purchased from Librairie Mollat ([www.mollat.com](http://www.mollat.com)) for 18 euros (plus shipping). Porquet presents Ellul as “the man who foresaw almost everything.” The heart of the book is Porquet's review of twenty ideas and phenomena of our technological civilization which Ellul discussed and analyzed well in advance of their dominance. Porquet's book will be reviewed in the Fall 2003 issue of *The Ellul Forum*

—**ANDREW GODDARD** ([andrew.goddard@wycliffe-hall.oxford.ac.uk](mailto:andrew.goddard@wycliffe-hall.oxford.ac.uk)) has recently published a new book, *Living the Word, Resisting the World: The Life and Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Paternoster Press, 2002, xxiv, 378 pages; [www.paternoster-publishing.com](http://www.paternoster-publishing.com)). It can be purchased in the US through Eisenbrauns ([www.eisenbrauns.com](http://www.eisenbrauns.com)) for about \$30 plus shipping. *Ellul Forum* review scheduled Fall 2003.

## How Big Is the Tent?

*by David W. Gill*

President, International Jacques Ellul Society

Not too long ago I attended a concert by Diana Krall and heard her make a sardonic reference to unnamed “jazz police” who had questioned her jazz authenticity. More recently a couple friends of mine in the “opera police” sputtered and fumed at a giant poster promoting the latest album from Italian singing star Andrea Bocelli, which hung just across the train platform from us.

Such experiences raise the question of whether The International Jacques Ellul Society—or any other individuals or organizations—might be tempted to act as a sort of “Ellul police,” passing judgment on who is or is not qualified as an “authentic” representative of Ellul's thought. Another way to put it is to ask whether we want a “little tent” accommodating only those with whom we agree—or a “big tent” that welcomes diversity and disagreement.

The IJES choice is to welcome anyone who in any way supports the goals of (1) preserving and disseminating the literary and intellectual heritage of Jacques Ellul, (2) extending his social critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) extending his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom. Affirm these goals, pay your annual dues, and you are in our “big tent” Ellul organization.

One reason for our “big tent” philosophy is tactical: all of us who care about Ellul need to work together if we want to accomplish the goals listed above. We are relatively small in number and scattered all over the globe. Publishing projects, conferences, and



the like, are costly and laborintensive. If we really care about Ellul's legacy, this is the time for collaboration, not fragmentation.

The historical reality is that an incredibly diverse group of people looks back to Jacques Ellul as a primary teacher and source of inspiration. Our current IJES leadership reflects some of that diversity: our professions range from attorney to university professor to independent scholar; our specialties range from communications to history, philosophy, language, theology, religion, ethics, political science, and law; some are active in churches (of various denominations) and some are not; we live in all regions of the United States and in England and France.

In the early 1970s, I recall being impressed at seeing Ellul's name in a catalog course description for Cal's Boalt Hall law school—as well as in sociology and theology course descriptions in other departments and schools. I was amazed at the diverse parade of Ellul admirers which I soon became aware of: mainstream Lutheran historian Martin Marty, *Brave New World* author Aldous Huxley, L'Abri evangelical intellectual Os Guinness, ex-Watergate-con, “born again” Prison Fellowship leader Chuck Colson, Anabaptist theologians John Howard Yoder and Vernard Eller, Catholic Worker leader Jeff Dietrich, counter-cultural historian Theodore Roszak, southern Christian church social activists Will Campbell and James Holloway, French professor Joyce Hanks and others now on our IJES board . . . and this is just a sample. Today, the Ellul tent stretches to include Jose Bove, the French farmer and anti-globalization activist, and Andy Baker and his “Jesus Radicals,” who, inspired by Ellul's version of Christian anarchy and discipleship, are out there bearing witness and getting arrested for protesting America's international violence.

This diversity among the students of Jacques Ellul is a wonderful thing in a world of partisan orthodoxies and narrow affinity groups. Little or nothing is gained, and much can be lost, by evading discussion with those different from ourselves and with whom we may disagree. Learning is rarely enhanced by narrowing our debates too soon. Whether based on fear or ignorance (two common sources), a strategy of exclusion is misguided.

The bottom line on this topic is that Jacques Ellul himself engaged all comers and viewpoints. He read widely and welcomed engagement with his critics as well as enthusiasts. He constructively stimulated the thinking and behavior of an unusually wide and diverse group of listeners and readers. He often wrote and said that his objective was not to provide a set of answers but rather to provide people with improved means to think for themselves. If Ellul's “anarchy” means anything, it allows for freedom, risk, transgression, deviance, and a readiness to be out of control.

In light of all of this, the IJES tent is designed to be big. We welcome your entry, your ideas, and your participation, and we encourage you to spread the word about the IJES to everyone you think might be interested.

# Advert: International Jacques Ellul Society

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The IJES (with its francophone sister-society, L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul) links together scholars and friends of various specializations, vocations, backgrounds, and nations, who share a common interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), long time professor at the University of Bordeaux. Our objectives are (1) to preserve and disseminate his literary and intellectual heritage, (2) to extend his social critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) to extend his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

The IJES and AIJE have been founded by a group of long-time students, scholars, and friends of Jacques Ellul, with the counsel and support of Jean, Yves, and Dominique Ellul, and as a French-American collaboration.

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Julianne Chatelain, a long time student of Ellul's thought, has voluntarily, in her spare time, helped construct and maintain the joint web site of the IJES and AIJE at <http://www.ellul.org>[[www.ellul.org](http://www.ellul.org). This is where you will find • information about IJES and AIJE activities and plans, • a brief and accurate biography of Jacques Ellul, and • a complete bibliography of Ellul's books in French and English.

#### *The Ellul Forum: 1988-2002, Issues 1-30 (compact disc)*

The Ellul Forum was founded by Prof. Darrell Fasching in 1988 as a twice-yearly publication for those interested in Ellul to exchange ideas and opinions and maintain contact while scattered all over North America and beyond. The first thirty issues

of The Forum, some 500 published pages total, are now available (only) on a single compact disc which can be purchased for \$15 (postage included). Send payment with your order to "IJES," P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705 USA.

### **Cahiers Jacques Ellul**

#### **Pour Une Critique de la Societe Technicienne**

The first volume of an annual journal called Cahiers Jacques Ellul has just appeared in France and is available for 20 euros (postage included) to individuals outside France, and for 25 euros to libraries. The theme of the initial 2003 volume is Les Annees Personalistes ("The Personalist Years"), with articles by Patrick Troude-Chastenet, and Jean-Louis Loubet del Bayle as well as from the Jacques Ellul archives.

The editor of Cahiers Jacques Ellul is Patrick Chastenet, President of L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul, the sister society of the IJES. Cahiers Jacques Ellul promises to be an essential new reference for those seriously interested in Ellul's ideas.

#### **Librairie Mollat—new books in French**

Librairie Mollat is one of the great bookstores you will ever visit, occupying a labyrinthine building in the center of old Bordeaux. If you cannot visit in person, Mollat's web site (<http://www.mollat.com>)[[www.mollat.com](http://www.mollat.com)] is an excellent resource for finding French language books, including those by and about Ellul. Mollat accepts credit cards over the web and will mail books anywhere in the world.

#### **Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works**

by Joyce Main Hanks. Research in Philosophy and Technology. Supplement 5. Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 2000. xiii., 206 pages. \$87. ISBN: 076230619X.

This is the essential guide for anyone doing research in Jacques Ellul's writings. An excellent brief biography is followed by a 140-page annotated bibliography of Ellul's fifty books and thousand-plus articles and a thirty-page subject index. Hank's work is comprehensive, accurate, and invariably helpful. This may be one of the more expensive books you buy for your library; it will surely be one of the most valuable. Visit [www.elsevier.com](http://www.elsevier.com) for ordering information.

#### **Alibris—used book source**

The Alibris web site (<http://www.alibris.com>)[[www.alibris.com](http://www.alibris.com)] recently gave thirty titles of used Jacques Ellul books in English translation available to order at reasonable prices. Alibris could be the answer if you are searching for an out-of-print Ellul title.

#### **Reprints of Nine Eerdmans Books By Ellul**

The William B. Eerdmans Company published several English translations of Ellul volumes that have been out of print for a few years now. Now, by arrangement with Ingram and Spring Arbor, individual reprint copies of these volumes can be purchased and in your hands in a week or so. The books and prices listed at the Eerdmans web site are as follows: The Ethics of Freedom (\$40), The Humiliation of the Word (\$26), The Judgment of Jonah (\$13), The Meaning of the City (\$20), The Politics of God and the Politics of Man (\$19), Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes (\$28), The Subversion of Christianity (\$20), and The Technological Bluff (\$35). Sources and

Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul translated by Marva Dawn is also available (price unknown).

To order any of these books, go to your bookstore (or on-line book dealer) and have them “back order” the titles you want. Do not go as an individual customer to Eerdmans or Ingram/Spring Arbor. For more information visit “Books on Demand” at <http://www.eerdmans.com>][[www.eerdmans.com](http://www.eerdmans.com)].

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**Issue #32 Fall 2003 — Violence,  
Terrorism, and Technology**

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### **For the Critique of Technological Civilization**



Jacques Ellul at age 70.

Photo by Lucia Gill, July 1982

"Liberating violence cannot establish a society's values; for if they are to be communal values they will have to be accepted as good and true by every member of the community (not only by a majority).

But that can never happen when the values are imposed by, or as the result of, violence. . . The Algerian war certainly has not led the Algerians to accept Western values. ”

Jacques Ellul

Violence 1969 pp. 114-115

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**The Ellul Forum**

**For the Critique of Technological Civilization**

**Founded 1988**

The Ellul Forum is published twice per year, in the Spring and Fall. Its purpose is to analyze and apply Jacques Ellul's thought to our technological civilization and carry forward both his sociological and theological analyses in new directions.

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## From the Editor

Jacques Ellul understood violence personally and came to grips with it intellectually. He lived in the maelstrom of war and violence. During World War II years, 1939-45, he was fired from his position on the Strasbourg University faculty (1940), his father was imprisoned and died under German military detention (1942), and Ellul and his family subsisted as refugee farmers while working with the Resistance in the Entredeux-Mers region outside Bourdeaux. The rancorous debates over the Algerian fight for independence from France during the Fifties, the student revolts of the Sixties, and the ongoing street-level conflicts of juvenile delinquents and gang members were among Ellul's special concerns after the War.

Ellul's *Violence: Reflections from a Christian Perspective* (1970 English; 1972 French *Contre les violents*) is a provocative analysis not confined to war in a narrow sense but ranging broadly across the spectrum from coercive political acts to revolutionary violence to institutional violence. Mennonite Professor Mark Baker "re-views" this classic on page 20.

In his major analysis of Ellul's work on violence, Andrew Goddard observes that it is "structured around the poles of freedom and necessity" (*Living the Word, Resisting the World*, Paternoster, 2002, p. 197). Certainly it is natural that *The Ellul Forum* dedicated to "carrying forward Ellul's analyses in new directions" would publish this issue on violence and terror, and do so in broader terms than war itself. From the myriad problems in this violent 21<sup>st</sup> century, we focus on three— war, terrorism, and surveillance.

In this issue, Andrew Goddard examines Ellul's refusal of just war theory, despite its dominance in the Christian tradition. As a Professor of the History and Sociology of Institutions in the Law Faculty, Ellul would have appreciated Dal Yong Jin's historical and legal analysis of the technology of cyberterrorism. David Lyon is the research director of the international Surveillance Project based at Queen's University, investigating surveillance, risk management, and social ordering in global information societies. He reflects on the rapid growth in existing surveillance trends produced by 9/11.

*The Ellul Forum* nurtures networks of discussion and learning. Interested readers are invited to engage the authors directly (contact info given at head of each major article). As always, manuscripts (or proposals) you wish to have considered for *The Ellul Forum* are welcomed by the Editor. Material for "News and Notes," "Ellul Resources," and queries about book reviews should be sent to the Associate Editor, David Gill.

Our upcoming Spring 2004 issue (#33), guest edited by Joyce Hanks, will mark the tenth anniversary of Jacques Ellul's death.

*Mea culpa*: our last issue (Spring 2003, #31) mistakenly omitted the name of Andoni Alonso from the title line as co-author (with Carl Mitcham) of the Ivan Illich obituary we republished from the Madrid daily *El Pais*. Our apologies to Andoni Alonso.

*Clifford G. Christians, Editor editor@ellul.org*

## Ellul on Violence and Just War

by Andrew Goddard

*Andrew Goddard (andrew.goddard@wycliffe-hall.oxford.ac.uk) is Tutor in Christian Ethics at Wycliffe Hall and a member of the Theology Faculty at Oxford University. His new book Living the Word, Resisting the World: The Life and Thought of Jacques Ellul (Paternoster, 2002) is reviewed on page 19 of this issue of The Ellul Forum.*

How should Christians respond to the violence of war? What are those, who want to be faithful disciples of Christ, to say and to do? As Ellul states in the opening sentence of his book on the subject, “The churches and theologians.. have never been in unanimous agreement in their views on violence in human society”.<sup>1</sup> There has, nevertheless, been a predominant approach to the question of war, namely that of the “just war tradition”. Ellul is a trenchant critic of this way of thinking and yet, as often in his writing, his comments are lacking in detailed engagement with the specific arguments of his opponents. Instead, he provides a broad-brush account and critique. While making some strong and valid objections, this is bound to leave anyone sympathetic to the just war tradition feeling rather dis-satisfied, perhaps even that they have been subjected to the “violence” of caricature.<sup>2</sup>

Given the importance of this subject and the strong differences of opinion found among Christians which results in divided witness to the world, it is necessary to step back and identify the fundamental differences between the just war tradition and Ellul’s thinking and to ascertain whether any constructive dialogue can take place between them. This article highlights two areas in which the wider rationale and method of Ellul and the just war tradition stand in tension with each other, and it acknowledges both strengths and weaknesses that can be seen when the two approaches are placed in dialogue.

The heart of the divergence between Ellul’s account of violence and that of the mainstream Christian tradition is perhaps most easily understood by reference to the two terms which identify that tradition - “just war”. Ellul questions both the central

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Violence: Reflections from a Christian Perspective* (London: SCM Press, 1970), p. 1. All page references in the text refer to this volume.]]

<sup>2</sup> The main critiques and account of the historical origins of the tradition are found in his categorisation of this approach as one of “compromise” (*Violence*, pp. 1-9) and his appendix on conscientious objection (*Anarchy and Christianity*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991, pp. 915). A less polemical account of the origins of the Christian just war tradition is found in his study of the history of institutions (*Histoire des Institutions Vol 2*, (Paris: PUF, 1989, pp. 506-7, 525-7). Particularly given our current context,

moral category and frame of reference to be used in thinking about the subject and the central moral task of such moral thinking.

*Subject Matter - War or Violence?*

It is of the utmost importance that Ellul's account is focused on *violence*, and interestingly, in the original French is entitled *Contre les violents*.<sup>3</sup> The specific question of *war* is therefore set in the wider context of the phenomenon of *violence*. He does not concentrate on "hostile contention by means of armed forces, carried on between nations, states, or rulers, or between parties in the same nation or state; the employment of armed forces against a foreign power, or against an opposing party in the state."<sup>4</sup> Instead, he insists that thinking about this specific subject can only be properly done once there is, in the words of the title of his book's third chapter, "Christian realism in the face of violence".

This approach marks a significant shift in understanding the question. The great Christian theologians of the just war tradition generally approach their discussion from two angles. In some contexts, it is a question about how a confessing Christian with a particular political or military responsibility in society is to act or indeed whether they can faithfully remain in certain positions given the duties that will be incumbent upon them.<sup>5</sup> In others, it is seeking to elucidate the obligations of love and the prohibitions entailed by the specific commandment against murder.<sup>6</sup> In thinking about "war", in other words, we are being asked to reflect on a form of practical, political action that raises a fundamental moral question because it requires participants to be involved in the taking of human life.

Ellul, from the opening pages of his book, resets and critiques this tradition within his own predominant category of violence. So, categorizing this strand of Christian thinking as "compromise", he places the early Christian concerns about the state in relation to "violence". "They saw that the state used violence against its enemies, internal or external. For war certainly seemed violence pure and simple, and the police operated by violence" (p. 2). The challenge that remained even when Christians held political office and the state ceased persecution of the church is expressed in the following terms - "the political power continued to use violence" (p. 3). Ellul then explains how theologians and canonists responded to this challenge of what he insists on calling "internal violence" and "external violence" by the state.

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it is also important to note that he sees this tradition in part shaped by Islam's subversion of Christian faith (*Subversion of Christianity*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), pp.100-4.

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Contre les violents* (Le Centurion, 1972).

<sup>4</sup> Oxford English Dictionary's primary definition of 'war'.

<sup>5</sup> So, in the tradition, among the key classic texts are Augustine's letter to Count Boniface (Letter 189, from 418AD) with the counsel, "Do not think that it is impossible for any one to please God while engaged in active military service" and Luther's "Whether Soldiers, too, Can be Saved" (1526) written to respond to the concerns of Assa von Kram of Wittenberg about reconciling his Christian faith and military profession.

<sup>6</sup> Thus Aquinas' main discussions in the *Summa* are (a) *ST II-II*, q40 which is entitled "of war" and, importantly, under the discussion of charity and (b) *ST II-II*, q64 "Of Murder".

In relation to “internal violence” Ellul discerns two key redefinitions taking place. A distinction is drawn between the state and human beings, and it is held that the state “never acts by violence when it constrains, condemns and kills” (p. 3). Instead, its actions are distinguished from “violence” by being conceived of as “force” so that the state “is the institution which demonstrates the difference between violence and force. There is all the difference between violence and force” (p. 4). The issue then becomes whether or not the state’s use of force is “just” or “unjust” and conformity to the law is here the determinative factor. However, even when the state does not conform to the law it still uses force - albeit now unjust force - rather than violence. This reasoning, Ellul claims, was an attempt “to clear the state of the charge of violence by explaining that it was not violence” (p. 5).

In relation to the external violence of war, Ellul contends that the church reasoned this way: “To deny the state the right to go to war was to condemn it to extinction;” yet the state was ordained by God, and therefore the state “must have the right to wage war” (p. 5). This he claims (though without citing any supporting evidence) was the origin and fundamental rationale for “the casuistry of the just war” whose evolving tradition he sums up in terms of seven conditions to make a war just. Although Ellul acknowledges that these “have theoretical solidity” (p. 6), he questions their practicality and relevance, especially in the contemporary world.

Ellul’s own contrasting approach to the question is shaped by what he calls “Christian realism.” “The Christian who wants to find out what he ought to do, must be realistic; this is the first step”. The problem is that we need first to be clear what the Christian must be realistic about and herein lies the fundamental weakness of Ellul’s work. “Violence” we have seen to be the lens through which he re-interprets and critiques the just war tradition. It is the phenomenon about which he insists we must be realistic. But “violence” is itself never defined by Ellul.<sup>7</sup> Clearly it is broader than the just war tradition’s focus on the taking of human life, but just how broad it is remains unclear. The signs are, however, that for Ellul the term is exceedingly wide-ranging in its scope - “economic relations, class relations, are relations of violence, nothing else” (p. 86), “psychological violence.. is simply violence, whether it takes the form of propaganda, biased reports, meetings of secret societies that inflate the egos of their members, brainwashing or intellectual terrorism” (p. 97). It would appear that Konyndyk is broadly correct that violent behaviour for Ellul is “coercing someone in a way that violates his personhood”.<sup>8</sup> Given that “violence” is to be the over-arching interpretive category for Christian reflection on war, and is being used to explain Christian moral assessments in history which did not themselves primarily use this category, it

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<sup>7</sup> This is a common criticism of Ellul’s writing; for example, “The first question, then would seem to be: What is violence? But, strangely, Ellul does not address it” (Kenneth J. Konyndyk, “Violence” in Clifford G. Christians & Jay M. Van Hook (eds), *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays* (University of Illinois Press, 1981), p. 256.

<sup>8</sup> Konyndyk, *op.cit.*, p. 256.

would help if such a definition - or preferably a more precise one - had been given by Ellul himself.

Despite this weakness, there are two great strengths in Ellul's approach. Firstly, it refuses to mask the fact that punitive measures taken by political authority have the same basic structure as the wrong actions to which they respond. So fines (like stealing) take away people's property without their consent, imprisonment (like kidnapping) deprives persons of their liberty. Although this should be more obvious in war, the language of "force" means that it can be effectively forgotten. As Glover comments, "It is widely held that killing in war is quite different. It is not, and we need to think about the implications of this".<sup>9</sup> But this similarity need not mean moral differentiation is impossible: materially the act of sexual intercourse has a common structure whether it is joyful marital sex, adultery, fornication or rape; the insertion of a knife into human flesh could be an act of surgery or grievous bodily harm. Ellul formulates a stark law of the identity or sameness of all violence. When it is given a moral focus in order to insist that we cannot distinguish between just and unjust violence or violence that liberates and violence that enslaves, this simply asserts what really needs to be argued for.

Secondly, Ellul also highlights the continuity between the internal coercive actions of political authority ("police functions" as we might call them) and the external actions (military functions in war). Here there is continuity with the traditional just war understanding. That tradition similarly refuses to treat these as two independent spheres with different moralities or criteria for action. Ellul thus will be sympathetic to a common critique made by just war theorists. They point out that there is a tension (if not incoherence) in being a principled advocate of nonviolent pacifism but not being a non-violent anarchist (Ellul's own position) or being committed to just war thinking but absolutely opposed in all circumstances to capital punishment. Where Ellul differs fundamentally is that the just war tradition is marked by seeing the task of political authority as one which can legitimately be fulfilled - at home and abroad, through police and through military - through the subordination of all uses of "violence" to the pursuit of justice.

Ellul himself held such views in his first published book where, in discussing biblical texts such as Romans 13 on the "use of the sword", he writes,

The use of the sword in itself is not condemned. The use is subject to eventual condemnation, which will become a reality only if the sword serves either the obstruction of justice or the spirit of power. Within this eschatological perspective, man's judgment in the realm of law assumes its rightful value. His judgment is the reason why the use of the sword will not be condemned. Any use of it apart from man's judgment runs counter to God's will. It is law which, before God, permits the use of force.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Glover, *Causing Death and Saving Lives* (London: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 251.

<sup>10</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Theological Foundation of Law* (London: SCM Press, 1961), p. 113.

Although it is difficult to be clear as to why Ellul departed from this viewpoint, one factor is perhaps found in his comment that the just war tradition is “based on the conviction that man can retain control of violence, that violence can be kept in the service of order and justice and even of peace” (pp. 5-6). Ellul’s realism about violence appears to have led him to reject this fundamental presupposition which is essential to just war thinking. In contrast to the just war tradition and his own early views, not only does he place all reflection about war under the broader rubric and laws of violence, he sees violence (and so war as a subset within that) as a force which rules human beings. Occasionally in this writing he relates this to his theological understanding of the principalities and powers by naming violence as “one of the ‘rudiments’ (*stoicheia*) of this world”.<sup>11</sup> This is, once again, a feature of Ellul’s work which frustratingly he does not develop but it stands as a further reminder that the just war tradition, in making judgments about war, must avoid an unrealistic picture of sovereign individuals abstracted from the reality of power making choices about their actions. In making moral judgments about particular actions it is also vitally important to consider in all our thinking the work of the powers in the wider shaping of our society and politics.

*The Purpose - Justification or Confession?*

Ellul’s differences with the just war tradition are not limited to his insistence on approaching the subject of war through the much larger category of violence then understood by him in a much more globalistic and quasi-deterministic fashion. He has a fundamental objection to just war’s attempt to provide justification for certain violent actions. This objection would appear to take two forms.

First, in his realistic analysis of violence, one of the features Ellul identifies - his fifth and final law of violence - is that “the man who uses violence always tries to justify both it and himself” (p. 103). The horror and agony caused by violence means, he claims, that everyone who uses it seeks to demonstrate that they have acted morally when they have turned to violence. More controversial still - especially given that the Augustinian strand of the just war tradition appeals to “love of neighbor” as its rationale for the use of coercive force - Ellul explains that this universality of justification derives from the fact that “violence is an expression of hatred, has its source in hatred and signifies hatred. It is absolutely essential for us to realize that there is an unbreakable link between violence and hatred” (p. 104). The just war tradition is, therefore, in Ellul’s eyes simply one of the multiple forms of self-justification inevitably developed by fallen human beings in the face of their own violence.

Second, although Ellul can apparently accept that Christians will use violence, he refuses to accept their justifications for this. Instead, he emphasizes that “as Christians we must firmly refuse to accept whatever justifications are advanced” (p. 140). He is insistent that “in their radical refusal to justify violence, Christians must not leave the smallest breach” (p. 141). Although particularly clear in his discussion of violence, this reflects a wider feature of Ellul’s approach to the task of Christian ethics. He

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<sup>11</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Prayer and Modern Man* (New York: Seabury, 1970), p.174.

is constantly on the alert to prevent a Christian ethic from becoming a means of human self-justification that escapes God's gracious gift of justification by faith in Christ.<sup>12</sup> Violence, Ellul argues, is a sign of the fact that we have sinned and ruptured our communion with God. We must not, therefore, formulate means to justify it in certain circumstances. Instead, we must confess our sin and seek God's forgiveness. For Ellul, the important truth is that the Christian cannot have a good conscience. "The Christian, even when he permits himself to use violence in what he considers the best of causes, cannot either feel or say that he is justified; he can only confess that he is a sinner, submit to God's judgment, and hope for God's grace and forgiveness" (p. 138). It is, however, important to realize that Ellul as emphatically rejects pacifist-inspired forms of self-justification which are developed for a policy of non-violence. He is quite honest that, "in the face of the tragic problem of violence, the first truth to be discerned is that, whatever side he takes, the Christian can never have an easy conscience and never feel that he is pursuing the way of truth" (p. 138). Yoder is therefore right to describe Ellul as holding the view that "the Christian will have to use violence but will know that it is sinful",<sup>13</sup> but Ronald Ray is also correct in drawing attention to the fact that "even the Christian position of non-violence involves guilt".<sup>14</sup>

This approach to the question of a Christian attitude to war provides a necessary challenge to some of the uses Christians make of the just war tradition. That tradition too easily becomes a means by which "our side" in a military conflict is able to claim moral superiority over the enemy and believe itself not guilty. Too many politicians and Christian leaders uncritically apply the "criteria" for a just war in a simplistic manner. They can simply become a checklist of tests in order to show that the decision to go to war is justified and that right is on the side of their government. Ellul, in contrast, highlights the painful and tragic reality of living in a fallen world and being, in Luther's famous phrase, *simul justus et peccator*.

There is, however, a major weakness in Ellul's approach. This is found in the fact that in its aversion to any form of self-justification it is of little or no practical help to people faced with the harsh realities of living and acting in the real world. Two pieces of evidence show the dangers in Ellul's approach. Firstly, he appears incoherent and inconsistent when he attempts to make moral distinctions between different violent acts. He will state that as a Christian he "cannot call violence good, legitimate and just" (p. 133) and yet there are situations when he says he approves of certain violent acts (p. 69). Indeed, in the original French, he even writes of conditions in which the use

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<sup>12</sup> The fullest account of this is his *To Will and To Do: An Ethical Research for Christians* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1969) where (p.108), Ellul asserts, "Every honest reflection must absolutely begin by acknowledging that...there cannot be a Christian ethic". I have discussed this point more fully in my *Living the Word, Resisting the World* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2002), pp. 108-112.

<sup>13</sup> John Howard Yoder, *Nevertheless* (Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1992), p. 177. n16.

<sup>14</sup> Ronald Ray, *A Critical Examination of Jacques Ellul's Christian Ethic* (unpublished Ph.D., University of St. Andrews, 1973), p. 196, n3.

of violence is acceptable and not condemnable.<sup>15</sup> Yet later he can write that violence is always condemnable.<sup>16</sup><sup>17</sup>

Secondly, when it comes to the full and extreme horrors of war, we see the further difficulty in treating all violence as the same and refusing to offer any means of moral discrimination. Here, Ellul appears to accept that “anything goes” once war has begun and to refuse any moral constraint lest those who accept the proposed limits then believe they are justified in the limited violence that they do use. So, in conversation with Patrick Troude-Chastenet he reflected on the French experience in Algeria in these terms:

According to me, once you have decided to go to war you have to go all out and use every means at your disposal. This is the case that applied in Algeria. Everyone was shouting their heads off against the torture that was going on. But the real problem was not the torture but the war itself. There is no morality in war. If you want to win you must pull out all the stops.<sup>(2)</sup>

Ellul is thus in a paradoxical situation compared to the just war tradition. That tradition seeks to limit war by acknowledging certain carefully delineated situations in which the use of coercion is justified. In so doing, it also lays down clear boundaries and a duty in certain contexts to sue for peace rather than to use immoral means. Ellul, in contrast, stands resolutely opposed to violence. However, his refusal to distinguish between different forms and levels of violence, his rejection of anything that could be construed as justification for violence, and his emphasis instead on the need to confess our necessary sinfulness in the fallen world, means that Christians guided by his approach may find themselves ending up involved in torture as a sad necessity (or presumably dropping nuclear weapons) in military conflict.

In short, Ellul has an aversion to any approach to moral thinking that he believes risks facilitating selfjustification or denying the continuing presence of sin in all our actions. Pushed to an extreme, however, this makes his writing incapable of providing moral guidance or setting clear and realistic moral limits. As Oliver O’Donovan comments in his discussion of whether killing is a moral evil that we are bound at all costs to avoid and thus participation in war totally prohibited,

The curious hybrid notions of “sin within the realm of necessity”(J.Ellul) and “responsible assumption of guilt” (H. Thielicke) capture dramatically the subjective moral tension which belongs to a decision of such gravity, but they leave the deliberative question in paradox and so seem to have more rhetorical than conceptual persuasiveness.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> “acceptable, non condemnable” (*Contre les violents*), p. 170.

<sup>16</sup> “La violence est toujours condamnable” (*Les combats de la liberte* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1984), p. 166 (italics original).

<sup>17</sup> *Jacques Ellul on Religion, Technology and Politics: Conversations with Patrick Troude-Chastenet* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), p. 39.

<sup>18</sup> Oliver O’Donovan, “War and Peace” in McGrath, Alister (ed), *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1993), pp. 655-6.

(2) Repeat of footnote 17.



Perhaps nothing illustrates the difficulty more sharply than Ellul's startling claim that "apart from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the use of violence is always an *a priori* contrary to the will of God".<sup>19</sup> How one discerns the Spirit's inspiration to use violence is, sadly, unelaborated. Presumably to attempt to do so would be to deny divine freedom and risk providing a means of self-justification!

## Conclusion

Ellul and the just war tradition clearly approach the subject of moral judgment in war from quite different perspectives. It is important to recognize that these different approaches to the subject then shape their different conclusions.

In the light of the valid criticisms and cautions raised by Ellul but also the serious weaknesses in his own method, the challenge is whether or not a third way is possible. This could represent a chastened form of just war thinking in the light of Ellul's critique. In contrast to Ellul's work (where his attempt to reconfigure the Christian tradition by making "violence" the controlling concept risks distorting the structure of the tradition's account of morality in war) this would recognize and build upon the strengths of the just war tradition. Rather than just subsuming war under a strong account of "violence" and eschewing anything that could amount to self-justification, this would provide a careful structured analysis of the key questions which must be addressed in thinking about going to war and conducting war: who is to wage war? why should they have recourse to war? when should they do so? how should they fight? It would draw on the wisdom of the just war tradition to discern where significant moral boundaries lie in each of these areas.

In particular, like Ellul in his earlier writing, it would be based on the conviction that the structure and limits which must be placed on any use of destructive or lethal force are defined by the fact that just judgment is not only necessary but good and the divinely ordained task of government in a fallen world. It is therefore certainly true that "violence" is a sign of the fallenness of the world - Ellul's emphasis on this must not be ignored even if it needs to be tempered - but it does not follow that all recourse to violence is the same and so moral discrimination impossible.<sup>20</sup> There is, for example, a difference between war in order to right wrongs (just cause) and war for self-aggrandisement even if the latter is sometimes masked behind a claim that it is the former. There is a difference as well as a similarity between attacking opposing armed forces and engaging in torture of prisoners of war or blanket bombing of noncombatants.

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<sup>19</sup> *The Ethics of Freedom* (London: Mowbrays, 1976), p. 406.

<sup>20</sup> "The distinction between a moral and a non-moral evil can be rendered in terms of what is evil *as action* and what is evil *as suffering*. Not every action that involves the suffering of evil is an evil action. The non-pacifist tradition has represented the justified belligerent as suffering the evil of necessity, but not as doing evil" (O'Donovan, *op. cit.*, p. 655).

This approach would, however, need to remedy the weaknesses in the just war tradition that become evident in the light of Ellul's approach. In particular it must redress the tendency to be unrealistic about the nature of human violence. There has to be a challenge to the idealism about human control in the face of the power of violence that so often undermines just war thinking. Perhaps most important of all, Ellul's critique has highlighted the tendency of the just war pattern of thinking to be hijacked for self-justification which masks the pervasiveness of human sin. The tradition could, however, be used as a more critical and prophetic tool. It would then raise before those holding political power and claiming to act justly, the challenging questions of their own complicity in global injustice and their enthrallment to the powers of Technique and propaganda as they make decisions about war in the contemporary world.

As in so many spheres of his thought, Ellul's work on violence runs the risk of an "all or nothing" response. Those attracted to the just war tradition easily ignore him as of no relevance to the realities of international power politics. Those eager for a prophetic Christian voice easily buy uncritically into his sweeping analysis of violence and by dismissing the tradition as "casuistry" and "compromise" find they are unable to offer guidance to those - including many Christians - with the terrible responsibilities of political authority. By recognizing the deeper divergences in method and focus between Ellul and the just war tradition and outlining both his strengths and weaknesses, it is possible to go beyond Ellul's work and develop a realistic analysis of the nature of war today that draws on the majority Christian tradition Ellul himself once embraced in order to encourage a prophetic yet discriminating voice for those seeking to be faithful disciples of Christ.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> I have explored some of these issues a little further in the booklet *When Is War Justified?* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2003), available from [www.grovebooks.co.uk](http://www.grovebooks.co.uk)

# Beyond Cyberterrorism: Cybersecurity in Everyday Life by Dal Yong Jin

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## Introduction

The attacks of September 11, 2001 against the United States reflect a growing use of the Internet as a digital and physical against terrorism. Since September 11 many computer and security experts have looked at the issue of cyberterrorism in a new light. Governments throughout the world have come to understand that terrorists and cyber criminals, such as crackers—reckless computer geeks aiming to crack codes, or bring havoc to computer traffic—are using today’s information infrastructure to bring havoc to computer traffic and threaten safety. The number, cost, and sophistication of these attacks are rising at alarming rates, with aggregate annual damage worldwide now measured in billions of dollars. The September 11 attacks have awakened the world to consider the real possibility of cyberterrorism.

There are several reasons why the Sept. 11 attacks point to cyberterrorism. One is Osama bin Laden’s networks and his use of the Internet to organize the attacks. He used laptops with satellite uplinks and heavily encrypted messages to liaison across national borders with his global underground network even before 2001. The other is the possibility of using steganography, a means by which one can hide messages in digital photographs or in music files but leave no outward trace that the files were altered. Osama bin Laden reportedly used steganography to conceal his messages for the September 11 attacks (“Veiled Messages,” 2001).

Moreover, concerns heightened that future cyber and physical attacks—not just for human targets, but for the telecommunication infrastructure as well—might be combined. Many New York citizens indeed could not use telecommunication and online systems for hours after the terrorist attacks due not only to overload but also destruction of the telecommunication infrastructure—including that in the World Trade Center. At that time, the United States narrowly avoided a complete shutdown of its critical financial transaction system—the nation’s mechanism for electronically transferring funds (Scott, 2002).

Such threats existed before the Sept. 11 attacks around the world, but the possibility of a significant attack, specifically, a combined cyber and physical assault, is being taken much more seriously since those events (Thibodeau, 2001).

The growing threat of terrorism, which has become one of the most significant global issues in recent years, raises the specter of increased security risks for informa-

tion managers—ranging from the nuisance of Web site defacements to the possibility that systems could be targeted in conjunction with a physical attack to maximize disruptions. Computer and security experts fear that cyberspace could be terrorist's next target because they saw a clear warning in the terrorists' reliance on, and expertise in, information technology. It had become clear that the computer communication infrastructure, on which wealth, information, and power in our world depend, is highly vulnerable to intrusion, interference, and disruption. Naturally, cybersecurity measures have come to the attention of governments as the most significant method to protect society from cyberterrorism.

This paper studies the development of the concept of cyberterrorism in cyberspace. In particular, it examines cultural aspects of cyberterrorism to ascertain its characteristics. This paper discusses the specific question of the relationship between cyberspace and cyberterrorism, as well as several cultural aspects, such as the relationship between humans and technology, and privacy. Then this paper addresses the significance of cybersecurity for protecting our society from cyberterrorism. Finally, it analyzes the importance of cybersurveillance and discusses the function of encryption as a valuable cybersecurity tool in everyday life in a digital society.

## **Cyberterrorism in Cyberspace**

In the wake of the September 11 attacks, many scholars, computer experts, and government officials around the world quickly jumped to conclusions that a new breed of terrorism is on the rise and that society must defend itself with all possible means. They understand that cyberattacks are sufficiently destructive to generate fear comparable to that of physical terrorism. Attacks that lead to death or bodily injury, extended power outages, plane crashes, water contamination, or major economic losses are examples.

Before developing the concept of cyberterrorism, however, it is necessary to explain the concept of terrorism. Computer experts and government officials borrowed the definition of terrorism to explain cyberterrorism, though no one definition of terrorism has gained universal acceptance. Brian Jenkins (1996), a former advisor to the National Commission on Terrorism, described terrorism as the calculated use of violence such as fear, intimidation or coercion, or the threat of such violence to attain goals that are political, religious, or ideological in nature. The U.S. Department of State (1996) defined terrorism as premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents. Meanwhile, Noam Chomsky used the term terrorism as the use of coercive means aimed at civilian populations in an effort to achieve political, religious, or other aims. He explains the World Trade Center bombing as an example of this kind of particularly horrifying terrorist crime (Barsamian, 2001, p.19).

Many security experts borrowed these different definitions to explain cyberterrorism; however they cannot agree on one single definition on cyberterrorism because

terrorism in cyberspace is difficult to define. Among these, Barry Collin (1996), a senior research fellow at the Institute for Security and Intelligence in California, defined cyberterrorism as the convergence of cybernetics and terrorism. The United States Federal Bureau of Investigation defines it as any politically motivated attack against information, computer systems, computer programs, and data which results in violence against non-combatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents. Possible cyberterrorism targets, therefore, include the banking industry, military installations, power plants, air traffic control centers, and water systems (Cyberterrorism, 2001). Hence, cyberterrorism is sometimes referred to as electronic terrorism, netwar or information war.

Cyberterrorism represents a new stage in that it occurs in and with cyberspace, and means an attack on the information structure and function. Examples of cyberterrorist activity include use of information technology to organize and carry out attacks, support group activities and perception-management campaigns. Depending on their impact, attacks against critical infrastructures such as electric power or emergency services could be acts of cyberterrorism. Attacks that disrupt nonessential services or that are mainly a costly nuisance would not be (Denning, 2002). In other words, the potential impact of cyberterrorism on private corporations and government agencies goes well beyond the traditional civil and criminal definitions of damage.

The damage from cyberterrorism has not been viewed only in physical terms. In this regard, computer and security experts assess the probability of various types of cyberattacks, which will occur in the near future:

- Very likely: Electronic warfare is the threat feared most. It could come in the form of denial-of-service attacks, in which crackers overwhelm and disable Web sites with junk data. Other electronic attacks include computer worms and viruses—malicious computer programs that spread via the Internet and erase computer data or clog Internet traffic (“Experts fear,” 2001). Online harassment such as harassing email, unsolicited pornographic pictures, and online stalking is also included.
- Likely: State-sponsored computer warfare is aimed at mainly the U.S. although it targets other countries. More than 30 countries have developed asymmetrical warfare strategies targeting vulnerabilities in U.S. computer systems. Because of U.S. military superiority, the countries see electronic warfare as their best tool to puncture U.S. defenses.
- Unlikely: The cutting of hundreds of fiber-optic cables—which carry Internet traffic between major hubs—knocks out portions of the Internet. Such an operation would require intimate knowledge of where key data hubs are, which only a handful of Internet firms know. It also would require a Herculean effort: most fiber cables are underwater or buried underground, so they are not easy to attack.

- Very unlikely: The bombing of Internet facilities, such as major data hubs, cripples the Internet. However, it is nearly impossible because the Internet resembles a cobweb of geographically dispersed facilities. For instance, in the United States, there are major routing hubs in Silicon Valley, Washington, Chicago, and Dallas (“Experts fear,” 2001). Likewise, Ericsson world network is centered in Sweden, the Nokia world network is centered in Finland, and the NEC world network is centered in Japan.

As can be seen in this dichotomy, computer and security experts do not take seriously the connection between computer and physical attacks, i.e., attacks on human beings. Terrorists could coordinate a cyber attack with other forms of attacks against physical infrastructure, such as those on September 11. For computer and security experts, however, the main defense against cyberterrorism is to protect the information infrastructure. Cyberterrorism could be understood as a means to attack computer systems and infrastructure rather than to attack people.

## **Cultural Aspects of Cyberterrorism**

It is generally recognized that technological decisions are made first, and then reflect on them ethically after they are developed. Throughout the history of technological innovations its main architects have often denied their moral responsibility. In this frame of mind their solutions do not require any ethical reflection. In fact, many users of technology argue that technology is essentially amoral and an entity apart from values. They point out that, if people use technology for destruction or pollution, as in the case of nuclear weapons and chemical pollution, it should not be blamed on technology, but on its misuse by politicians, the military, big business and others.

However, the historical emergence of a technological culture has made the issue of moral responsibility for technological development increasingly urgent because technology inevitably brings significant risks, as well as great benefits. Computer and cyberspace, in which cyberterrorism occurs, also brings about risks because they were not created by sheer act of will. Computers and the Internet indeed draw attention to the commercial, political, and military interests from the beginning. Therefore, it is indispensable to seriously consider the human and social aspects of cyberterrorism in cyberspace. As Jacques Ellul (1964) emphasized, one should be looking at technology in its sociological aspect because technology is not an isolated fact in society but is related to every factor in the life of modern man. With Ellul, Clifford Christians (1989, pp. 124-125) points out, “technology is the distinct cultural activity in which human beings form and transform natural reality for practical ends with the aid of tools and procedures.” He argues that cultures are humankind’s distinctive and immediate environment built from the material order by men and women’s creative effort.

In this light, cyberterrorism could be understood based upon the relationship between man and technology. It requires understanding the relationship between commu-

nications and control together because cyberterrorism affects the relationship between communication technology and the humans who handle it. As Norbert Wiener argued (1957, p.16), society can only be understood through a study of the messages and the communication facilities which belong to it; and that in the future development of these messages and communication facilities, messages between humans and machines, between machines and humans, and between machine and machine, are destined to play an ever-increasing part. Indeed, communication and control belong to the essence of a person's inner life, even as they belong to our social life.

Regarding the relationship between people and technology, cyberterrorism occurs when humans use potentially harmful aspects of the technology. Cyberterrorism occurs because some consider cyberspace as a zone of unlimited freedom, a reference grid for free experimentation, an atmosphere in which there is no barrier (Robins and Webster, 1999, p.91). For instance, crackers try—without permission—to enter computer systems by breaking through security measures. Breaking into a computer system with criminal intentions is illegal and a case for criminal prosecution.

Meanwhile, cyberspace is a geographically unlimited, non-physical domain, in which—independent of time, distance and location—transactions take place between people, between computers, and between people and computers. Unlike physical attacks, cyberattacks are carried out from the comfort of their home and can occur in more than one place at a time through cyberspace. Cyberspace enables terrorist organizations to plan attacks more easily on multiple targets and spread their own organizations over a larger geographic area. It is not closed, but open—where we live everyday. To cyberterrorists, distance is meaningless. The Internet provides them with the ability to be halfway around the world instantly, in many places at once, and have an army of compromised machines to do their bidding (Robinson, 2001, pp.17-20).

In fact, one characteristic of cyberspace is the impossibility of pointing to the precise place and time where an activity occurs or information traffic happens to be. As Lefebvre observes, space and time are intertwined in nature and in society, and space organizes time in a network society (Lefebvre & Nicholson, 1991). This is possible because cyberspace plays a fundamental role in altering the nature of information's production, distribution, and consumption by allowing radically greater amounts and speeds of information flow (Jordan, 1999, p.117). Since more and more objects are provided via digital facilities, they acquire forms of intelligence, can communicate with each other, and thus create a permanent virtual space in which time and space lose their absolute significance. The spaces of the physical and the virtual world are closely interconnected.

Naturally, the threat of cyberterrorism, which has these cultural forms mentioned above, has increased with the development of computers, the Internet, and broadband because Internet communication allows terrorists to be decentralized, and thus harder to identify and observe their attacks. By the end of 2001, there were 455 million computers around the world. Internet users have also increased 17.5-fold between 1994 and

2002, from 38 million in 1994 to 665 million in 2002 (Computer Industry Almanac Inc, 2002). In the U.S. alone, almost 160 million United States households and businesses used the Internet for communication and commerce in 2002. With the rapid growth of computing and online systems, almost \$2.2 trillion in goods and services were sold via the Internet in 2001. That is expected to grow to \$12.2 trillion in 2006 (UN Conference on Trade and Development, 2002). Furthermore, every day, 1.4 billion emails were sent in 2001 (Swartz, 2001).

Under these circumstances, the number of cyberattacks rose to almost 35,000 during the first three quarters of 2001 alone, from 21,756 in 2000, and 2,134 in 1997, respectively. Among these, the Love Bug virus hit over 55 million computers and crippled email systems around the world in May 2000. Approximately four percent of the total computers that received the virus required human intervention to reconfigure them or in some way repair them, which resulted in \$10 billion in economic damage. The Code Red worm also infected about a million servers in July and August in 2001 and caused \$2.6 billion in damages (Denning, 2002). Cyberattacks caused \$12 billion in damage and economic losses in 2001 alone (Squitieri, 2002).

The number and damage of cyberattacks worldwide is growing with the development of broadband (high speed Internet services) in recent years. Broadband users are seen as being more vulnerable to attacks because their computers are always connected to the Internet. In particular, several East Asian countries, which are showing rapid growth of broadband, produce the most cyberattacks of any country apart from the U.S. Asian and Pacific Rim countries indeed produced 91 percent of all attacks during the fourth quarter of 2001. Among these, computer-related crime in Korea, which boasts 10 million broadband users, soared. Computer-related crimes in Korea zoomed 13.6 times higher to 33,289 cases in 2001 from 2,444 a year earlier (National Policy Agency, 2002).

The next generation of terrorists will grow up in a digital world, with ever more powerful and easy-to-use cracking tools at their disposal. They may see greater potential for cyberterrorism than do the terrorists of today, and their level of knowledge and skill relating to cracking will be greater. Cyberterrorism could also become more attractive as the real and virtual worlds become more closely coupled with automobiles, appliances, and other devices attached to the Internet. Unless these systems are carefully secured, conducting an operation that physically harms someone may be as easy as penetrating a Web site is today. In other words, societies that apply many digital systems are extremely vulnerable to cyberterrorism. With relatively simple tools the key functions of such societies can be disrupted. Therefore, cybersecurity is the essential topic in current debates on new forms of war on terrorism because the relationship between men and technology must be secure.



## Cybersecurity in Everyday Life

Security risks in digital systems can be caused by totally unpredictable factors, such as earthquakes, floods, fires, and lightning as well as cyberterrorism. Security can also be threatened by electromagnetic signals that suddenly open or close electronic gates and doors or set electronic toys in motion (Hamelink, 2000, p.116). However, the government and business have not paid much attention to security until recent years. In the business sector, corporations have spent billions of dollars for electronic security in recent years, however, companies spent, on average, only about \$250 for security measures out of every \$1 million they spent on information technology in 2001 (Lemke, 2002, p.31). At the government level, the situation was not far different. For instance, the United States government spent \$938 million in 2000 to protect federal computer systems.

Increased security concerns in the wake of the September11 attacks have stimulated spending for cybersecurity. The U.S. government sought about \$4.5 billion in its 2003 budget request, which accounts for 8 percent of its information technology budget (Berkowitz & Hahn, 2003). Despite tight information technology spending budgets, the worldwide security software market was also projected to be at \$4.3 billion in 2002, an 18 percent increase over revenue of \$3.6 billion in 2001, according to Dataquest Inc. (2002). Meanwhile, the U.S. government created the Department of Homeland Security for protecting the country from both physical terrorism and cyberterrorism in November 2002. The department would have about 170,000 employees and \$37 billion budget. In addition, the U.S. and U.K. homeland security teams are to hold joint exercises as part of efforts to prevent simultaneous cyber terror attacks on the two countries beginning in April 2003.

Alarmed by the September11 attacks, government and security experts are clamoring for the world to craft better cyberdefenses. They want tougher laws against crackers, more resources, and closer cooperation among agencies to thwart attacks. As noted, they worry that the threat of cyberattacks will grow seriously as business and government use the Internet more. They point out that society needs cybersecurity tools and control strategies for society's security. In fact, cybersecurity issues are so much an intrinsic part of everyday life today because most of our social encounters and almost all our economic transactions are subject to electronic recording, checking, and authorization. For instance, we unblinkingly produce passports for scanners to read at airports, feed plastic cards with personal identifiers into street bank machines, fill out warranty forms when we buy appliances, key confidential data into online transactions, or use bar-coded keys to enter offices and laboratories. However, the growth of electronic commerce and electronic recording has brought about several negative effects for society, such as property damage, and business disruption through online fraud. As Robins and Webster addressed (1999, p.122) information is thought to be the key to a new phase of economic growth, but it also causes severe damage for today's information society.

As for computerized surveillance and security issues, one of the most important is encryption. Encryption is the art of scrambling messages to a predefined code or key and thus ensuring only those who know the key can read the message. Encryption technology empowers users to protect their digital property from unauthorized use because only the intended recipient—the key holder—can access the information. In particular, the public key approach is the most powerful method of authentication. Two sets of keys are used. In the public key system, one key is publicly revealed and the other is known only to the user. The keys are linked in such a manner that information encrypted by the public key can only be deciphered by the corresponding private key. Specifically, the public key (the product) is used to encrypt a message. A message encrypted with the public key cannot be decrypted with the same key; only the corresponding private key may decrypt it.

In conventional correspondence two devices are employed to ensure security and authentication. For privacy purposes, it is customary to place a letter within an envelope. But we want the intended recipient to know that we sent the letter, not some impostor. When we sign a letter, that signature serves to confirm our identity. This is exactly what occurs in public key encryption. By applying the recipient's public key to the message, we are assured that only recipients read it.

As the significance of the Internet increases, encryption policy becomes more critical in transferring and protecting information. Under an open and nonsecure Internet system, the issue of encryption places emphasis on security, authenticity, identification, and validation in information exchange. For instance, as an effort to prevent unauthorized access or modification and to secure Internet commerce, the U.S. government indicates that a secure Global Information Infrastructure (GII) should incorporate the following aspects:

- Secure and reliable telecommunications networks.
- Effective means for protecting the information systems attached to those networks.
- Effective means for authenticating and ensuring confidentiality of electronic information to protect data from unauthorized use.
- Well-trained GII users who understand how to protect their systems and data (U.S. Government, 2000).

In order to ascertain the characteristics and merits of cybersurveillance, it is worth comparing cybersurveillance with electronics-based surveillance technology, such as Closed-Circuit TV (CCTV) technology. Electronic-based surveillance technologies are recognized as the primary surveillance technologies today. They are very useful tools in prohibiting some teenagers from entering shopping malls for shoplifting or displacing them from certain city streets. The recent growth in the use of the open-street CCTV

system has been accompanied by a proliferation in the use of visual surveillance in a wide range of different institutional settings, including hospitals, schools, high rise housing blocks, and the workplace (McCahill, 1998, p.44). It is useful because cameras in public places may deter criminals. However, CCTV surveillance is not useful in cyberspace because it is not a cybersurveillance tool that functions in cyberspace.

CCTV also raises concern about privacy. While CCTV is a useful tool for protecting shoplifting in department stores, it also keeps watch over every guest without their permission. While some government agencies and businessmen believe surveillance is more important than privacy in order to protect physical property and even life, privacy is actually part of the problem (Lyon, 2001, p.66). Hence, in many countries electronic surveillance is mushrooming; however, the sanctity of privacy has also been eroded by the increasing intrusion of surveillance technology. Although safety and security are important, privacy should not be sacrificed for society's safety.

In addition, electronic surveillance is not adequate to protect global data and money flows. As seen thus far, protecting global data and money flow in a digital society should be one of the main functions of surveillance and cybersecurity. As global flow of technology, information, people, images and symbols rise in volume, surveillance should be employed to track and monitor these movements. More delicate and effective surveillance tools, such as high level encryption technology, become essential for protecting our lives and our property.

Unlike CCTV, encryption tools reduce threats to an invasion of privacy while protecting global data and money flows. Considering personal privacy, encryption applies to medical records, personal credit ratings, and spending histories. The problems of failing security need urgent solutions, in particular, for the success of digital trading. The combination of security, privacy, and authentication should make electronic commerce, whether conducted on private networks, the Internet or even in person, the preferred medium for financial transactions of all sorts. The widespread use of encryption is necessary for safe financial transactions online (Jordan, 1999). More importantly, strong encryption hinders cyberterror because terrorists cannot interpret the message easily. Although some terrorists have some decoding skills, it is not easy for them to overcome the encoding skills of security experts. One of the most obvious signs of surveillance is the overhead "electronic eye" of the closed-circuit television camera, and encryption is one of the most effective "cyber eyes" of cyberspace. With these forces behind it, strong encryption might be thought of as an essential element of cyberspace.

## *Conclusion*

Cyberterrorism is becoming a common phenomenon. The next terrorist attack may be not physical in nature but could come through cyberspace to disrupt the communication infrastructure. Cyberattacks on the military, economic and telecommunications infrastructure around the world can be launched from anywhere in the world, and they can be used to transport the problems of a distant conflict directly to America's heart-

land, as well as other countries. However, it is true that the impact of this risk to the physical health of humankind is still minimal, at present, although the current state of cyberspace is such that information is seriously at risk. Computers do not currently control sufficient physical processes, without human intervention, to pose a significant risk of terrorism in the classic sense. Therefore, a proactive approach to protecting the information infrastructure is indispensable for preventing its becoming more seriously vulnerable.

Computer-based security technology, in particular high-level encryption, is strongly needed for securing today's society from terrorist attacks. Encryption is essential to protect the telecommunication infrastructure. This has obvious advantages for users' privacy, and it deters the members of criminal organizations accessing secret communication. Surveillance and security are not simply coercive and controlling. They are often a matter of influence and persuasion. We are all involved in our own surveillance as we leave the tracks and traces that are sensed and surveyed by different surveillance agencies. Encryption is a non-coercive security and surveillance technique in cyberspace.

In conclusion, cyberterror and cybersecurity have become part of our everyday lives. Everyday life has been conducted more and more in cyberspace in modern times, and this has strong implications for surveillance. On a daily basis, life in cyberspace entails surveillance in constantly increasing contexts.

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## Surveillance After September 11: Ellul and Electronic Profiling by David Lyon

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In a classic one-liner, Jacques Ellul once suggested that “To be sure of apprehending criminals, it is necessary that *everyone* be supervised.”<sup>22</sup> Substitute the word “terrorists” for “criminals” and we have an uncannily accurate description of the world since 9/11. Anti-“terrorist” measures, from securing airports to intercepting emails, are everywhere. The dramatic events of 2001 served to accelerate processes of general “supervision” that had been underway since Ellul’s prophetic words were written, in the early 1960s. Especially in the USA, but also in countries around the world, we are creating sophisticated surveillance societies in which everyone is supervised, or watched over.

Let me clarify two things right away. One, in this world that we help to make, what I’m calling surveillance is partly a by-product of modern bureaucratic efficiency. More mobility means that many things are done at a distance. So some ways are needed of keeping track of transactions or keeping tabs on populations. Surveillance fills that gap - PINs, barcodes, video images, and scans are tokens of trust that compensate for the fact that in a global village we can’t all know everyone else. So surveillance is not just sinister; but neither is it simply benign. It’s deeply ambiguous, and increasingly influential. In this piece, however, I focus on the risks.

Two, what follows is not just a paranoid whine about intensified intrusions, still less a plea for more privacy. In the context of today’s rampant individualism, the antidote to more surveillance is quickly seen in terms of personal space and personal solutions.

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<sup>22</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (Knopf, 1964), p. 100.

Of course, some government departments or corporations have no business prying into our personal affairs, and even traffic light cameras can pick up passenger images that should never be recognizable. But while some aspects of privacy may be important - human dignity based on the *imago dei* would make selfcommunication a voluntary, limited activity within relations of trust - the language of privacy fails to touch many crucial issues. As well, privacy is also ambiguous.

Or should domestic violence in a “private” space be exempt from public scrutiny?

9/11 produced a rapid augmenting of existing surveillance trends. Many companies, government departments and organizations (such as the American military) saw 9/11 as an opportunity to put in place measures previously proscribed because of privacy or civil liberties scruples. Multiple use smart cards, for example, have been around for over a decade, but few large scale uses have been found for them. No wonder Larry Ellison, of Oracle Corporation, quickly offered free software to the US government to create a national ID. Mercifully, despite the emotionalism and panic, he was turned down.

This reflects one major trend in surveillance, to automate and integrate systems of processing personal data. What was once done using ranks of filing cabinets and index cards in large offices could be done much more easily with computers. Add telecommunications, so they could network, and software for searching databases, and the stage was set for surveillance in its dominant twenty-first century forms. This isn't the topdown nightmare of eerie telescreens featuring *Nineteen-Eighty-Four's* Big Brother, but the Google model of homing on hits using keywords. It's algorithmic surveillance, that sorts for suspects.

But not only for suspects. The categories cover all kinds of persons, lifestyles, occupations, interests, positions and preferences. Just as the firm might fire you for failing to meet your performance requirements, the bank may well do the same if your business is worth less to it than your neighbour's. The Royal Bank of Canada does it by sending letters that explain their new financial features, which reveal that not all customers will qualify.

Still, if we're thinking about 9/11, suspects are exactly what surveillance seeks. Indeed, hasty legislation (in the USA and elsewhere) and new surveillance technologies combine to create an expanded version of what Onora O'Neill calls a “culture of suspicion.”<sup>23</sup> Vague and prejudicial definitions of “terrorist” help to widen the net, while dubious surveillance softwares serve to tighten the mesh. But those are only the first steps. The culture of suspicion spreads as trust is eroded at every level. New York Muslims called “Mohammed” are finding their American Express cards withdrawn; companies are hiring consultants to do “security” checks on people who apply for jobs; and hotlines proliferate for letting ordinary people be the “eyes and ears” of law enforcement.

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<sup>23</sup> Onora O'Neill, *A Question of Trust* (Cambridge, 2002).

Unfortunately for those spending millions on high-tech security devices, the systems aren't really up to snuff. The brand new facial recognition cameras at Logan Airport in Boston, from which two planes containing global guerillas took off on 9/11, have been criticized by an independent security contractor for having blurred shots and excessive false positives.<sup>24</sup> In short, they won't work for the purposes stated. And this is also true of several other surveillance schemes for identifying, locating, and capturing "terrorists."<sup>25</sup>

But while the new surveillance is unlikely to prevent terrorism, this does not mean it is ineffective. Those drawn into the net include a vast range of persons - all of us, one way and another - whose personal data are extracted from us as transaction records (such as phone, credit cards), behaviours (what cameras and scanners see in car parks or airports), body indicators (iris scans or fingerprints), and other traces are transmitted to databases. True, we may falsify records on the internet, or evade the street camera, but most of us comply, cheerfully or otherwise, most days.

Notice what goes into the system. Just bits of data, fragments of information. They may be built into a larger profile but even that will scarcely be recognized as a reliable image by the person concerned. No matter, it's the fragments that count. The system isn't interested in "who" you really are. All it can do is create situational controls, momentary management opportunities. These surveillance devices are meant to channel flows, to inhibit some activities, to promote others. "Entry denied," flashes the sign; "Do you wish to redeem your points?" asks the cashier; "You have been selected..." says the SPAM. Morality does not really feature, here. Mere management has taken over.

This means that we are all targets, and that justice reduces to the actuarial. The smug response that those who have nothing to hide have nothing to fear is pernicious nonsense. The fact of being placed in a category of suspicion, or even in a marketer's niche, means that our life-chances and our choices are already affected. Systems designed to sort are there to classify our lifestyles and our proclivities, discriminating between one and another. Different insurance rates, promotional offers, treatment by police, and speed of passage - such as through airport check-in - are the result. That your neighbourhood becomes high-risk may not be your doing, and that you're a single mother on welfare not your fault. The automated label sticks, until you can find some way of removing it. So much for presumptions of innocence!

But let's go back to those global guerilla fighters. No one wants to see them succeed, and every right thinking person believes, correctly, that terrorism is a curse to be opposed. If reports of capture, whether in Pakistan, Germany, Indonesia or Canada are correct, then one checks in vain for reports of high tech devices being crucial. In fact, where terrorist cells have been busted, or dangerous individuals apprehended, it

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<sup>24</sup> Technology and Liberty Program of the ACLU, Sept. 2, 2003 ([www.aclu.org/Privacy/Privacy.cfm](http://www.aclu.org/Privacy/Privacy.cfm))

<sup>25</sup> Details of some such failed schemes are in David Lyon, *Surveillance after September 11* (Polity Press, 2003).



seems that old-fashioned intelligence-gathering, under-cover work, and informers are responsible.

So why all the hype about technology? Well, this is where Ellul becomes relevant once more. He maintained that in the modern era an obsessive search for the one right way of doing things - the correct “technique” - was fast becoming dominant. Hence his critique of “technological society.” Appropriate goals were being obscured as the myopic quest for the best means filled the cultural horizon. The idol would bind its adherents to a single program, and blind them to its consequences and alternatives. “In displacing spirituality,” summarises Karim Karim, “technique itself becomes an object of faith.”<sup>26</sup>

Of course, Max Weber had made similar observations, much earlier in the twentieth century, but he seemed to despair of ever finding away out of this “iron cage.” His insights are indispensable, but incomplete. On the other hand, despite his apparent view that technology is an unstoppable juggernaut, Ellul actually insisted that choices could still be made. Having been a member of the French World War Two resistance movement against the apparently invincible German occupation, his position had some credibility. Ellul parted company with Weber at the crossroads of the spiritual. The latter confessed to being “religiously tonedead” while the former pursued parallel paths of sociological and theological analysis.

So what directions are suggested by this line of thinking? The first is a general point about the priority of “technique.” From the Renaissance, the idea took root that peace and prosperity could be engineered, and the Enlightenment took this notion further. Technology was among the tools for manufacturing desirable social conditions. But this is an inversion of priorities. Loving one’s neighbour and seeking social justice are stressed by the Hebrew scriptures as prior conditions for peace and prosperity. Doing technology falls under the same rubric. It is subject to norms, to morality and to ethics. You can’t engineer security or safety, although technology may play an appropriate role in achieving such goals.

Moving closer to the aftermath of 9/11, what might a socio-theological approach have to offer? Assuming there is some merit in the above argument, key issues concern what we might call “embodiment” and “embrace.” Why these?

First, the garnering of personal data fragments makes it possible to assemble profiles that proxy for persons. I may not recognize my data-image but it’s the data-image that plays a key role in my life-chances. The abstract data-image is not the embodied person, even though it seems to have taken over the task of defining me. In the twenty-first century, electronic proxies are likely to proliferate. Modern(ist) notions of the independent individual are already imperiled by such developments. But at the core of Christian commitment is the notion that persons are relational and embodied. Those

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<sup>26</sup> Karim H. Karim, “Cyber-Utopia and the Myth of Paradise: Using Jacques Ellul’s work on propaganda to analyse information society rhetoric” *Information, Communication, and Society*, 4:1, 2001, 113-134.

relationships, echoing the sociality of God, are central. And our being “enfleshed,” which was affirmed by the “enfleshment” (incarnation) of Jesus, is equally so. So whenever a data-image is privileged over the person, damage is done.

Second, the use of searchable databases for surveillance means they act as a form of triage, screening behaviours and activities in order to assign different treatments. It’s an exclusionary process that cuts out or creams off without recourse to ethics. Loving one’s neighbour flies in the face of this, demanding instead inclusion and embrace. As Miroslav Volf poignantly notes, exclusion may be overt, flowing from domination, or it may be occluded, subtly producing abandonment.<sup>27</sup> In the twenty-first century, we have found ways of automating the practice of “passing by on the other side.” As soon as “Arab-Muslim” or “not credit-worthy” features in a database, mental sirens should sound.

None of this is meant to imply that policy makers, politicians, or technologists for that matter, have easy decisions to make. Rather, appropriate priorities should be recovered and highlighted as each issue is confronted. Equally, everyone needs to be informed and involved. In the twenty-first century, the politics of information are shifting to a much more central position than formerly, and democratic citizenship demands that all take an interest in how this plays out. We shall surely get the technologies we deserve if we do not make our voices heard in dissent and re-direction. Already, popular outcry has helped to rein in some of the most egregious aspects of the “Total Terrorist Awareness” and “Computer-Assisted Passenger Pre-Screening” programs in the USA.

Although present surveillance trends were visible well before 9/11, those events have served to accelerate and also to highlight them. Technological decisions are now far too important to be left to politicians and engineers. They affect all of us, and, at a simple level, we can all contribute to shifts in thinking and practice. It behooves those who believe that loving neighbours and seeking justice are key priorities to expose the lie that having “nothing to hide” exempts one from the consequences of today’s surveillance. Likewise, the emphasis on justice requires that mere “privacy” solutions be re-thought. Profiling, not prying; sorting not spying; these are the real issues. Whenever someone suggests that “intrusion” is the problem, remember that “exclusion” is at least equally dangerous.

Having begun with some references to Ellul, I’ll let him have the last word too. I have no special brief for Ellul; indeed, I am also a critic of some of his ideas. But his insights, developed at the dawn of the computer era, have a compelling resonance with what’s happening today. He once commented that in the antique cities of Babylon and Ninevah, peace, prosperity and security were sought through city walls and military machines. But he also reminded readers of another city, where inclusion is the key - the gates are always open - and where the light is always on.<sup>28</sup> Trust, not suspicion,

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<sup>27</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* (Abingdon 1996).

<sup>28</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City* (Eerdmans, 1970).

and embrace, not exclusion, are the watchwords. We don't yet see this city. But as another sage once said, it's not too much to hope for.

References

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Ellul Today**

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## For the Critique of Technological Civilization



"We must get to the roots of our society (technology, political power, psychological manipulation) and attack it there. . . . I believe that it is only through complete refusal to compromise with the forms and forces of our society that we can find the right orientation and recover the hope of human freedom."

Jacques Ellul

"Mirror of These Ten Years," trans. Cecelia Gaul Kings *Christian Century*, 87.7 (18 Feb 1970): 203.

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## **Mirror of Another Ten Years**

by Joyce Hanks, Guest Editor

Much as Ellul in 1970 surveyed the previous decade when he wrote the words on our cover, in this issue of the *Ellul Forum* we review the ten-year period since he died, on 19 May 1994. We have looked at both his sociology and his theology, in broad outline and by way of specific example, attempting to assess the relevance of his thought for our time.

Nothing had prepared me for the amazing displays of new books by and about Ellul that awaited me when I arrived in France for a spring 2003 sabbatical. The first of Patrick Chastenet’s new annual series, the *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*, providing us with previously unpublished and difficult-to-find early writings by Ellul, as well as helpful articles about him, had come out. A journalist unknown to me, Jean-Luc Porquet, had just published a book detailing connections between Ellul’s main themes and recent events, demonstrating the current importance of Ellul’s thought. This volume made

quite a splash, with standing-room-only public presentations by the author, prominent reviews in widely-read publications, and an almost immediate second printing—all giving evidence of Ellul's ability to challenge us years after he stopped writing.

A team of three serious students of Ellul's work crowned years of painstaking effort by publishing their first volume, also in 2003. Gerard Paul, Jean-Pierre Jezequel, and Michel Hourcade had gathered, pieced together, edited and annotated various sets of notes taken during Ellul's lectures over many years (as well as lectures tape-recorded by Willem Vanderburg, a contributing editor of the *Ellul Forum*), to produce *La pensee marxiste*, a kind of posthumous cooperative venture between Ellul and his three editors, published by La Table Ronde. This same publisher, having previously provided us with second editions of several of Ellul's long out-of-print books, offered another one in 2003: *Sans feu ni lieu* (originally published in English in 1970 as *The Meaning of the City*). Add to this a second edition of *Trahison de l'Occident (Betrayal of the West)*, published through the efforts of Ellul's daughter, Dominique North, and you begin to imagine what I saw spread out in bookstores across France a year ago. More work by Ellul has been published since last spring, and more is on the way.

Why do we still consider Ellul's ideas important, given how our world has changed? Jean-Luc Porquet, the journalist mentioned above, gives us his take on that question, as do Gerard Paul, a banker, also mentioned above, and Olivier Pigeaud, a French Reformed pastor in Bordeaux. I have requested, translated, and edited their articles, and wish to express my thanks to Clifford Christians and David Gill for agreeing to publish the original articles in French as well. As you read the reflections of these three writers who have carefully studied Ellul's thought, you will undoubtedly find yourself taking issue with them at certain points. But I feel certain that such lively disagreement would have suited Ellul just fine!

## Ellul Today

by Jean-Luc Porquet

Why did it take me such a long time—45 years—to become aware of Ellul? I was born in 1954, the year his *The Technological Society* was issued in France.<sup>29</sup> Obviously I could not read it when it first came out. In high school, no one mentioned it to me. At the university, utter silence. I studied engineering. Although professors spoke a great deal about fluid mechanics, methodology, computer science, physics, etc., not a single course was devoted to critical reflection on the profession they were preparing us for.

My generation turned fourteen years old at the time of the pivotal events of 1968. As far as the press goes, many of us cut our political and intellectual teeth on such publications as the daily newspaper *Liberation*, launched in 1973, and sponsored by the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre. Other formative publications included *Politique Hebdo*

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<sup>29</sup> Trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Knopf, 1964).



(the weekly mouthpiece of the far Left), *Charlie Hebdo*, a biting witty libertarian weekly, *La Gueule Ouverte* (the first real environmentalist monthly, created by the staff of *Charlie Hebdo*), and *Actuel* (an underground monthly to which I would contribute from 1982 to 1987). Somewhat less influential was the *Nouvel Observateur* (closely affiliated with the Socialist Party), together with its ecology supplement, *Le Sauvage*. This list indicates what I, at least, was reading at the time.

These publications introduced us, helter-skelter, to the thought of Herbert Marcuse, Ivan Illich, Wilhelm Reich, Rene Dumont, Michel Foucault, the 1974 Club of Rome report on the limits of growth, etc. But none of these sources ever spoke of Ellul! True, Ellul's alter ego, Bernard Charbonneau, wrote a column for *La Gueule Ouverte*, but he scarcely mentioned his friend. The only interview with Ellul in *La Gueule Ouverte* appeared in the eleventh issue (September 1973)—a long and boring affair, with “Mr. Ellul, Doesn't What You Say Lead to Despair?” as its theme. Ellul himself sometimes contributed to *Le Monde*, the establishment daily paper, but I read only *Liberation*. At the time *Libe*, as we called it, was the “Bible” of “rebellious” youth. Like so many others of my generation, I managed for years to avoid Ellul in this way!

Of course, his name finally became familiar to me. I finally learned that he was *the* thinker in the field of Technique. So, one fine day in the year 2000, having only this scanty acquaintance with Ellul's reputation, I happened to pull *The Technological Bluff*<sup>30</sup> off a second-hand book dealer's display shelf on the Boulevard Saint-Michel in Paris. A stroke of luck, since Ellul's books are hard to find in bookstores: they seem to be reprinted by the eyedropper-full. Besides, as a second-hand book dealer once remarked to me, “We rarely handle anything by Ellul: people hang on to good books!”

When I ran across Ellul's *The Technological Bluff*, I was working as a journalist for the weekly *Le Canard*

*Enchaine*, a satirical weekly paper that will soon celebrate a century of publication. It has stayed alive by always refusing all advertising, and looks critically at current events (someone has even called it the paper that serves as a filter for the impurities of the democratic system). At the time, I wrote rather often about what we now call “the mad cow scare,” the result of thousands of cows in England falling ill after eating feed containing animal protein. Once we had proof that this bovine spongiform encephalopathy could be transmitted to human beings, all of Europe went through an earthquake-like experience of a kind never seen before. From that day on, everyone looked suspiciously at the food on his plate: will this piece of meat kill me gradually, subjecting me to excruciating pain? Parents insisted that beef be banned from schools. Experts explained that measures had been taken, that beef was safe. Politicians tried to reassure us, all the while taking care to protect themselves against any future prosecution. The media spoke of “psychosis,” but continually put more fuel on the fire.

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<sup>30</sup> Trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990; French ed. 1988).

At the same time, I was reading in Ellul's *The Technological Bluff* that technical progress requires us "to make constant decisions about problems that are infinitely beyond us" (p. 10). Not only did his analysis clarify the situation perfectly, it enabled me to come up with a list of other such problems: global warming, the thinning of earth's protective ozone layer, nuclear waste (France depends more on nuclear reactors than any other country in the world), blood products contaminated with the HIV virus and knowingly used for transfusions to hemophiliacs, pesticides (France ranks second in the world in use of pesticides), genetically modified food, extremely dangerous industrial sites called "Seveso" sites,<sup>31</sup> mercury-contaminated plumbing, cell phones, multiplication of cellphone towers, videosnooping (it is impossible to find out how many of these video surveillance cameras we have in France: 200,000 or a million?), atmospheric pollution, cloning, sewage sludge in fields (is it toxic or not?), the explosion of allergies, hepatitis B vaccine (does it cause multiple sclerosis or not?), the Balkan syndrome, reduced male fertility, etc.

These unsolvable crises that point the finger at Technique were multiplying in the year 2000, and appearing on the front pages of newspapers. But not a single French intellectual (and so many people claim to belong to this category!) could be found who really thought through these urgent issues. I began to read other Ellul books, and each one confirmed my first impression: here was a dispeller of illusions on a grand scale, a shedder of light, a visionary, plowing the same furrow his whole life long. He had a carefully constructed, methodical way of thinking (and not just mere opinions based on idle political discussion): solid, rigorous analytical methods inspired by Karl Marx. Ellul's style was uneven, certainly, and he could be difficult to understand, but often he was brilliant (as in *A Critique of the New Commonplaces*<sup>32</sup>), or inspired (*Anarchy and Christianity*<sup>33</sup>). In any case, he wanted to make himself clear to thinking people generally, and not just to his intellectual peers. All this he applied to Technique, a subject that apparently causes thinkers to go to pieces.

I talked constantly about Ellul to people I knew, and discovered to my distress that they recognized his name, but that no one had read him. I quoted Ellul repeatedly in my articles. Then one day my friend Cabu (the cartoonist who honors me with his illustrations of my weekly column, and who regularly inquires about the subject of my next book), shot off: "So, write his biography, already!" Of course! I decided to write a kind of intellectual biography, centered around the weightiest ideas in Ellul's immense output: the ones that still have the power to enlighten us today. I would illustrate these ideas by means of examples taken from current events.

I looked over the theological side of Ellul's work. This was definitely not the aspect of his thought that interested me; only his writing on Technique did (still, I devoted a

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<sup>31</sup> After the accidental explosion of a chemical factory in Toulouse that caused around thirty deaths, French citizens learned that their country had no fewer than 1,250 industrial sites dangerous enough to be classified as "Seveso."

<sup>32</sup> Trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Knopf, 1968; French ed. 1966).

<sup>33</sup> Trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991; French ed. 1988).

few pages to his theological work, which one cannot simply dismiss with a snap of the fingers!). After a difficult selection process, I settled on twenty forceful ideas. Three of them seemed overwhelmingly crucial to me. But before we look at those, here are some of Ellul's prophecies that seem striking to me. They exemplify how he functioned in his role as a veritable sentinel—a watchman who was more clairvoyant and visionary than many others:

1. On terrorism: Ellul makes a remark in *The Technological Bluff* that might have seemed crazy before September 11, 2001: we will see "Third World terrorism which can only grow worse and which cannot be stamped out so long as the terrorists are ready to sacrifice themselves. When everything becomes dangerous in our world, we will be on our knees with no power to resist" (pp. 234-235).

2. On propaganda: Ellul understood the fact that the information we are bombarded with, supposedly an extension of democracy, ends up producing a need for propaganda. We can see in our day the glaring results of that need (including "embedded" journalists, the homogenizing of the American people manipulated by the propaganda of George W. Bush, etc.).

3. On the confused thinking that equates information with culture: the appearance of the Internet (unknown to Ellul), and the rhetoric that accompanies its increasing power continually reinforce this confusion between culture and information. The current technical obsession involves continually increasing the number of channels, stuffing them with so-called cultural material, and then churning out all of this without interruption. This process is justified as a way to save us time and as a means of cultural improvement. Having access to millions of data bases is useful, of course, particularly for the purpose of training information specialists and technicians. But it adds nothing to culture, and does not affect the number or quality of cultured people.

4. On the growing numbers of those we must call "human discards." Whether they be the homeless, the poor, the aged, or others, the technical system rejects more and more people who do not fit its criteria.

Now, three of Ellul's powerful ideas:

1. Technique creates problems that it promises to resolve by means of Technique. We can confirm this idea almost daily, in every area. Each time technical progress resolves a problem, it creates new ones, "and we need more technology, always more and more, to solve them."<sup>34</sup> Yet such technical advances are presented to us as new successes. For instance, with each oil spill (the last one in Europe, in 2002, was caused by the oil tanker *Prestige*), we are shown wonderful machines that can clean up the petroleum oozing out over the surface of the ocean. But no one questions our insane over-consumption of oil. We respond to the loneliness of the elderly by inventing high-tech houses equipped with electronic mats that tell time when a person walks on them. As for the mounting anguish and depression stemming from the mass media

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<sup>34</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Continuum, 1980; Fr. ed. 1977), p. 225.

and technique-induced work conditions, we offer antidepressants (of which the French consume more than any other nation). To the increasing demand for energy, we respond with massive recourse to nuclear reactors . . . which leave us with the problem of nuclear waste (but we will surely find a solution!). To the pollution caused by pesticides, we counter with genetically engineered crops, etc.

Ellul singles out at least two "vast problems [that] will arise with the new stage of the technical system" (*Bluff*, p. 54): the ecological problem and the situation of the Third World. The first is well known. Anyone can draw up a list of outrageously damaging environmental events, and a shorter list of measures taken to limit such damage. But Ellul affirms that "pollution will continue to develop at the pace of technical growth" (*Bluff*, p. 232). As for international law, agreements and regulations, Ellul simply does not believe in them. And unfortunately, current difficulties over the Kyoto agreement on global warming would seem to prove him right.

What about the Third World? Noting that the "West implicitly refuses to give up its own extravagance and expansion of high tech," Ellul prophesies that we are going to be "engaged in a true war waged by the Third World against the developed countries" (*Bluff*, p. 234). Isn't this just what is happening to us with terrorism?

2. Technique simply goes its own way, riding roughshod over democracy. Most technical choices sidestep democracy, according to Ellul: technical progress requires efficiency and speed, bypassing all democratic procedures. The public is never consulted about it! In this way, for example, France has become the most nuclear-dependent country in the world. Another example: within a three-year period, French cellular telephone interests have put together a network of 30,000 wireless towers, without ever demanding anyone's opinion.

Technicians obviously face a problem concerning their failure to consult, which they can hardly deny. They always seem to think they have resolved the difficulty by means of their repeated: "We must inform the public." But their "informing" involves this unspoken assumption: "Once people have been informed, they will see the wisdom of our choices." On the other hand, Ellul observes that if it were necessary to inform people about every technical issue, it would take each person a lifetime to figure things out! How could people work out reasoned positions on energy choices, cloning, biotechnology, nuclear waste, industrial agriculture, global warming, the some 30,000 different byproducts regularly spewed out in massive quantities by the chemical industry, etc.? Ellul points out the paradox that the more the public is informed, the less it can come to a conclusion one way or another.

Some have tried to get around this problem by creating "consensus groups" that empower ordinary people to choose among technological options. One begins this process by gathering a group of fifteen or so "uninformed" people who receive two weekends of instruction in the main problems involved in making a given technological decision. Then this group meets with specialists, questioning them at will, after which time the group makes its recommendations. In France, the first of these consensus groups met in 1998, in order to decide under what conditions genetically modified foods could be

grown and sold. It was a model democratic exercise. The group members made sensible recommendations, including that such organisms be prohibited if they had a certain gene that was resistant to antibiotics (such organisms would be dangerous, since they might develop bacteria that would not respond to antibiotics). But a month later, the government authorized the cultivation of two types of genetically altered corn that had this particular gene. So the consensus group was a farce. Here again, Ellul foresaw this sort of thing. He reminds us that we cannot count on the State to conduct itself honestly when it claims to act in the general interest, since the State is "a technological agent itself, both integrated into the technological system, determined by its demands, and modified in its structures by its relationship to the imperative of technological growth" (*Technological System*, p. 132).

In the months following the decision of the consensus group, people opposed to genetically engineered crops swung into action. Convinced that democratic processes had not worked in this situation, they began "harvesting" genetically altered plants. They ran into trouble with the law for this: Jose Bove and his accomplice, Rene Riesel, each received a six month prison term. Only two days after Bove began to serve his time, a group of about 800 French scientists signed a public declaration concerning the usefulness of genetically modified foods. But even today, these specialists wonder how one could arrange a genuine public debate about such foods, instead of simply imposing them on everyone. So Ellul's analysis is utterly relevant to this burning question.

This kind of controversy continues to multiply, and sometimes has dramatic consequences. For example, in Saint-Cyr-L'Ecole, a Paris suburb, brain cancer has been diagnosed in a number of pupils from a public school located near cellphone towers. The panic-stricken parents rose up in arms, insisting that cellular telephone companies remove their towers. Although the parents finally won, the phone companies maintained that they had given in only to calm people down, and that their towers were harmless. The snag is that no study has been carried out to determine the effects of these wireless towers on health. And now thousands of people live in dread, wondering if the tower near their home can cause serious illness. After the nuclear threat and genetically engineered foods, we can expect that nanotechnologies will be next in line, trying to impose themselves by force.

3. Advertising and the technological bluff are the driving force behind the technological system. Ellul noted in 1987 that advertising had just gone through a spectacular seachange. Its budgets had begun to swell inordinately, it was becoming an enormous economic and financial power, and it no longer aimed at selling basic products, but rather high-tech gadgets, pure and simple. These had become the key to economic development. This analysis rings even truer today: the entire French audio-visual system now depends on publicity, whereas this was not true twenty years ago, before the time when almost all French public television channels fell into private hands. Advertising has become invasive, molding the consumer's life, to the point where he believes that the new high-tech products he hears about (CD's, DVD's, the internet, digital cameras, etc.) are indispensable for life in the technological system. This mounting pressure

seems increasingly intolerable to a handful of French people, who have formed such groups as "ad destroyers" (following the example of American "ad busters"), and leave their graffiti in the subways. But here again, the problem seems to have no solution. How can the public resist the bombardment of advertising? How to construct a different view of the world? Or resist submitting to technological propaganda?

In 1954, Ellul said "It is only fair to wonder what consequences these propagandistic manipulations will have. The real consequences are not discernible because the mechanisms have been operating for too short a time. And, of course, when the consequences finally appear, we still will not recognize them. We will have been so absorbed and manipulated, rendered so indifferent that objective knowledge on this score will be impossible. We will no longer even have any idea of what men might once have been" (*The Technological Society*, pp. 368-369). Fifty years later, this question remains central: how can we take our distance from this world; how can we look at it objectively?

Over just the last few years, a movement of thinkers and militants has advocated "convivial growth decrease." In France, Serge Latouche and the Association of the Friends of Francois Partant have led this effort. It has met with a growing response, especially among the "altermondialists." This movement is utterly consistent with the thought of Ellul. Ten years after his death, he is more relevant than ever, and I believe it essential that we read his books. We need his thought in order to nourish not only a new kind of critical thinking, but also in order to arrive at new individual behavior and collective actions.

## Ellul aujourd'hui

Jean-Luc Porquet

Pourquoi m'a-t-il fallu tout ce temps, 45 ans, pour connaître Ellul? Je suis né en 1954, l'année où parut en France « la technique ». On comprendra que je n'aie pas pu lire dès sa parution... Au lycée, personne pour m'en parler. À l'université, silence complet: je suivais des études d'ingénieur, et si les professeurs parlaient abondamment de mécanique des fluides, de bureau des méthodes, d'informatique, de physique, etc, pas un seul cours n'était consacré à une réflexion critique sur la profession à laquelle ils nous préparaient. Quant à la presse... Pour une grande partie de ma génération, celle qui a eu 14 ans en 1968, l'apprentissage politique et intellectuel s'est fait à partir du quotidien *Liberation*, lancé en 1973 et parrainé par Sartre, de *Politique Hebdo* (porte-voix de l'extrême-gauche), *Charlie-Hebdo*, journal libertaire, humoristique et corrosif, de la *Gueule ouverte*, premier vrai mensuel écologiste (lancé par l'équipe de *Charlie Hebdo*), d'*Actuel* (mensuel underground, auquel je devais collaborer de 1982 à 1987), et, dans une moindre mesure, du *Nouvel Observateur* (proche du parti socialiste), ainsi que de son supplément écolo, « le Sauvage ». Telles étaient en tout cas mes lectures. Et si ces journaux nous initiaient, en vrac, à la pensée de Marcuse, Ivan Illich, Reich, René Dumont, Foucault, au rapport du club de Rome, etc, aucun ne parlait jamais d'Ellul!

Certes, Bernard Charbonneau, l'alter ego d'Ellul, tint chronique dans « la Gueule ouverte », mais il n'évoquait guère son ami - celui-ci, d'ailleurs, n'eut droit qu'à une interview, longue et ennuyeuse, sur le thème « Monsieur Ellul, ce que vous dites n'est-il pas désespérant? », dans le numéro 11 de la Gueule Ouverte (septembre 73). Ellul lui-même, donnait parfois des tribunes au « Monde », quotidien institutionnel: or je ne lisais que « Libe », qui était alors la Bible de la jeunesse dite « contestataire ». Et voilà comment je suis passé durant toutes ces années à côté d'Ellul, comme tant d'autres de ma génération !

Bien sûr, ce nom a fini par me dire quelque chose... J'ai fini par savoir qu'il était « le » penseur de la technique. Et c'est équipe de ce maigre savoir qu'un beau jour de l'an 2000 je mis la main, chez un bouquiniste du boulevard Saint Michel, sur « le bluff technologique ».<sup>35</sup> Coup de chance, car, faut-il le préciser? les livres d'Ellul, réédités au compte-goutte, sont difficiles à trouver en librairie, et, comme me le disait un bouquiniste, « chez nous on les voit rarement passer: les bons livres, les gens les gardent chez eux ! ». Journaliste au Canard enchaîné, hebdomadaire satirique qui depuis bientôt un siècle, vit en refusant toute publicité et jette sur l'actualité un regard critique (on a pu dire que ce journal était le filtre des impuretés du système démocratique), j'y écrivais assez souvent à l'époque sur ce qu'on appelle aujourd'hui la « crise de la vache folle »: on sait que, nourries de farines animales, des vaches anglaises tomberent malades par milliers, et que, des le jour où il fut prouvé que l'encephalite spongiforme se transmettait à l'homme, l'Europe entière vécut un séisme d'un genre inédit.

Desormais, chacun jetait sur son assiette un regard suspicieux: ce morceau de viande allait-il nous tuer à petit feu et dans d'atroces souffrances? Des parents exigeaient que la viande de bœuf soit interdite à l'école. Des experts expliquaient que les mesures avaient été prises, et que la viande était saine. Les hommes politiques essayaient de rassurer, tout en prenant soin de se protéger des possibles suites judiciaires. Les médias parlaient de « psychose », et ne cessaient de l'alimenter.

Et au même moment, je lisais dans Ellul que le progrès technique nous sommait « de prendre constamment des décisions au sujet de problèmes ou de situations qui nous dépassent infiniment » (*Bluff*, pp. 25-26). Non seulement son analyse éclairait parfaitement la situation, mais elle me permettait d'en appréhender d'autres: réchauffement climatique, trou d'ozone, déchets nucléaires (la France est le pays le plus nucléarisé au monde), sang contaminé par le virus du sida et transfusé en toute connaissance de cause aux hémophiles, pesticides (la France est le deuxième plus gros consommateur au monde), OGM, sites Seveso (suite à l'explosion accidentelle d'une usine chimique à Toulouse, laquelle fit une trentaine de morts, les Français découvrirent que leur pays comportait pas moins de 1250 sites industriels classés Seveso, c'est-à-dire extrêmement dangereux), plombages au mercure, téléphones portables, multiplication des antennes-relais, vidéoflicage (impossible de savoir combien il existe de caméras de

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<sup>35</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Le bluff technologique* (Paris: Hachette, 1988).

videosurveillance en France: 200 000 ou 1 million?), pollution atmospherique, clonage, boues d'epuration dans les champs (sont-elles ou non toxiques?), explosion des allergies, vaccin contre l'hepatite B (provoque-t-il ou non des scleroses en plaques), syndrome des Balkans, baisse de la fertilité masculine, etc: les crises inextricables mettant en cause la technique se multipliaient, faisaient la Une des journaux. Et aucun intellectuel francais -Dieu sait pourtant s'ils sont nombreux a revendiquer ce titre !-pour penser vraiment ces crises. Je me mis a lire d'autres ouvrages d'Ellul, et chacun m'en apporta la confirmation: il etait un demystificateur de grande envergure, un eclaireur, un visionnaire, creusant le meme sillon toute sa vie, arme d'une pensee construite, methodique, (et pas uniquement d'opinions dignes du cafe du commerce), de methodes d'analyse inspirees de Marx, solides et rigoureuses, d'un style inegal, certes, parfois ardu, mais souvent brillant (exegese des lieux communs<sup>36</sup>) ou inspire (anarchie et christianisme<sup>37</sup>), de la volonte en tout cas de se faire comprendre de l' « honnete homme », et pas uniquement de ses pairs intellectuels... Et tout cela applique a la technique, un domaine devant lequel les penseurs semblent perdre leurs moyens.

Je parlais sans cesse d'Ellul autour de moi (et me desolais de m'apercevoir que son nom « disait quelque chose », mais que personne ne l'avait lu), je le citais a plusieurs reprises dans mes articles, et un jour mon ami Cabu, dessinateur qui me fait l'honneur d'illustrer ma

chronique hebdomadaire, et me demande regulierement le sujet de mon prochain bouquin, me lanca: « Ecris done sa biographie ! ». Tilt ! Je decidai d'ecrire une sorte de biographie intellectuelle, de choisir dans l'auvre abondante d'Ellul ses idees les plus fortes, celles qui aujourd'hui encore peuvent nous eclairer, et de les illustrer par des exemples pris dans l'actualite. Je jetai un oeil au versant theologique de son oeuvre: decidement, ce n'etait pas cet aspect de sa pensee qui m'interessait ; uniquement celui sur la technique (je consacrai cependant quelques pages a l'oeuvre theologique, qu'on ne peut isoler du reste d'un claquement de doigt !). Apres un tri delicat, je distinguais vingt idees fortes. En voici trois qui me paraissent des plus cruciales. Mais auparavant, voici quelques propheties d'Ellul qui me semblent frappantes, et montrent en quoi il etait reellement une sentinelle, plus clairvoyant, plus visionnaire que beaucoup:

-sur le terrorisme, cette remarque dans « le bluff technologique » (1988), qui pouvait paraître delirante avant le 11 septembre: « Il y aura un terrorisme tiers-mondiste qui ne peut que s'accentuer et qui est imparable dans la mesure ou ces « combattants » font d'avance le sacrifice de leur vie. Quand tout, dans notre monde, sera devenu dangereux, nous finirons par etre a genoux sans avoir pu combattre » (p.

280)..

-sur la propagande et le fait que le bombardement d'informations, sense etre une avancee democratique, finit par entrainer une demande de propagande: on constate

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<sup>36</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Exegese des nouveaux lieux communs* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1966; 2[e] ed Paris: La Table Ronde, 1994).

<sup>37</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Anarchie et christianisme* (Lyon: Atelier de Creation Libertaire, 1988; 2[e] ed. Paris: La Table Ronde, 1998).



aujourd'hui le retour eclatant de cette derniere (journalistes « embedded », peuple americain malaxe par la propagande de Bush Jr, etc)

-sur la culture que l'on confond avec la documentation: l'apparition d'Internet-que n'a pas connu Ellul-et les discours qui accompagnent sa montee en puissance ne cessent de renforcer cette confusion entre culture et documentation. L'obsession technicienne qui consiste a ouvrir sans cesse de nouveaux canaux, a y enfourner des produits dits culturels, et a les verser sans interruption, s'autojustifie en pretendant nous faire gagner du temps et elever le niveau culturel. Or avoir acces a des millions de banques de donnees, c'est interessant, notamment pour former des documentalistes et des techniciens, mais cela n'apporte rien a la culture, et n'accroit ni le nombre ni la qualite des gens cultives.

-sur la multiplication « de ce que l'on est obliges d'appeler des dechets humains ». Que ce soit les SDF, les pauvres, les personnes agees, etc, le systeme technicien rejette de plus en plus ceux qui ne correspondent pas a ses criteres.

Trois de ses idees fortes, maintenant:

-La technique cree des problemes qu'elle promet de resoudre par la technique. On peut verifier cette idee d'Ellul, chaque jour ou presque, dans tous les domaines. A chaque fois que le progres technique resout des problemes, il en souleve de nouveaux, « et il faut plus de technique, toujours plus de technique pour les resoudre ».<sup>38</sup> Et on nous presente ces avancees techniques comme de nouveaux triomphes.

Ainsi, a chaque maree noire (la derniere en Europe, due au Prestige, date de 2002), on nous montre de merveilleuses machines capables de nettoyer le petrole repandu a la surface de la mer (et l'on ne s'interroge pas sur notre aberrante surconsommation de petrole). A la solitude des vieillards, on repond en imaginant des maisons hi-tech (le tapis electronique qui donne l'heure quand on marche dessus). A la montee des angoisses et des depressions dues aux medias de masse et aux conditions de travail dues au progres technique, on repond par les antidepresseurs (dont les Francais sont les premiers consommateurs au monde). A la demande croissante d'energie on repond par le recours massif au nucleaire... ce qui pose le probleme des dechets nucleaires (mais on trouvera bien une solution !). A la pollution due aux pesticides, on repond par les OGM, etc. Ellul identifie au moins deux « vastes problemes qui seront soulevés lors de la nouvelle etape d'expansion du systeme technicien » (*Bluff*, p. 75): le probleme ecologique et la situation du tiers-monde. Le premier est bien connu. Chacun peut dresser la liste effarante des degats sur l'environnement, et une liste, moins fournie, des mesures prises pour limiter ces degats. Mais Ellul l'affirme: « La pollution va continuer a se developper au rythme de croissance de la technique » (*Bluff*, p. 278). Le droit international, les conventions, les reglementations? Il n'y croit tout simplement pas... et les mesaventures actuelles du protocole de Kyoto semblent malheureusement lui donner raison.

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<sup>38</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Le systeme technicien* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1977), p. 245.

Le tiers-monde? Constatant le « refus implicite de l'Occident de mettre fin a ses gaspillages et a son expansion des *high tech* », il prophetise: « Nous allons etre engages dans une veritable guerre menee par le tiers monde contre les pays developpes » (*Bluff*, p. 280). N'est-ce pas ce qui nous arrive avec le terrorisme?

-La technique n'en fait qu'a sa tete et pietine la democratie. La plupart des choix techniques echappent a la democratie, dit Ellul: le progres technique exige l'efficacite, la rapidite, et contourne toutes les procedures democratiques. On ne consulte jamais le citoyen a son sujet ! Et c'est ainsi, par exemple, que la France est devenu le pays le plus nuclearise du monde, ou qu'en trois ans, les operateurs du telephone portable ont bati un reseau de 30 000 antennes-relais, cela sans jamais demander l'avis des citoyens. Ce fait, difficile a nier, pose evidemment aux techniciens un probleme qu'ils pensent toujours avoir resolu grace a ce leitmotiv: il faut informer le citoyen. Sous-entendu: lorsqu'il sera informe, il comprendra a quel point nos choix sont judicieux. Mais, note Ellul, s'il fallait informer le citoyen sur tous les choix techniques, celui-ci y passerait sa vie ! Comment pourrait-il se forger une opinion serieuse sur les choix energetiques, le clonage, les biotechnologies, les dechets nucleaires, l'agriculture industrielle, les 30 000 substances rejetees massivement par l'industrie chimique, le rechauffement climatique, etc? D'ou ce paradoxe pointe par Ellul: « Plus le citoyen sera informe moins il pourra prendre parti ». Certains ont tente de contourner cette difficulte en imaginant des « conferences de consensus » pouvant permettre a des citoyens lambda d'arbitrer des choix techniques. On commence par reunir une quinzaine de « candides », qu'on initie en deux week-ends aux principales problematiques d'un choix technique, puis on les confronte a des specialistes, qu'ils peuvent interpeller comme ils le desirent, a la suite de quoi ils forment leurs recommandations. En France, la premiere de ces « conferences de consensus » eut lieu en 1998. Elle avait pour objet de savoir selon quelles modalites les OGM (organismes genetiquement modifies) pouvaient etre mis en culture et commercialises. Ce fut un bel exercice democratique. Les citoyens firent des recommandations de bon sens, reclamant par exemple que soient interdits les OGM a gene de resistance aux antibiotiques (dangereux car risquant de developper des bacteries resistantes a ces medicaments). Mais un mois plus tard, le gouvernement donnait l'autorisation de cultiver deux maïs transgeniques equipes de ce fameux gene. C'etait donc pure mascarade... Et la encore, Ellul avait prevu la chose, en rappelant qu'on ne pouvait compter sur le fait que l'Etat joue honnetement son role de garant de l'interet general, car il est lui-meme « un agent technique, a la fois integre dans le systeme technicien, determine par ses exigences, et en meme temps modifie dans ses structures par rapport a l'imperatif de croissance technique » (*Systeme technicien*, pp. 144-145).

Dans les mois qui suivirent, les opposants aux OGM, convaincus que les processus democratiques etaient inoperants en la matiere, se lancerent dans des « fauchages » de plants transgeniques. Et furent pour cela poursuivis en justice: Jose Bove et son complice Rene Riesel, ecoperent chacun de six mois de prison. C'est seulement deux jours apres que Bove soit jete en prison qu'une poignee de scientifiques lancerent une lettre ouverte sur l'utilite des OGM (appel signe par 800 chercheurs). Mais aujourd'hui

encore, ces chercheurs se demandent comment faire en sorte que les OGM fassent l'objet d'un véritable débat public, et ne soient pas purement et simplement imposés aux citoyens. L'analyse d'Ellul est donc d'une actualité brûlante.

Et ce type de controverses, qui ne cesse de se multiplier, a parfois des conséquences dramatiques. Ainsi sur les antennes-relais: à Saint-Cyr-L'école, en banlieue parisienne, plusieurs élèves d'une même école publique près de laquelle se trouvaient des antennes-relais ont été atteints d'un cancer du cerveau. Affolement des parents, mobilisation contre les opérateurs pour qu'ils retirent leurs antennes... Si les parents ont finalement eu gain de cause, les opérateurs ont affirmé qu'ils cédaient pour apaiser les esprits, mais que leurs antennes étaient inoffensives. Le hic, c'est qu'aucune étude n'a été faite sur les effets sanitaires de ces antennes-relais. Et que désormais, des milliers de gens vivent dans l'angoisse, se demandant si l'antenne près de laquelle ils vivent peut ou non les rendre gravement malades...

On peut s'attendre à ce que demain, après notamment le nucléaire et les OGM, ce soit au tour des nanotechnologies d'essayer de passer en force.

-La publicité et le bluff technologique sont le moteur du système technicien. Ellul notait en 1987 que la publicité venait de connaître un changement d'échelle spectaculaire: ses budgets s'étaient mis à enfler démesurément, elle devenait une énorme puissance économique-financière, et ne visait plus à écouler des produits de première nécessité, mais de purs et simples gadgets high tech, lesquels sont devenus la clé du développement économique. Analyse encore plus vraie aujourd'hui: l'ensemble du système audio-visuel français est désormais dépendant de la pub (ce n'était pas vrai il y a vingt ans, avant la privatisation quasi-totale des chaînes publiques). Elle est devenue envahissante, et sert à modeler le style de vie du consommateur de façon à ce qu'il soit convaincu que les nouveautés high tech qu'on lui vante (CD, DVD, Internet, appareils photos numériques, etc) sont indispensables pour vivre dans le système technicien. Cette pression de plus en plus forte paraît de plus en plus intolérable à une poignée de citoyens, d'où la naissance de groupes comme « casseurs de pub » (sur le modèle de « adbusters »), et quelques actions de graffitis dans le métro. Mais là encore, la question paraît insoluble: comment le citoyen peut-il résister à ce bombardement? se forger une autre vision du monde? ne pas se soumettre à la propagande technicienne?

En 1954, Ellul s'interrogeait: « L'on est en droit de se demander quelles conséquences entraînent ces manipulations? On ne peut pas encore les discerner complètement, car il y a trop peu de temps que ces mécanismes sont en marche pour qu'on en voie les conséquences véritables. Il est vrai que lorsque ces conséquences auront paru, nous ne les reconnaitrons pas non plus parce que nous serons tellement absorbés, tellement indifférenciés, tellement manipulés que nous ne pourrions plus objectiver cette connaissance et que nous n'aurons plus aucune idée de ce que pouvait être l'homme, avant ».<sup>39</sup> Cinquante ans plus tard, cette question reste centrale: comment prendre des distances avec ce monde, comment l'objectiver?

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<sup>39</sup> Jacques Ellul, *La Technique ou l'enjeu du siècle* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1954), p. 333; 2[e] éd.

Depuis quelques années à peine, un mouvement de penseurs et militants (en France, notamment: Serge Latouche et l'association des amis de François Partant) prône la « décroissance conviviale ». Il trouve un écho grandissant, surtout chez les altermondialistes. Il s'inscrit dans la droite ligne de la pensée d'Ellul: dix ans après sa mort, celui-ci est plus actuel que jamais, et je suis persuadé que la lecture de son œuvre est indispensable pour nourrir non seulement une nouvelle pensée critique, mais déboucher sur de nouveaux comportements individuels ainsi que sur des actions collectives.

## A Look at Ellul the Biblical Scholar

by Olivier Pigeaud

Presentations of Jacques Ellul's work begin with Ellul the historian of institutions and Ellul the sociologist, and only then mention Ellul the theologian. In that connection, one usually refers, and rightly so, to *The Ethics of Freedom*<sup>40</sup>, but less often do we hear of Ellul's books of biblical exegesis. Many know that Ellul preached, but his leadership of Bible study groups, even during the last years of his life, is not often mentioned. I am not a professor of theology, but rather a pastor working locally with Bible study groups. Perhaps this activity I have in common with Ellul entitles me to put forward a modest interpretation and description of some of Ellul's biblical writings.

Ellul published a number of biblical studies, including *La Genèse aujourd'hui*<sup>41</sup>, *Ce Dieu injuste*, a study of Romans 9 to 11<sup>42</sup>, *Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation*<sup>43</sup>, and *Conférence sur l'Apocalypse de Jean*.<sup>44</sup> But we will concentrate on two of his books: *The Judgment of Jonah*<sup>45</sup>, and *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes*.<sup>46</sup> Jonah is Ellul's first book of biblical interpretation, and Ecclesiastes is his last one. He wrote in his "Preliminary, Polemical, Nondefinitive Postscript" that this commentary on Ecclesiastes forms an "adequate conclusion" (p. 3) to his work: not just to his theological writings, but to his work overall.

### Style in Ellul's Commentaries

We will begin by looking at some formal aspects of Ellul's style in his biblical studies. The reader is immediately struck by Ellul's frequent use of the first person singular, but he does this in many of his books. More notable is his way of involving the reader.

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(Paris: Economica, 1990), p. 334.

<sup>40</sup> Trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976; Fr. ed. 2 vols [1973, 1974]).

<sup>41</sup> With François Tosquelles (Ligne, France: AREFPPI [1987]).

<sup>42</sup> (Paris: Arlea, 1991).

<sup>43</sup> Trans. George W. Schreiner (New York: Seabury, 1977; Fr. ed. 1975).

<sup>44</sup> ([Nantes, France: AREFPPI, 1985]).

<sup>45</sup> Trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971; Fr. ed. [1952]).

<sup>46</sup> Trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990; Fr. ed. 1987).

Instead of writing about humanity in general, or about believers and unbelievers, he says "we." In this way he places himself alongside his readers, showing that he speaks as much to himself as to them. This is especially true in the two commentaries we have singled out. Even when we omit such turns of phrase as "we note that, in the biblical text...", or "we conclude that...", *Jonah* contains a good thirty passages, some of them long, of the "we" type, and *Ecclesiastes* has about forty.

Here are two examples: in the commentary on *Jonah*, in Ellul's treatment of Matthew 12:39-41, we read: "after the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we know why this word was spoken and we take it more seriously by referring it to the sole miracle, Jesus Christ living eternally for us" (p. 67). Pages 160 and 161 of *Reason for Being* offer us some sentences with "we," some with "I," and others with "you": "Since we do not know what tomorrow will bring, how could we know beyond any doubt what is good today? . . . As far as the situation I am acquainted with today goes, I can play my role and make an excellent decision, but when everything has changed tomorrow, my actions may prove catastrophic

You claim you can tell a person what is good for him by means of morality? What an illusion . . . We cannot tell what is good."

This kind of language clearly contrasts sharply with the style of most biblical commentaries, except perhaps those of Alphonse Maillot, a theologian whom Ellul knew well and appreciated very much. In his commentaries, Maillot the preacher often comes through as much as Maillot the commentator. I do not consider this aspect of Ellul's style as an attempt to make his writing more lively or to grab the attention of the reader. Instead, he gives priority to challenging the reader, rather than constructing a dogmatic system.

We must not conclude that Ellul lacks acquaintance with the "scientific" commentators, or that he looks down on them. On the contrary, he quotes them, basing his argument on them or distinguishing his views from theirs. He is more galvanizer than systematician. Underlying this is his view that faith cannot be systematically expressed. The reader reminds me of Ellul's admiration for Karl Barth, systematic theologian par excellence? I respond that Barth's initial dialectical thought is profoundly opposed to the construction of a closed theological system!

Perhaps you think that involving the reader is nothing new when we consider present-day leadership styles for biblical groups, where leaders make skillful use of the principles of group dynamics, and place importance on "existential" matters. But this was not really the situation in 1952. And in any case, let me repeat that Ellul's writing style was not a technique for manipulating people, but rather a seamless part of his profound understanding of the biblical message.

## **Content in Ellul's Commentaries**

Now let's examine some aspects of the content in Ellul's commentaries. We can certainly see in these works some of his strongest theological and sociological views, as

expressed, for example, in his summary work, *What I Believe*.<sup>47</sup> If we know the biblical book of Jonah, we will not feel surprised to find passages in Ellul's commentary (see p. 32, for example) in which he put forward the doctrine of universal salvation, which he felt strongly about. Although Ecclesiastes does not often treat the question of salvation explicitly, it is a universalist text. Ellul addresses the words of Georges Bernanos to everyone when he places them at the beginning of his study (after the preliminary postscript): "In order to be prepared to hope in what does not deceive, we must first lose hope in everything that deceives" (p. 47).

God's policy of non-intervention, his voluntary choice of non-power (not to be confused with imposed powerlessness), is another of Ellul's strong convictions. The whole end of the book of Jonah gives Ellul an opportunity to express this concept (see pp. 79, 93-98). In the case of Ecclesiastes, the entire text conveys the believer's confusion in the face of God's apparent failure to intervene.

We should note that in his commentaries Ellul does not use the major theological terms we have just cited. Nor does he make use of other words he holds dear, such as "transcendence" and "dialectic." He means to suggest possible directions for thought and faith, rather than to promote previously packaged theological positions.

Now that we have examined some of Ellul's theological points in these commentaries, we will consider his sociological positions. His criticism of Technique, more precisely his critique of the technological system, does indeed come through often in his biblical commentaries. As early as 1952, when Ellul's commentary on Jonah saw publication in French, he warns us against "all our organizations and techniques and works" (p. 65). In his commentary on Ecclesiastes, Ellul often develops these themes (see pp. 104, 145, 153-154, 225). In one especially relevant passage, he writes: "Technique . . . has, like money, become *the mediator of everything*, whereas in itself, it is nothing. In an earlier time, the allurements of money dominated people. Today the allurements of technique plays this role" (p. 92). We can see clearly that what Ellul rejects in Technique is its all-encompassing aspect. The technological system is an absolute system, utterly closed.

His rejection of systems extends to any "system of history" (*Apocalypse*, pp. 150-151), or of justice (*What I Believe*, p. 130). One of the things he likes about the author of Ecclesiastes is that he has no philosophical system (*Reason for Being*, p. 126). All systems tend to live for and by themselves, with no purpose or external controls. Because of this they lead directly to totalitarianism in philosophical and religious thought, and to political totalitarianism.

## Conclusion

Clearly the same point of view determines both the form and the content of Ellul's biblical commentaries, and this point of view is consistent throughout his work: a

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<sup>47</sup> Trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989; Fr. ed. 1987).

continuous struggle against all forms of absolutism that would put human work and organizations in the place reserved for God alone. This final quotation from *Reason for Being* says it best: "I must not make use of the Bible for my own ends, but rather take myself out of the picture as much as possible, in order to listen and learn. This way I may hear a word that has never entered into the human heart and that will catch me unawares" (p. 127).

## Regard sur Ellul bibliste

Olivier Pigeaud

Quand on presente Jacques Ellul, on commence par l'historien des institutions, l'analyste de la societe.. ,et on ne parle qu'ensuite du theologien. On cite alors en general, a juste titre, *Ethique de la liberte*<sup>48</sup> mais moins ses autres d'exegese des textes bibliques.

On sait en general qu'il a ete predicateur, on dit moins qu'il a ete animateur de groupes bibliques et ce jusque dans les dernieres annees de sa vie. C'est ce qui autorise peut-etre quelqu'un qui n'est pas theologien universitaire, mais animateur biblique de terrain, a proposer une modeste relecture de quelques ecrits d'Ellul bibliste pour en degager quelques caracteristiques.

Sans oublier *La Genese aujourd'hui*<sup>49</sup>, *Ce Dieu injuste*<sup>50</sup>, consacre a Romains 9 a 11, *L'Apocalypse: Architecture en mouvement*<sup>51</sup>, et *Conference sur l'Apocalypse de Jean*<sup>52</sup>, nous nous concentrerons sur *Le livre de Jonas*<sup>53</sup>, Cahier Biblique de Foi et Vie de 1952, et sur *La raison d'etre: Meditation sur l'Ecclesiaste*<sup>54</sup>, de 1987.

Jonas est le premier ouvrage ellulien de lecture biblique et l'Ecclesiaste est le dernier. Il y ecrit, dans le post-scriptum liminaire (p. 9), que ce commentaire est une « conclusion adequate » a son ouvrage non seulement theologique, mais aussi au sens le plus large.

Le Style des commentaires.

Commencons par examiner de facon tres formelle le style d'Ellul dans ses ouvrages de bibliste. Ce qui frappe tres vite c'est que Jacques Ellul ecrit souvent a la premiere personne du singulier, mais il le fait souvent dans bien de ses ecrits. Plus remarquable est sa facon d'impliquer le lecteur. Il ne parle pas de l'etre humain en general, du croyant, ou de l'incroyant, il ecrit « nous », se placant d'ailleurs lui-meme du cote des lecteurs, concerne autant qu'eux.

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<sup>48</sup> 2 tomes (Geneve: Labor et Fides, [1973, 1974] ).

<sup>49</sup> Avec Francois Tosquelles (Ligne: AREFPPI [1987] ).

<sup>50</sup> (Paris: Arlea, 1991).

<sup>51</sup> ([Paris]: Desclee, 1975).

<sup>52</sup> ([Nantes]: AREFPPI, 1985] ).

<sup>53</sup> (Paris: Cahiers Bibliques de Foi et Vie, [1952] ).

<sup>54</sup> (Paris: Le Seuil, 1987).

C'est particulièrement vrai dans les deux commentaires auxquels nous nous attachons. Sans tenir compte des phrases du style « nous constatons que, dans le texte biblique.. », ou « nous concluons que. », le commentaire de Jonas compte une bonne trentaine de passages, parfois longs, où Ellul écrit « nous » et il y en a une quarantaine dans le commentaire de l'Ecclesiaste.

Voici deux exemples: dans le commentaire de Jonas nous lisons, page 65,: « après la résurrection de Jésus-Christ, nous savons en plus pourquoi cette Parole a été dite et nous pensons plus complètement à la prendre au sérieux en la dépouillant de son caractère prodigieux, pour l'amener à ce seul miracle: Jésus-Christ vivant éternellement pour nous ». La page 155 de *La raison d'être* nous offre et des phrases en « nous » et d'autres en « je » et en « vous »: « puisque nous ne savons pas ce que sera demain, comment

pourrions-nous savoir sans nous tromper ce qui est bon pour aujourd'hui? » « par rapport à la situation que je connais

aujourd'hui, mon rôle, ma décision peuvent être excellents, mais tout ayant changé pour demain, cela peut devenir catastrophique. » « Vous prétendez dire par la morale ce

qui est bon pour l'Homme? Quelle illusion. ».. « Nous ne pouvons pas « dire » le bien et le bon. »

Cela tranche bien évidemment par rapport au style de la plupart des commentaires bibliques sauf peut-être ceux du théologien bien connu et très apprécié d'Ellul, Alphonse Maillot, qui est souvent autant prédicateur que commentateur.

Il ne s'agit pas, bien sûr, d'un style « pour faire vivant », pour accrocher le lecteur, mais c'est ainsi que je l'interprète, d'un type de lecture qui vise prioritairement l'interpellation du lecteur et non la construction d'une dogmatique.

Ce n'est pas qu'il ignore, néglige ou méprise les commentateurs « scientifiques », il les cite, s'appuyant sur eux ou s'en démarquant. Mais c'est qu'il est animateur plus que systématicien. Plus profondément encore on peut dire que, pour Ellul, l'expression de la foi ne peut pas être systématique. On me rappellera l'admiration d'Ellul pour Karl Barth, systématicien par excellence. Je répondrai que la pensée dialectique initiale de Barth est profondément opposée à une construction d'un système théologique fermé !

Sans doute pensez-vous qu'impliquer le lecteur n'a rien d'original dans l'animation biblique actuelle, qui maîtrise bien les outils de l'animation de groupes et qui par ailleurs a le souci de l'« existentiel », mais ce n'était sans doute pas le cas en 1952 et de toutes façons. chez Ellul, le style d'écriture n'est pas, redisons le, un « truc » d'animateur, mais il est cohérent avec sa façon profonde d'appréhender le message biblique.

Leur contenu.

Venons-en donc à l'examen de certains aspects du contenu des commentaires d'Ellul, pour constater que s'y trouvent bien quelques éléments forts de ses vues théologiques



et sociales telles qu'on les retrouve, par exemple, dans son ouvrage synthétique *Ce que je crois*<sup>55</sup>, de 1987.

On ne sera pas étonné, connaissant le récit de Jonas, de trouver des passages du commentaire où Ellul met en avant l'universalisme du salut auquel il tient beaucoup. C'est le cas, par exemple, page 27. Il est peu question explicitement de salut dans le livre de l'Ecclesiaste. C'est pourtant un texte universaliste et Ellul adresse à tous cette phrase de Bernanos qu'il place en frontispice à sa méditation: « Pour être prêt à espérer en ce qui ne trompe pas, il faut d'abord désespérer de tout ce qui trompe » (p. 49).

Autre point fort des convictions elluliennes: le non-interventionnisme de Dieu, sa non-puissance volontaire (à ne pas confondre avec l'impuissance subie). Toute la fin de Jonas donne à Ellul l'occasion de s'exprimer dans ce sens, page 77, puis pages 92 et suivantes. Pour ce qui est de l'Ecclesiaste c'est l'ensemble du texte qui exprime le désarroi du croyant devant une certaine absence d'intervention de Dieu.

Notons que dans ces commentaires Ellul n'emploie pas les grands mots de la théologie que nous venons de citer, pas plus que d'autres qui lui sont chers comme transcendance ou dialectique. Il cherche plus à suggérer des mouvements de pensée et de foi qu'à promouvoir des positions théologiques étiquetées d'avance.

Après les références théologiques d'Ellul dans ses commentaires venons-en à ses positions sociales. Sa critique de la technique et plus précisément du système technicien est en effet très présente dans ses commentaires bibliques.

Déjà dans le commentaire de Jonas, page 63, il y a une mise en garde contre « nos organisations, nos techniques, nos œuvres ». Dans le commentaire de l'Ecclesiaste les développements sur ces sujets sont assez nombreux (pages 103, 140, 148, 215). Un passage particulièrement intéressant se trouve page 91: « la technique est devenue (comme l'argent) la *mediatrice de tout*, alors qu'en elle-même elle n'est rien.. .aujourd'hui c'est la séduction de la technique. » On saisit bien que ce qu'Ellul rejette dans la technique, c'est son caractère totalisant. Le système technicien est un système absolu et fermé.

C'est bien sûr à rapprocher du refus ellulien d'un « système de l'histoire » (*L'Apocalypse*, p. 157), de sa méfiance de la justice quand elle devient un système (*Ce que je crois*, p. 174). Une des choses qu'il aime chez l'auteur de l'Ecclesiaste c'est qu'il n'a pas de système philosophique (pages 123-124). Tout système tend à vivre par et pour lui-même, sans finalité et sans contrôle extérieurs. Cela mène directement au totalitarisme de la pensée philosophique et religieuse, au totalitarisme politique.

Conclusion.

C'est bien la même veine qui détermine et la forme et le fond des écrits d'Ellul sur les textes bibliques et elle est très cohérente avec l'ensemble de son œuvre: une lutte permanente contre toute forme d'absolutisme qui mettrait l'œuvre humaine et les organisations mondaines à la place réservée à Dieu seul.

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<sup>55</sup> (Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle, 1987).

Cette dernière citation de *La raison d'être* (p. 125) le dit au mieux: « et je n'ai pas à utiliser la Bible mais à devenir moi-même aussi absent que possible pour me mettre à l'école, pour écouter, seulement écouter une parole qui n'est pas montée au cmur de l'homme et qui me surprendra toujours ».

## New Metamorphoses of Bourgeois Society

by Gerard Paul

For all his readers and disciples, Jacques Ellul is the philosopher, or at least the sociologist, of the technological system, rather than of Technique. And long ago, it was agreed that his work comprises a sociological component and a theological component. But Ellul's thought is too rich and has too much unity, and his different books refer to each other too often, for us to go along with this division. Even considered simply as a means of classification, this opposition oversimplifies his work.<sup>56</sup> When we consider the sociological aspect of Ellul's work, we naturally think of *The Technological Society*<sup>57</sup>, *The Technological System*<sup>58</sup>, or *The Technological Bluff*.<sup>59</sup> A common thread obviously connects them. We can more or less categorize other books by Ellul as belonging to this sociological group: *L'empire du non-sens*<sup>60</sup> and *The Humiliation of the Word*,<sup>61</sup> for instance. And theological inspiration is evidently present in Ellul's ethical studies<sup>62</sup>, in *Hope in Time of Abandonment*<sup>63</sup>, and in *Reason for Being*.<sup>64</sup> But some titles prove

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<sup>56</sup> This remains true in spite of the fact that Ellul himself used this distinction, and thus to some degree lent it validity. See interviews in Jacques Ellul, *In Season, Out of Season: An Introduction to the Thought of Jacques Ellul: Based on Interviews by Madeleine Garrigou-Lagrange*, trans. Lani K. Niles (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982; Fr. ed. 1981), and *Jacques Ellul on Religion, Technology, and Politics: Conversations with Patrick Troude-Chastenet*, trans. Joan Mendes France (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998; Fr. ed. 1994). The sociology/theology division has become a kind of commonplace in the understanding of Ellul's thought.

<sup>57</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Knopf, 1964; Fr. eds. 1954, 1990).

<sup>58</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Continuum, 1980; Fr. ed. 1977).

<sup>59</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990; Fr. ed. 1988).

<sup>60</sup> Jacques Ellul, *L'empire du non-sens: L'art et la société technicienne* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1980).

<sup>61</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985; Fr. ed. 1981).

<sup>62</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976; Fr. ed. in two vols., [1973, 1974]). Jacques Ellul, *Les combats de la liberté* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, and Paris: Le Centurion, 1984). Jacques Ellul, *To Will and To Do: An Ethical Research for Christians*, trans. C. Edward Hopkin (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1969; Fr. ed. 1964).

<sup>63</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, trans. C. Edward Hopkin (New York: Seabury, 1973; Fr. ed. 1972).

<sup>64</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand

more difficult to classify, such as *Money and Power*.<sup>65</sup> This is even more true of *The Meaning of the City*<sup>66</sup>, a book in a class by itself. This study resulted from thorough biblical exegesis, and refers implicitly to the earliest manifestations of Technique and human activity with a demiurgic aim.

We have paid too little attention, I believe, to Ellul as historian. History was his inclination and his choice, for both his education and his professional life. He was a historian of law—of human, social questions, and his five-volume *Histoire des institutions*<sup>67</sup> served as a basic textbook for many generations of French law students. In an interview with Madeleine Garrigou-Lagrange, when Ellul recalls which books affected him most, and had a formative influence on him, in a sense, between the age of eighteen and twenty, he cites the Bible and Karl Marx's *Capital (In Season*, pp. 1115). We cannot possibly put these two books on the same plane, but for Ellul, they remained strongly tied together. He saw them as connected simply because of their historical inspiration. In his course on Marxist thought which he taught for thirty years in the Institute for Political Studies (at the University of Bordeaux), Ellul made it clear that Marx referred to Revelation because he wrote a book of history: "history as we find it in the Bible: history filled with meaning."<sup>68</sup>

Along with Ellul's books on Technique and those connected with theology or spirituality, we find a third series of works that seem off to one side, or perhaps between his two main areas of concern. It does not really matter very much what word we use to group together these books that do not quite fit with either of Ellul's other areas of concern but have some connection with both of them. Among his less well-known works, we find one that sheds a particularly clear light on his ideas, because it deals with the profound nature of the ideology that lies at the root of the technological society: bourgeois ideology. Ellul's *Metamorphose du bourgeois*,<sup>69</sup> a reflection on the origins of Technique, also enables Ellul to analyse, understand, lay out, and foresee the evolution of the ideologies resulting from Technique.

In his lectures at the Institute for Political Studies in Bordeaux, when Ellul spoke of the central place given by Marx to economics, he rarely failed to point out that in our

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Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990; Fr. ed. 1987).

<sup>65</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Money and Power*, trans. LaVonne Neff (Downers Grove IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984; Fr. ed. 1954).

<sup>66</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, trans. Dennis Pardee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970; Fr. ed. 1975).

<sup>67</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Histoire des institutions*, 5 vols. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1955-1999; many eds.).

<sup>68</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Jesus and Marx: From Gospel to Ideology*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988; Fr. ed. 1979), p. 9.

<sup>69</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Metamorphose du bourgeois* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1967), has been little referred to, and probably rarely read or re-read by "Ellulians." It has not been translated into English (an observation that English-speaking readers of this article may take as a friendly hint!), but came out in a second French edition in 1998, in the "Petite Vermillon" collection (Paris: La Table Ronde). We find this comment among the remarks on the back cover: "Indispensable for understanding where we are,

day "it is perhaps no longer economics we should consider determinative"<sup>70</sup> It is quite clear that in Ellul's thinking, for the second half of the twentieth century, Technique constitutes the main factor—or, more precisely, the main fact. By saying this, he does not invalidate Marx's insight; he simply believes that the evolution of Technique and the way it has become a global system make it for now the central social fact. For Ellul, Technique is not limited to machines, or even to the increasingly close-knit combination of technical means of transportation and transformation or manufacture of objects. What makes the modern world a "technological system" is its characteristic global organization, which has an all-encompassing, or even a "totalitarian" quality. It includes and makes use of all the supplementary, non-material techniques, from the most ancient and relatively simple (such as law or accounting) to the most recent and complex (insurance, economic calculation, data processing, or advertising, which has for many years made use of the techniques of propaganda, and in the future will perhaps rely on techniques of molecular biology). Ellul is perfectly clear on this point when he writes: "What Toynbee calls *organization* and Burnham calls *managerial action*, is technique applied to social, economic, or administrative life" (*The Technological Society*, p. 11).

In his works with with a "historical" dimension, and in particular in the earliest of these, *Metamorphose du bourgeois* (1967), Ellul extends his sociological analysis much farther than what he had outlined in *The Technological Society* (1<sup>st</sup> Fr. ed. 1954). More precisely, he places the technical phenomenon and the systematization of Technique in their historical perspective, thus enriching his earlier thought by adding the basis of its true originality. In this process, Ellul offers us a coherent explanation of cultural, ideological, and philosophical transformations, and deduces from this pattern the developments most likely to occur in the future—or certain to occur. When we draw together the personal reflections that Ellul offered students in his course on Marxist thought, his pages on bourgeois society in *The Technological Society* (pp. 218-227), and finally, the entirety of *Metamorphose du bourgeois*, we discover a global analysis that resembles a philosophy of history. Although the confines of this article will limit my observations to a somewhat sketchy overview, I will try to show here (1) on the one hand, that Ellul's philosophy of history follows a continuum that extends from Marx to the Situationists, and

(2) on the other hand, that the recent and humanly foreseeable evolution of our societies follows the direction that Ellul endeavored to describe and decipher between 1954 and 1994.

From the outset, we must try to eliminate two possible sources of misunderstanding. First, I will make no attempt to reveal Ellul as a crypto-Marxist, since he was sufficiently clear on this point to remove any possible ambiguity. He never hid or denied

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and where we are going."

<sup>70</sup> Jacques Ellul, *La pensee marxiste: Cours professe a llnstitut d'etudespolitiques de Bordeaux de 1947 a 1979*, ed. Michel Hourcade, Jean-Pierre Jezequel, and Gerard Paul (Paris: La Table Ronde, 2003), p. 104.

what he owed to his reading of Marx, no more than he hid or denied what separated him radically from Marx. He made it clear to his students that a person could not be both a Christian and a Marxist. Ellul's thought has stirred up controversy and differing interpretations in the past, and will surely continue to do so in the future, but at least one point cannot become a matter of debate: the depth of his faith. On the other hand, I will not claim that the writers mentioned below were influenced by Ellul's writings, making them into something like "Ellulians without knowing it." Some of them may have little or erroneous knowledge of Ellul's thought, and others no doubt disagree with him. Quite simply, the historical, economic, or social analyses they put forward serve to strengthen conclusions that Ellul, in another time, drew from his own observations. One final preliminary remark: when I refer to Ellul's thought, or compare his thought with that of other writers, I have ignored chronological considerations or possible mutual influence. My purpose is not to offer an exegesis of Ellul's sources, but simply to show the diversity of such sources, and the very useful character of his analyses for the present day.

*Metamorphose du bourgeois* was published in 1967, the same year as Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*<sup>71</sup> and Raoul Vaneigem's *The Revolution of Everyday Life*.<sup>72</sup> This is no accident: Ellul was interested in the thought of the Situationists, with whom he had some contact around the middle of the 1960's.<sup>73</sup> For, contrary to a common view, although Ellul was certainly a rather isolated man, clearly we cannot call him a "solitary thinker." Whatever subject he wrote on, Ellul read everything that mattered. Sometimes he criticized what he read, and often he maintained a certain distance from it, but he also approved, quoted, used, developed, and confirmed the thought of a large number of French and international thinkers from every imaginable outlook, who represented the most widely diverse disciplines and schools of thought.

We cannot begin to understand Ellul's interest in the Situationists' thinking unless we go back to the body of thought he had in common with them. Within Marxist thought, Ellul reserved a prominent and privileged place for the fundamental economic and social analysis of Marx, and also for what has weathered the forces of events and politics. In the course he gave for thirty years in Bordeaux, he paid special attention to Marx's presentation on commodities (the first chapter of *Capital*), alienation, and work.<sup>74</sup> And in Ellul's books, these topics constitute the main areas of borrowing from and references to Marxism (but this applies only to his positive references to Marx,

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<sup>71</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone, 1994; Fr. ed. 1967).

<sup>72</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Seattle: Left Bank Books, 1983; Fr. ed. 1967).

<sup>73</sup> We have very little information about these contacts, their nature, how long they lasted, and their extent. With whom did Ellul have contact? Did he meet with someone, or exchange letters? The only explanation we have about why contact was broken off is that there was an insurmountable disagreement over the issue of faith. That is not really surprising.

<sup>74</sup> In July 1980, Ellul wrote two articles, an introduction and a conclusion, for a theme issue on work of *Foi et Vie*, a journal of which he was editor at that time. The introductory article analyzes

since Ellul did not hesitate to criticize other aspects of Marxist philosophy, or the followers and misinterpretations of Marx).

To summarize very briefly the intellectual approach of the Situationists, essentially by means of the thought of Debord, we must begin by referring to the very first sentence of Marx's *Capital*: "The wealth of societies in which the *capitalist mode of production* prevails appears as an 'immense collection of *commodities*.'" <sup>75</sup> Here is the first sentence of Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*: "The whole life of those societies in which *modern conditions of production* prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*" (p. 12; emphasis added). The meaning and implications of the differences between these two sentences are obvious: Debord's phrase, "all of life," underscores the extent of the economy's hold over all of society. Likewise, whereas Marx analyzed "the capitalist mode of production," Debord sees, quite correctly, "modern conditions of production." It is true that when Debord wrote, any sufficiently clear-eyed, objective observer could see that the so-called socialist economies amounted in reality to state capitalism. Debord's "modern conditions of production" are fundamentally just one more manifestation of Ellul's Technique.

But Debord's first thesis leads to a second statement, just as important: "All that once was directly lived has become mere representation" (p. 12). In other words, the economy has subjected to its laws the totality of social life, and, in the last analysis, the life of each person individually. The concept of spectacle in Debord has little to do with the increasing influence of the media, which involves only one manifestation of his principle, among others—perhaps its most "spectacular" manifestation, but surely not the most fundamental. The spectacle, "whose very *manner of being concrete* is, precisely, abstraction" (p. 22), is also the supreme stage of alienation. In one of the best and clearest introductions to Debord available, the Italian Anselm Jappe writes: "Debord's analysis is based on the everyday experience of the impoverishment of life, its fragmentation into more and more widely separated spheres, and the disappearance of any unitary aspect from society. The spectacle consists in the reunification of separate aspects at the level of the *image*." <sup>76</sup> In a later section, Debord writes: "Separation is the alpha and omega of the spectacle" (p. 20).

Ellul does not make use of this concept of spectacle. Instead, he bases his thought on the historical process of the individual's alienation, stemming from the loss of control over the product of one's work. The end result is the loss of control over one's work itself, extending to the loss of mastery over one's whole being. Ellul follows this line of thought when he writes in *Metamorphose*:

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the historical evolution of work, its place in traditional societies up to the present time. The conclusion analyzes the value of human activity from an eschatological perspective. These two articles make it clear that for Ellul, there was no radical incompatibility between objective sociological analysis (which we could call a purely materialist analysis) and considerations of faith.

<sup>75</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1976), p. 125. Emphasis added.

<sup>76</sup> Anselm Jappe, *Guy Debord*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Berkeley: University of California

"The individual is progressively eliminated as subject (that is, as a person able to decide, autonomous and unique) by technological growth. This growth imposes lifestyles, behaviors, and rules that are calculated, systematized, and increasingly rigid, on the individual, who is subjected to progressive 'reification,' as objects invade his life. He lives in a universe that teems with more and more artificial objects, and he must live, and place himself, in relation to that universe. He himself is treated as an object, whenever the need for organization, production, or consuming requires it. This leads to humanity's notorious reification, much more so than does our feeling dispossessed from the product of our work. A hundred years ago, the Marxist theory of commodities that served to explain such reification held true. But now, that explanation amounts to a mere detail: in our day, reification extends to every sector of human activity and life. It affects our family life as well as our leisure and our culture. Reification does not result from a given economic structure, but from the growth of the technical environment. And this reification brings with it a corollary: the progressive elimination of human beings by human beings" (p. 237<sup>77</sup>; pp. 273-274<sup>78</sup>).

In fact, Ellul and Debord carry out utterly parallel analyses. We could multiply criss-crossing quotations, always keeping in mind, however, that Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* and Ellul's *Metamorphose du bourgeois* were written concurrently, and therefore did not influence each other. Neither does Ellul turn his *Metamorphose* into an instrument for criticizing Debord's propositions. But let's examine the fundamental differences between the two writers, showing what makes Ellul original, and, from my point of view, how his analysis goes farther than the ideas of the Situationists. For Ellul, the idea of Technique's development as the central social phenomenon of modern society is an issue that has been settled once and for all. So he is in a sense more of a materialist than Debord, who places spectacle, a single element, at the center of his social analysis. Debord is quite objective in this, but it remains true that spectacle belongs to the order of the "superstructure," to use a Marxist term. Jappe writes: "It will be evident by this time that the spectacle is the heir of religion" (p. 8). However, Jappe refuses to see the invasion, or rather the transformation of social life into a spectacle, into a representation of a virtual society, as "a fatality [or] the inevitable result of technological development" (p. 8). For the Situationists, the remote origin of the spectacle, which separates us from the real world and gives us only a "representation" to see, lies in the earliest institutionalized separation: that of Power. The crux of the problem thus becomes identifying "Power" for our day. For, unless we give up on the transformation of society (and such transformation constitutes precisely the Situationists' goal), the issue of Power remains central. This is true, whatever the processes of transformation may be (it is true even if the aim becomes to abolish or annihilate Power, rather than to take it up, which has up to now always been the

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Press, 1999; Fr. ed. 1995), p. 6.

<sup>77</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom*. Trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976).

<sup>78</sup> *McCarthy on Trademarks* 18:65.

objective of every revolutionary). On this point, the Situationists' thought seems very weak to me: they see Power sometimes as personified in a some mythical bourgeoisie, sometimes as identified with a "social practice" that is both anonymous and collective, but rarely as something readily identifiable that would enable us to imagine the forms that any efficient action might take.

Contrary to all this, Ellul's thought enables us to go farther in understanding the mechanisms by which modernday society functions: he calls this the "technological system." According to him, it is the bourgeoisie that developed the ideology of "doing," and this ideology made possible, justified, sustained, and supported the development of technique. Of course, and Ellul was perfectly clear on this point as well, the ideology of "doing" is not the result of the thinking of several groups of intellectuals whom we could locate precisely in time and space. Ellul's "bourgeois" is both the Renaissance merchant and the nineteenth-century industrialist, and no doubt also the eighteenth-century philosopher and the member of the 1789 Convention, perhaps also Pascal and Descartes. And Racine. And the Pilgrim Fathers. Furthermore, this uncertainty concerning the origins of the bourgeoisie, along with its diversity, is probably what gave such power to the ideology of doing and gave the bourgeoisie its capacity to assimilate everything that could enable it to survive. Ellul's whole idea in *Metamorphose* is to show how bourgeois "doing," at the beginning, enabled the bourgeois to capture the reality of Power: economic power at first, then political power, and finally intellectual power. Intellectual rather than artistic power: during the industrial era, hard science is bourgeois, as is the political economy, as Marx clearly pointed out. The only opposition to the ideological bourgeois order comes from the world of art, the novel, painting, poetry, the theater, and philosophy. But, as Ellul demonstrates, the bourgeois ideology of "doing" includes precisely the unlimited ability to take over and absorb everything that at first would seem to be most opposed to it.

So with the passage of time, bourgeois "doing" leaves its mark on the whole of society. Ellul never wrote that all men became bourgeois—on the contrary. But he did maintain in everything he wrote after 1967 the idea that the technological system is essentially bourgeois by nature, and, in a sense, bourgeois "by birth." It is, after all, a system within which individuals, even titans of the economic or political world, have absolutely no power to significantly change its course.

This is because, for its part, the development of Technique moulds society in such a way that it eliminates all leeway for movement, all free spaces. We can credit the Situationists with having proposed the concept of spectacle to describe a society that is both a world of abstraction (in its intellectual, scientific, and technical foundations) and a world of appearances (in the kind of life it proposes). It is an intrinsically "false" world, in which "the detachment of the commodity from any genuine human need has succeeded, with the advent of patently useless objects, in attaining a quasi-religious level."<sup>79</sup> In fact, bourgeois "doing," which was originally the expression of an individual

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<sup>79</sup> Jappe, p. 10. Debord suggested collections of key rings used for advertising purposes as an



will, and then of a democratic will to live together, seems to have mutated now into an autonomous "doing" in a world which has not only lost but abandoned control over its future. We can find multiplied instances of this downward spiral, the most basic doubtless being those that affect humanity itself. For this reason, we will develop three basic aspects of it: the disappearance of values, the alteration in our relationship with time, and questions concerning our biological being .

Of course, one could object that no value (in the sense of a moral category, whether positive or negative) has actually "disappeared": Good, Evil (we have proof in the existence of an "Axis of Evil," which implicitly supposes that we should oppose it with an "Empire of Good"), solidarity, compassion , and so on. Do we need to go on? The issue does not lie in these, but rather in the stated or proclaimed reasons for action: values in the general sense of motives. To be more specific, or even trivial about it, what are, in their own eyes, the justifications for action of modern entrepreneurs and current leaders of great nations? We must not idealise the past; most certainly, concupiscence, cupidity, and sublimation of the sexual urge were not absent from the actions of our ancestors. However, these probably remained secondary to (and no doubt often had less intensity than) loftier ambitions. But in reality, we cannot help noting the absence, or at least the near absence, of transcendent objectives. No, when I use the word "transcendent," I do not mean to refer to the Other or the Beyond. I simply suggest a kind of motivation that would rise above the action in itself. In the not so distant past, and, ironically, in precisely decreasing order of transcendence, we had, in succession, Salvation, then the ideology of Happiness, then material well-being (with it being generally understood that this was the condition and guarantee of moral progress and spiritual improvement for the future).

We have changed all that, moving within a few centuries from the quest of Salvation to "shareholder value," from Pascal's wager to the most senseless technological wagers. In a world of competition, there is no other meaning than mere survival; the proof comes when one merely listens to the prevailing talk about decisions in the business world: "We have no choice," "Forge ahead or die out." Such language may seem acceptable and justifiable in the case of a company that, however large it may be, represents only a minuscule percentage of human society. But the same kind of language seems destined to inspire whole nations in the future. In this way "doing" is purged of any end outside of itself, and motivation (I no longer dare to use the term "value" in this context) is limited to the pursuit of survival, or of individual or collective security. However surprising it may seem when we consider the variety and the efficiency of all sorts of tools offered by Technique, the technological society no longer seems to offer to itself the possibility of changing the world. On the contrary, it imposes adaptation on a permanent basis. An extreme lack of meaning has been attained when we can read in *Le Monde* (30 September 2003) that "change becomes a value" (although we do not

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example of commodity fetishism. On a symbolic level, he was entirely right. Unfortunately, the problem is less superficial, as the amazing changes in consumer behavior since 1967 amply demonstrate.

know if the author is recognizing the state of things or setting out a rule to follow). When will we understand that competition can have only two meanings, in the area of human relations: that of a game in which the stake is pure intellectual satisfaction, or that of the survival of the fittest and the corresponding elimination of the weakest? The second alternative is the one our distant ancestors confronted over a period of several millennia.

Of course, we would be insulting managers and other organizational consultants if we implied that they are not aware of the emptiness of the "values" put forward. This is especially true in cases where change is necessary because of the effects of inadequate strategy, and cannot be assumed to improve things except in comparison with the worst possible outcome: the loss of one's job. But even without going into such dire possibilities, the fragmentation of activity (including that of the tertiary sector and executives) has led some to conceive of ways of organizing work that are supposed to value and develop individual qualities, autonomy, and the spirit of initiative. "The new spirit of capitalism"<sup>80</sup> thus takes mainly the form of "management by project," which indeed seems perfectly suited to the fragmentation of skills and knowledge. But it is doubtful that this approach can long continue to delude people within the framework of a kind of business organization that has remained hierarchical and pyramid-shaped almost everywhere.

Secondly, with respect to a different matter, the evolution of the technological society has profoundly modified our relationship with time. This is true both at the level of the individual within a social organization (whether within or outside of the workplace, although sometimes the dividing line between the two seems very blurred), and with respect to the whole of society. Over the last twenty years, we have seen many books devoted to our relationship with time.<sup>81</sup> In *The Technological Society*, Ellul mentions Enrico Castelli's *Le temps harcelant*, in which the author "shows how the man of the technical world lives without past or future and how the loss of the sense of duration deprives law and language of their meaning.... Technique, as a result of the perfection of means which it has placed at the disposal of modern man, has effectively suppressed the respite of time *indispensable to the rhythm of life*."<sup>82</sup> All the uneasiness of modern people in their relationship with time is described in these words from more than fifty years ago (an eternity within the context of the increasingly fast passage of time as we live it now)! Fifty-six years later, Nicole Aubert merely updates the analyses of Castelli, whom she does not mention (the reader should not take this remark as a criticism, but simply as an observation that there is such an abundance of literature on this subject that books written in the midtwentieth century are no longer considered

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<sup>80</sup> Title of a book by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (Paris: Gallimard, 1999).

<sup>81</sup> One of the most recent, for example, is Nicole Aubert, *Le culte de l'urgence: La société malade du temps* (Paris: Flammarion, 2003).

<sup>82</sup> *The Technological Society*, pp. 329-330, n.1. See Enrico Castelli, *Il tempo esaurito* (Rome: Bussola, 1947). Emphasis added.

essential references; the overwhelming majority of the more than two hundred books and articles mentioned by Aubert were published after 1990).

This uneasiness with respect to time would seem initially to affect only the individual, or at most the organizations that work in the field of economics, where the cult of urgency naturally reigns. But this time-related malaise really affects society as a whole much more profoundly in the way society situates itself in the present with respect to its past and its future. In his very recent book, Francois Hartog analyzes what he calls "historical regimes": how societies experience different ways of being in time, the various forms of circumscribing and "connecting the past, the present, and the future."<sup>83</sup> After an era in which the past was seen as a fixed model to be endlessly repeated, thinking evolved during the period of the philosophy of Enlightenment and the French Revolution, toward a concept in which the future was identified with the promise of continuous, guaranteed progress. Hartog notes that our current collective conception of time amounts to historicizing the present. We see the present as something self-sufficient, massive, invasive, omnipresent, "a perpetual, elusive, and almost motionless present that seeks in spite of everything to produce for itself its own historical time" (p. 28). "The present has become the horizon. With no future and no past, it generates, from one day to the next, the past and future that it needs, day after day, and it bestows value on immediacy" (p. 126). We can see signs of this concept in the way we hide death, and, at the same time, in the permanent presence of memory, in the desire to preserve our heritage and to celebrate, and in our tendency toward repentance and pardon across the centuries. All of these offer opportunities to write a new history, better adapted to the needs of the moment. The reader must pardon me for what may sound like a bad joke, but how could a person fail to feel ill at ease, when he lives in a present that is poorly connected to the past and the future, and at the same time he is obliged to adapt very quickly to non-stop technological changes?

We have seen how the modern individual is left without landmarks because he has no values by means of which he might find meaning in his actions. He is also dispossessed of the world around him, by means of the organization of spectacle, which is the height of alienation. In addition, he is deprived of temporal reference points, which he might have received from an understood and accepted past and a future that he might have had reasonable hope (although no certainty) of controlling. Finally, he is questioned in his biological being.

The theme of the elimination of the person by Technique is very present in Ellul's writings. He emphasizes this idea in his commentary on Marxist political economy, noting that the absence of the human factor in the thought of bourgeois economists does not stem merely from a desire for ease of explanation. It also represents quite accurately the economic reality of their time. This is much more true two centuries later. But we have not yet arrived at this point in analyzing the consequences of Technique's

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<sup>83</sup> FranQois Hartog, *Des regimes d'historicite: Presentisme et experiences du temps* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2003), p. 27.

development. In 1967, in *Metamorphose du bourgeois*, Ellul refers to the ethnologist Andre Leroi-Gourhan: "Since the beginning, man has followed his distinctive genius by creating technical objects: he gives himself the means of dominating a hostile world, but at the same time, the entire development of the technical process consists of an elimination of man through his own techniques."<sup>84</sup> We find this idea again, developed and amplified, in Ellul's later works: *Autopsy of Revolution*,<sup>85</sup> *The Technological System*, and *The Technological Bluff*.

The continuous development of ancient or new techniques now touches us very directly in our very being. It is not a matter of eliminating human beings (since engineers, fighter pilots, and even more so, consumers, are still necessary) , but rather of improving our "performance," through the contribution of techniques. The improvement of sports performance through the use of pharmaceuticals is certainly nothing new. We will just note here the utter absurdity of the widespread use of such substances, strictly from the point of view of sports achievement. But, of course, economic and financial considerations are at stake. So . . . Similarly, the availability of calculators, simulators, etc., is nothing new: the difference between the Chinese abacus and a Cray 2 computer lies in the fact that the person who used an abacus increased his power, whereas the engineer has lost part of his.

But the recent tendencies we wish to emphasize have little to do with the questionable practices of certain athletes or the production of more and more powerful means of computation. Technique calls us into question biologically in two ways: on the one hand, the evolution of certain tools shows human capacity to be obviously inadequate. For example, piloting some military airplanes can no longer be done simply by relying on the "normal functioning" of human beings, on the speed of our brains' responses and the quality of our reflexes. The time is coming when it will become necessary either to bypass human pilots (we see this tendency in the parallel development of cruise missiles and drones), or to increase the speed of the circulation of information between human beings and tools— in a sense, to improve the quality and reliability of the

"connections" between the two. On the other hand, developments in the neurosciences enable us to envisage the appearance of a new Technique, neuromarketing, based on a better understanding of the human brain, and therefore of its receptivity to certain forms of advertising. This example symbolizes the functioning of the technological system, or of what some call "technoscience." Scientists describe a chemical, biological, or other type of law. Immediately, practical applications are searched for (in the case of neuroscience, these might be a treatment for Alzheimer's disease, an improvement in language learning, etc., although we are not aware of such applications). But above all one must quickly find profitable applications, and this brings us to neuromarketing.

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<sup>84</sup> *Metamorphose*, p. 237 [1967] ; p. 274 [1998] . See Andre Leroi-Gourhan, *Le geste et la parole* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1965).

<sup>85</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Autopsy of Revolution*, trans. Patricia Wolf (New York: Knopf, 1971; Fr. ed. 1969).

On this last note, we will attempt to arrive at a tentative conclusion in the form of a question. There is no questioning the issue of efficiency or profitability in the development of new techniques of neuromarketing, which we must now consider as almost a given. We should note that, since efficiency is measured primarily in terms of profitability, the only issue that might call neuromarketing into question would be inadequate profitability. Does anyone question the ethical dimension of the issue? Yes, certainly: Olivier Oullier, a researcher in neuroscience at the Center for Complex Systems and Brain Sciences at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, poses the question of the legitimacy of using neuromarketing, conjuring up the specter of George Orwell. He then suggests that legislators decide the issue.<sup>86</sup> But in reality, the problem is already resolved, and in any case, it is a false problem: the techniques of neuromarketing are only an improvement, achieved through progress in scientific knowledge, of earlier traditional and practical techniques of advertising and propaganda. Since this is so, how could anyone show objectively that any great harm would be involved? In fact, there is only one question that has not been asked, and that will not be asked: what is the real usefulness of neuromarketing? But in order even to have the desire to ask this question, it would be necessary for society to have previously established its ultimate ends: the only ones that could serve to establish a standard for measuring indisputable social usefulness.

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## **Nouvelles metamorphoses de la societe bourgeoise**

Gerard Paul

Pour tous ses lecteurs ou disciples, Jacques Ellul est le philosophe, ou a tout le moins le sociologue, non pas tant de la technique que du systeme technicien. Et il est depuis longtemps admis que son oeuvre comporte un versant "sociologique" et un versant "theologique".

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<sup>86</sup> Olivier Oullier, "Le 'neuromarketing' est-il l'avenir de la publicite?" (*Le Monde*, 24 October 2003).

Or la pensée d'Ellul est trop riche, comporte trop de cohérence et les différents livres trop de renvois les uns aux autres pour qu'on puisse se satisfaire de cette opposition ou même seulement classification quelque peu simplificatrice<sup>87</sup>.

Lorsqu'on évoque le "volet" sociologique de l'auteur, on pense spontanément à *L'enjeu du siècle*, au *système* ou au *bluff*. Incontestablement, un fil court de *La technique ou l'enjeu du siècle* (1954)<sup>88</sup> au *Bluff technologique* (1988)<sup>89</sup> en passant par *Le système technicien* (1977)<sup>90</sup>. D'autres titres peuvent être plus ou moins rattachés au "versant sociologique", *L'empire du non-sens*<sup>91</sup> ou *La Parole humiliée*<sup>92</sup>. L'inspiration théologique est évidemment présente dans *Le vouloir et le faire* et les trois volumes de *L'éthique de la liberté*<sup>93</sup>, *L'Espérance oubliée*<sup>94</sup> ou encore la méditation sur l'Ecclesiaste<sup>95</sup>. Mais déjà, au sein de cet ensemble, quelques titres sont moins faciles à classer, *L'homme et l'argent*<sup>96</sup> et davantage *Sans feu ni lieu*<sup>97</sup> qui constitue un cas particulier, résultat d'une exégèse biblique approfondie et renvoyant implicitement aux plus anciennes manifestations de la technique et d'un "faire" humain à visée demiurgique.

Il me semble qu'on a trop oublié qu'Ellul était un historien. Par goût et par choix, de formation et de métier. Et un historien du droit, donc de l'humain, du social, l'auteur d'une *Histoire des Institutions*<sup>98</sup> ayant servi d'ouvrage de référence à plusieurs générations d'étudiants en droit. Lorsque Jacques Ellul évoque, auprès de Madeleine Garrigou-Lagrange (*A temps*, pp. 14-22), les lectures qui l'ont marqué, des lectures de formation en quelque sorte, ce sont, presque en même temps, entre sa dix-huitième et sa vingtième année, *la Bible* et *Le Capital*, deux livres qu'il n'est certes pas possible de placer sur le même plan mais qui, dans l'esprit d'Ellul, resteront fortement liés.

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<sup>87</sup> Bien qu'elle ait été utilisée et par la même, dans une certaine mesure validée par Ellul, par exemple dans les entretiens avec Madeleine Garrigou-Lagrange ou Patrick Chastenet jusqu'à devenir en quelque sorte un lieu commun de la compréhension de la pensée ellulienne. Jacques Ellul, *A temps et à contretemps: Entretiens avec Madeleine Garrigou-Lagrange* (Paris: Le Centurion, 1981); Patrick Chastenet, *Entretiens avec Jacques Ellul* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1994).

<sup>88</sup> Jacques Ellul, *La technique ou l'enjeu du siècle* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1954; 2[e] ed. Paris: Economica, 1990).

<sup>89</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Le bluff technologique* (Paris: Hachette, 1988).

<sup>90</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Le système technicien* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1977).

<sup>91</sup> Jacques Ellul, *L'empire du non-sens: L'art et la société technicienne* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1980).

<sup>92</sup> Jacques Ellul, *La Parole humiliée* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1981).

<sup>93</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Le vouloir et le faire: Recherches éthiques pour les chrétiens: Introduction (première partie)* (Geneve: Labor et Fides, 1964); *Éthique de la liberté*, 2 vols. (Geneve: Labor et Fides, [1973, 1974]); *Les combats de la liberté: Éthique de la liberté, t. 3* (Geneve: Labor et Fides; Paris: Le Centurion, 1984).

<sup>94</sup> Jacques Ellul, *L'espérance oubliée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972).

<sup>95</sup> Jacques Ellul, *La raison d'être: Méditation sur l'Ecclesiaste* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1987).

<sup>96</sup> Jacques Ellul, *L'homme et l'argent (Nova et vetera)* (Neuchâtel: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1954; 2[e] ed. Lausanne: Presses Bibliques Universitaires, 1979).

<sup>97</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Sans feu ni lieu: Signification biblique de la Grande Ville* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975; ed. en anglais 1970).

<sup>98</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Histoire des institutions*, 5 vols. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1955-1999, en multiples éditions).

Et lies tout simplement par leur inspiration historique: dans l'enseignement sur *La pensee marxiste* qu'il a dispense trente annees durant a l'Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Bordeaux, il mettait en evidence que Marx renvoyait a la Revelation pour avoir ecrit une Histoire "comme celle de la Bible, . . . chargee de sens"<sup>99</sup>.

Entre les livres consacres au phenomene technicien et ceux relevant de la theologie, voire de la spiritualite, emerge une serie d'ecrits qui parait se situer quelque part a cote ou peut-etre entre les deux ordres de preoccupations. Peu importe le terme qui n'est avance que pour tenter d'unifier des titres qui ne se rattachent explicitement a aucun des deux "versants" de l'auvre mais qui ont a faire, dans une certaine mesure, a l'un et a l'autre. Et dans ces ouvrages (un peu) meconnus<sup>100</sup> d'Ellul, on trouve une reflexion particulierement eclairante de ses idees parce que portant sur la nature profonde de l'ideologie qui inspire la societe technicienne, l'ideologie bourgeoise. Cette reflexion sur les origines du developpement de la Technique permettra aussi a Ellul de mieux analyser, comprendre, exposer et prevoir l'evolution des ideologies elles-memes produites par ce developpement.

Lorsque Jacques Ellul, dans son enseignement a l'Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Bordeaux, evoque la place centrale donnee par Marx a l'economie, il manque rarement de signaler que "dans la societe actuelle, ce ne serait peut-etre plus l'economie qui serait determinante."<sup>101</sup> Il est tout a fait evident que dans l'esprit d'Ellul, parlant dans la seconde moitie du XXeme siecle, c'est a la Technique que revient le role de facteur ou plus exactement de fait preminent. Pour autant, il n'invalide pas la demarche de Marx, considerant simplement que l'evolution de la technique et sa constitution en systeme global en fait desormais le "fait social central".

La Technique, chez Ellul, ne se reduit pas a la machine, ni meme a la combinaison de plus en plus serree des moyens techniques d'extraction, de transport, de transformation et de fabrication des objets. Ce qui fait du monde moderne un "systeme technicien", c'est son caractere d'organisation globale, totalisante (on pourrait aller jusqu'a dire "totalitaire") par le fait qu'elle utilise et inclut toutes les techniques annexes immateriales, des plus anciennes ou simples (relativement) telles que le droit ou la comptabilite, aux plus recentes ou complexes, l'assurance, le calcul economique, plus generalement le traitement de l'information, ou encore la publicite qui emprunte largement depuis longtemps aux techniques de la Propagande (et demain peut etre a celles de la biologie moleculaire). Ellul est parfaitement clair sur ce point lorsqu'il ecrit:

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<sup>99</sup> Jacques Ellul, *L'ideologie marxiste chretienne* (Paris: Le Centurion, 1979), p. 15.

<sup>100</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Metamorphose du bourgeois* (Paris: Calman-Levy, 1967), est peu cite, probablement peu lu ou relu par les "elluliens". L'ouvrage n'a pas ete traduit en anglais (remarque que les lecteurs anglo-saxons du present article pourront prendre comme un appel amical!). Il a cependant ete reedite en 1998 (Collection "Petite Vermillon," Paris: La Table Ronde), avec en quatrieme de couverture ce commentaire lapidaire: "Indispensable pour comprendre ou nous en sommes, vers quoi nous allons".

<sup>101</sup> Jacques Ellul, *La pensee marxiste: Cours professe a l'Institut d'etudes politiques de Bordeaux de 1947 a 1979*, ed. Michel Hourcade, Jean-Pierre Jezequel, et Gerard Paul (Paris: La Table Ronde, 2003), p. 104.

”Ce que M. Toynbee appelle *organisation* ou M. Burnham *managerial action*, c’est la technique appliquée à la vie sociale, économique ou administrative” (*La technique*, p. 9).

Or, dans les ouvrages comportant une dimension ”historique”, et particulièrement le premier publié, *Metamorphose du bourgeois*, Ellul pousse l’analyse sociologique bien au delà de ce qu’il avait esquissé en 1954 dans *La technique*. Plus exactement, il replace le phénomène technique et la ”systematisation” du fait technique dans une perspective historique, donnant ainsi à sa pensée ce qui fait sa véritable originalité. Dans cette démarche, Ellul donne une explication cohérente des transformations culturelles, idéologiques, philosophiques et en déduit leurs évolutions futures les plus probables sinon certaines.

Lorsqu’on rapproche les réflexions personnelles que Jacques Ellul livrait aux auditeurs de son cours sur *La pensée marxiste*, quelques pages sur la société bourgeoise dans *La technique* (pp. 198-206<sup>102</sup>; pp. 200-208<sup>103</sup>), enfin le propos tout entier de *Metamorphose du bourgeois*, on découvre une analyse globale qui s’apparente à une philosophie de l’Histoire. Nous nous proposons d’essayer de montrer - très superficiellement dans le cadre de cet article - d’une part que cette philosophie de l’Histoire s’inscrit dans une continuité qui va de Marx aux situationnistes, d’autre part que l’évolution récente et prévisible à vue humaine de nos sociétés est dans la ligne du mouvement qu’Ellul s’est efforcé de décrire et de décrypter entre 1954 et 1994.

Efforçons-nous de dissiper d’emblée deux sources possibles de malentendus. Tout d’abord, il n’est pas question d’essayer de dévoiler en Jacques Ellul un crypto-marxiste, l’intérêt ayant été suffisamment clair sur ce point pour que toute ambiguïté soit levée. Il n’a jamais ni caché ni renié ce qu’il devait à sa lecture de Marx, pas davantage ce qui l’en séparait radicalement lorsqu’il déclarait à ses étudiants qu’on ne pouvait être à la fois chrétien et marxiste. Or si Jacques Ellul a suscité et suscitera encore certainement des interprétations divergentes et des controverses, un point au moins ne fera pas débat: la profondeur de sa foi. Symétriquement, il ne peut être davantage question de prétendre que les quelques auteurs cités ci-après aient pu être influencés par les écrits de Jacques Ellul, d’en faire d’une certaine manière des ”elluliens qui s’ignorent”. Certains d’entre eux peut-être connaissent peu ou mal la pensée d’Ellul, d’autres sans doute la contestent. Simplement, les éléments d’analyse historique, économique ou sociale qu’ils mettent en évidence sont de nature à conforter les conclusions qu’en d’autres temps Ellul avait tirées de ses propres observations. Un dernier point mérite une remarque préliminaire: en me référant à la pensée d’Ellul, de même qu’en effectuant des rapprochements de sa pensée à celle d’autres auteurs, je me suis affranchi de toute considération temporelle et de toute recherche du sens dans lequel a pu s’opérer l’influence réciproque. Mon propos n’est pas de livrer une exégèse des sources de la pensée d’Ellul

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<sup>102</sup> Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*. Trans. Victor Gollancz (New York: Seabird, 1978), 16-17.

<sup>103</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Politics of God and The Politics of Man*. Trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 192.



mais plus simplement de montrer la diversite de ces sources et le caractere toujours aujourd'hui tres operationnel des analyses elluliennes.

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*Metamorphose du bourgeois* parait en 1967, la meme annee que *La societe du spectacle* de Guy Debord<sup>104</sup>, et le *Traite de savoir-vivre a l'usage des jeunes generations* de Raoul Vaneigem<sup>105</sup>. Ce n'est pas un hasard: Ellul s'est interesse a la reflexion menee par les situationnistes avec lesquels il eut des contacts vers le milieu des annees soixante<sup>106</sup>. Car, contrairement a un autre lieu commun bien etabli, si Ellul etait tres certainement un homme assez isole, on ne peut a l'evidence pas le qualifier de "penseur solitaire". Ellul ecrivant, sur quelque theme que ce soit, a lu tout ce qui compte, critique parfois, prend ses distances souvent, mais aussi approuve, cite, utilise, prolonge, conforte les reflexions d'un grand nombre de penseurs francais et etrangers, de tous les horizons, et representants des disciplines et des ecoles les plus diverses.

On ne peut rien comprendre de l'interet qu'a pu susciter chez Ellul la demarche intellectuelle des situationnistes sans remonter au "tronc commun" des deux reflexions. Dans l'ensemble de la pensee marxiste, Ellul accordait une place preeminente et privilegiee a ce qui est au fondement de l'analyse economique et sociale de Marx et qui est aussi ce qui a resiste a l'epreuve des evenements et des politiques. Dans le cours donne pendant trente ans a Bordeaux, l'expose des reflexions sur la marchandise (le Chapitre 1[er] du Capital), sur l'alienation et sur le travail<sup>107</sup> est particulierement developpe. Et dans le reste de l'oeuvre, c'est sur ces themes qu'on retrouve l'essentiel des emprunts et des references au marxisme (references positives et emprunts revendiques car Ellul ne se prive pas par ailleurs de critiquer d'autres aspects de la philosophie marxiste, de ses prolongements et de ses deviations).

Pour resumer tres sommairement la demarche intellectuelle des situationnistes, essentiellement a travers la pensee de Debord, il faut en premier lieu se referer a la toute premiere phrase du Chapitre 1[er] du *Capital*: "La richesse des societes dans lesquelles regne le mode de production capitaliste s'annonce comme une immense accumulation de marchandises"<sup>108</sup>. La premiere these de *La societe du spectacle* est ainsi redigee:

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<sup>104</sup> Guy Debord, *La societe du spectacle* (Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1967; 3[e] ed.: Paris: Gallimard, 1992). Nous citons la troisieme edition.

<sup>105</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, *Traite de savoir-vivre a l'usage des jeunes generations* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967).

<sup>106</sup> Tres peu d'informations existent sur ces contacts, sur leur nature, leur duree, leur etendue. Avec qui Ellul a-t-il eu des contacts? Sous quelle forme, entretiens ou echanges de lettres? Le seul element explicatif de leur interruption qui ait ete fourni est que le desaccord a ete insurmontable sur la question de la foi. Ce qui n'est pas veritablement surprenant.

<sup>107</sup> En juillet 1980, Jacques Ellul ecrit, pour un numero special consacre au theme du Travail de la revue *Foi et Vie* dont il etait alors le directeur, deux articles d'introduction et de conclusion. Le premier analyse l'evolution historique du travail, de sa place dans les societes traditionnelles jusqu'a l'epoque contemporaine, le deuxieme la valeur de l'activite humaine dans une perspective eschatologique. Ces deux textes font apparaitre clairement que dans l'esprit d'Ellul, il n'y avait pas d'incompatibilite radicale entre une analyse sociologique objective (purement materialiste pourrait-on dire) et une demarche de foi.

<sup>108</sup> Karl Marx, *Oeuvres*, tome I, *Economie*, Bibliotheque de la Pleiade, trad. Joseph Roy, ed. Max-

"Toute la vie des sociétés dans lesquelles regnent *les conditions modernes de production* s'annonce comme une immense accumulation de *spectacles*" (p. 3; c'est nous qui soulignons). Le sens et la portée des différences entre les deux phrases sont évidents: la formulation de Debord, "toute la vie", marque l'extension de l'emprise de l'économie sur la société toute entière. De même, là où Marx analysait "le mode de production capitaliste", Debord voit, fort justement, "les conditions modernes de production": il est vrai qu'à l'époque où il écrit, tout observateur suffisamment lucide et objectif a compris que les économies dites socialistes ne sont pas autre chose que des "capitalismes d'État". "Les conditions modernes de production" de Debord ne sont pas fondamentalement autre chose qu'une des manifestations de "la Technique" ellulienne.

Mais cette première thèse comporte une seconde phrase, tout aussi importante: "Tout ce qui était directement vécu s'est éloigné dans une représentation" (p. 3). En d'autres termes, l'économie a soumis à ses lois l'ensemble de la vie sociale et pour tout dire la vie de chaque personne individuellement. Le concept de spectacle chez Debord a peu à voir avec la montée de l'influence des médias, laquelle n'en est qu'une manifestation parmi d'autres, la plus "spectaculaire" sans doute mais non la plus fondamentale. Le spectacle, "dont le *mode d'être concret* est justement l'abstraction" (p. 15) est aussi le stade suprême de l'aliénation. Dans une des meilleures et plus claires introductions à Debord qu'on puisse trouver, l'italien Anselm Jappe écrit que: "L'analyse de Debord s'appuie sur l'expérience quotidienne de l'appauvrissement de la vie vécue, de sa fragmentation en sphères de plus en plus séparées, ainsi que de la perte de tout aspect unitaire dans la société. Le spectacle consiste dans la recombinaison des aspects séparés sur le plan de l'image"<sup>109</sup>.

Et plus loin Debord ajoute: "La *separation* est l'alpha et l'omega du spectacle" (p. 13).

Sans utiliser cette catégorie du spectacle, s'appuyant historiquement sur le processus d'aliénation de l'individu du fait de sa perte de maîtrise du produit de son travail, donc de son travail lui-même, jusqu'à la perte de la maîtrise de son être tout entier, Ellul est exactement dans la même ligne lorsqu'il écrit dans *Metamorphose*: "L'homme est progressivement éliminé en tant que sujet (apte à décider, autonome, singulier), par la croissance technique, qui lui impose des modes de vie, des comportements, des règles calculées, systématisées, de plus en plus rigoureuses. L'homme est soumis à une "réification" progressive par l'invasion des objets. Il vit dans un univers de plus en plus fourmillant d'objets artificiels, et se doit d'être, de se situer par rapport à cela. Il est traité lui-même en objet lorsque la nécessité d'organisation, de production, de consommation l'exige. Et c'est en cela que consiste la fameuse réification bien plus qu'en une dépossession de son travail produisant des marchandises. La théorie marxiste de la marchandise pour expliquer cette réification était exacte il y a un siècle. Elle n'est plus qu'un détail. La réification porte maintenant sur l'ensemble des secteurs de

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imilien Rubel (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), p. 561. C'est nous qui soulignons.

<sup>109</sup> Anselm Jappe, *Guy Debord*, 2<sup>e</sup> éd. (Arles: Sulliver; Marseille: Via Valeriana, 1998), p. 22.

l'activite, de l'etre de l'homme. Elle concerne aussi bien sa vie familiale que ses loisirs, que sa culture. La reification n'est pas liee a une certaine organisation economique, mais a la croissance du milieu technicien. Et cette reification comporte un corollaire sur l'elimination progressive de l'homme par lui-meme" (p. 237<sup>110</sup>; pp. 273-274<sup>111</sup>).

En fait, Ellul et Debord menent des analyses tout a fait paralleles. On pourrait multiplier les citations croisees en ayant bien toujours a l'esprit que les deux textes, *La societe du spectacle* et *Metamorphose du bourgeois* ont ete ecrits en meme temps donc n'ont pas ete influences l'un par l'autre. Et Ellul ne fait pas davantage de *Metamorphose* un instrument critique des theses de Debord. Pourtant, il faut bien en venir aux differences fondamentales et mettre en evidence ce qui fait l'originalite d'Ellul et - de mon point de vue - la plus grande portee de son analyse par rapport aux idees des situationnistes.

Pour Ellul, est posee une fois pour toutes l'idee que le developpement de la Technique est le phenomene social central des societes modernes. Ainsi Ellul se montre d'une certaine maniere plus materialiste que Debord qui, lui, met au centre de son analyse sociale un element, le spectacle, qui est parfaitement objectif mais n'en demeure pas moins de l'ordre de la "superstructure" pour utiliser le vocabulaire marxiste. ". Il devient evident, ecrit Anselm Jappe, que le spectacle est l'heritier de la *religion*" (p. 24). Cependant, le meme Jappe refuse de voir dans "tout ceci" (p. 25), c'est-a-dire l'envahissement de la vie sociale ou bien plutot la transformation de la vie sociale en spectacle, en representation d'une societe virtuelle "ni un destin, ni un produit inevitable du developpement de la technique" (p. 25). Pour les situationnistes, l'origine lointaine du spectacle qui separe l'homme du monde reel en ne lui donnant a voir qu'une "representation" se situe dans la separation la plus anciennement institutionnalisee, celle du Pouvoir.

Le fond du probleme devient alors de savoir ce qu'est aujourd'hui le "Pouvoir". Car sauf a renoncer a la transformation de la societe - transformation que precisement les situationnistes posent en objectif - et quels que soient les processus de cette transformation, la question du Pouvoir demeure centrale (quand bien meme on se fixerait pour but de l'abolir, de l'aneantir plutot que de le prendre, ce qui a toujours ete jusqu'a ce jour l'objectif de tout revolutionnaire). Et sur ce point, la pensee des situationnistes me parait extremement faible: le Pouvoir est tantot personnalise dans une bourgeoisie mythique, tantot identifie a une "pratique sociale" aussi anonyme que collective, rarement quelque chose de bien identifiable permettant d'imaginer les formes d'une action efficiente.

A l'oppose, la pensee d'Ellul permet d'aller plus loin dans la comprehension des mecanismes de fonctionnement de la societe actuelle, celle qui merite l'appellation de "systeme technicien". Pour lui, c'est le bourgeois qui a produit l'ideologie du "faire" et

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<sup>110</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom*. Trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976).

<sup>111</sup> *McCarthy on Trademarks* 18:65.

c'est cette ideologie qui a permis, justifie, soutenu, supporte le developpement de la technique. Bien entendu, et sur ce point aussi Ellul a ete parfaitement clair, l'ideologie du "faire" n'est pas le produit de la reflexion menee par quelques cercles d'intellectuels qu'il serait possible de situer tres precisement dans l'espace et dans le temps. Le "bourgeois" d'Ellul est a la fois le marchand de la Renaissance et l'industriel du XIXeme siecle, et sans aucun doute le philosophe des Lumieres et le Conventionnel de 1789 ; et peut etre aussi Pascal et Descartes. Et Racine. Et les Pilgrim Fathers. C'est probablement d'ailleurs cette incertitude des origines et leur diversite qui a fait la puissance de l'ideologie du faire et la capacite du bourgeois a assimiler tout ce qui peut servir a sa survie.

Tout le propos d'Ellul dans *Metamorphose du bourgeois* est precisement de montrer comment le "faire" bourgeois a, dans un premier temps, permis a celui-ci de prendre la realite du Pouvoir, economique d'abord, puis politique, puis intellectuel. Intellectuel, pas artistique: dans toute la periode industrielle, les sciences "dures" sont bourgeoises ; et meme l'economie politique, Marx le dira suffisamment. La seule contestation de l'ordre (ideologique) bourgeois vient du monde de l'art, le roman, la peinture, la poesie, le theatre, la philosophie. Or, Ellul demontre que l'ideologie bourgeoise du "faire" comporte precisement la faculte infinie de s'approprier, phagocyter tout ce qui a premiere vue semble lui etre le plus contraire.

Ainsi au fil du temps, le "faire" bourgeois imprime sa marque a la societe toute entiere. Jamais Ellul n'ecrira - au contraire - que tout le monde est devenu bourgeois. En revanche il maintiendra dans tous les ecrits posterieurs a 1967 l'idee que le "systeme technicien" est "bourgeois" par essence et en quelque sorte "de naissance". Et il s'agit bien d'un systeme au sein duquel les individus, fussent-ils des potentats du monde economique ou politique, n'ont strictement aucun pouvoir d'en inflechir sensiblement la marche.

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Car en retour, le developpement de la technique faconne la societe de telle sorte qu'elle elimine les marges de manœuvre, les espaces de liberte. On peut donner acte aux situationnistes d'avoir mis en evidence le concept de spectacle pour qualifier une societe qui est a la fois un monde de l'abstraction (dans ses fondements intellectuels, scientifiques et techniques), un monde de l'apparence (dans le mode de vie qu'elle propose), enfin un monde intrinsequement "faux" dans lequel "le detachement de la marchandise de tout besoin humain authentique atteint finalement un niveau pseudo-religieux avec les objets manifestement inutiles"<sup>112</sup> En fait, le "faire" bourgeois qui etait a l'origine la manifestation d'une volonte individuelle, puis d'un "vouloir-vivre ensemble" democratique, semble s'etre desormais mue en un "faire" autonome dans un monde qui n'aurait pas seulement perdu mais abandonne la maitrise de son avenir.

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<sup>112</sup> Jappe, p. 27. Debord citait en exemple du fetichisme de la marchandise les collections de portecles publicitaires. Au niveau symbolique, il avait tout a fait raison. Le probleme est malheureusement moins superficiel, les modifications phenomenales des comportements de consommation depuis 1967 le demontrent amplement (*La societe du spectacle*, pp. 43-44).

On peut trouver de multiples manifestations de cette derive, les plus fondamentales etant sans doute celles qui desormais touchent l'etre humain lui-meme. C'est pourquoi nous nous attacherons a trois elements qui nous paraissent fondamentaux: la disparition des valeurs, la modification du rapport au temps, la mise en question de notre etre biologique.

Bien entendu, on pourra objecter qu'aucune valeur (au sens de categorie morale, positive ou negative) n'a "disparu": le Bien, le Mal (la preuve, il existe meme un "Axe du Mal" qui suppose implicitement qu'on doive lui opposer un "Empire du Bien"), la solidarite, la compassion, ... Faut-il en citer davantage? Ce n'est pas de cela qu'il s'agit mais d'objectifs a l'action affiches, proclames, des valeurs au sens general de motivations. Pour etre plus concret, sinon trivial, quelles sont, a leurs propres yeux, les justifications d'action des entrepreneurs modernes ou des dirigeants actuels des grandes nations? Il ne saurait etre question d'idealiser le passe: tres certainement, concupiscence, cupidite, sublimation de la pulsion sexuelle n'etaient pas absents de l'agir de nos peres mais au cote vraisemblablement (et sans doute souvent au-dessus en intensite) d'ambitions d'un ordre plus eleve.

Mais en realite, on ne peut que constater l'absence ou au moins la quasi-absence de transcendance des objectifs. Oh, lorsque nous employons le mot de transcendance, nous n'entendons faire aucune reference a un Autre ou un Au-dela. Nous visons seulement une nature de motivation qui depasserait l'action en elle-meme. Dans un passe pas si lointain, et dans l'ordre decroissant precisement de transcendance, on a evoque successivement le Salut, puis l'ideologie du Bonheur, puis encore le bien-etre materiel (etant generalement sous-entendu qu'il etait pour l'avenir la condition et le garant du progres moral et de l'elevation spirituelle).

Nous avons change tout cela, passant en quelques siecles de la quete du Salut a la "valeur pour l'actionnaire", du pari de Pascal aux paris technologiques les plus insensés. Dans un monde de competition, il n'y a pas d'autre sens que la simple survie ; il suffit pour s'en convaincre d'ecouter le discours dominant du monde de l'entreprise sur la justification des decisions: "Nous n'avons pas le choix", "Aller de l'avant ou disparaitre". Or, si ce discours est acceptable, justifie, s'agissant d'une entreprise qui, si grande soit-elle, ne represente toujours qu'une part minuscule de la societe humaine, le meme discours semble etre desormais celui destine a inspirer les nations. Le "faire" est ainsi purifie de tout objectif autre que lui-meme et la motivation (je n'ose plus ici employer le terme de valeur) se limite a la recherche de la survie ou de la securite individuelle ou collective. Aussi surprenant que cela puisse paraître lorsqu'on considere la variete et les performances des outils de toutes natures qu'elle offre, la societe technicienne semble ne plus offrir la possibilite de changer le monde. En revanche elle impose l'adaptation permanente. Le sommet du non-signifiant est atteint lorsqu'on peut lire dans *Le Monde* du 30 septembre 2003 que "le changement devient une valeur" (sans qu'on sache d'ailleurs tres bien si l'auteur constate un etat de fait ou enonce une regle de conduite). Prendra-t-on conscience rapidement que sur le plan des relations humaines, la competition ne peut avoir que deux significations: celle d'un jeu dans

lequel l'enjeu est de pure satisfaction intellectuelle, celle de la survie des plus forts et de l'élimination correlative des plus faibles. Le second cas de figure est celui que nos lointains ancêtres ont affronté pendant quelques millénaires...

Bien entendu, ce serait faire injure aux managers et autres conseils en organisation que de laisser croire qu'ils n'ont pas conscience de la vacuité des "valeurs" mises en avant, particulièrement dans les cas où le changement, imposé par les conséquences d'une stratégie déficiente, ne peut être affecté d'un signe positif qu'au regard du pire, en l'occurrence la perte de l'emploi. Mais sans même aller jusqu'à évoquer des hypothèses aussi noires, l'émiettement de l'activité, y compris dans le secteur tertiaire et chez les cadres, a conduit à imaginer des modes d'organisation du travail censés valoriser et développer les qualités individuelles, l'autonomie, l'esprit d'initiative. "Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme"<sup>113</sup> s'incarne donc principalement dans le "mode de gestion par projet" qui apparaît en effet parfaitement adapté à l'émiettement des compétences et des savoirs. Il est douteux qu'il puisse longtemps faire illusion dans le cadre d'une organisation de l'entreprise demeurée presque partout hiérarchisée et pyramidale.

Dans un autre ordre d'idée, l'évolution de la société technicienne a modifié profondément le rapport au temps, que ce soit au niveau de l'individu intégré dans une organisation sociale incluant à la fois le travail et le nontravail (parfois d'ailleurs en laissant très floue la séparation entre les deux), ou au niveau de la société toute entière. On a vu depuis une vingtaine d'années se multiplier les ouvrages consacrés à ce sujet sensible du rapport au temps<sup>114</sup>. Or, dans *La technique*, Jacques Ellul évoquait l'ouvrage intitulé *Le temps harcelant* dont l'auteur, Enrico Castelli, montrait "comment l'homme du monde technique vit sans passé et sans avenir, comment la perte du sens de la durée ôte son sens au droit et au langage". Et encore: ". la technique, grâce aux moyens perfectionnés qu'elle met à la disposition de l'homme, supprime effectivement tous les délais qui étaient indispensables au rythme de vie"<sup>115</sup>.

Tout le malaise de l'homme moderne dans son rapport au temps est contenu dans ces mots datant maintenant de plus de 50 ans (une éternité dans le contexte d'accélération du déroulement temporel tel que nous le vivons maintenant !). Cinquante-six ans plus tard, Nicole Aubert ne fait qu'actualiser les analyses de Castelli qu'elle ne cite d'ailleurs pas (qu'on ne voie pas dans cette notation un reproche mais le simple constat que l'abondance de la littérature sur le sujet est telle que des ouvrages écrits vers le milieu du vingtième siècle ne constituent plus des références obligées - l'immense majorité des titres référencés par Mme Aubert, plus de 200 livres et articles, sont datés après 1990).

Or, ce malaise par rapport au temps, qui, dans une première approche, semble ne toucher que l'individu, ou tout au plus les organisations œuvrant dans le champ de

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<sup>113</sup> Titre d'un livre de Luc Boltanski et Eve Chiapello (Paris: Gallimard, 1999).

<sup>114</sup> L'un des derniers en date: *Le culte de l'urgence*, sous-titre *La société malade du temps*, de Nicole Aubert (Paris: Flammarion, 2003).

<sup>115</sup> *La technique*, p. 297-298, n.1 [1954] ; p.298, n.1 [1990] . V. Enrico Castelli, *Il tempo esaurito* (Rome: Bussola, 1947). C'est nous qui soulignons.

l'économique ou regne justement ce "culte de l'urgence", affecte en réalité beaucoup plus profondément le corps social dans la manière dont il se situe dans le présent par rapport à son passé et à son avenir. Dans son livre très récent<sup>116</sup>, François Hartog analyse les différentes manières, ce qu'il appelle les "régimes d'historicité", c'est-à-dire comment les sociétés vivent les différentes manières d'être dans le temps, les diverses formes de délimitation et "d'articulation du passé, du présent et du futur" (p. 27). D'une époque où le passé était vu comme le modèle indépassable à répéter sans fin, on avait évolué, avec la philosophie des Lumières et la Révolution française, vers une conception dans laquelle l'avenir était identifié à la promesse d'un progrès continu et garanti. Or, constate Hartog, notre conception collective du temps est celle de l'historicisation d'un présent qui se suffit à lui-même, un présent massif, envahissant, omniprésent, "un présent perpétuel, insaisissable et quasiment immobile, cherchant malgré tout à produire pour lui-même son propre temps historique" (p. 28).

"Le présent est devenu l'horizon. Sans futur et sans passé, il génère, au jour le jour, le passé et le futur dont il

a, jour après jour besoin et valorise l'immédiat" (p. 126). Signes de cette conception, la mort escamotée et, en même temps, la présence permanente de la mémoire, le goût de la conservation du patrimoine, de la célébration, du repentir et du pardon par-delà les siècles, toutes occasions de réécrire une histoire nouvelle, mieux adaptée aux besoins du moment.

Qu'on veuille bien me pardonner ce qui pourrait passer pour une plaisanterie facile. Mais comment pourrait-il échapper au malaise, cet individu qui survit dans un présent mal relié au passé comme au futur, et est en même temps contraint de s'adapter à toute vitesse à des changements techniques permanents?

Privé des repères que sont les valeurs par lesquelles il pourrait trouver un sens à ses actes, dépossédé du monde qui l'entoure par l'organisation du spectacle, paroxysme de l'aliénation, privé des repères temporels que lui donneraient un passé compris et assumé et un avenir qu'il aurait, sinon la certitude, au moins une espérance raisonnable de maîtriser, l'être humain est enfin remis en question dans son être biologique.

Le thème de "l'élimination de la personne" par la technique est très présent chez Ellul. Il met déjà cette idée en valeur dans son commentaire de l'économie politique marxiste en notant que l'absence du facteur humain dans la pensée des économistes bourgeois ne répond pas seulement à une commodité d'exposition mais traduit très précisément la réalité économique du temps. A fortiori, la réalité économique deux siècles plus tard. Mais nous ne sommes pas encore là dans l'analyse des conséquences du développement de la technique. Des 1967, dans *Metamorphose du bourgeois*, Ellul invoque l'ethnologue Leroi-Gourhan (*Le geste et la parole*) en écrivant: ". l'homme depuis l'origine en créant des objets techniques obéit à son génie particulier, il se donne les moyens de dominer un monde hostile, mais *en même temps* tout le développement du processus technique

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<sup>116</sup> François Hartog, *Des régimes d'historicité: Présentisme et expériences du temps* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2003).

consiste en une élimination de l'homme par ses propres techniques"<sup>117</sup>. On retrouve cette idée, développée et amplifiée, dans tous les ouvrages ultérieurs, *Autopsie de la Revolution*<sup>118</sup>, *Le système technicien*, *Le bluff technologique*.

Or, le développement continu d'anciennes ou de nouvelles techniques touche maintenant très directement la personne dans son être: il ne s'agit plus de l'éliminer (pour l'instant on ne se passe pas - pas encore - de l'ingénieur, du pilote de chasse, moins encore du consommateur) mais d'améliorer la "performance" par l'apport des techniques. L'amélioration des performances sportives par l'apport de substances pharmaceutiques n'a rien d'un phénomène nouveau. On notera seulement ici le caractère totalement absurde de la généralisation de telles pratiques, du point de vue strict de l'exploit sportif. Mais bien entendu, des considérations économiques et financières sont en jeu. Alors ... De même, la mise à disposition d'outils de calcul, de simulation, etc. n'a rien non plus de très nouveau: la différence entre le boulier chinois et un ordinateur Cray 2 tient à ce que l'utilisateur du boulier accroissait son pouvoir tandis que l'ingénieur a perdu une part du sien.

Mais les tendances récentes que nous voulons mettre en lumière ont peu à voir avec les pratiques douteuses de certains sportifs ou la production de moyens de calcul de plus en plus puissants. La technique met en question l'être humain biologique sous deux aspects:

-d'une part, l'évolution de certains outils met en évidence l'insuffisance des capacités humaines: le pilotage de certains avions militaires ne peut plus être assuré seulement en s'appuyant sur le "fonctionnement normal" d'un être humain, sur la rapidité de son système neuronal, la qualité de ses réflexes. Le temps est proche où il deviendra nécessaire, soit de se passer du pilotage humain (c'est la tendance au développement parallèle des missiles de croisière et des drones), soit d'accroître la vitesse de circulation de l'information entre nous et les outils, en quelque sorte d'améliorer la qualité et la fiabilité des "connexions" entre les deux. D'autre part, le développement des neurosciences permet d'envisager qu'apparaisse une technique nouvelle, celle du neuromarketing fondée sur une meilleure compréhension du cerveau humain, donc de sa réceptivité à telle ou telle forme de publicité. Or, cet exemple est emblématique du fonctionnement du système technicien ou de ce que certains nomment "Technoscience". Des scientifiques mettent en évidence telle ou telle loi physique, chimique, biologique, etc. On met immédiatement à l'étude quelques applications positives (dans le cas présent des neurosciences, ce pourrait être - mais nous n'en avons pas entendu parler - la thérapeutique d'Alzheimer, l'amélioration de l'apprentissage des langues, etc.). Mais il faut surtout trouver très vite des applications "rentables", d'où le neuromarketing.

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<sup>117</sup> *Metamorphose*, p. 237 [1967] ; p. 274 [1998] . V. André Leroi-Gourhan, *Le geste et la parole* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1965).

<sup>118</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Autopsie de la révolution* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1979).



C'est sur cette dernière notation que nous nous essaierons à une conclusion toute provisoire en forme de question. Dans la mise en œuvre, qu'il faut considérer maintenant comme quasi acquise, des techniques nouvelles du neuromarketing, l'idée de l'efficacité ne fait pas débat. Sa rentabilité non plus. Il convient de remarquer que l'efficacité étant mesurée principalement à l'aune de la rentabilité, le seul élément de nature à provoquer une remise en cause du neuromarketing serait le constat d'une rentabilité insuffisante. S'interroge-t-on sur la dimension éthique de la question? Certes, et M. Olivier Oullier, chercheur en neurosciences au Center for Complex Systems and Brain Sciences à la Florida Atlantic University de Boca Raton, pose la question de la légitimité de l'usage du neuromarketing, et évoquant le spectre d'Orwell, renvoie finalement la balle au législateur<sup>119</sup>. Mais en réalité le problème est déjà résolu et c'est d'ailleurs un faux problème: les techniques du neuromarketing ne sont qu'un perfectionnement, apporté par les progrès de la connaissance scientifique, aux vieilles techniques artisanales et empiriques de la publicité et de la propagande; comment pourrait-on, dans ces conditions, en démontrer objectivement la plus grande nocivité?

En fait, il n'est qu'une question qui n'a pas été posée et qu'on ne posera pas: quelle est l'utilité réelle du neuromarketing? Mais pour avoir seulement envie de poser cette question, il serait préalablement nécessaire que la société ait établi les fins supérieures qui seules pourraient constituer l'étalon de mesure d'une utilité sociale incontestable.

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<sup>119</sup> Olivier Oullier, "Le 'neuromarketing' est-il l'avenir de la publicité?" (*Le Monde*, 24 octobre 2003).

# Re-Viewing Ellul

## Presence of the Kingdom

by Jacques Ellul

Reviewed by Virginia Landgraf

*Presence au monde moderne: problemes de la civilisation post-chretienne.* Geneva: Roulet, 1948. English translation by Olive Wyon published with a foreword by William Stringfellow as *The Presence of the Kingdom* (New York: Seabury, 1967). Second edition of Wyon's translation, with a new preface and afterword by the author and an introduction by Daniel B. Clendenin, published under the same English title (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1989).

This 1948 book is Ellul's manifesto. Declaring an opposition between the spirit of "this present age," which he believes is always a will to death, and the spirit of Christ which Christians are called to bear in this world, he announces his diagnosis of the problems of contemporary civilization and sketches what Christian resistance might look like.

The diagnosis of civilization's problems will look familiar to those who know Ellul's later work. A vicious circle is operating based on the reverence for facts (even dreadful realities such as the atomic bomb); technical, political, and social activities aimed at material effectiveness; and the drowning out of communication between persons by mass media and ideological myths. The elements of this circle rob people of transcendent reference points by which to question these facts, activities, or noises. Means for material success have become ends in themselves, altars on which are sacrificed the time, freedom, and lives of flesh-and-blood human beings.

In face of this vicious circle, Ellul criticizes some common approaches of the churches as unbiblical and ineffectual. Spiritualization of the Christian message, as if the material world did not matter, denies the calling of Christians to live *in* the world. Baptism by the churches of worldly projects, such as socialism or post-war reconstruction, denies their calling to be not *of* the world. Either of these options destroys the tension between the "already" and the "not yet" in this world prior to the eschaton. Christians may be called to withdraw from worldly projects or to join them, but their refusal should never be escapism, and their cooperation should never be confused with identification of a given activity as the one Christian way.

Ellul believes that the true calling of Christians is to bear the eschatological presence of Christ here and now. This presence is a truly revolutionary force because it brings

judgment to bear on the forces of the world and hope for a future beyond the vicious circle of material facts. This presence should issue in a Christian “style of life” which appears as a sign to those outside the church, an alternative to the way things are currently going. Ellul is reluctant to give programmatic specifics about this style of life, except to say that it involves one’s material commitments, personal relationships, and involvements in the wider society.

Because this is one of Ellul’s earliest books, he sometimes makes arguments which he developed at length elsewhere, such as the autonomy of technique. Even one who knows the details of these arguments may question the hyperbolic nature of some of his statements. Do the workings of the world always lead towards suicide? One may agree that many forces today drive the world towards self-destruction without being able to isolate a diabolical element in every phenomenon. It is ultimately a theological assumption to believe that this world is ruled by powers opposed to God. Without such an assumption, many of Ellul’s arguments would not make sense. One might believe that these forces will reach a point of exhaustion and right themselves.

Similarly, one may disagree with the positive side of his proclamation if one holds different theological assumptions. A theology of gradual improvement may have no use for a tension between the “already” and “not yet.” One who does not believe in the decisiveness of Jesus Christ may question whether that event can bring a transcendent perspective to bear on a closed system.

However, if one accepts that the world is fallen and that the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are decisive for the redemption of creation, Ellul’s argument still holds appeal today. Even if technique is not as autonomous from human ends as Ellul thought, technique still manifests a kind of excess, and the desire to create more powerful means leads to the forced adjustment of human beings to these means. Consider the obsolescence of computer hardware and software which are in good working order. Desires for technical effectiveness, power over others, and economic wealth are probably mixed in most people’s psyches into a more generalized desire for security or safety. Attempts to isolate any one of these desires as *the* driving force of society in a given time may be mistaken. However, analysis of the ways in which technical effectiveness, political power, or financial capital become ends in themselves is still helpful.

## News & Notes

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—**International Colloquium on Ellul: POITIERS, 21-22 OCTOBER 2004**

Patrick Chastenet, AIJE President and Professor of Political Science at the University of Poitiers, has announced the program for the international colloquium taking

place 21-22 October 2004. The overall title of the program is “Jacques Ellul: Libre examen d’une pensée sans frontières.” The nineteen scheduled papers will cover explore a wide range of topics including technology, politics, law, art, propaganda and ethics. For further information, including how to register, visit [www.ellul.org](http://www.ellul.org) or [www.jacques-ellul.org](http://www.jacques-ellul.org).

—**ALPHONSE MAILLOT**, a pastor and theologian in the Reformed Church of France died on December 5, 2003 at the age of 83. Maillot was a good friend and colleague of Jacques Ellul in the Reformed Church and one of Ellul’s favorite biblical scholars. Among his many published books were a three-volume commentary on the Psalms, an exposition of Romans, and a study of the Beatitudes. In his own forthcoming book on the Ten Commandments, David Gill writes that Maillot’s book on the Decalogue is by far the best and most insightful work he has ever read on the topic.

—**XNASTS SYMPOSIUM ON ELLUL**. Bill Vanderburg informs us that a special symposium on Jacques Ellul took place February 21, 2004, at the annual meeting of the National Association for Science, Technology, and Society in Baltimore. Some or all of the ten papers presented at the meeting will be published in a future issue of the *Bulletin of Science, Technology, and Society*. More information available at [www.nasts.org](http://www.nasts.org).

—**SOCIALCRITIC.ORG**. The *Social Criticism Review*, (Hans Talmon, Editor), web site [www.socialcritic.org](http://www.socialcritic.org), is a “forum for ideas that go against the current.” Based in the Netherlands, SCR offers an outstanding selection of over 1000 online readings on the crisis of modernity, including material by Jacques Ellul. Check out this terrific resource.

—**MEDIA ECOLOGY ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE**, 1013 JUNE 2004. Joyce Hanks will be a speaker on “Media Education in a Technological Society” at the annual convention of the MEA at Rochester Institute of Technology in New York. The MEA is an association of media and communications scholars interested in the work of thinkers like Jacques Ellul, Neil Postman, Walter Ong, Marshall McLuhan, and Harold Innis.

—**CHRISTIANITY & ANARCHISM CONFERENCE**, 31 JULY 2004. Andy Baker invites all interested to participate in a one-day conference on “Engaging the Powers: Anarchism, Christianity, and Social Change,” July 31, 2004, in New York City. Topics will include voting, imprisonment, social change, and the Catholic Worker movement. More info by writing Andy at 332 East 19<sup>th</sup> Street, #14, New York NY 10003, by visiting <http://conference.jesusradicals.com>, or by telephoning 646-425-3272.

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The IJES (with its francophone sister-society, L’Association Internationale Jacques Ellul) links together scholars and friends of various specializations, vocations, back-

grounds, and nations, who share a common interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), long time professor at the University of Bordeaux. Our objectives are (1) to preserve and disseminate his literary and intellectual heritage, (2) to extend his social critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) to extend his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

The IJES and AIJE have been founded by a group of long-time students, scholars, and friends of Jacques Ellul, with the counsel and support of Jean, Yves, and Dominique Ellul, and as a French-American collaboration.

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### **Pour une critique de la société technicienne**

2004/2

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La Technique

Editorial

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## Editorial

Le premier numéro des *Cahiers Jacques Ellul* a trouvé son public. Ce succès est un encouragement pour son éditeur, l'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul. Paradoxalement, cette réussite nourrit aussi chez certains quelques inquiétudes. Didier Nordon a fait un (mauvais) rêve: la pensée d'Ellul, ou du moins son ersatz, citée à tort et à travers par l'ensemble de la classe politico-médiatique. Pour éviter sa banalisation et sa trahison, il encourage l'A.I.J.E. à rester ellulienne, donc petite !

À l'inverse, notre ami David W. Gill s'inquiète moins du dévotionnisme que des risques de division en petites chapelles recroquevillées sur elles-mêmes. Il milite résolument en faveur de l'ouverture et du pluralisme. La publication en version originale (outre l'occasion d'entretenir notre lecture de l'anglais et de rendre la politesse à *The Ellul Forum*) de l'article du président de l'*International Jacques Ellul Society* a valeur de symbole. Elle renforce les liens qui nous unissent aux amis américains d'Ellul par-delà toute considération de politique internationale.

Les attentats du 11 septembre 2001 et le déclenchement de la « guerre contre le terrorisme » en Afghanistan, en Irak et ailleurs, sont l'occasion de rappeler l'exigence chrétienne radicale d'Ellul en la matière. Non seulement il réfute la fameuse théorie de « la guerre juste » qui légitime le recours à la violence mais il plaide aussi en faveur de la « non-puissance », c'est-à-dire le refus délibéré d'exercer sa puissance. Si la guerre peut s'avérer inévitable du point de vue politique, elle ne peut jamais se justifier au regard de la foi en Christ.

Sur le même sujet, Patrick Troude-Chastenot se demande si l'on peut vouloir faire la guerre au nom (de la défense) du Droit sans risquer soit de perdre la première soit de bafouer le second. Le traitement que l'Amérique réserve à ses prisonniers - au nom de l'efficacité ! - illustre selon lui la difficulté des démocraties pluralistes à respecter leurs propres règles lorsqu'elles sont confrontées à la menace terroriste.

Il est toujours question des Etats-Unis avec Franck Bousquet qui décrit les films hollywoodiens comme l'illustration parfaite de la société technicienne analysée par Ellul. Ne retrouve-t-on pas en effet le principe technique - la recherche de l'efficacité et donc la valorisation du spécialiste - à l'origine de la plupart des scénarios des *blockbusters*?

Daniel Cerezuelle s'est intéressé pour sa part à deux films de science-fiction symptomatiques de notre fascination pour les techniques informatiques. À la manière complaisante de *The Matrix* ou plus distanciée de *Avalon*, cette plongée dans le monde virtuel flatterait nos desirs régressifs et nous éloignerait aussi dangereusement du « sens des réalités » que le ferait une drogue.

Le *Dossier special* de cette livraison est consacré à la technique. Il débute par ce que Jacques Ellul lui-même présentait comme le résumé d'un livre longtemps introuvable *Le Système technicien* (1977).

Si Dominique Bourg reconnaît volontiers à l'auteur de *La Technique ou l'enjeu du siècle* (1954) la primauté d'une réflexion sociologique argumentée sur la question de l'autonomie de la technique, il ne partage ni ses prémisses ni ses conclusions. Sa méthode reposerait, selon lui, sur un substrat moral qui en réduirait singulièrement la validité. Cette interprétation critique confirme la pertinence et l'actualité de la pensée d'Ellul en cette année marquant le dixième anniversaire de sa mort. Alain Gras souhaite pour sa part compléter la critique ellulienne en soulignant l'importance du problème énergétique et le privilège accordé au feu dans notre modèle de développement. Refutant la thèse évolutionniste d'un progrès technique continu, il considère que la bifurcation nous ayant conduit à la « société thermo-industrielle » n'avait rien d'inéluctable, et que seule la voie de la décroissance nous fera sortir de cette impasse.

Le milieu technicien dans lequel nous vivons permet-il encore la réflexion indispensable à une culture véritable? La culture technicienne se réduit en fait à une masse d'informations placées sous le signe de l'éclaté et de l'éphémère. Jacques Ellul rejoint ici Edgar Morin pour diagnostiquer « le déferlement d'un nouveau type d'ignorance dans l'accumulation des connaissances ». La culture n'existe selon Ellul que si elle soulève la question du sens de la vie: la question du pourquoi et non pas celle du comment.

La rubrique *Archives* s'ouvre par un texte tiré d'un manuscrit encore inédit intitulé: *Theologie et Technique*. Nous sommes reconnaissants à ses enfants de nous avoir autorisé à en publier un premier extrait dans lequel notamment Jacques Ellul confronte ses propres recherches aux travaux de René Girard.

Alors que l'œuvre de Max Weber continue de susciter de nouvelles traductions, il nous a paru intéressant de publier la recension de la première édition en français de *L'Éthique protestante et l'esprit du capitalisme* (1964). Après avoir exposé fidèlement la thèse weberienne, Ellul écarte les critiques traditionnelles résultant pour la plupart d'une lecture hâtive et leur substitue ses objections personnelles qui n'invalident pas pour autant la démonstration générale du grand sociologue allemand.

Enfin, Jacques Ellul formule quatre propositions pour tenter de fonder une éthique dans une société technicienne. S'appuyant pour commencer sur les notions de seuils



et de limites cheres a Ivan Illich, il prone une ethique de non-puissance, de liberte, de tension et de transgression.

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*Pour Une Critique de la Societe Technicienne*

The second issue of *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*, an annual journal edited by Patrick Chastenet and published by our sister society, L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul, is now off the press. It is available for 20 euros (postage included) to individuals outside France, and for 25 euros to libraries. The theme of the second issue just released is "La Technque."

*Cahiers Jacques Ellul* is an essential new reference for those interested in Ellul's ideas.

**Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works** by Joyce Main Hanks. Research in Philosophy and Technology. Supplement 5. Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 2000. xiii., 206 pages. \$87. ISBN: 076230619X.

This is the essential guide for anyone doing research in Jacques Ellul's writings. An excellent brief biography is followed by a 140-page annotated bibliography of Ellul's fifty books and thousand-plus articles and a thirty-page subject index. Hank's work is comprehensive, accurate, and invariably helpful. This may be one of the more expensive books you buy for your library; it will surely be one of the most valuable. Visit [www.elsevier.com](http://www.elsevier.com) for ordering information.

### **Alibris—used books in English**

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By arrangement with Ingram and Spring Arbor, individual reprint copies of several Ellul books originally published by William B. Eerdmans can now be purchased. The books and prices listed at the Eerdmans web site are as follows: *The Ethics of Freedom* (\$40), *The Humiliation of the Word* (\$26), *The Judgment of Jonah* (\$13), *The Meaning of the City* (\$20), *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man* (\$19), *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes* (\$28), *The Subversion of Christianity* (\$20), and *The Technological Bluff* (\$35). *Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul* translated by Marva Dawn is also available (price unknown).

Have your bookstore (or on-line book dealer) “back order” the titles you want. Do not go as an individual customer to Eerdmans or Ingram/Spring Arbor. For more information visit “Books on Demand” at [www.eerdmans.com](http://www.eerdmans.com).

**Ellul on Video**

French film maker Serge Steyer’s film “Jacques Ellul: L’homme entier” (52 minutes) is available for 25 euros at the web site [www.meromedia.com](http://www.meromedia.com). Ellul is himself interviewed as are several commentators on Ellul’s ideas.

Another hour-length film/video that is focused entirely on Ellul’s commentary on technique in our society, “The Treachery of Technology,” was produced by Dutch film maker Jan van Boekel for ReRun Produkties (mail to: Postbus 43021, 1009 ZA Amsterdam).

If you try to purchase either of these excellent films, be sure to check on compatibility with your video system and on whether English subtitles are provided, if that is desired.

**Issue #34 Fall 2004 — Jacques  
Ellul on Sports**

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## For the Critique of Technological Civilization



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## Cover

Jacques Ellul in the 1960s

"The mechanization of actions is accompanied by the mechanization of sporting goods—stop watches, starting machines, and so on... The individual, by means of the discipline imposed on him by sport, not only plays and finds relaxation from the various compulsions to which he is subjected, but without knowing it trains himself for new compulsions... [R]eal play and enjoyment... improvisation and spontaneity all disappear."

Jacques Ellul

*The Technological Society* (1954; ET 1964), p. 383

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**For the Critique of Technological Civilization**

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## **From the Editor**

From 1935 until his death in 1994, Jacques Ellul argued for *la technique* as the twentieth century’s most distinctive phenomenon and its most powerful, defining force. Technique, he wrote, is “the totality of methods rationally arrived at and have absolute

efficiency in every field of human knowledge” (*Technological Society*, (1954) ET 1964, p. xxv.).

Developed most conspicuously in his classic trilogy (*Technological Society*, *Political Illusion*, and *Propaganda*), rearticulated and extended in *Technological System* and *Technological Bluff*, *la technique* is the organizing idea for all of Ellul’s work. He exhaustively portrays one thesis—that industrialized nations are beguiled enough by machine productivity to reconstruct all their social institutions on this model. The technical mystique so captivates our thinking that we cast aside all other imperatives “as in ancient days men put out the eyes of nightingales in order to make them sing better” (p. 75).

In coming to grips with Technique, Ellul addressed a wide-ranging audience of practitioners as well as theorists, thoughtful people both inside and outside the academy. In this issue Michel Hourcade and Boyan Koutevski continue that tradition, both academically-trained but serving also as a government official (Hourcade) and media professional (Koutevski). Hourcade wants to understand sports decisively and chooses Technique as his critical lens, rather than professionalization, money, and media spectacle. Koutevski explores the Internet in terms of Technique.

Little needs to be said about the importance of assessing the explosive growth and challenge of the Internet in the decade since Ellul’s death. With the record-setting attendance and skyrocketing economics of sport in our era, with the Tour de France, Wimbledon, Olympic Games, U.S. baseball World Series, the popular film “Bend it Like Beckham,” the influential book *How Soccer Explains the World*, and many other evidences, it is also timely to focus some Ellulian attention on sport.

We are also honored to have Professor Rustum Roy’s “review” of *The Technological Society* in this fiftieth year after its initial publication (p. 19). Associate Editor David Gill is provoked both by the contentious and superficial political contest this fall in the U.S. and by the fortieth anniversary of the Free Speech Movement at his alma mater, UC Berkeley, to reflect on Ellul’s contribution to a better politics (p. 23). Gill also provides a review of *Ellul Forum* Contributing Editor Bill Vanderburg’s newly reissued *Perspectives on Our Age: Jacques Ellul Speaks on His Life and Work*, a fine little introduction to Ellul’s thought that Vanderburg edited from his interviews twenty-five years ago (p. 21).

Next up (Spring 2005, Issue 35) we will be thinking about the relationship of Rene Girard’s ideas to those of Ellul. In Fall 2005 (Issue 36) we are planning an issue on Ellul’s biblical studies. We gratefully welcome your ideas, news, manuscripts, feedback, support, and ongoing participation in the IJES.

*Clifford G. Christians, Editor editor@ellul.org*

## **Sport, Technique, & Society: Ellul on Sports**

by Michel Hourcade

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"I find sports boring." This admission by Jacques Ellul, expressed in the course of his correspondence with Didier Nordon<sup>1</sup>, seems like a sufficient reason for ruling out any effort to study his opinions and ideas on the subject of sports. Also, of course, sufficient to discourage the reader from venturing beyond the first few lines of this article. However, the context of Ellul's words deserves attention, because it reveals a thought process that is both critical and self-critical.

Here is the context of Ellul's statement: "I do not go to the trouble of making a critical analysis of social phenomena that bore me, that I have nothing to do with. I find sports boring, but I can conceive of someone taking pleasure in going in for a sport. I do not understand how someone can feel passionate as a spectator, however. But since I am not involved with them, I take care not to write about sports as sports I did so once, and made huge mistakes!" So ( to quote the title of a recent book on Ellul<sup>2</sup>), "the one who foresaw (almost) everything," once took the liberty of writing about sports, and later recognized that he had gone far afield.

Should such a modest effort (just one text on sports, and mistaken at that!) cause us to consider closed the subject of Ellul on sports? Or, on the contrary, should we keep the issue on the table, and try to locate Ellul's comments on sports, and, secondarily, his "huge mistakes"? The second option naturally appeals more to me, considering that in 2004 Ellul is still an important author, and sports remain a major facet of our civilization.

My reading in Ellul so far (probably incomplete) has uncovered five separate references that would constitute his "sports bibliography":

1. Brief references in two of his very early writings, in the mid-1930's;
2. A section in one chapter of a major book, *The Technological Society*<sup>3</sup>;
3. A section in one chapter of *The Technological Bluff*<sup>4</sup>;
4. An aside in one of his last books (see above);
5. An article requested by a critical sports journal in French.

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Ellul and Didier Nordon, *L'homme a lui-meme: Correspondance* (Paris: Felin, 1992), p. 173.

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Luc Porquet, *Jacques Ellul: L'homme qui avait (presque) toutprevu* (Paris: Le Cherche-Midi, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Knopf, 1964; Fr. eds. 1954 and 1990).

<sup>4</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990; Fr. ed. 1988).



The publication in 2003 of the first issue of the *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*<sup>5</sup> gives us access to some of Ellul's earliest writings, written as he was finishing his studies. It seems worthwhile to place ourselves at least briefly in the center of his thinking at that time in his life.

Ellul's seventeen-page essay "Fatality in the modern world"<sup>6</sup> shows the weight of new forces that press heavily on man and leave him with only one possible response: passivity. Centralization; gigantic size; Technique (already a concern of Ellul's!) which makes centralization and hugeness possible; and the powerlessness of politics—all of these serve as examples of this fatality that turns all men into proletarians.

What strikes Ellul about this society is the importance of the masses, a concept he takes care to define, and then goes on to illustrate, in particular by means of references to the phenomenon of sport. Ellul states that "man becomes part of the crowd. He will become an element within a mass, that is, within a grouping of men, which has come together under some external pressure, for a given purpose they share. Such a grouping lasts only a short time, but such masses occur again and again, almost without interruption, in our society. They are constantly re-formed: the individual becomes part of a mass in the workplace, whether office or factory, he belongs to the mass of readers of the same evening paper, the mass of moviegoers, the mass of *sports enthusiasts*" (p. 110; emphasis added). These words, in a text to which we can assign a date of 1936 or 1937 (p. 95, n. 1), probably constitute one of the first references to sports in Ellul's work. As we saw above, sports are not Ellul's favorite topic, but that does not keep them from surfacing spontaneously in his mind when he is describing society.

Ellul's second reference to sports comes in an essay written around the same time as the above text, in 1937: "Le fascisme, fils du libéralisme" ("Fascism, Offspring of Liberalism").<sup>7</sup> The very subject of fascism offers a hint as to Ellul's probable inspiration in making a reference to sports: the Berlin Olympic Games of 1936 and their context, the Nazi regime and its propaganda display. In this essay also, Ellul points out the role of the masses in human submission. But in this case he offers a more expanded study (some 25 pages in the *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*), intentionally based on Emile Durkheim's sociology, with some references to Georges Gurvitch. The essay concludes with a quotation from Alexis de Tocqueville.

Ellul approaches Fascism and liberalism by means of Durkheim's classical distinction between the two forms of solidarity: mechanical and organic. In mechanical solidarity, an individual is subject to society, whose collective consciousness overlays individual consciousness, and penal law is the juridical expression of society. In organic solidarity,

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<sup>5</sup> *Cahiers Jacques Ellul: Pour une Critique de la Société Technicienne*, no. 1, "Les années personnelles," ed. Patrick Troude-Chastenet (2003).

<sup>6</sup> Jacques Ellul, "Fatalité du monde moderne," *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*, ed. Patrick Troude-Chastenet, no. 1 (2003), pp. 95-111.

<sup>7</sup> Jacques Ellul, "Le fascisme, fils du libéralisme," *Esprit*, vol. 5, no. 53 (1 Feb. 1937), pp. 761-797; reprinted in *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*, ed. Patrick Troude-Chastenet, no. 1 (2003), pp. 113-137.

society breaks down into many subgroups, and the will of the individual plays an important role. The individual is not directly connected to society as a whole, but rather to its parts. The juridical expression of this society is civil, contractual law.

Another distinction, based on duration, is added to this distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity: the masses, distinguished by their temporary character, are seen as distinct from more permanent arrangements, such as groups, the abstract collective, etc. Ellul identifies still another group: the abstract masses, which passively receive external influences, and can transform themselves into concrete masses, thus giving birth to Fascism. As for sports, "liberalism has brought about a social passivity unprecedented in history. It has permitted the creation of abstract masses [ . . . ] in which the life of a man is covered over by a series of overlapping circles that completely engulf the individual: the cafe group, the club group, *the sports group*, and the trade or professional group" (pp. 135-136; emphasis added).

In *The Technological Society*, first published in French in 1954, Ellul devotes a separate section to "Sport" in his fifth chapter, in which he deals with human techniques. Between sections entitled "Amusement" and "Medicine," he devotes two pages to the many aspects of sport, using a distinctly critical tone.<sup>8</sup> Two main themes are taken up, illustrated by examples that initially seem disconcerting. First of all, Ellul notes that sports are connected with big cities (perhaps an allusion to English "rural sports" in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, such as hunting), and with industrialization: first English, then American, and finally Soviet. We should note that this correlation between industrialization and the appearance and development of modern sports is quite commonly laid out in modern studies on sports. Most authors limit themselves to mentioning the historical co-existence of these two developments, with only a few writers daring to answer the question: is the appearance of sports inevitable in a society in the process of industrialization? The boldest writers emphasize the relationship between the gymnasium and the factory. Some more careful ones enumerate the inventions (in transportation and telecommunications) that have enabled different disciplines or sports events to reach the level of fame, passion, or myth (for example, football, baseball, the Olympic Games, and the Tour de France). Still other authors search out possible cultural or national factors. Richard D. Mandell does this: "The same forces that made the young nation a populous industrial power made American sport."<sup>9</sup> Although Ellul did not originate the idea of a connection between industrialization and sports, we should recognize that he pointed it out, half a century ago. Perhaps he discovered it in reading the history or sociology of sport, or, just as likely, he may have come up with this linkage on the basis of his own reflection on the history of Technique.

Ellul continues in *The Technological Society* by saying that sport is also connected with the world of Technique, and is itself a Technique. Here we enter Ellul's preferred

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<sup>8</sup> *The Technological Society*, pp. 382-384.

<sup>9</sup> Richard D. Mandell, *Sport, a Cultural History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 184.

domain, in which he proceeds pretty much on his own, since his keen understanding of the technical phenomenon constitutes an original approach to sport. For instance, the distinction he makes between swimming and the competitive sport of swimming is quite clear and appropriate. The degree to which sports involve technical skill is only rarely noticed and commented on by others,<sup>10</sup> implicitly confirming Ellul's understanding of Technique as omnipresent in society, to such a degree that it becomes invisible.

We could extend Ellul's principles by noting that physical exercise initially constitutes the least technical human activity. For this reason, it is the most susceptible to Technique. The nude Greek athlete apparently shocked the Romans and then the Church; according to etymology, the gymnast was similarly nude. Modern athletes wear scarcely more clothes, but their scanty attire has been carefully designed to offer the least possible aerodynamic resistance. Such clothing is made of the most efficient new fiber blends. This modern athlete's movements and stride have been filmed, dissected, compared, and improved. His food intake obeys the dictates of dieticians, he is medically monitored, and his real or perceived deficiencies are offset by inventions straight from the laboratory. A psychologist completes this medical engineering of sport.

Swimming vs. natation: the athlete is Technique in human form. Should we soften this statement by thinking about diversity in the practice of sports? For example, the difference between high-level sports and recreational sports, or between professional and amateur sports? I am not inclined to think so. The most anonymous athlete, even the beginner, will choose equipment that imitates the champion's. He buys performance enhancing agents at the drugstore or online, and wears tiny electronic devices that measure his pulse and keep track of how far he has run. A study in November 2003 revealed that ten percent of French teenagers who take part in sports use stimulants. According to this same study, young French athletes begin to use such substances at the age of fourteen; Americans apparently begin at eight years of age.

Ellul continues with a reference to the use of equipment such as stopwatches: "This mechanization of actions is accompanied by the mechanization of sporting goods [. . .] In this exact measurement of time, in this precision training of muscular actions, and in the principle of the 'record,' we find repeated in sport one of the essential elements of industrial life" (p. 383). So when science and budding industrial technique met in England, sport very quickly became infused with a modern mentality that would lead to amazing consequences. After all, expressions we commonly use today, such as: "running the hundred meter dash in ten seconds," presuppose that we have previously defined the length of the meter, and that we can measure in seconds. None of this was scientifically and technologically possible before the end of the eighteenth century, which saw the measurement of the earth's meridian and the invention of the Swiss watch. Unexpectedly, but significantly, we can observe these same aspects of modern

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<sup>10</sup> See, however, "Presence de la technique," in Georges Vigarello, *Du jeu ancien au show sportif: La naissance d'un mythe* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2002).

mentality, and therefore of sport mentality, in the early days of mountain climbing,<sup>11</sup> at about the same time.

After considering the relationship of sports, industry, and Technique, Ellul comes to the question of the subjection of man to totalitarian society through sports. At this point Ellul's analysis converges with that of an active minority among sociologists who are critical of sport, represented in France by Jean-Marie Brohm, of whom we will speak later. Ellul states that sports enable a man to relax from the pressures he experiences, but at the same time, surreptitiously, they adapt him to new constraints. This "insidious Technique" extends to the masses. In the guise of team spirit, sports prepare people for the totalitarian spirit, so that sports are essential for Fascist, Nazi, and Communist dictatorships. In "developing" countries, we can see the concurrent penetration of techniques and sports.

Ellul is scarcely gentler in speaking of the United States as the country that first developed sport as Technique, and in calling it "the most conformist of all countries" (p. 383; here Ellul apparently takes up an observation usually attributed to Tocqueville). What can we say to this indictment? As noted above, the analysis of sports by means of Technique is rather uncommon, and radical critique of sports comes only from a minority of voices. Clearly, it is dangerous to pontificate on the degree of conformity among Americans. We can point out simply that there are arguments both for and against. A significant amount of sports sociology, especially in America, follows a functional approach that tends to recognize the role, implicitly positive, of sports in adapting people to social values and in socializing them. As Aesop might have said, sports are the best thing and the worst thing.

Leaving this debate behind momentarily, I suggest to the reader that we examine the sometimes disconcerting examples cited by Ellul to support his argument. He offers three, all related to the relationship between sports, industry, and Technique. Here is the first: "The only country in central Europe which had organized sport, Czechoslovakia, was the only one which was industrialized" (p. 382). Since we have no additional precise references from Ellul here, we can speculate that Ellul had in mind the "sokol" movement, founded in 1862 in what would become Czechoslovakia. It was an organization that aimed at developing "a healthy mind in a healthy body." This movement took root in the United States beginning in 1865, and apparently continues to flourish. Ellul's rather abrupt statement thus seems to refer to an established episode in the history of sport. In this example we can see something of the extent and the diversity of his knowledge, which casts some doubt on his claim to have no interest in sports.

The second example, from ancient history, seems less surprising coming from the pen of Ellul the historian: "The enormous contrast between the athletes of Greece and those of Rome is well known. For the Greeks, physical exercise was an ethic for

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<sup>11</sup> Nicolas Giudici, *La philosophie du Mont Blanc: De l'alpinisme a l'economie immaterielle* (Paris: Grasset, 2000).

developing freely and harmoniously the form and strength of the human body. For the Romans, it was a technique for increasing the legionnaire's efficiency" (pp. 382-383). Evidently, Ellul knew at least some of the many studies on physical exercise in antiquity, which conclude that the Romans had a concept of physical activity different from the Greeks, a concept directly oriented toward its military application. On the other hand, historians of ancient Greece emphasize the very strong religious connotation of physical activity, especially the Olympic Games. In descriptions of modern sports, and not only of the Olympics, the parallel between sports and religion recurs often. We might consider it paradoxical that Ellul, who devoted much of his writing to religious issues, did not note this comparison, which has become almost a cliché.

The third and final example Ellul offers is the most disconcerting: "The best athletes come from workingclass environments. Peasants, woodsmen, and the like, may be more vigorous than the proletariat, but they are not as good athletes. In part, the reason for this is that machine work develops the musculature necessary for sport, which is very different from peasant musculature. Machine work also develops the speed and precision of actions and reflexes" (p. 382). We probably cannot uncover the sources that enabled Ellul to arrive at this clear distinction between worker and peasant performance. We can credit him with considerable knowledge of lumberjacks' capacities, since he is known to have occasionally borrowed an ax to chop down a tree, for relaxation and exercise. But "the one who foresaw (almost) everything" may still have surprises in store for us. French statistics dating for the most part after Ellul's writing of *The Technological Society* indeed demonstrate, on the one hand, that workers go in much more for sports than peasants, and, on the other hand, that physical aptitudes are correlated with height. Also, according to statistics, peasants tend to be smaller than workers.

In Ellul's trilogy on Technique, *The Technological System*<sup>12</sup> and *The Technological Bluff*<sup>13</sup> follow *The Technological Society*. Although absent from *The Technological System*, sports surface again in the "Bluff," as a six-page section inserted between those on games and the automobile, in a chapter on diversions. By way of introduction, Ellul refers briefly to *The Technological Society* and outlines his dual approach involving spectacle and technological discourse, which "has transformed sport into an enormous spectacle" (p. 366).

Clearly, by "spectacle" Ellul means television, and the overwhelming presence of sport in this medium, as illustrated by many statistics. We can also suggest that Ellul may have borrowed at this point from *The Society of the Spectacle*,<sup>14</sup> the best seller of Situationist literature, published in 1967, and well known to Ellul (who was cited in the sacred texts of the *Internationale Situationniste*). Technological discourse is the

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<sup>12</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Continuum, 1980; Fr. eds. 1977 and 2004).

<sup>13</sup> See note 4.

<sup>14</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone, 1994; Fr. ed. 1967).

key term underlying this third part of Ellul's trilogy, following his earlier volumes on the technological society and the technological system.

As in his earlier book, Ellul amazes us in the "*Bluff*" with the multiplicity of his examples, which prove that he did pay attention to sports, in clear contradiction to the lack of interest in them that he claims elsewhere. We also note some naive touches or throwbacks ("Originally a city team used to be made up of people from that city," p. 368; "But where is the tennis of yesteryear . . .?," p. 368), and this unassailable title quoted from the discerning anarchist Cavanna: "Dying as a Fool for Paris-Dakar" (p. 370). Ellul mentions the place of sports in the media, professionalism, money, and violence, offering an abundance of examples and figures, in keeping with the overall tendency of this book, which overflows with statistics and references. But Ellul does not draw only on current events. Comparisons with antiquity mushroom as he writes. The sale of professional soccer players "reminds us of the auctioning of gladiators, pugilists, and chariot drivers at Rome" (p. 368, n.11). The Olympic Games of antiquity (another backwardlooking touch?) "were something quite different . . . there was a truce, fighting stopped, Greek unity was restored" (p. 369), in precise contrast with modern-day Olympic boycotts applied to the United States, the Soviet Union, and South Africa. Ellul suggests that the Games have become an expression of conflict "due to the technicizing of society (not its politicizing, for no world was more political than the Greek)"! (p. 370).

I find three of his observations especially striking because of their relevance or their originality. First, Ellul (who knew sailing well from time spent at the Arcachon Basin, a favorite spot for the sport not far from Bordeaux) describes the racing of yachts, which have become a medium of advertising and "monstrous gadgets" (p. 367, n.9). They are outfitted with satellite navigation systems, weather decoders, on-board computers, and television cameras for retransmission by the media—all presented by the press without irony as "Technology in the Service of Fantasy" (p. 371). A fine example of technological discourse that masks the technical reality and leads us to confuse the real with the virtual, the cause with the effect.

Next, the creation of events: no empty slots may be left in the feeding of the spectacle-hungry public. Does such creation stem, as Ellul suggests (for example, an event "has to be staged," p. 370) from the will of mysterious forces, from the constraints of implacable Technique, or simply from the logic of media programming, which abhors a vacuum and loves publicity revenue? The observation of a so-called journalist shouting out his lungs, with heavy use of hyperbole, in his commentary on the retransmission of a dull but expensive sporting event, can serve as evidence in this debate. Note that this staging of events mentioned in Ellul's section on sports could take its place just as well in other parts of the book: Games, Diversions, Information, etc.

Finally, in counterpoint to this downward spiral in sports and the media, Ellul surprises us with a rather unexpected reference to bullfighting: "the barbarous game has been ritualized," and its "collective behavior set within a kind of communal ethic" (p. 369).

We will conclude this consideration of sports in *The Technological Bluff* with a passage that shows Ellul's originality in reflection and action. In connection with the inordinately high cost of signing professional soccer players, he mentions the financial difficulties of soccer clubs (a problem that was just beginning when Ellul's book came out, but which has continued in its importance since then), the generous subsidies offered to them by municipalities, and the use for this purpose of taxes levied on many taxpayers who have no passionate interest in sports at all. In 1988, Ellul was certainly one of the first to have identified and raised this problem of subsidies to professional clubs. Beginning in 1994, it would become the object of sharp debates and decisions aimed at limiting such generosity by local governments. But in particular, as he mentions in a footnote, Ellul had proposed a tax reduction for those who did not care about sports clubs (p. 367, n.10). As a pioneer of "think globally, act locally," whether or not he invented the slogan, Ellul singled out sports for his participation in local affairs, along with the environment in Aquitaine and its coastline, and action to prevent young people from becoming delinquents.

In April 1991, the journal *Quel Corps?* published its 41<sup>st</sup> issue, entitled "The Cannibalism of Sports." In this number of more than two hundred pages, Ellul had an article that ran to seven pages: "Sport et technique" (Sports and Technique).<sup>15</sup> The journal's director, Jean-Marie Brohm, wrote two articles for the same journal issue: "La guerre olympique" (The Olympic War) and "Le sport est un assassin" (Sport is an Assassin), whose very titles give evidence of the existence in France of the critical school of sports sociologists mentioned above. Can we find in this article by Ellul the "huge mistakes" he admitted to in his 1992 correspondence with Nordon? In any case, we probably owe this article in *Quel Corps?* to Nordon, a friend of both Ellul and Brohm.

After explaining his understanding of Technique, in the introduction to this article, Ellul sets out the image of sports prevalent in 1930, and then describes the impact of the technological society: on sports, on the bodies of those who practice sports, and on sports equipment. He concludes with the role of money. According to Ellul, around 1930, when the era of Technique really began, the image of sports was that of a game played locally, to act on the imperative of "a healthy mind in a healthy body." There were sports for the rich, and other sports for everybody else. For all, sports meant fair play, according to rules that prepared one for life in society (note here the function of sports in socialization, mentioned above).

In this passage, Ellul is careful to look at sport objectively. He limits himself to describing the image of sport at the time, since it quickly became an ideological, idealized concept. As in the material from *The Technological Society* and *The Technological Bluff* we have examined, Ellul here illustrates his ideas with many specific examples. He calls boxing "one of the first sports to be regulated" (p. 78), and indeed, although it was not the first sport to be organized and to have rules, boxing was organized as a sports association in England in 1884, on the basis of the Marquis of Queensberry

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<sup>15</sup> Jacques Ellul, "Sport et Technique," *Quel Corps?*, no. 41 (April 1991), pp. 77-83.

rules. Ellul cites another example, from soccer, which he says already existed professionally in Great Britain in 1900-1930. Here also, Ellul is right, since soccer became a professional sport in Great Britain in 1885. We cannot fault him in this first part of the article. In his enthusiasm, he cannot resist the pleasure of adding a few historical details, which curious readers would surely try to verify: "of course, fair play was not always observed: cyclists in the second Tour de France were knocked senseless by regional fans of another team" (p. 78 n.1). Here is another one: "in auto races, people sometimes put nails on the track" (p. 78 n.1).

What happened to sport as it was practiced at the beginning of the twentieth century? Ellul indicates that in the technological society, winning, and thus competition, became decisive values. In sports, a competitor must choose the winning method at all costs, because Technique teaches us we must always win. Images broadcast around the world by means of new techniques, coupled with our hunger for entertainment, have encouraged aggressiveness, replacing the earlier value accorded to beauty and elegance of movement. Perhaps idealizing the past a bit, Ellul offers the boxer Georges Carpentier as an example. He makes a perceptive observation, however, when he applies this aspect of Technique to tennis: "muscles that pack a powerful punch" (p. 79). What would Ellul have said about tennis in the new millenium, and especially women's tennis?

Next, Ellul examines techniques of the athletic body as a development of Taylorism. He refers to the use of film, physical and psychological preparation, dietetics, and chemical agents and drugs. His thoughts on the banning of illegal drugs need to be quoted in full: "This prohibition can be perfectly understood in the case of two men (or two teams) opposing each other, who would have been like all the others, for whom sports were a hobby, much as other people might take part in amateur theater. But is this prohibition really so understandable in the case of two opposing machines, whose only purpose is to show their power and win?" (p. 80).

Ellul's point of view calls for two comments. First of all, the article was published in 1991, well before 1998. In that fateful year, the Tour de France, the bicycle race that had been exalted to mythical status, and that enjoyed international renown, was the object of devastating revelations concerning the massive use of illegal drugs in both professional and amateur cycling. Since 1998, drug use in sports has become a matter of widespread public interest. Its existence is divulged from time to time in detailed revelations which prove embarrassing for the sports world, whereas earlier, the mere suggestion of such a thing was often considered obscene or sacriligious ("sportingly incorrect" as well as "politically incorrect"). Now drug use is no longer such a taboo subject. The year 1998 enables us, then, to make a ruthless distinction between those who had enough perception and intellectual honesty to deal with the drug problem, and those who merely got on the train after it had already begun to roll, or who even discovered the existence and the importance of the sports phenomenon by means of attention paid by the media to the drug scandal. And we must note that Ellul belongs to the first group.



Secondly, the use of chemical substances, as part of the mobilization of all possible technical resources for the purpose of improving performance and achieving victory, may indeed seem perfectly consistent. Drug use is just one more demonstration of the impact of Technique on our society. Its tacit acceptance in sports circles and the relative indifference of public opinion show rather clearly the moral standards that prevail in a technological society. Sports in general, and drug use in particular, fit in perfectly with Ellul's analysis.

His article continues with a denunciation of the ridiculous precision involved in the calculation of records and the use of sophisticated devices to distinguish between competitors when the human eye cannot detect any difference between them; he calls this "the irony of a human spectacle utterly outclassed by human technical inventions" (p. 81). Ellul mentions another gadget: the racing car, "a strange instrument that resembles a car only in that it has four wheels" (p. 81). Then he assesses automobile research, carried out by people who are "more and more specialized, in typical technical fashion" (p. 81). In reality, Ellul's commentary sheds little light on the subject of auto racing and does not really enrich his analysis of Technique.

On the other hand, he spends considerable time on the bicycle, which he believes has undergone the most spectacular transformation. And it is true that the bicycle used in racing or in the time trials of the Tour de France has undergone very visible changes. But Vigarello<sup>16</sup> would no doubt remind us that the bicycle underwent a series of important changes right after it was invented: the free wheel, pressurized tires, and the gear shift. This last invention was long banned for reasons of "sportsmanship." So perhaps the distinction between the early period and the advent of the technological society should be sought in the change from concern with the perfecting of machines to concern with obtaining the maximum performance from the human machine. After examining these concrete examples, Ellul alludes briefly to developments in pole vaulting and skiing. Then he questions the meaning of such "progress" in performance, the supposed reality of the superiority of contemporary athletes over earlier ones, or over ordinary people in previous historical periods. He concludes that sports records become values in themselves, and that they demonstrate the triumph of techniques over bodies and equipment.

Ellul closes his article by considering how money has become the ultimate justification for sport. He spells out the reciprocal relationships, the "self-augmentation" (alluding to one of the characteristics of Technique that he has outlined in his books) resulting from the media, advertising, rebroadcasting rights, sponsorship, sports organizations, spectators and TV viewers. Ellul also mentions the role of government authorities in the construction of sports venues. The end result of the interaction of these different players parallels the conclusions of current economic and sociological analyses of trends in sport. In his conclusion, Ellul defines sports as "entertainment that allows us to absorb unused passions (in a society that no longer has any values),

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<sup>16</sup> See note 10.

in the midst of millions of men who no longer believe in anything” (p. 83). In this way sports fall into “this empty space with no meaning that characterizes our time, and that stems from the replacement of personal action with the spectacle of collective expression” (p. 83).

What main impressions can we gain from Ellul’s views on sports, spread out over more than fifty years, from his first to his last writings? Clearly, his alleged lack of interest and the mistakes he claims to have made are largely contradicted by his remarks, which go to the heart of the subject, with accurate aim. Except for some examples we cannot confirm and an occasional hasty word, Ellul makes use of established arguments based on current events and important books. It is perhaps surprising that he fails to refer to Norbert Elias, a historian and sociologist like Ellul, but fifteen years older. There are other parallels between them: both treat the subject of sports in summary fashion in a major work (*The Technological Society* in French in 1954 in Ellul’s case; *The Civilizing Process* for Elias<sup>17</sup>). But of the two, only Elias would return at length to the subject of sports, which he considered a key for understanding the evolution of modern societies. He wrote a number of articles since gathered into a single volume in translation.<sup>18</sup>

Another item we note as missing, already referred to, is the importance of religion in sports, and the role of sport as a possible substitute for religion: Pierre de Coubertin proclaimed this, and many have suspected it. Paradoxically, Ellul barely touches on the matter, merely mentioning the “millions of men who no longer believe in anything.” In reality, for Ellul sport is only a technical epiphenomenon in a world in which man “transfers his sense of the sacred to the very thing that has destroyed its former object: to technique itself.”<sup>19</sup>

*Translated by Joyce Hanks, University of Scranton.]]*

## Sport, technique et societe Le sport vu par Jacques Ellul

**Michel Hourcade**

« Le sport m’ennuie »...

Exprime au détour d’une de ses correspondances, cet aveu suffirait à disqualifier toute tentative d’étude des opinions et réflexions de Jacques Ellul sur le phénomène sportif et, accessoirement, à dissuader tout lecteur d’aller au-delà des premières lignes

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<sup>17</sup> Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (New York: Urizen, 1978); *La civilisation des moeurs* ([Paris]: Calmann-Levy, 1973; original German ed. 1939).

<sup>18</sup> Norbert Elias, *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process* (New York: B. Blackwell, 1986); *Sport, violence et societe: La violence maitrisee* (Paris: Fayard, 1994). The title of one of the articles in this volume, “The Quest for Excitement in Unexciting Society,” seems to parallel Ellul’s words.

<sup>19</sup> *The Technological Society*, p. 143.

du present texte. Le contexte de la citation merite toutefois d'etre mentionne car revelateur d'une demarche a la fois critique et autocritique.

« Je ne me donne pas la peine », nous dit Ellul, « de proceder a une analyse critique de phenomenes sociaux qui m'ennuient, ou je me sens etranger. Le sport m'ennuie, je con^ois qu'on prenne plaisir a pratiquer un sport - moins a le regarder et a se passionner. La, je ne comprends pas. Mais dans la mesure ou il m'est etranger, je me garde d'ecrire sur le sport en tant que tel (je l'ai fait une fois et j'avais commis de belles erreurs!) ».

« Celui qui avait (presque) tout prevu », pour reprendre le titre d'un ouvrage recent qui lui est consacre,<sup>20</sup> se serait donc laisse aller a ecrire sur le sport (une fois) et reconnaitrait s'etre fourvoye.

Tant de modestie (un seul texte, et errone de surcroit!) doit-il nous inciter a refermer le chapitre du sport vu par Ellul ou au contraire a le garder ouvert en recherchant les ecrits elluliens sur le sport et, subsidiairement, ses belles erreurs? La seconde option m'a naturellement paru plus stimulante si l'on veut bien considerer qu'en 2004 Jacques Ellul est toujours un auteur important et que le phenomene sportif reste une manifestation majeure de notre civilisation.

La « bibliographie sportive » attribuable a Jacques Ellul recouvre, en l'etat actuel (probablement incomplet) de mes lectures, cinq references bien distinctes:

- Une breve reference dans deux ecrits "de jeunesse" (vers 1936)
- Un sous-chapitre dans son ouvrage majeur *La technique ou l'enjeu du siecle* (1954)<sup>21</sup><sup>22</sup>
- Un sous-chapitre dans *Le bluff technologique* (1988)<sup>23</sup>
- Une contribution sollicitée par une revue critique du sport fran^aise (1991)
- Une mention dans un de ses derniers ecrits (1992; voir ci-dessus)

La publication en 2003 du premier numero des *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*<sup>24</sup> permet d'accéder a des textes qui comptent parmi les plus anciens sous la plume d'Ellul, qui achevait alors ses etudes. Il n'est pas sans interet de se replacer, au moins succinctement, au cwur de la reflexion qui l'anime alors.

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<sup>20</sup> Jacques Ellul et Didier Nordon, *L'homme a lui-meme: Correspondance* (Paris: Felin, 1992), p. 173.

<sup>21</sup> Jean-Luc Porquet, *Jacques Ellul: L'homme qui avait (presque) tout prevu* (Paris: Le Cherche-Midi, 2003).

<sup>22</sup> Jacques Ellul, *La technique ou l'enjeu du siecle* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1954; 2[e] ed. Paris: Economica, 1990).

<sup>23</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Le bluff technologique* (Paris: Hachette, 1988).

<sup>24</sup> *Cahiers Jacques Ellul: Pour une Critique de la Societe Technicienne*, no. 1, "Les annees personalistes," ed. Patrick Troude-Chastenet (2003).

Le texte *Fatalite du monde moderne*<sup>25</sup> enonce en dix-sept pages le poids des forces nouvelles qui pesent sur l'homme et ne lui laissent qu'une possibilite: la passivite. La centralisation, le gigantisme, la technique (deja!) qui permet leur realisation, l'impuissance de la politique, illustrent cette fatalite qui fait de tous les hommes des proletaires. Ce qui frappe Ellul dans cette societe, c'est l'importance des masses, concept qu'il s'attache a definir et qu'il va illustrer, notamment, par reference au phenomene sportif. L'homme, nous dit Ellul, « rentre desormais dans la foule. Il sera l'element d'une masse, c'est-a-dire d'une reunion d'hommes, faite sous une pression exterieure dans un but determine pour chacun d'eux, et qui ne dure que peu de temps - mais ces masses se renouvellent presque sans interruption dans notre societe - elles sont incessamment refaites - l'individu fait partie de la masse de son travail - au bureau ou dans l'usine - de la masse des lecteurs de Paris-Soir, de la masse des spectateurs de cinema, de la masse de la *societe sportive* » (p. 110; c'est nous qui soulignons).

Voila pour ce qui est probablement une des premieres mentions du sport dans l'oeuvre ellulienne a travers ce texte que l'on peut dater de 1936 ou de 1937 (p. 95, n. 1). On l'a vu plus haut, le sport n'est pas le sujet de predilection de Jacques Ellul, ce qui n'empeche pas qu'il lui vienne assez spontanement a l'esprit dans sa description de la societe.

Le second texte a mentionner le sport, intitule *Le fascisme, fils du liberalisme*,<sup>26</sup> a ete ecrit a la meme epoque (1937) que le precedent. Le sujet meme du fascisme nous fournit un indice assez vraisemblable des origines de l'inspiration d'Ellul faisant reference au sport: l'organisation des Jeux Olympiques de Berlin en 1936, dans le cadre du regime nazi et de son deferlement de propagande. La masse est ici encore le groupe humain designe pour son role de soumission de l'homme, mais a travers un developpement plus etoffe (vingt-cinq pages dans les *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*) d'inspiration deliberelement sociologique, empruntant pour l'essentiel a Durkheim, ponctuellement a Gurvitch et concluant sur une citation de Tocqueville.

Fascisme et liberalisme sont abordes a travers la distinction classique formulee par Durkheim entre les deux formes de solidarite, mecanique et organique. Dans la solidarite mecanique, l'individu est soumis a la societe, la conscience collective recouvre les consciences individuelles. Le droit penal est l'expression juridique de la societe. Dans la solidarite organique, la societe se fractionne en sous-groupes nombreux et la volonte individuelle y joue un role important. L'individu n'est pas rattache directement a la societe globale mais a ses parties. L'expression juridique de cette societe est le droit civil, contractuel.

Sur la division solidarite mecanique-solidarite organique vient se greffer une autre division selon la duree, la masse qui se distingue par son caractere passager d'autres

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<sup>25</sup> Jacques Ellul, "Fatalite du monde moderne," *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*, ed. Patrick Troude-Chastenet, no. 1 (2003), pp. 95-111.

<sup>26</sup> Jacques Ellul, "Le fascisme, fils du liberalisme," *Esprit*, vol. 5, no. 53 (1 fev. 1937), pp. 761-797; reimprime dans *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*, ed. Patrick Troude-Chastenet, no. 1 (2003), pp. 113-137.

notions plus permanentes (le groupe, le collectif abstrait). Ellul distingue en outre les masses abstraites, qui reçoivent passivement des influences de l'extérieur, et peuvent se transformer en masses concrètes, donnant alors naissance au fascisme. Quant au sport: « le libéralisme a entraîné un amorphisme social probablement sans précédent dans l'histoire. Il a permis la création de ces masses abstraites [...] où la vie de l'homme se recouvre d'une série de cercles qui se recoupent et qui absorbent totalement l'individu. Groupe du café et groupe du club, *groupe du sport* et groupe du métier » (p. 795, 1937; pp. 135-136, 2003; c'est nous qui soulignons).

Dans *La technique ou l'enjeu du siècle* publiée en 1954, le sport fait l'objet d'un traitement spécifique à l'intérieur du chapitre V consacré aux techniques de l'homme. Entre *divertissement* et *médecine*, deux pages sont consacrées au sport sous ses multiples facettes et dans une tonalité nettement critique.<sup>27</sup>

Deux thèmes principaux sont abordés, émaillés d'illustrations et d'exemples à première vue déconcertants.

Le sport, note d'abord Ellul, est lié à la grande ville (allusion possible aux *rural sports* anglais du 17<sup>ème</sup> siècle, comme la chasse à courre) et à l'industrialisation, anglaise, américaine puis soviétique. On observera que cette corrélation entre industrialisation et apparition et développement du sport moderne est aujourd'hui très couramment exposée dans la littérature consacrée au sport. Si la plupart des auteurs se bornent à mentionner la concomitance historique des deux événements, peu se hasardent à répondre à la question: l'apparition du sport était-elle inévitable dans une société en cours d'industrialisation? Les plus hardis souligneront la parenté entre gymnase et manufacture. Plus prudents, d'autres énumèrent les inventions (transports, télécommunications) qui ont permis à des disciplines ou des manifestations sportives (que l'on songe au football, au base-ball, aux Jeux Olympiques ou au Tour de France) d'accéder à la notoriété, à la passion ou au mythe. D'autres encore recherchent une tracabilité culturelle ou nationale. Ainsi R.D. Mandell: « the same forces that made the young nation a populous industrial power made American sport ». <sup>28</sup> À défaut d'originalité, il faut sans doute reconnaître à l'auteur de *La technique* le mérite d'avoir, il y a un demi-siècle, identifié ce lien, que ce soit à partir de lectures sur l'histoire ou la sociologie du sport ou, tout aussi vraisemblablement, sur la base de sa propre réflexion sur l'histoire de la technique.

Le sport, poursuit Ellul, est aussi lié au monde technique, il est lui-même une technique. Nous sommes évidemment ici dans son domaine de prédilection, où il évolue un peu seul il est vrai, tant sa perception aigüe du phénomène technique constitue une approche spécifique du sport. La distinction qu'il opère entre, par exemple, nage et natation, est tout à fait explicite et pertinente. La part de technicité incorporée au sport est rarement perdue et commentée,<sup>29</sup> confirmation implicite de la perception ellulienne

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<sup>27</sup> *La technique*, pp. 346-348 (1954, 1990).

<sup>28</sup> Richard D. Mandell, *Sport, a Cultural History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 184.

<sup>29</sup> Voir cependant "Présence de la technique," in Georges Vigarello, *Du jeu ancien au show sportif:*

d'une technique omniprésente dans la société et qui finit par devenir invisible. Dans le prolongement du texte, on pourrait avancer que l'exercice physique est au départ l'activité humaine la moins technicisée et qu'elle recèle donc le plus fort potentiel de technicisation. L'athlète grec était nu, ce qui choqua parait-il les Romains, puis l'Eglise. Le gymnaste, étymologiquement, arborait la même nudité. L'athlète moderne est à peine plus vêtu. Mais le peu de vêtement qu'il porte a été soigneusement étudié pour ne pas offrir de prise au vent. Son matériel utilise les matériaux nouveaux les plus performants. Son geste, sa foulée, ont été filmés, décortiqués, comparés et améliorés. Son alimentation observe les prescriptions du diététicien, son suivi médical est assuré, ses carences réelles ou supposées compensées par des produits conçus en laboratoire. Le psychologue vient parachever cette ingénierie médico-sportive.

La nage et la natation. Le sportif est la technique faite homme.

Convient-il de relativiser le propos en ayant présenté à l'esprit la diversité des pratiques sportives, par exemple la séparation entre le haut niveau et le sport de masse, le professionnalisme et l'amateurisme? Je ne suis pas enclin à le penser. Le sportif le plus anonyme, et même le débutant, copie leur équipement sur celui du champion, achète en pharmacie ou sur l'internet les « aliments de l'effort », annexent à leur corps de minuscules capteurs électroniques qui mesurent leur pouls et calculent les distances parcourues. Une étude révélait en novembre 2003 que les adolescents français qui pratiquent un sport sont 10% à recourir à des substances dopantes. Selon la même étude, c'est à quatorze ans que les jeunes sportifs français commenceraient à recourir à ces produits ; pour les jeunes Américains, ce serait à huit ans...

La mécanisation des gestes poursuit Ellul, correspond à la mécanisation des appareils utilisés pour le sport (chronomètres.). La mesure de précision, la formation des gestes, le principe du record, qui sont des éléments importants de l'industrie, se retrouvent donc dans le sport (p. 347). Au confluent de la science et de la technique industrielle naissantes en Angleterre, le sport s'impregnerait ainsi très tôt d'une mentalité moderne appelée à de fameux prolongements. Après tout, l'expression aujourd'hui banale « courir le 100 mètres en dix secondes » suppose bien que l'on ait préalablement défini la notion de mètre et que l'on soit capable de chronométrer en secondes, ce qui ne fut scientifiquement et techniquement possible qu'à partir de la fin du 18<sup>ème</sup> siècle avec la mesure du méridien terrestre et l'invention de la montre suisse. De façon inattendue mais assez significative, on retrouve ces ingrédients de la mentalité moderne, et donc sportive, dès les balbutiements de l'alpinisme, à la même époque.<sup>30</sup>

Après avoir abordé le thème des rapports entre sport, industrie et technique, Ellul en vient au thème de l'assujettissement de l'homme à la société totalitaire par le sport. Nous sommes ici résolument dans une approche critique du sport, approche qui correspond à un courant minoritaire mais actif à l'intérieur de la sociologie du sport,

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*La naissance d'un mythe* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2002).

<sup>30</sup> Nicolas Giudici, *La philosophie du Mont Blanc: De l'alpinisme à l'économie immatérielle* (Paris: Grasset, 2000).

represente en France notamment par Jean-Marie Brohm dont nous reparlerons plus loin.

Le sport, indique Ellul, permet a l'homme de se delasser de ses contraintes mais l'adapte aussi a son insu a de nouvelles contraintes, et cette « technique insidieuse » s'etend a la grande masse. Sous couvert d'esprit d'equipe, le sport preparerait a l'esprit totalitaire. Il est indispensable aux dictatures fascistes, nazies et communistes. Dans les pays « nouveaux », on assiste a une penetration conjointe des techniques et du sport. Guere plus tendre avec les Etats-Unis, Ellul constate que le sport technicise s'y est developpe d'abord en leur qualite de « pays le plus conformiste ».<sup>31</sup>

Que repondre a cette charge? Comme indique plus haut, l'analyse du sport a travers la technique est assez peu repandue et la critique radicale du sport n'est le fait que de courants minoritaires. Il est evidemment perilleux de dissenter sur le caractere plus ou moins conformiste des Americains. Avancons simplement que les arguments peuvent etre reversibles. Une bonne part de la sociologie du sport, et de la sociologie americaine en particulier, obeit a une approche fonctionnaliste qui se plait a reconnaitre le role - implicitement positif - du sport dans l'adaptation aux valeurs sociales et la socialisation. Le sport, aurait dit Esopo, est la meilleure et la pire des choses.

Pour quitter provisoirement le debat d'idees, je propose au lecteur de revenir sur les exemples parfois deconcertants apportees par Ellul a l'appui de son raisonnement.

Ils sont au nombre de trois, tous lies a la relation entre sport, industrie et technique.

Premier exemple: « le seul pays d'Europe centrale ayant une organisation sportive etait le seul industrialise: la Tchechoslovaquie » (p. 346). En l'absence de toute reference ou indication plus precises dans le texte, on peut avancer l'hypothese qu'Ellul avait a l'esprit le mouvement sokol, fonde en 1862 dans ce qui allait devenir la Tchechoslovaquie, mouvement visant a developper « un esprit sain dans un corps sain ». Ce mouvement s'est implante aux Etats-Unis des 1865 et il semble y etre toujours vivace. L'affirmation un peu abrupte d'Ellul correspondrait ainsi a un episode avere dans l'histoire du sport ce qui donne une idee de l'etendue et de la diversite de ses informations et relativise le pretendu desinteret qu'il professait a l'egard du sport.

Le second exemple, emprunte a l'histoire de l'Antiquite, surprendra moins sous la plume de l'historien qu'etait Ellul: « on sait la grande opposition qui a ete faite entre les athletes grecs et les athletes romains. Pour les premiers, l'exercice corporel etait un jeu qui tendait a developper harmonieusement et librement les formes et les puissances corporelles. Pour les seconds, il s'agissait d'une technique pour avoir plus d'efficacite et vaincre » (p. 346, 1954; p. 347, 1990). Visiblement, Ellul avait connaissance d'une partie au moins des abondantes etudes relatives aux exercices physiques de l'Antiquite dont il ressort, effectivement, que les Romains avaient une conception des activites corporelles differente de celle des Grecs, et directement tourne vers l'usage militaire. En revanche, les historiens de l'Antiquite grecque ne manquent pas de souligner la tres

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<sup>31</sup> P. 347, 1954; p. 348, 1990. Ellul reprendrait ici un constat que l'on prete habituellement a Tocqueville.

forte connotation religieuse des activités physiques, et des Jeux Olympiques en particulier. Dans la description du sport moderne, et pas seulement des Jeux Olympiques, le parallèle entre sport et religion revient fréquemment. On pourra juger paradoxal qu'un auteur qui a consacré une partie considérable de son œuvre au problème religieux n'ait pas manifesté de sensibilité à ce rapprochement devenu presque un cliché.

Le troisième et dernier exemple proposé par Ellul est le plus déconcertant: « Les meilleurs sportifs sortent des milieux ouvriers: les paysans, les forestiers, qui peuvent être plus vigoureux, sont de moins bons athlètes. Cela tient au fait que le travail à la machine développe une certaine musculature, juste celle qu'il faut pour le sport, très différente de la musculature paysanne; et d'autre part ce travail développe la rapidité, la précision des gestes, des réflexes » (p. 346, 1954; p. 347, 1990).

Les sources qui permirent à l'auteur de proposer cette distinction tranchée entre performances ouvrières et paysannes resteront probablement inconnues. Nous porterons à son crédit qu'il était sans doute bon connaisseur des aptitudes des forestiers puisque l'on sait qu'il ne dédaignait pas d'emprunter une hache pour abattre un arbre, à l'occasion, à titre de détente et d'exercice physique. Mais « celui qui avait (presque) tout prévu » pourrait encore nous réserver une surprise. Des données statistiques françaises largement postérieures à l'époque de rédaction de *La technique* montrent en effet d'une part que les ouvriers pratiquent beaucoup plus le sport que les paysans, d'autre part que les aptitudes physiques sont liées à une taille élevée. Or, toujours selon les statistiques, les paysans seraient plus petits que les ouvriers...

Dans la trilogie ellulienne consacrée à la technique, *Le système technicien*<sup>32</sup> et *Le bluff technologique*<sup>33</sup> font suite à *La technique*.<sup>34</sup> Absent du *Système technicien*, le sport est à nouveau à l'honneur dans *Le bluff technologique*, avec un sous-chapitre de sept pages intercalé entre le jeu et l'auto, à l'intérieur d'un chapitre consacré au divertissement.

En introduction, une brève référence à "mon premier livre" (*La technique*, donc) et une double approche à travers le spectacle et le discours technologique: "le discours technologique a transformé le sport en énorme spectacle" (p. 430). Le spectacle, c'est évidemment la télévision, et l'omniprésence du sport dans ce média illustrée par de nombreuses statistiques. Avancons aussi l'hypothèse d'un emprunt à *La société du spectacle*<sup>35</sup> best-seller de la littérature situationniste publiée en 1967, bien connu d'un Ellul lui-même cité dans les textes sacrés de l'Internationale Situationniste. Le discours technologique, c'est, après la société technicienne et le système technicien, le maître mot qui sous-tend le troisième volet de la trilogie.

Comme dans l'ouvrage précédent, Ellul étonne par la multiplicité des exemples choisis, preuve d'une attention portée au sport en parfaite contradiction avec le désintérêt

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<sup>32</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Le système technicien* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1977; 2[e] éd. Paris: Le Cherche-Midi, 2004, avec une préface de Jean-Luc Porquet).

<sup>33</sup> V. la note 4.

<sup>34</sup> V. la note 3.

<sup>35</sup> Guy Debord, *La société du spectacle* (Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1967; 3[e] éd. Paris: Gallimard,



et l'ennui professes ailleurs. On relevera aussi quelques notations naives ou passeistes ("autrefois, l'association bordelaise pour le football etait composee de Bordelais," p. 432; "mais ou est donc le tennis d'antan?," p. 432), et cette formule sans appel empruntee au subtil anarchiste Cavanna: "mourir comme un con pour le Paris-Dakar" (p. 434).

La place du sport dans les medias, le professionnalisme, l'argent, la violence, sont evoques avec abondance d'exemples et de chiffres, a l'image de l'ensemble de l'ouvrage qui regorge de statistiques et de references. Mais Ellul ne puise pas seulement dans l'actualite. Les comparaisons avec l'Antiquite

fleurissent sous sa plume. Les achats de footballeurs professionnels "rappellent exactement la vente a l'encan, a Rome, des gladiateurs, des pugilistes, des conducteurs de char" (p. 432, n. 8). Les Jeux Olympiques de l'Antiquite (autre notation passeiste?) "etaient tout autre chose" (p. 433): la guerre s'arretait et l'unite de la Grece etait reconstituee, a l'inverse des boycotts americains, sovietiques et sud-africains. Les Jeux, avance Ellul, sont devenus un moyen de combat du fait de la technicisation de la societe, et non de sa politisation "car il n'y avait pas de monde plus politise que le monde grec!" (pp. 433-434).

Trois observations d'Ellul me frappent par leur pertinence ou leur originalite. Il decrit d'abord les courses de ces voiliers (le bassin d'Arcachon, proche de Bordeaux et prise par les adeptes de la voile, lui etait familier), qui sont devenus des supports publicitaires et des "monstres de gadgets" (p. 430, n. 6) equipes d'appareils de navigation par satellite, de decodeurs meteo, d'ordinateurs de bord, de cameras pour la retransmission mediatique et que la presse presente sans rire comme "la technologie au service de l'imaginaire" (p. 435)! Bel exemple de ce discours technologique qui masque la realite technicienne et nous amene a confondre le reel et le virtuel, la cause et l'effet.

La creation d'evenements ensuite: ne pas laisser de vide dans l'alimentation spectaculaire du public. Cette creation resulte-t-elle, comme le suggere Ellul ("il faut" creer; "on" cree) de la volonte de forces mysterieuses, des contraintes d'une technique implacable, ou plus simplement de la logique d'une programmation mediatique qui a horreur du vide et adore les recettes publicitaires? L'observation du journaliste (sic) s'epoumonant a commenter, a grand renfort d'hyperboles, la retransmission d'une rencontre sportive languissante mais cherement payee peut servir a alimenter ce debat. Notons que cette creation d'evenements mise en evidence dans la partie de l'ouvrage consacree au sport s'appliquerait avec autant de pertinence a bien d'autres chapitres de l'ouvrage (jeux, divertissement, information...).

En contrepoint des derives sportives et mediatique, Ellul nous surprend enfin par une reference un peu inattendue: la corrida, "jeu barbare ... ritualise" (p. 433), ou encore "comportements collectifs integres dans une sorte d'ethique commune" (p. 433).

Terminons cette presentation des pages du *Bluff technologique* consacrees au sport par un passage qui campe Ellul dans l'originalite de sa reflexion et de son action.

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1992).

A propos de l'achat a prix d'or des joueurs professionnels de football, il mentionne les difficultes financieres des clubs (probleme naissant a la sortie de l'ouvrage et qui n'a cesse d'etre d'actualite depuis), les subventions genereuses que leur versent les municipalites et le prelevement fiscal qui en resulte pour des contribuables qui ne sont pas tous des passionnes de sport. En 1988, Ellul etait certainement l'un des premiers a avoir identifie et souleve le probleme des subventions aux clubs professionnels qui devait faire l'objet, a partir de 1994, de vifs debats politiques et de decisions visant a limiter la generosite des collectivites territoriales. Mais surtout, il avait, comme il le rappelle en note, propose une reduction fiscale pour les contribuables qui ne s'interessaient pas aux clubs sportifs (p. 431, n. 7). Pionnier, sinon createur, du *think global, act local*, Ellul avait choisi le sport pour sa participation a la vie locale, au meme titre que la protection de l'environnement aquitain et de son littoral ou l'action en direction des jeunes delinquants.

En avril 1991, la revue *Quel corps?* publiait son numero 41 intitule « Anthropophage du sport » (sic). Riche de plus de deux cents pages, ce numero incluait un article de sept pages intitule « Sport et technique » signe de Jacques Ellul.<sup>36</sup> Le responsable de la publication, Jean-Marie Brohm, signait pour sa part deux articles (*La guerre olympique ; Le sport est un assassin*), dont l'intitule meme illustre assez bien l'existence en France du courant critique evoque plus haut.

Trouvera-t-on dans cet article les « belles erreurs » qu'il reconnaissait dans sa correspondance de 1992 avec Didier Nordon? C'est en tous cas a ce dernier, ami commun de Jacques Ellul et de Jean-Marie Brohm, que l'on doit probablement cette contribution a *Quel corps?*.

Après avoir rappele en introduction ce qu'il entend par technique, Ellul expose l'image que l'on donnait du sport vers 1930, decrit ensuite l'impact de la societe technicienne sur le sport, le corps du sportif et son materiel, pour achever son expose avec le role de l'argent.

L'image que l'on donnait du sport vers 1930, lorsque commence vraiment l'ere technicienne, nous dit Ellul, etait d'abord celle d'un jeu pratique au niveau local, avec un imperatif de « mens sana in corpore sano ». Le sport, qui se divisait en sports de riches et sports pour tous etait alors synonyme de fair play, avec des regles a respecter qui favorisaient l'apprentissage de la vie en societe (notons que l'on retrouve ici la fonction de socialisation evoquee plus haut).

Dans ce passage, Ellul prend soin de garder ses distances avec le sport. Il se borne a decrire l'image que l'on en faisait, tant il est vrai que le sport est rapidement devenu une representation ideologique et idealisee.

Comme dans les textes tires de *La technique* et du *Bluff technologique*, l'expose des idees s'appuie sur des exemples precis particulierement nombreux. Ainsi de la boxe, « un des premiers sports a etre regle ». Effectivement, sans etre la plus ancienne dans son organisation et ses regles, la boxe fut constituee en association sportive en Angleterre

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<sup>36</sup> Jacques Ellul, "Sport et Technique," *Quel corps?*, no. 41 (avril 1991), pp. 77-83.

des 1884, sur la base de la codification effectuee par le marquis de Queensberry. Autre exemple de l'auteur relatif au football, le professionnalisme en Grande Bretagne qui existait « deja » en 1900-1930. Mention encore une fois exacte, le football y etant devenu sport professionnel en 1885. Incollable dans cette premiere partie de l'article, notre auteur, decidement tres en verve, ne resiste pas au plaisir de l'anecdote, que les lecteurs les plus curieux ne manqueront pas d'aller verifier: « bien entendu, le fair play n'etait pas applique partout: des coureurs du second Tour de France furent assommes par des partisans regionaux d'une autre equipe ». Ou encore: « dans des courses automobiles, on placait des clous sur la piste... ! ».

Qu'est-il advenu du sport tel qu'on le representait au debut du 20[eme] siecle? Dans une societe technicienne, indique Ellul, la reussite, donc la competitivite sont devenues des valeurs decisives. En sport, il faut choisir a tout prix le moyen de gagner car la technique nous a appris a toujours gagner. La diffusion mondiale des images par les techniques nouvelles, le gout pour le divertissement, ont encourage l'agressivite, releguant le beau jeu et l'elegance. Et de citer (idealisant peut-etre un peu le passe) l'exemple du boxeur Georges Carpentier. Observation lucide en revanche sur l'extension au tennis « des muscles qui tapent avec violence » (qu'aurait dit Ellul du tennis du troisieme millenaire, et particulierement du tennis feminin?).

Les techniques en rapport avec le corps sont ensuite examinees dans leur filiation avec le taylorisme. Ellul cite l'usage du film, la preparation physique et psychologique, la dietetique, et aborde les produits chimiques et les dopants. Sur l'interdiction des produits dopants, sa pensee merite d'etre reprise dans son integralite: « Cette interdiction se comprend

parfaitement lorsqu'il s'agissait de l'affrontement de deux hommes, (ou d'equipes) comparables a tous les autres, et qui pratiquaient le sport comme une sorte de distraction, comme d'autres font du theatre amateur. Mais est-ce encore tout a fait aussi comprehensible lorsqu'il s'agit de l'affrontement de deux machines uniquement destinees a montrer leur puissance et a gagner? ».

Une telle prise de position merite un double commentaire. En premier lieu, l'article a ete publie en 1990, soit bien avant 1998, annee fatidique au cours de laquelle le Tour de France, epreuve cycliste erigee en mythe et de notoriete internationale fut l'objet de revelations accablantes sur l'usage massif du dopage dans le cyclisme professionnel et amateur. Depuis 1998, le dopage dans le sport est devenu un sujet "grand public". Son existence est divulguee periodiquement par des revelations circonstanciees, embarrassantes pour le milieu sportif, alors que sa seule evocation etait auparavant souvent consideree comme indecente ou sacrilege (« sportivement incorrecte » aussi bien que « politiquement incorrecte »). Le dopage n'est plus tout a fait un sujet tabou. L'annee 1998 permet des lors d'operer une distinction impitoyable entre ceux qui avaient eu assez de lucidite et d'honnetete intellectuelle pour aborder le probleme du dopage, et ceux qui se sont contentes de prendre le train en marche, voire qui ont decouvert l'existence et l'importance du phenomene sportif a travers le scandale mediatise du dopage. Et force est de constater qu'Ellul se range dans la premiere categorie.

En second lieu, dans la mobilisation de toutes les ressources techniques au service de la performance et de la victoire, l'absorption de substances chimiques peut en effet paraître parfaitement cohérente. Le dopage est une démonstration supplémentaire de la technicisation de notre société. Son acceptation tacite par les milieux sportifs et la relative indifférence de l'opinion illustrent assez bien la morale qui prévaut dans une société technicienne. Le sport en général, le dopage en particulier, s'inscrivent parfaitement dans l'analyse ellulienne.

L'article se poursuit par la dénonciation du caractère dérisoire de la précision apportée au chiffrage des records et du recours à des engins sophistiqués pour départager des concurrents que le trail humain est incapable de différencier: « dérision du spectacle de l'homme parfaitement déclassé par ses engins techniques ».

Autre engin évoqué, l'automobile de compétition « instrument étrange qui n'a plus de l'auto que les quatre roues ». S'ensuit une appréciation sur la recherche en matière automobile par des chercheurs « de plus en plus spécialisés, ce qui est le processus typique de la technique ». À vrai dire, le commentaire d'Ellul apporte peu sur le sujet de la course automobile et n'enrichit pas véritablement son analyse de la technique. Il s'attarde en revanche sur la bicyclette qui aurait selon lui connu la mutation la plus spectaculaire. Et il est vrai que l'engin utilisé sur piste ou dans les étapes contre la montre du Tour de France a connu des modifications très visibles. Georges Vigarello<sup>37</sup> ferait sans doute observer que, dès les premières années de son invention, la bicyclette connut également des modifications successives notables avec l'apport de la roue libre, du pneumatique et du dérailleur. Ce dernier mécanisme, on le sait, fut d'ailleurs longtemps prohibé pour des raisons propres à « l'esprit sportif ». Peut-être alors la distinction entre les deux époques (la première précédant l'avènement de la société technicienne, comme indiqué plus haut) serait-elle à rechercher dans le passage d'un souci de perfectionnement de la machine à un souci d'obtention de la performance maximum de l'homme-machine.

Après l'examen de ces exemples précis, complétés par une brève allusion à l'évolution du saut à la perche et du ski, Ellul se livre à une interrogation sur le sens de ce « progrès » des performances, sur la réalité de la supériorité des sportifs contemporains sur leurs prédécesseurs ou sur l'homme quelconque à d'autres périodes de l'histoire. Le record, conclut-il, devient une valeur en soi et atteste du triomphe des techniques sur le corps et sur les instruments.

L'article se termine sur l'évocation de l'argent dans le sport, devenu sa « raison dernière ». Ellul développe les liens, « l'auto accroissement » (par référence aux caractéristiques de la technique qu'il a définies dans ses ouvrages) entre médias, publicité, droits de retransmission, sponsoring, organismes sportifs, spectateurs et téléspectateurs. Est en outre mentionné le rôle des pouvoirs publics dans la construction des équipements sportifs. Le cumul de ces différents intervenants correspond bien, en effet, aux analyses économiques et sociologiques actuelles sur le développement du sport.

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<sup>37</sup> V. la note 10.

Citons les phrases conclusives de l'article qui définissent le sport comme « un divertissement qui permet d'investir des passions inemployées (dans une société qui n'a plus de valeurs) face à des millions d'hommes qui ne croient plus à rien ». Le sport est ainsi tombé dans « ce vide de sens qui caractérise notre époque, provenant du remplacement de l'action personnelle par le spectacle d'une manifestation collective ».

Quelles impressions dominantes retirer de ce discours sur le sport échelonné sur une période de plus d'un demi-siècle, des premiers aux derniers écrits?

Il est assez clair que le désintérêt affiché et les prétendues erreurs commises sont largement contredits par une réflexion qui porte sur l'essentiel du sujet, qui vise juste et qui apporte à la démonstration, à côté de quelques illustrations invérifiables et de formules parfois hatives, des arguments avérés recueillis dans l'actualité aussi bien que dans des ouvrages. Parmi ces derniers, il est peut-être étonnant de ne trouver ni mention ni allusion à Norbert Elias, de quinze ans l'aîné d'Ellul et comme lui historien et sociologue. Le parallèle pourrait être poussé plus loin: chez les deux auteurs, le sport est abordé rapidement dans une œuvre maîtresse (*La technique* pour Ellul en 1954, *La civilisation des mœurs* en 1939 avec une traduction française en 1973 et anglaise en 1978 pour Elias<sup>38</sup>). Mais seul ce dernier reviendra longuement sur le sport, dont il fait une clef pour la compréhension de l'évolution de nos sociétés à travers différents articles repris en traduction française sous le titre *Sport, violence et société, la violence maîtrisée*.<sup>39</sup>

Autre absence, déjà relevée, la part du religieux dans le phénomène sportif, son rôle possible de substitut de la religion; Coubertin le proclamait, beaucoup en ont l'intuition. Paradoxalement, Ellul effleure à peine le sujet, mentionnant simplement ces « millions d'hommes qui ne croient plus à rien ». C'est qu'en réalité, le sport n'est pour lui qu'un épiphénomène technique dans un monde où l'homme « reporte son sens du sacré sur cela même qui a détruit tout ce qui en était l'objet: sur la technique ».<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Norbert Elias, *La civilisation des mœurs* ([Paris]: Calmann-Lévy, 1973; ISBN 2702101291).

<sup>39</sup> Norbert Elias, *Sport, violence et société: La violence maîtrisée* (Paris: Fayard, 1994). On mentionnera le titre de l'un de ces articles, "The Quest for Excitement in Unexciting Society," qui semble faire écho aux propos d'Ellul.

<sup>40</sup> *La technique*, p. 131 (1954); p. 132 (1990).

## Ellul & the Internet

by Boyan Koutevski

*Boyan Koutevski is a senior creative executive with MAG Communications, Bulgaria. He is completing his Ph.D. in Communications and Public Relations at the University of Sofia.*

Forecasts of the future usually reflect the fortune teller's mysticism, and we tend to doubt them. The main reason for our distrust is the claim of their authors that these are prophecies; that they, but no one else, has "the gift" to see far into the coming future. In describing and defending themselves, they actually identify with the mage of James Frazer's "social magician."

Jacques Ellul didn't make for himself this common claim for prophecy—he didn't need to. His prophecy emanated from his very personality. His ideas were clearly enough explained and argued. There are no absolute formulas. The skilled scientist cannot afford to have a passion different from the passion toward knowledge. Ellul didn't make glamorous statements. He didn't produce neologisms. So much social phenomena needed clear and simple, but at the same time, precise explanations. Ellul never hesitated to express his point of view; he never made critics by simply mentioning different theories or others' viewpoints. Explanation and persuasion are for me the two keywords that describe his scientific approach.

Ellul foresaw the estrangement among people caused by emerging technologies and by the bewildering consumption of goods and symbols. He warned us against the depersonalization of the individual; against the scarce knowledge resulting from image-based culture; against the opportunities, which overinformation have provided the propagandists for disabling one's critical judgments; against the equalization of truth and reality in a society ruled by fake images. The French philosopher examined in depth the transition from industrialism to the technological age—an age, which today has become a vast evolution of information technologies. Though the Internet form of those technologies emerged after Ellul's death, it is relevant to ask how his thinking comprehends it.

Let's not forget that the Internet started its existence simultaneously in the university and in military research centers in the USA, hence its "parents" are totally different. Meanwhile, we shall note that for Ellul technologies go beyond the control of their physical creators and owners. Therefore, we need a broader perspective than to see the Internet in terms of its parentage, which have become synonyms for the freedom of the mind and oppression respectively.

In *The Technological Society* (1954) and its "up-grade" *The Technological Bluff* (1990) Ellul argued one of the main ideas in his works— technologies push people into compliance and the chase for perpetual effectiveness, transforming individual personalities into an obedient mass. The inevitable consequence of this malfunction of civilization is the emergence of the mass-man. Ellul gave the example of advertising's technique, whose main goal has always been the creation of artificial needs as emotional

desires among the biggest possible target group, without paying any attention to the negative results of this influence. Ellul implied that the notion “technological society” is an evolution of Raymond Aron’s “industrial society.” We can define the Internet society along the same logical lines.

After this brief survey of information in the past, we must now assess the complete change in our own day. Confronted with what now passes for information, we note at once the intellectual and conceptual gulf that separates us from the computer. What is information for the computer? Information is defined as data. Facts and ideas are formalized in such a way that they can be communicated or manipulated by different procedures. But that data have first to be represented. This representation is used throughout. The process consists of handling the data, which may or may not be memorized. It is interesting to note that in analyses of the information handled by the computer, we find again the ideas of knowledge-information and service-information, but the words have now changed their meaning. The knowledge at issue here is comparable merely to the predigested knowledge of an encyclopedia, which gives a certain picture of the world but bears no reference to reality<sup>41</sup>.

Ellul spoke against the transformation of technologies from being an instrument for human progress in society and the final objective of this progress. The Internet has been mutating menacingly from the means of communication among people into communication for the sake of the process itself— alienating people and making them an easy prey for attempts to bring compliance. As knowledge media become over-informative media, they exhaust the mind in their attempt to convert this information into a subjective judgment. Ellul summarized the common principles, which drive the technologies, especially media technologies and explained their impact on culture. Technologies themselves have been emerging on a cultural base, making them adaptive to the culture system and allowing them to change it. The scientist doesn’t resist technological progress, he only warns that technologies have been developing beyond human control and progress becomes a goal in itself. Internet as practically unlimited emerging media fits this definition and that’s the reason it has been chosen as the research object of this retrospective study. The easy mass access to the Internet, which doesn’t require some scarcely spread technical equipment, draws the problem out of the technique of physical actuality. The analysis of the Internet must get more and more philosophical rather than be only technological in nature.

A similar evolution in understanding technological innovations has been observed with any new revolutionary means of communication: steam printing press, telegraph, phone, radio, TV, and lately, with the emergence of the global electronic network. However, in contrast to its predecessors, the Internet relies more on the already existing infrastructure and industrial capacities. Therefore, its technological destiny and development dynamics, including virtual “social processing,” have been foreseen.

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<sup>41</sup> Ellul, J. *The Technological Bluff* <http://t2100.dct.Kippona.net/public/ellul>, 19.01.2004.

As noted earlier, the Internet went through several stages of development to build the infrastructure that would support networking innovations. The Department of Defense, the military, the National Science Foundation, and many more, financed and helped develop the infrastructure that would eventually become today's Internet. The Internet was not immediately successful. But, as time passed, its users and builders found ways to implement the technology, slowly changing its character<sup>42</sup>.

Ellul developed a way of thinking and acting that is necessary when thinking of technology, but is not necessarily connected with machinery. *Technique*, as described by Ellul, refers to governments as well as to artifacts. In fact, it is, *the ensemble of practices by which one uses available resources to achieve certain valued ends*. The printing press is technique. Slavery is technique. The alphabet is technique. Government is technique. Steam power is technique. Ellul claims the key characteristics of technique are rationality, artificiality, the automatism of technical choice, selfaugmentation, monism, universalism, and autonomy<sup>43</sup>.

These are the Internet's basic features which are unique for this medium: it's the answer to the rational needs of the globalizing world; it creates artificial reality; consumption becomes a stereotype; it grows from the human desire not to stay apart from the technological advantages of computer networks; it's an autonomic medium; it covers every aspect of life; the development limitations are minimal. Ellul's view of technology is that once it is let out of the laboratory, technology cannot be turned off. Technology begets more technology. The modern world, therefore, is one in which more technology is inevitable. "Fixing" or remediating the impact of a technology like water pollution requires—you guessed it—more technology<sup>44</sup>.

To the science of persuasion, Ellul's biggest contribution was the analysis of technology's social development and being. In contrast to American researchers, he didn't stick with proving the "technologies-propaganda" interaction, using examples from social practice and strict definitions of the persuasion approaches. What he did was search for the deeper psychological and social prime movers leading to propaganda's success. As a sociologist, Ellul didn't limit his effort to the standard process: the subject uses persuasion technique with X results. He researched the process as complex interaction in its systematic specificity; in so doing, he opposed the theory that only via influence and attitude change is propaganda effective. Ellul's point of view was that a person or social group could be pushed toward certain desires by the propagandist's action without being preliminarily convinced of its correctness. This decision-making pattern appeared to Ellul to be caused very much by the influence of technique.

Marshall McLuhan's review of *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* for *Book Week* summarized Ellul's general finding: "...when a new technology encompasses any culture or society, the result is propaganda"<sup>45</sup>. Blocking critical thinking, together

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<sup>42</sup> *Intepreting the Net*, [www.engl.virginia.edu/~pas6b/2/docs/interpreting.html](http://www.engl.virginia.edu/~pas6b/2/docs/interpreting.html), 07.06.2000.

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.rheingold.com/texts/technopolitix/technquotes/ellul/html>, 16.01.2004, p. 1.

<sup>44</sup> [www.xenky.com/news/20030213/bookreview\\_20030213.html](http://www.xenky.com/news/20030213/bookreview_20030213.html), 19.01.2004, pp. 1-2.

<sup>45</sup> Ellul, J. *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, New York, 1973.



with the belief that the machinery (including computers) is totally reliable, are ideal premises for successful persuasion. Professor Robert B. Cialdini also demonstrates this interconnection and defined it as “primitive automaticity” similar to animals’ instinct. We are likely to use those lone cues when we don’t have the inclination, time, energy or cognitive resources to undertake a complete analysis of the situation. When we are rushed, stressed, uncertain, indifferent, distracted, or fatigued, we tend to focus on less of the information available to us. When making decisions under these circumstances, we often revert to the rather primitive but necessary single-piece-of-good-evidence approach<sup>46</sup>.

The total technological foundation of contemporary society has also made the propaganda total—totally pervasive, presented in every form of public communication. Ellul rejected all attempts to research propaganda in small experimental groups. To him propaganda was a unique phenomenon, springing out of almighty powers, pushing the persons in the technological society in a way that could not be reproduced in an experimental environment. The most powerful form of propaganda—sociological propaganda—has found in the Internet an excellent medium. Sociological propaganda is a phenomenon much more difficult to grasp than political propaganda, and is rarely discussed. *Basically it is the penetration of an ideology into its sociological context*<sup>47</sup>.

In his conversations with the French journalist Patrick Troude-Chastenet, featured in the book *Jacques Ellul on Religion, Technology and Politics*, the social philosopher made a precarious balance which was unknown to the book’s readers and to researchers. Ellul summarized his analysis of technological developments during his lifetime, and in the process gave his forecast for the Internet’s unseen future:

I would say that I have tried to show how technology is developing completely independently of any human control. Carried away in some Promethean dream, modern man has always thought he could harness Nature, whereas what is happening is that he is building an artificial universe for himself where he is increasingly being constrained. He thought he would achieve this goal by using technology but he has ended up its slave. The means have become the goals and necessity is a virtue<sup>48</sup>.

I merely have tried to start analyzing the determinist characteristics of technology with this essay. The main problem of the vast majority of texts critically examining the men-and-technology interconnection is that they are limited to human labor activity and the concrete negative ends for people in their relations with technology. I have tried to analyze it in the way Ellul did—developing the problem in more general terms, while researching also the changes in real time. In this way, he destroyed the utopia of balanced control in society, executed via some kind of technology in the way Aldous Huxley had done with his *Brave New World*. But keep in mind that Huxley’s

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<sup>46</sup> Cialdini, R. *Influence: Science and Practice*, Boston, 2001, p. 235.

<sup>47</sup> Ellul, *Propaganda*, p. 63.

<sup>48</sup> Troude-Chastenet, P. *Jacques Ellul on Religion, Technology and Politics*, ch. 13, <http://t2100cdt.kippona.net/public/ellul>, 19.01.2004

work is conditioned by and is clearly anti-utopian, in contrast to Ellul's describing real processes in contemporary society.

Jacques Ellul left this world before the Internet had shown its true social power. Mentioning here its drawbacks to social development, mainly caused by its nature as a technologically based medium, it is fair to praise its ability to change technology's role in the social process. The combination of image, sound, text and the hyperlink have brought back the opportunity to choose the messages received. Internet isn't simply one of the electronic media—it limits information access only minimally. The development of search machines containing artificial intellectual elements could not only improve the quality of the information found but also lead to its critical interpretation. The critical analysis of the global network shouldn't be done in a retrograde mode. The lack of technological progress or its violent delay or stop has always led to a distortion of the principles of democracy, not just technically but also in their very core. This analysis is necessary for society, to protect it from becoming a mass of consumer spectacles in real time, and to leave the anti-utopia nightmares of George Orwell, Aldous Huxley and Robert Sheckley in the sci-fi thriller genre. The critical point of view plays its role of "socially-tolerated pessimism." It always tries to find problems (real or imagined) as if obsessed by paranoia, but it guarantees the transparency of the processes and the development of human-oriented technologies. Maybe the critical perspective is on its way to transform the technologically determined society into a society determining its technologies.

# Re-Viewing Ellul

*Fifty years ago, in 1954, Jacques Ellul published what would become his most famous and influential book, La Technique, which in 1964 was published in an English translation as The Technological Society. To mark this half-century milestone, the Ellul Forum asked the distinguished Penn State University professor of materials science, Rustum Roy, to re-view Ellul's great book and its contribution to our thinking.*

## The Technological Society

by **Jacques Ellul**

Translated by John Wilkinson. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1964. Revised American edition, New York: Knopf/Vintage Books, 1967.

Original edition *La Technique ou l'enjeu du siecle*. Paris: Armand Colin, 1954. Second ed. Paris: Economic, 1990.

**Reviewed by Rustum Roy**

Founding Director STS Program, Penn State University; Founding Director, Materials Research Laboratory, Penn State University

Master Jacques Ellul: A Tribute\*

In the euphoric time surrounding the release of Pope John XXIII<sup>rd</sup>'s "Pacem in Terris" at a symposium in New York, John Wilkinson mentioned a book creating a stir in Europe called *La Technique* by a Professor of Law named Jacques Ellul. These comments made no connection for me until the conversation turned to the content of the book and the summary of its thesis. Put crudely: Ellul, it was said, claimed that "Technology" was not controllable by human society. That in a sense technology was ultimately an enemy of human development.

As the only working high tech scientist usually present in such theological groups, I had become accustomed to the next question, "And how would Rustum Roy respond?" In this case my interlocutors were surprised by both my reply, and the tone of delivery. My response then, as it remains today was: Ellul not only was right, but he had *underestimated* the size of the problem, and how great a danger to the future of the human race the scientific/technological enterprise *as practiced today*, posed.

I had been introduced to the thoughts of Jacques Ellul through his slim volume *The Presence of the Kingdom* (1948; ET 1953). In the radical new Christianity emerging after WWII, Dietrich Bonhoeffer had emerged as its prophet - with his "religionless Christianity." And here was Ellul expressing very similar ideas. So when his *Techno-*

*logical Society* painted similar ideas on a broader canvas, it was clearly destined to be a masterpiece. Notice I do not identify “science” or “technology” *per se* as dangers to humanity, only the *present “system,”* Ellul’s clearly identified “technological society” which has emerged in our time.

All great societies have had science and “technology” - much of it very sophisticated. From the Egyptian pyramids to Brunelleschi’s Florentine cathedral there were dramatic technological achievements. The great insight Ellul brought into play was that in the contemporary technological society, technology had surreptitiously usurped the function of mythopoesis. Why? Because it had become something quite new: a *system*; thence: the “Technological-Society”—technology completely integrated into the warp and woof of culture. That remains Ellul’s and this book’s greatest insight, still hardly appreciated, even in academia.

The technological society was a conspiracy without conspirators. As Ellul clearly understood, our collective universal conspiracy is to allow our baser personal desires to be manipulated to undercut the collective good. Why? Because we had abandoned the transcendent values: we had dethroned all gods and God. Over the years I have phrased it thus: Technology is America’s religion— with rigid practices, rituals, and liturgies— and Science has become its rather onedimensional theology. It is surely necessary for academics never to discuss together incommensurable units such as “science and religion”: one can not measure volume (the three dimensions of religion) in the units of length, linear science (cm). Our arguments should pit technology against religion as they interface in Ellul’s *Technological Society*.

The other great insight of Ellul was that modern technology had mastered the art of using appropriate feedback loops to take over larger and larger spheres of human activity. Technology gives humans what their hearts desire, and for which humans will gladly sacrifice all their cherished values.

As we at Penn State helped seed and shape what was to become the national (and later international) Science, Technology & Society movement, it became clear that Ellul was in some ways the philosophical rock on which our call rested. I therefore approached him to join our fledgling movement to bridge the divide in C. P. Snow’s “Two Cultures” world. He joined me as a CoEditor in Chief for the *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*. At an early national Conference of the National

Association for STS, Ellul sent over a 45 minute speech in French for the opening plenary lecture. We played it, as I remember, with an English translation in voice-over. It appeared in the *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*. That surely was appropriate, for in “STS” as an emerging academic field no one could be more relevant than Jacques Ellul and now as his various updates of the Technological Society have emerged, I would hope that no one can get any degree in STS without a real familiarity with Ellul’s Technological Society concept. It is particularly fitting that Ellul’s Canadian protege, Prof. W. Vanderburg has succeeded both of us as Editor in Chief of that Journal.

But there is another way in which Ellul underestimates the danger we stand in - that is the danger, not only from technology, but from “science” of various degrees of “basicity.” Unlike Ellul, I have lived 100% immersed in that world of academic basic science *and* its applications in the real world for, six decades, while being, like Ellul, simultaneously a committed socially-and-politically *active* liberal, inclusivist Christian and, also like Ellul, an active but “outsider” participant in established church circles. I have very little patience for the esoteric *academic* science - religion dialogues about the Big Bang, evolution, etc. distracting citizens and even believers from the full bodied nature of religion and the Gospel imperatives of feeding the poor or loving enemies. Ellul, to the best of my knowledge, never discussed the fine points of evolution or string theory, and its relevance to the nature of God!! Nothing would be more irrelevant to the existential relation of “S/T” to religion as practiced. My experience is that modern science *as practiced today* has become, in fact, “scientism”. It has created in the West an oxymoronic “culture of disbelief”; since all other cultures cohere around a set of beliefs (*resultant practices and rituals*). “Scientism”, by actual acknowledgement or default, seduces most regular scientists into a frame of reference that has *all* reality subjected to evaluation by scientific measurements however narrow or irrelevant they may be. With the incredible degree of reductionist fragmentation, (disciplinary specialization in the common parlance) which creates a hitherto unknown condition: where no one “specializes” in the whole, i.e. in the biggest overarching issues of life in Society—in a word— religion. This is what Ellul did. He put together *in his life* his academic and theological insights with his actions - his praxis.

The part (science) is claiming, putting on airs, indeed positioning itself as the whole (Religious behavior), while entering into so-called conversations on “Science & Religion.” Among the world’s theologians, only Huston Smith (see his book *Religion Matters*) has clearly spotted this trend and attacked it vigorously. Among distinguished scientists, only C.F. von Weisacker has identified the danger. In the closing paragraphs of “The History of Nature” Weisacker writes:

*But when knowledge without love becomes the hireling of the resistance against love, then it assumes the role which in the Christian mythical imagery is the role of the devil. The serpent in paradise urges on man knowledge without love.*

*Anti-Christ is the power in history that leads loveless knowledge into the battle of destruction against love. But it is at the same time also the power that destroys itself in its triumph. The battle is still raging. We are in the midst of it, at a post not of our choosing where we must prove ourselves.*

Ellul was at his post proving himself!!

Yet a final topic which must be addressed is the Janus-like character of Ellul’s work: his deep, voluminous theological works on the one hand, and his “STS” writings including his cornerstone, *The Technological Society* on the other. There was little cross-referencing between the two realms in Ellul’s own writing. I have not seen this commented on widely by others. Perhaps only Willem Vanderburg, with his five year apprenticeship under Ellul, could fill out this story for the community. And in fact

in a short second Appendix to his recent book “Perspectives on our Age” Vanderburg has given his very sound hypothesis on why Ellul did not link his two foci explicitly. I found the case very well argued. Contemporary culture simply cannot be mapped on to a Christian mythos. These worlds remain separated, with the rare working participants in both shuttling between them, fitting in, incognito, in both camps - rarely betraying their other allegiances. Like Kierkegaard’s Knight of Faith, the sensitized believer appears no different from other knights in the ordinary world (of technology.) Like Petru Dumitriu’s believers living in the even more constrained communist bloc, described in his great classic work, “Incognito,” they learn to use a special, largely unspoken, language when communicating among themselves.

In summary: Ellul is with little doubt the most significant author for the STS field; the unchallenged philosopher of technology, and the theologian providing a “Guide for the Perplexed” for believers living in a “Technological Society.” \*This appellation, “Master Jacques” used by my friend and colleague, Ivan Illich, at a celebrating event shortly before Ellul’s death, has a great ring to it.

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# In Review

## Enough: Staying Human in an Engineered Age by Bill McKibben.

New York: Henry Holt, Times Books, 2003. xiii., 272 pp. Reviewed by David W. Gill

Bill McKibben writes regularly for the *New York Review of Books*, *The New York Times*, *The Atlantic*, and many other publications. Among his previous books are *The End of Nature* and *The Age of Missing Information*. McKibben's *Enough* is an impassioned call for debate on whether we should set limits on developments in human genetic engineering and advanced forms of robotics and nanotechnology. His belief is that these technologies "may alter our relationship not just with the rest of nature but with ourselves" and "call into question, often quite explicitly, our understanding of what it means to be a human being." (xii).

McKibben fends off the possible charge of impeding progress and playing the Luddite by saying such charges are "as silly as accusing someone of being a prohibitionist because he'd rather leave a barroom with a warm glow than a spinning head" (xii). Is it possible that our technological reach is now far enough? Can we limit ourselves? Should we do so?

McKibben is especially concerned about germline genetic engineering and cloning. So far this has not been successfully done on humans but recent progress on both plants and animals and the lack of public discussion is an ominous portent. Part of McKibben's concern is with the potential for unintended, dangerous, even macabre consequences. But the center of his argument is with the erosion of our humanity as we turn ourselves into technical objects, devices, engineered phenomena. Part of what it means to be human is to struggle against our limits; to transgress all limits by technological decisions would be to erase one of the essential features of our humanity.

Echoing Bill Joy's famous article, McKibben also argues that nanotechnology, miniaturization, selfreplicating assemblers, and robotics are to inanimate matter what biotechnology is to animate matter. The two realms are threatening—and converging.

McKibben's answer is that we say "enough" and pronounce the world we live in "good." He quotes technophile futurist Lee Silver as saying we are on a "journey into a rapidly evolving future that no man, or woman, could stop" (p. 163). It is this arrogance and assumption of inevitability that McKibben challenges. McKibben gives examples of how various societies and groups have said "no" at various points. The

Amish lifestyle, the European rejection of genetically modified food, the rejection of DDT, the resistance to nuclear power plants, some progress in controlling population growth . . . there are examples of a human capacity to resist what looks like inevitable scientific-technological prescriptions for our lives.

The scientists and their business investors are unlikely to be willing to stop on their own; a broader social debate is necessary. The answer is most certainly not to stop all scientific and technological advance; rather, it is to set some boundaries at critical points where our humanity is clearly at stake. McKibben's argument is well-written, provocative, and deserving of careful consideration.

## **Perspectives on Our Age: Jacques Ellul Speaks on His Life and Work Edited by Willem H. Vanderburg**

Revised edition. Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2004. xvii, 131 pp.. Original edition , 1981.

Reviewed by David W. Gill

Bill Vanderburg is the founding director of the Centre for Technology and Social Development at the University of Toronto and the author of *The Growth of Minds and Cultures* and *The Labyrinth of Technology*. Vanderburg is one of a long procession of students, researchers, and activists from North America and around the world to travel to Bordeaux for shorter or longer periods of study with Jacques Ellul. Vanderburg carried out "four-and-a-half years of postdoctoral work" with Ellul during the 1970s (p. x) and has continued to ponder and extend the ideas of Ellul during a quarter century as a professor working with engineering students and others.

*Perspectives on Our Age* is a superb introduction to Jacques Ellul's core ideas and perspectives and we can be grateful that it has now been republished. Vanderburg first worked with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation to create a series of radio programs on Ellul with interviews of Ellul himself and commentary by others. (It would be great if these programs could be reissued on a compact disc). Following the radio broadcasts in 1979 and 1980, Vanderburg developed the material into the present manuscript. Vanderburg mapped out the organization and questions; Ellul provided the answers and narrative.

*Perspectives* has four main sections: (1) The Questions of My Life, (2) Understanding our Age, (3) The Present and the Future, and (4) Faith or Religion? Ellul's basic perspectives on technique/technology, Marx and Marxism, politics and the state, and Christianity and religion are all sketched out in an understandable way, with a lot of helpful personal and historical context.

The original preface to the first edition was not included in the Seabury Press publication of 1981 for some reason. It is now included along with a new preface



and two additional appendices from Bill Vanderburg. Appendix 1 gives Vanderburg's understanding of Ellul's concept of technique; appendix 2 gives his understanding of the relation of Ellul's sociology to his Christian faith and theology. Some readers will, no doubt, find the Vanderburg additions helpful.

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The IJES (with its francophone sister-society, L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul) links together scholars and friends of various specializations, vocations, backgrounds, and nations, who share a common interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), long time professor at the University of Bordeaux. Our objectives are (1) to preserve and disseminate his literary and intellectual heritage, (2) to extend his social critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) to extend his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

The IJES and AIJE have been founded by a group of long-time students, scholars, and friends of Jacques Ellul, with the counsel and support of Jean, Yves, and Dominique Ellul, and as a French-American collaboration.

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## **Political Illusions & Realities**

by David W. Gill

President, International Jacques Ellul Society

In this year of great anniversaries, a local one that has special meaning for me has been the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Free Speech Movement at the University of California. This past month in Berkeley we have had various reunions, reminiscences, panel discussions, speeches, rallies, and even a reenactment of Mario Savio's speech standing on top of a police car surrounded by thousands of seated demonstrators on Sproul Plaza.

I was an 18-year-old freshman student just starting at Berkeley when the student movement started in October 1964. I often joke that it is hard for me to study without the smell of tear gas in the air because the two are so closely associated in my experience! I loved the Free Speech Movement (and, for that matter, I was an enthusiastic participant in most of the movements that followed: demanding multicultural studies options, more diversity in the student body and on the faculty, a more thoughtful university development approach ("People's Park!"), and a rejection of the catastrophic Vietnam war).

The university was dramatically improved by these movements and the forty-year celebration is fully warranted. But there were two aspects to these movements that began to trouble me within a year of the launch of the Free Speech Movement.

Two Weaknesses in the Student Movement

The first problem was the *inconsistency*, even hypocrisy, of some of the movement and leadership. "Free speech for me, but not for thee"—was one way this played out. No, I didn't like Dow Chemical or R.O.T.C., either, but authentic free speech means having debates, not shouting down those we don't agree with. I was then, and am now, an advocate of radically free speech, not a selectively permitted speech (one reason why the IJES is a "big tent," inclusivist group rather than a sectarian elite as some would have it).

Same with violence: the Free Speech Movement, like much of the Civil Rights Movement, was nonviolent, using tactics like administrative office sit-ins, class disruptions, campus work stoppages, and the like. But when these non-violent tactics were replaced by some violence against people (including some innocent bystanders)—and truly idiotic destruction of property—I had to protest against the protesters.

The second problem was *naivete*. We needed social challenge and change and there was some great thinking that went on in those days. But there was also some truly awesome naivete regarding human nature, communities, tradition, and social and political change.

Enter Ellul

This is where Jacques Ellul stepped into my picture. I had heard about him in the mid-1960s but it was only in 1971 that I finally read *The Meaning of the City* for an article on urbanization I was writing. Then in 1972 I read four of his books in quick succession: *The Political Illusion*, *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, *Presence of the Kingdom*, and *False Presence of the Kingdom*. I had seen these titles listed on the fly-leaf to *The Meaning of the City* and now read them to help me prepare

to cover the Democratic Convention in Miami Beach in summer 1972 (with a press pass from *Radix Magazine* in Berkeley).

To say that I was “blown away” by the stunning political insight of Ellul is an understatement. With Ellul’s help I was able to see much more clearly the political illusion and reality of the McGovern/Nixon contest and the larger society which hosted it. (Almost on a whim I sent some of my book reviews and articles to Ellul in the fall of 1972; his encouraging letter back to me was the beginning of a 22-year correspondence and what I recently added up as about 24 months of residence in Bordeaux over the years).

#### Deeper Forces Driving Political Reality

Jacques Ellul’s political insight struck me first of all with its *depth*. Most political discussion and thought today is conducted in the world of images, he explained. Ephemeral current events, news sound bites, slogans, and image management—this is where the political passions of the citizens are engaged. Since Ellul’s analyses of forty to fifty years ago, all of this has become more blatant than ever, embraced by journalists, politicians, and voters alike.

Meanwhile, underneath this surface froth the actual directions of our society and world are set by the deeper forces of technique, bureaucratization, the globalizing-technological-corporate economic order, the desperate search for survival, social order, and meaning by Islamic societies, and so on. Failing to insist that we explore, understand, and engage these deeper forces—rather than just adding rhetorical fuel to the fires passing for today’s political debate—is a betrayal of our calling as thoughtful, reflective people in our world.

#### Self-criticism and the Search for a Third Way

The second contribution Ellul made to my political thinking was his continual call for self-criticism and an end to hypocrisy. We must help our “side” to understand the other side and to recognize and address our own failures and inconsistencies, not just those of our opponents. Christians, especially, should search for a “third way” beyond the standard options of Left and Right.

Radical, deep, courageous, self-critical, liberating, innovative, humane . . . these are some of the central characteristics of Ellul’s political orientation. In the era of Bush, Kerry, Nader & Co. (to speak only of the American context) . . . it is of the highest urgency that some voices be raised for a different political path with these characteristics.

## Resources for Ellul Studies

[www.ellul.org](http://www.ellul.org) & [www.jacques-ellul.org](http://www.jacques-ellul.org)

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The IJES/AIJE web site at [www.ellul.org](http://www.ellul.org) contains (1) news about IJES and AIJE activities and plans, (2) a brief and accurate biography of Jacques Ellul, (3) a complete bibliography of Ellul's books in French and English, and (4) links and information on other resources for students of Jacques Ellul. The new AIJE web site at [www.jacques-ellul.org](http://www.jacques-ellul.org) offers a French language supplement.

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#### **Cahiers Jacques Ellul**

*Pour Une Critique de la Societe Technicienne*

The second issue of *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*, an annual journal edited by Patrick Chastenet and published by our sister society, L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul, is now available for 20 euros (postage included) to individuals outside France, and for 25 euros to libraries. The theme of the second issue is "La Technque."

*Cahiers Jacques Ellul* is an essential new reference for those interested in Ellul's ideas.

**Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works** by Joyce Main Hanks. Research in Philosophy and Technology. Supplement 5. Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 2000. xiii., 206 pages. \$87. ISBN: 076230619X.

This is the essential guide for anyone doing research in Jacques Ellul's writings. An excellent brief biography is followed by a 140-page annotated bibliography of Ellul's fifty books and thousand-plus articles and a thirtypage subject index. Hank's work is comprehensive, accurate, and invariably helpful. This may be one of the more expensive books you buy for your library; it will surely be one of the most valuable. Visit [www.elsevier.com](http://www.elsevier.com) for ordering information.

#### **Alibris—used books in English**

The Alibris web site ([www.alibris.com](http://www.alibris.com)) lists thirty titles of used and out-of-print Jacques Ellul books in English translation available to order at reasonable prices.

**Librairie Mollat—new books in French** Librairie Mollat in the center of old Bordeaux ([www.mollat.com](http://www.mollat.com)) is an excellent resource for French language books, including those by and about Ellul.

Mollat accepts credit cards over the web and will mail books anywhere in the world.

#### **Used books in French:**

##### **two web resources**

Two web sites that will be of help in finding used books in French by Jacques Ellul (and others) are [www.chapitre.com](http://www.chapitre.com) and [www.livre-rare-book.com](http://www.livre-rare-book.com).

#### **Reprints of Nine Ellul Books**

By arrangement with Ingram and Spring Arbor, individual reprint copies of several Ellul books originally published by William B. Eerdmans can now be purchased. The books and prices listed at the Eerdmans web site are as follows: *The Ethics of Freedom*

(\$40), *The Humiliation of the Word* (\$26), *The Judgment of Jonah* (\$13), *The Meaning of the City* (\$20), *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man* (\$19), *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes* (\$28), *The Subversion of Christianity* (\$20), and *The Technological Bluff* (\$35). *Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul* translated by Marva Dawn is also available (price unknown).

Have your bookstore (or on-line book dealer) “back order” the titles you want. Do not go as an individual customer to Eerdmans or Ingram/Spring Arbor. For more information visit “Books on Demand” at [www.eerdmans.com](http://www.eerdmans.com).

### **Ellul on Video**

French film maker Serge Steyer’s film “Jacques Ellul: L’homme entier” (52 minutes) is available for 25 euros at the web site [www.meromedia.com](http://www.meromedia.com). Ellul is himself interviewed as are several commentators on Ellul’s ideas.

Another hour-length film/video that is focused entirely on Ellul’s commentary on technique in our society, “The Treachery of Technology,” was produced by Dutch film maker Jan van Boekel for ReRun Produkties (mail to: Postbus 43021, 1009 ZA Amsterdam).

If you try to purchase either of these excellent films, be sure to check on compatibility with your video system and on whether English subtitles are provided, if that is desired.

**Issue #35 Spring 2005 — René  
Girard and Jacques Ellul**

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## For the Critique of Technological Civilization

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”In the area of scriptural interpretation we are clearly faced with ideological choices... Recently we have witnessed the appearance of a new interpretive grill presented by Rene Girard... Rather than presenting merely another interpretation, Girard gives us a genuine method. Since it fits no ideological canon, I feel certain it will never attract notice or be taken into account by biblical scholars. ”

Jacques Ellul

in *Jesus and Marx: From Gospel to Ideology* (1979; ET 1988), p. 86 n2.

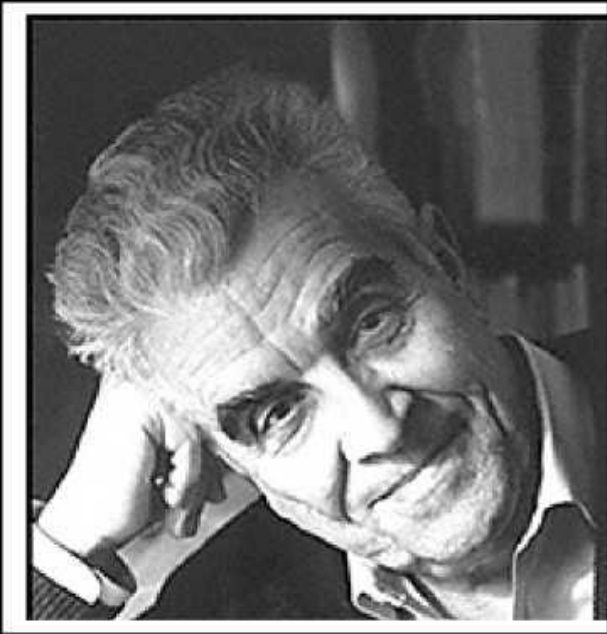
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**For the Critique of Technological Civilization**

**Founded 1988**





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## From the Editor

This issue illustrates how *The Ellul Forum* carries out its mission. One purpose is to advance Ellul's "sociological and theological analyses in new directions." In order to accomplish that goal, *The Forum* feeds from a world network of Ellul scholars and friends, even as it nurtures that society in return.

Months ago, contributing editor Carl Mitcham proposed an issue on Ellul and Girard. Jim Grote knows Ellul's work and Rene Girard personally, so he became our point man in moving this good idea forward. In Innsbruck, Jim hears an ambitious and authoritative paper by Matthew Pattillo, a young Ellul scholar, on this very topic. And with this issue, a version of that paper becomes part of the network and invigorates our thinking. Pattillo demonstrates how Girard provides "theoretical underpinnings for Ellul's theology" while Ellul offers him a "more biblically consistent content" for the life of faith. In the process of establishing these interconnections, the importance of human relationships (and Christians would say "of the Body of Christ") vis-a-vis the global state becomes transparent.

French scholar Michel Hourcade on Sport and Technique, Korean scholar Myung Su Yang on Utopia, and American scholar Dell DeChant on the Sacred and Postmodernism, illustrated the same process in other recent issues of *The Ellul Forum*. The editors will depend on the idea-specialist cycle for enhancing our mission in the future.

In addition to Jim Grote's introduction and Matthew Pattillo's marvelous essay, we have Darrell Fasching's interesting "re-view" of Ellul's *New Demons* and a brief interview of Rene Girard by David Gill. David also reviews Jim Grote and John McGeeney's Girardian business ethics text, *Clever as Serpents*, and Jacques Ellul's new book on Islam, made available posthumously through the efforts of Jacques Ellul's daughter, Dominique.

The theme for *Ellul Forum* Issue 36 (Fall 2005) is Ellul's biblical interpretation. Ellul published several biblical studies and commentaries—always "edgy" and provocative, sometimes maddening, always valuable and illuminating. We welcome your ideas and input on this and future issues of the *Forum*.

Our back page "News and Notes" reports on two great colloquia on Ellul in France last Fall. We would love to sponsor something similar in North America but must wait for funding, timing, location, and other issues to be resolved.

*Clifford G. Christians, Editor editor@ellul.org*

# Introducing Rene Girard

by Jim Grote

*Jim Grote, CFP, a financial writer with over 20 years experience as a development officer, has been an adjunct professor in business ethics and philosophy at several universities. His book on Girardian business ethics (co-authored with John McGeeney), Clever as Serpents: Business Ethics and Office Politics (reviewed on p. 22 below), was recently translated and published in Germany and Indonesia. [jimgrote@hotmail.com]*

Born on Christmas Day, 1923, in Avignon, France, Rene Girard's work has been a blend of history, literature, anthropology and theology with implications for science, technology, and ethics that have only begun to be appreciated. He graduated from the Ecole des Chartes in Paris in 1947 (as a specialist in medieval studies) with a thesis on private life in his hometown of Avignon in the second half of the fifteenth century. A year's trip abroad turned into a Ph.D. in history from Indiana University, after which Girard remained in the United States, where he retired as a professor of French Language, Literature, and Civilization from Stanford University in 1995.

Girard's early historiographic publications soon gave way to an avalanche of literary criticism. His first book, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* (1966), contrasted the romantic lie of individualism with the novelistic truth of what he called "imitative" or "mimetic desire." Among five major novelists (Cervantes, Stehnhel, Flaubert, Proust and Dostoevsky) Girard discovered a triangular structure to desire where the protagonists struggle with the realization that their deepest aspirations were mere imitations of a model or rival - hence the infamous love triangle. Adultery remains the archetype for this phenomenon as illustrated in Dostoevsky's novella, *The Eternal Husband*. The husband is obsessed by his wife's lovers, who inflame, validate and aggravate his own desire. Girard's students have likened his discovery of imitation in the social sciences to Newton's discovery of gravity in the physical sciences. The vast secondary literature on mimetic desire now extends these early insights into the diverse fields of economics, sociology, psychology, theology and anthropology.

*Violence and the Sacred* (1977), an anthropological study, offers a rational explanation for sacrificial rituals (as well as religious myths and prohibitions) in what he terms the "victimage mechanism." Mimetic desire is inevitably conflictual. "Rivalry does not arise because of the fortuitous convergence of two desires on a single object; rather, *the subject desires the object because the rival desires it*" (1977, p. 145). Ancient religion developed as an unconscious method of keeping the peace where the mimetic war of all against all is replaced by the more efficient war of all against one - the community's sacrifice of a scapegoat. Sacrifice acts as a kind of vaccination whose small doses of violence inoculate the community against greater violence.

This sacrificial mechanism is examined in more detail in a work of biblical criticism, *The Scapegoat* (1986). While the mimetic conflict of model and disciple cannot be resolved by sharing the same object of desire (which is a source of the conflict), it may be resolved or at least mitigated by sharing the same object of revulsion - the

scapegoat. Nothing unites people like a common enemy. "This is the terrible paradox of human desires. They can never be reconciled in the preservation of their object but only through its destruction; they can only find agreement at the expense of a victim" (1986, p. 146).

*Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* (1987), a conversation between Girard and two French psychiatrists, explores an anthropological foundation for Girard's theories. The discussion includes a hypothesis of a "founding murder" among mimetically hysterical primates that initiated the long, slow process of hominization as well as sacrificial mechanisms. Girard sheds new light on the often-discarded speculations on primal murders found in Freud's *Totem and Taboo*. He also proposes the controversial thesis that the Judeo-Christian revelation of the victimage mechanism provides the anthropological tools necessary to demythologize pagan religious practices, which for Girard includes much of Western Christianity. According to Girard, Christ's death was not a sacrifice willed by an angry God to atone for an original sin, but simply a revelation of human brutality and violence by a loving God.

The remainder of Girard's major work includes two works of literary criticism, *A Theater of Envy: William Shakespeare* (1991) and *Oedipus Unbound: Selected Writings on Rivalry and Desire* (2004) as well as two works of biblical criticism, *Job: The Victim of His People* (1987) and *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (2001). Girard's recent book on Satan may seem worlds removed from his first work on novelistic love triangles. But it was the recurring patterns of seduction in the novel that led Girard to take the idea of Satan seriously - not as a prudish rejection of the world or a projection of childhood fears, but as an explanatory (one is tempted to say, scientific) principle. Throughout his works, Girard contrasts the Hebrew word Satan, the technical term referring to the accuser before a tribunal, with the Greek word for the Holy Spirit, the *parakletos* or defense attorney.

For Girard, modern science and technology are an inevitable consequence of the demythologization of sacrificial violence and magical thought. Magical thought always seeks a social/moral explanation for pain. For example, the Black Plague was often attributed to the Jews poisoning the water supply. As Girard quips, "Those who are suffering are not interested in natural causes" (1986, p. 53). However, with a loosening of magical thought, the search for natural causes slowly becomes a more reasonable path toward the "relief of man's estate" (Francis Bacon). "The invention of science is not the reason that there are no longer witch hunts, but the fact that there are no longer witch hunts is the reason that science has been invented. The scientific spirit, like the spirit of enterprise in an economy, is a by-product of the profound action of the Gospel text" (1986, p. 204).

Yet Girard's attitude toward science contains a certain Freudian ambivalence. Science is necessarily part of the Christian concern for victims and is a consequence of this charitable impulse. At the same time, modern technology has an apocalyptic edge to it. With the loosening of ancient sacred restraints and prohibitions, modern technology like modern economy, unleashes the phenomenon of mimetic desire in a wave of con-

sumerism, ethnic rivalry, media frenzy and politically correct victimology. For Girard it is no accident that names for nuclear weapons are “taken from the direst divinities in Greek mythology, like Titan, Poseidon, and Saturn, the god who devoured his own children” (1987, p. 256).

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## Christianity, Violence, & Anarchy: Girard and Ellul

by Matthew Pattillo

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This essay will examine the personal and social consequences of sin, biblically defined, and will contend that Christian faith necessitates a rejection of the secular political order. Exploring and contrasting the thought of Rene Girard and Jacques

Ellul, we will demonstrate that Girard's mimetic theory supplies crucial theoretical underpinnings for Ellul's theology. Ellul, in turn, sequencing the Biblical narrative somewhat differently, provides Girard the more biblically consistent content of the life of faith.

The ethical content of the life of faith is a continuation of the salvation narrative inaugurated in Genesis 1-2, incarnated and perpetuated in Israel and later, the universalized community of the Abrahamic blessing. The historical content of this faith demonstrates the incompatibility of political power with freedom in Christ, and the Christian church's ill-fated attempts to maintain an authentic practice of faith while legitimizing the secular order are exposed by the Biblical critique of power. While the growth of the global state has made a total withdrawal from the political order inconceivable, it is precisely its utter domination today that makes critical the continued defiance of the Body of Christ.

#### Original Sin

Girard observes that when the snake first appears in the Genesis account of the humanity's primal sin, it is already in conflict with God, opposing him as a jealous rival. Eve is enticed by it to covet what belongs to God - the knowledge of good and evil - and to herself become his rival.<sup>1</sup> Her imitation of the serpent's covetousness forms "an alliance of two against one,"<sup>2</sup> and God is expelled from the relationship. The contagion of metaphysical desire, or mimesis, soon claims Adam and what began as a relationship of obedience without conflict between God and human beings is forever changed. An acquisitive mimesis turns antagonistic and rivalrous.<sup>3</sup> When called to account for her disobedience, Eve blames the serpent. Adam in turn blames Eve, implying that God is himself at least partially culpable: "The woman whom *You* gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate."<sup>4</sup>

In the earliest account of human origins then, rivalry with God produces rivalry between people. Girard argues that although conflict must inevitably lead to violence, here "God takes the violence upon himself and founds humanity by driving Adam and Eve far away from him."<sup>5</sup> God's banishment of the first humans only mirrors the expulsion implied by human collusion with the snake.

"Now we know that covetousness is the crux of the whole affair," Ellul writes, "since sin always depends on it. 'You shall not covet' (Exodus 20:17) is the last of the commandments because it summarizes *everything* - all the other sins."<sup>6</sup> Prior to the Fall, Adam and Eve are not required to choose between good and evil. "All that counted

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<sup>1</sup> "Every victim of metaphysical desire... covets his mediator's divinity." Rene Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* (Johns Hopkins, 1965), 182.

<sup>2</sup> Rene Girard, "From Ritual to Science," *Configurations* 8 (2000): 171-185.

<sup>3</sup> Rene Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (Stanford University, 1978), 95.

<sup>4</sup> Gen. 3:12 (NKJV unless otherwise noted); emphasis mine.

<sup>5</sup> Girard, *Things Hidden*, 142

<sup>6</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word* (Eerdmans, 1985), 101; see also Rene Girard, *I See Satan Fall like Lightning* (Orbis, 1999), pp. 7-12.

was the relation to God and its expression in action.”<sup>7</sup> Here Ellul understands freedom as obedience to God’s commandments *within the context of a relationship with God*. Independence from God is mere slavery: “Adam seeks to liberate himself from the limits which God has set for him and in so doing he enters into rivalry with other forces and becomes subject to sin.”<sup>8</sup> The knowledge that Adam and Eve covet and usurp from God is “the power to *decide* on one’s own *what is good and what is evil*.”<sup>9</sup> Consequently, human morality is seen as founded on the order of the Fall, and Girard concurs: the ethical always derives from victimary unanimity,<sup>10</sup> in this case the rejection of God.

For Ellul “covetousness is equivalent to the spirit of power or domination,”<sup>11</sup> and “no society is possible among people who compete for power or who covet and find themselves coveting the same thing.”<sup>12</sup> Civil order between rivals in the Genesis prehistory can only be founded on blood. All the elements of the violent origin of civilization are present in this text. Cain murders his brother and rival, Abel, becoming the founder of the first city. The threat of contagious violence is described by the multiplication of Cain’s murder into a sevenfold revenge, which becomes his descendant Lamech’s seventy-seven-fold revenge, so that by the time of Noah violence engulfs the world. The acceptability of Abel’s blood sacrifice is read by Girard as an adumbration of the sacrificial protection on which all social order will be founded: the violence of all against all will be kept in check by the ritualized violence of all against one. For Girard, Cain represents the chaotic mob in the grip of a violent frenzy, uniting against a single victim, a scapegoat. This unity achieves a real peace and allows for the development of all that is collectively termed civilization.<sup>13</sup> In the emergent order legal codes address that which must be prohibited to maintain that peace, and ritual describes the action by which it was first secured.<sup>14</sup> For Girard the fundamental character of ritual is reenactment of the immolation of the victim,<sup>15</sup> as it is this act that first brought concord out of chaos. Culture in all its expressions, the arts and sciences, every mode

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<sup>7</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Ethics of Freedom* (Eerdmans, 1976), 51.

<sup>8</sup> Ellul, *Ethics*, 49.

<sup>9</sup> Ellul, *Humiliation*, 96n (emphasis Ellul’s).

<sup>10</sup> Girard, *Things Hidden*, 236.

<sup>11</sup> Ellul, *Humiliation*, 101; cf also Jacques Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity* (Eerdmans, 1991), 20: “Sin is a break with God and all that this entails. When I say that people are not good, I am not adopting a Christian or a moral standpoint. I am saying that their two great characteristics, no matter what their society or education, are covetousness and the desire for power. Rene Girard has fully shown what the implications of covetousness are.” Note Ellul’s humble confession, p. 7: “I do not pretend to be able to unveil things hidden from the beginning of the world.”

<sup>12</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity* (Eerdmans, 1991), 20.

<sup>13</sup> Jacques Ellul, *What I Believe* (Eerdmans, 1989), 59: “For years now we have been playing the scapegoat game. It has a profound source, as Girard has recalled. the possibility of universalizing it is the exclusive work of television, the radio, and the press. These attach the label and thereby justify whole nations and each and every individual.”

<sup>14</sup> Rene Girard, *Violent Origins: Walter Burkert, Rene Girard & Jonathan Z. Smith on Ritual Killing and Cultural Formation*, ed. Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly (Stanford University, 1987), 93.

<sup>15</sup> Girard, *Violent Origins*, 107; compare Jacques Ellul, *The New Demons* (Seabury, 1975), 9: “We



of communication, is seen as having as its *fons et origo* the same ritualized coaxing of order from disorder.<sup>16</sup>

Arguing in a similar fashion, Ellul represents the first city as founded on Cain's rejection of God, specifically his offer of protection against vengeance,<sup>17</sup> and his choosing instead to create his own protection - the city. The city "expresses the attempt to exclude God, to shut oneself off from him, to fabricate a world which is purely and exclusively human."<sup>18</sup> Such an exclusively human world is necessarily founded and maintained through force,<sup>19</sup> which is legalized and ritualized:

In its origin law is religious. This is confirmed by almost all sociological findings. Law is the expression of the will of a god; it is formulated by the priest: it is given religious sanction, it is accompanied by magic ritual. Reciprocally, religious precepts are presented in juridical garb. The relationship with the god is established by man in the form of a contract.

The priest guarantees religion with the occult authority of law.<sup>20</sup>

The civil or secular order is understood as founded on violence and maintained by force.<sup>21</sup> The clear implication is that what humans esteem as "law and order" is established by a crime, and is therefore fundamentally *unjust*. Inasmuch as the founding murder is *arbitrary* violence, there can be no authentic *justice* in the city.<sup>22</sup> The victim upon whom the city is founded is innocent, and what is believed just is itself only the legitimization of an unjust order, the illusion of justice serving to suppress all consciousness of its criminal origins. In the city "justice" can only mean that the victim of arbitrary violence is also given credit for the establishment of (temporary) peace.<sup>23</sup> Justice comes too late for the victim, but is timely enough for the consciences of the perpetrators, for whom the ensuing peace confirms the correctness of the original divi-

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all know, obviously, the close link between religion and violence..The psychological reasons for this have been a matter of question..The fact that Christianity, the revelation of the God of love, could have so changed..sets one thinking..Religion *always* produces violence. When violence comes first, it requires the appearance of a religion."

<sup>16</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Autopsy of Revolution* (Knopf, 1971), 246: "Human society is based on the creative violence which has engendered individual consciousness as well as social order."

<sup>17</sup> Ellul's is the more literal reading of Gen 4:15: "And the Lord said to him, 'Therefore, whoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.' And the Lord set a mark on Cain, lest anyone finding him should kill him."

<sup>18</sup> Ellul, *Ethics*, 39.

<sup>19</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Violence: Reflections from a Christian Perspective* (Seabury, 1969), 84: "Every state is founded on violence and cannot maintain itself save by and through violence."

<sup>20</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Theological Foundation of Law* (Doubleday, 1960), 18.

<sup>21</sup> No distinction can be made between force and violence. Jacques Ellul, *False Presence of the Kingdom* (Seabury, 1971), 151: "It is shortsighted, both politically and spiritually, to say that there is a violence which liberates and another which subjugates. All violence is a crime before the eternal." Compare Girard, *Things Hidden*, 266: "The illusion that there is difference within the heart of violence is the key to the sacrificial way of thinking."

<sup>22</sup> Legal execution, for example, is only ritualized violence (Girard, *Things Hidden*, 173).

<sup>23</sup> Girard, "From Ritual to Science," 185.

sion. Still, the memory of the victim is never effaced and he becomes with time a sort of god, a sacred being who is simultaneously, mysteriously malevolent *and* benevolent. The deification of the victim and the ritualized reenactment of the crime establishing peace serve to suppress from memory the malevolence of the perpetrators and the victim's innocence. The legal system is thus revealed as a religious phenomenon and its charter becomes the seal of our bondage to the secular order.<sup>24</sup> Ellul writes:

Why, after all, does one obey the state? Beyond factors that may be understood and analyzed, not everything can be accounted for, as in the case of the soul that the scalpel cannot find no matter how close the analysis. The residue is a spiritual power, an exousia, that inhabits the body of the state.<sup>25</sup>

#### Society of Technique & the Sacrificial Order

The Biblical narrative confirms the necessity of law in a fallen world - social laws, moral laws, physical laws that govern every aspect of life but which are all forms of the same necessity. "From the moment when Adam separated himself from God," Ellul writes, "when his freedom was no longer love but the choice between two possibilities, from that moment Adam moved from the realm of freedom into the realm of necessity."<sup>26</sup>

The immediate relationship of the Garden is broken in the Fall, disrupting the relation between humans and God, between man and woman, and between man and nature. No longer in the fellowship of love with God, humans are subjected [[to the laws of necessity, and begin to learn and master them, altering their world according to these laws. They adopt means of mediation in their approach to one another, to nature, and to God. Cain's descendants are read by Ellul as inventors of these mediating techniques - the domestication of animals, music-making, and the fashioning of tools. These means are derivative of the first successful technique mentioned in the Genesis account, Abel's blood sacrifice, which serves as both a screen between humanity and God and an approach.<sup>27</sup> Girard, too, sees that the sciences and arts, and every form of human communication have their origins in ritual violence.<sup>28</sup> Once the connection

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<sup>24</sup> Rene Girard, "How Can Satan Cast out Satan?" In *Biblische Theologie und gesellschaftlicher Wandel. Fuer Norbert Lohfink, SJ*, ed. Braulik, G., Gross, W., and McEvenue, S., (Freiburg: Herder, 1993), 137.

<sup>25</sup> Ellul, *Subversion of Christianity* (Eerdmans, 1986), 175.

<sup>26</sup> Jacques Ellul, "Technique and the Opening Chapters of Genesis," in *Theology and Technology*, ed. Carl Mitcham and Jim Grote (Lanham, MD: University of America Press, 1984), 134.

<sup>27</sup> Ellul, "Technique," 132. Compare Ellul, *Jesus and Marx*, 86n: "Recently we have witnessed the appearance of a new interpretation grill presented by Rene Girard ...Rather than presenting merely another interpretation, Girard gives us a genuine method. Since it fits no ideological canon, I feel certain it will never attract notice or be taken into account by biblical scholars." Also, p. 87n: "Concerning the contrast of two themes, pollution and debt, I must underline, as a point of comparison, Girard's much more profound interpretation.with respect to the sacrificial and nonsacrificial reading of biblical texts. But Girard's approach involves no socioeconomic infrastructure that would permit a Marxist interpretation. The sacrificial interpretation springs from more fundamental facts about human beings and society!"

<sup>28</sup> Girard, "From Ritual to Science," 171-185.

between ritual and culture becomes clear, the truly religious nature of all human civilization is made plain. The denial of sacrificial origins for the arts and sciences is an indication of the veiled and veiling character of ritual violence. Suppression of the knowledge of its origins enables human culture to flourish.

The Biblical revelation, then, by unveiling the sacred violence at the heart of religion, poses a threat to human society. The demythologizing effect of revelation undermines the sacred structures of our world. Girard sees the progressive influence of the Biblical revelation in the now universal concern for victims and the growing inability of persecutors to impose their own perspectives on others by fiat. "Centuries were needed to demystify medieval persecutors," he writes, "a few years suffice to discredit contemporary persecutors."<sup>29</sup> This does not mean that our world knows less persecution or violence, only that the myths that once protected the persecutors and blinded people to the innocence of their victims have been eroded by the demythologizing power of the Biblical revelation. The world becomes "increasingly apocalyptic,"<sup>30</sup> as time wears on, for without "sacrificial protections," without a means of limiting it, humans are faced with the unhappy prospect of a global deluge of violence. By unveiling the violent foundations of human society, the Biblical revelation robs it of the only means it has ever known for maintaining order. After the proclamation of the innocence of sacrificial victims the violent order can only be maintained by the naked will to power. Girard observes that because of the Biblical revelation, we save and, paradoxically, produce more victims than ever before. This latter result is the meaning of Christ's warning, "I did not come to bring peace but a sword."<sup>31</sup> Both are evidence of the "unrelenting historical advance" of Christian truth in our world.<sup>32</sup>

Ellul also traces the historical desacralization of religious forms accomplished by the Biblical revelation - including the desacralization of "Christian religion."<sup>33</sup> But he contends that the primitive sacred has been replaced by a modern sacred, a secular religion whose myths are Progress, Work, and Happiness, and whose ideologies include Nationalism, Socialism, Democracy, and Capitalism.<sup>34</sup>

For Ellul, this "desacralization permitted the development of technology and the unlimited exploitation of the world."<sup>35</sup> In *The Technological Society*,<sup>36</sup> he argues that

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<sup>29</sup> Girard, *The Scapegoat* (Johns Hopkins University, 1986), 201.

<sup>30</sup> Girard, *The Girard Reader* (Crossroad, 1996), 274.

<sup>31</sup> Matthew 10.34.

<sup>32</sup> Girard, *I See Satan*, 174.

<sup>33</sup> Ellul, *The New Demons*.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 112: "The myth of progress as man's seizure of history in order to make it serve him is probably the greatest success ever brought off by a myth. The myth of work as an affirmation of man's transcendence and everlastingness in the face of, and in relation to, history; the myth of happiness as the joy of participating in a glorious time, which is outside the time in which we now participate, hence both a reality and a promise at the same time - all that appears to be at the very heart of these creations of the modern consciousness. In truth, it is all simply the mythical response to the person in the new situation."

<sup>35</sup> Ellul, *Subversion*, 143.

<sup>36</sup> *The Technological Society* (Knopf, 1965) was first published in French in 1954, the same year

the modern world is increasingly dominated by Technique: not merely technology, but the collection of means - political, economic, scientific, etc. - by which humans utilize and master nature and one another. The Society of Technique is concerned above all with efficiency, and elevates means above ends. The magical nature of primitive ritual has been replaced by the conscious design of social engineering.<sup>37</sup> The worldwide domination of the State, which centralizes and integrates all of the various techniques, is creating a kind of global concentration camp in which individuals are valued only for the "role" each plays in the proper functioning of society. Humans no longer control the means but are controlled by them. When technical developments become possible, people are no longer able to ask whether these developments ought or ought not be pursued. If it can be done, it will be done, and if, for example, the development of nuclear energy and weaponry creates unforeseen environmental and human consequences, the hope is always expressed that future technical progress will at last propose a remedy. Technique always advances according to its own irreversible logic.

Where Ellul saw Efficiency as the defining goal and characteristic of the global society, Girard argues that it is precisely the "the concern for victims... [that] dominates the total planetary culture in which we live The world becoming

one culture is the fruit of this concern and not the reverse."<sup>38</sup> The ineluctable advance of the Biblical revelation renders "new" myths incapable of survival.<sup>39</sup> He considers the principle challenge to the Biblical revelation today to be a kind of "false concern for the victim," the political appropriation of concern for the victims that turns the accusation of victimization against Christians and against the Biblical revelation itself.<sup>40</sup> The result is that the status of victim is eagerly sought, since it is deemed a position of power and a source of political capital. Consider, for example, the debate over abortion rights framed on both sides as concern for the victim, or the American capitalization of its victim-status in the wake of terrorist attacks on its World Trade Center since the turn of the century.

Ellul, too, saw that the great secular metanarratives since the Enlightenment had been largely discredited. Of Kant and Hegel, he writes:

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that Heidegger's 1949 lecture "The Question Concerning Technology" was first published. The two reach many of the same conclusions.

<sup>37</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Autopsy of Revolution* (Knopf, 1971), 259.

<sup>38</sup> Girard, *I See Satan*, 178; Compare Jean Baudrillard, "The Violence of the Global," available from [http://www.ctheory.net/text\\_file.asp?pick=385](http://www.ctheory.net/text_file.asp?pick=385); Internet; accessed 23 May 2003: "The analogy between the terms 'global' and 'universal' is misleading. Universalization has to do with human rights, liberty, culture, and democracy. By contrast, globalization is about technology, the market, tourism, and information. Globalization appears to be irreversible whereas universalization is likely to be on its way out. At least, it appears to be retreating as a value system which developed in the context of Western modernity and was unmatched by any other culture."

<sup>39</sup> Girard, *Scapegoat*, 201: "Even if some totalitarian system were to control the entire planet tomorrow, it would not succeed in making its own myth, or the magical aspect of its persecution, prevail."

<sup>40</sup> Girard, *I See Satan*, 180: " *The other totalitarianism* ...does not oppose Judeo-Christian aspirations but claims them as its own and questions the concern for victims on the part of Christians.(It

It was wonderful to set forth an attractive outline of history and its development, but what a fraud, what a swindle, when the only decisive result was the relentless strengthening of the State, the very place where man should have concentrated all his forces to prevent such a thing.<sup>41</sup>

The same could be said, of course, for Marx, and a host of utopian dreamers since, Christian and otherwise. The history of the twentieth century is an especially cluttered graveyard of capsized myths of progress and new world ideologies run aground. Most of those that made serious claims on the age in which Ellul lived and wrote are little more than historical curiosities today. But even today, in the global-capitalist aftermath of the last century's ideology wars, Ellul's analysis tolls true:

Capitalism has progressively subordinated all of life - individual and collective - to money. Money has become the sole criterion for judging man and his activity...money, the source of power and freedom, must take priority over everything else. This belief is well supported on the one hand by a general loss of spiritual sensitivity (if not of faith itself) and on the other by the incredible growth of technology. Money, which allows us to obtain everything material progress offers (in truth, everything our fallen nature desires), is no longer merely an economic value. It has become a moral value and an ethical standard.<sup>42</sup>

Recent years have witnessed the rise and fall of the "Information Age," with its promise of decentralized power and freedom for individuals through the supposed egalitarianism of the Internet. The vastly increased technical power of the State to house and reference information on the lives of individual citizens, the rabid proliferation of electronic surveillance and identification systems since the early nineties, to name just a couple of recent "advances," have made such short work of this craze that it was scarcely uttered before it was dead in the water. Ellul is again prophetic: "Technical aggrandizement of the state...is the only condition under which a contract between state and individual is possible."<sup>43</sup>

#### Genesis 1-2, Contingency and Chaos

The seeming inevitability of a world dominated by political power has left humanity very little room to hope for a different social reality. In a world where freedom is limited to "freedom of choice" between good and evil, law or chaos, "the true is a moment of the false."<sup>44</sup> The exigencies of life within the Society of the Spectacle make it difficult to imagine any action one might take that would not merely strengthen the present order.

We have demonstrated the close connection between the Fall and the foundation of the state. In the same sense that justice within the secular order is strictly relative, so

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does not openly oppose Christianity but outflanks it on its left wing"(emphasis Girard's).

<sup>41</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment* (Seabury, 1973), 278.

<sup>42</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Money and Power* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), 20.

<sup>43</sup> Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 309.

<sup>44</sup> Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black & Red, 1983), 9; Ellul, *Anarchy*, 3: "In 1964 I was attracted by a movement very close to anarchism, that is, situationism. I had very friendly

virtue within the state, too, has use-value only as the personal legitimization of secular power. The personal and the social consequences of the Fall cannot be abstracted from one another: the external secular power is maintained by those who have internalized its constraints and its justifications, while secular power "reinforces human sinfulness and conceals our fallen character from view."<sup>45</sup>

The Genesis narrative places the birth of secular morality (the knowledge of good and evil) before the violent foundation of the civil order, implying that political domination or sovereignty is an external manifestation of the internal rejection of God. Rivalry with God leads to rivalry among people, which leads to the violent contagion of all against all checked only by the violence of all against one. It is thus the civil order emerges.

However, morality or civic virtue is *also* the internalization of the coercive peace of the secular city. As the sacrifice of a scapegoat stills the chaos of unrestrained social violence, so morality is the (violent) inhibition of the supposed chaos of the passions. Ellul writes, "The more complex and refined civilization becomes the greater is the 'interiorizing' of determinations. These become less and less visible, external, constricting and offensive. They are instead invisible, interior, benevolent, and insidious."<sup>46</sup> This interiorization of the political order manifests itself in asceticism, a heroic self-restraint of the passions, and personal enforcement of moral law. As with the "exchangerelations of arbitrary power," freedom is granted only as a concession of power, and a certain mechanical and repetitive peace is imposed; selfdenial and the repression of desire produce an artificial calm but never succeed in uprooting the unruly passions.<sup>47</sup>

On both the social and individual levels, then, fallen humanity *seems* constrained by only two options: "law and order," or chaos; morality, or depravity. Girard writes, "We cannot postulate the existence in man of a desire radically disruptive of human relations without simultaneously postulating the means of keeping this desire in check."<sup>48</sup> John Milbank argues instead that "desire" is not *necessarily* "radically disruptive of human relations." Primeval chaos is an element of the myth that sustains the civil order. Equally tenable, he argues, is the postulation of an already existing hierarchical order justified and maintained with the help of the myth of a chaos always threatening resurgence. The mythical chaos is feared, yet idolized and celebrated in violent spec-

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contacts with Guy Debord, and one day I asked him bluntly whether I could join his movement and work with him. He said that he would ask his comrades. Their answer was frank. Since I was a Christian I could not belong to their movement. For my part, I could not renounce my faith."

<sup>45</sup> John Milbank, "An Essay against Secular Order," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 15/2 (1987): 209.

<sup>46</sup> Ellul, *Ethics*, 41

<sup>47</sup> Milbank, "Essay," 221; cf. 208-9: "Augustine is then able to show that all Roman virtue is a merely relative matter because it is only possible within a circle bounded by arbitrary violence: a circle however, which more and more recedes from view as time goes on and political coercion assumes more and more 'commuted' and legally regular forms."

<sup>48</sup> Rene Girard, *Violence & the Sacred* (Johns Hopkins, 1977), 218.

tacles, e. g. the ultra-violence of Hollywood films, or the public spectacle of American football.<sup>49</sup>

Following Milbank's argument, if the passions are thought to be an interior disorder brought to order by the interiorized sacrificial order of "fighting virtue," then the notion of a chaos of desire might be just a "mythic" element of the internal coercive order. This is not to say that people are naturally "good" and that removal of personal and social restraint will produce an ideal society. We merely point out that the absence of alternatives to "law and order, or anarchy" is precisely the enslavement of humanity to the "knowledge of good and evil" described in the Bible. We are concerned in this essay to demonstrate that the Biblical narrative insists on a "third" way beyond law, beyond morality, and beyond chaos.

Girard convincingly traces the violent origins of the secular political order, but what seems less clear is the shape the way out of this order might take. We contend that by ignoring the narrative priorities of the Biblical text Girard makes it difficult to recover the form anti-sacrificial practice takes. Girard privileges the Fall-Cain narrative over the Genesis 1-2 narrative, so that the sacrificial order he so clearly identifies takes on a predetermined quality. Given the covetous nature of humanity, the resulting sacrificial order of Cain is inevitable. However, the Biblical sequencing is the more ontologically correct. Adam's Fall obviously implies a fall *from* something, and the prior condition is described in Genesis 1-2.

Ellul, too, contends the creation story describes an origin fundamentally different than foundational violence. Genesis 1-2 illustrate "no relationship of exploitation, utilization, or subordination," but rather a "directing which nevertheless leaves the other intact."<sup>50</sup> God's word, the power of creation, is not an intellectual analysis that divides and separates, but the language of union and love. Adam's naming of the animals is no mere technique in the Ellulian sense, but "the continuation of the word of God."<sup>51</sup> Christian tradition often places the expulsion of Satan from heaven between days one and two in the creation account, but such an expulsion is not in the Hebrew text. Creation emerges from what is "formless and void," not by violence but by the word of God.<sup>52</sup> The later insertion of Satan's expulsion into the creation narrative may be the result of a "sacrificial reading" of the Hebrew Scriptures<sup>53</sup> via a sacrificial reading of the Gospels - the work of Christian exegetes who fundamentally misunderstood the Gospel revelation.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Milbank, "Essay," 208-9; *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Blackwell, 1991), 394-5.

<sup>50</sup> Ellul, "Technique," 131.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Girard, "From Ritual," 183-4: Following Michel Serres, Girard traces in the distinction between void and matter the violence of expulsion, or purge.

<sup>53</sup> Girard, *Things Hidden*, 268: "The Old Testament is far from being dominated by sacred violence. It actually moves away from violence, although in its most primitive sections it still remains sufficiently wedded to violence for people to be able to brand it as violent without appearing totally implausible."

<sup>54</sup> Girard, "From Ritual to Science," 171-185; compare Jacques Ellul, *Subversion of Christianity*

Genesis 1-2 describe an "immediate relationship of love and knowledge"<sup>55</sup> among those who are different: God and humans, man and woman, humankind and nature. Adam and Eve "needed to follow no method, to apply no technique, because there was no force to exert, no need to fulfill, no necessity to overcome."<sup>56</sup> There was "no protocol or sacrifices"<sup>57</sup> because there was no disorder, only order. Genesis 1-2 argue that the sacrificial mechanisms Girard identifies as maintaining law and order do not *necessitate* a primeval chaos from which order emerged. The hypothesis of an original, divine order prior to the Fall de-naturalizes the sacrificial order of Cain; the creation story insists "it didn't have to be this way," and announces, *from the beginning*, the existence of a different way of life. Moreover, the seventhday creation of the Sabbath marking Jewish practice signals that the Jew-Gentile distinction is not incidental but *inherent* to the "other way of life" embodied in Israel and later, the Church.<sup>58</sup> The record of God's original intentions for humanity and creation contextualizes all of the Biblical narratives, up to and including the Gospel revelation. Biblical salvation is not a *return* to Eden, but rather the *inclusion* of the individual into the narrative inaugurated in Genesis 1-2.

## Narrative and Idiom

No mere hypothesis of freedom, the Scriptures insert the individual into the narrative itself - the continuing historical embodiment of the divine revelation in time and space. The Gospel revelation is then first received by members of a community not unfamiliar with its themes. We have mentioned the stories of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel. The authors of these "have recast a preexistent mythology, adapting it in the spirit of their special concerns...inverting the relationship between the victim and the persecuting community." In fact the Hebrew Bible brims with demythologizing reversals of sacred narrative. The book of Job, perhaps the oldest of the Hebrew texts, depicts persecution from the perspective of a victim who protests his innocence, refusing the accusations of his interlocutors, and is at last vindicated by God. The story of Joseph and his brothers previews the self-sacrifice of Christ and the Father's forgiveness in Judah's offer to substitute himself for Benjamin and Joseph's compassion for the brothers who once victimized and expelled him. The Exodus of Israel from slavery in Egypt identifies the community of faith as those who have been set free from bondage to the pagan political order and not merely as those who are free by nature or divine right. The story of Solomon's judgment between two prostitutes depicts the judgment

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(Eerdmans, 1986), 159: "Grace excludes sacrifice. Girard is quite right when he shows how basic sacrifice is to humanity. There can be no accepted life or social relation without sacrifice. But gracious grace rejects the validity of all human sacrifice. It ruins a basic element in human psychology."

<sup>55</sup> Ellul, "Technique," 128.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Fortress Press, 1996), 118.



of God in favor of she who would sacrifice herself to save another, and against the one who preferred the violent sacrifice productive of victims. The binding of Isaac, David's penitential Psalms, Isaiah's songs of the Suffering Servant, the story of Jonah - each in its own way contravenes and reverses the mythic pattern of the secular order.

The revelation of the Hebrew Scriptures is then numerous recapitulated by the Gospels. "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill," Jesus tells those gathered for the Sermon on the Mount. Conversion implies a concomitant break with the pagan narrative, and the reaffirmation of Hebrew Scriptural revelation. Jesus is called "the second Adam," and is represented as taking up the cause of immemorial victims, beginning with "righteous Abel." The creation story begins with a social order radically differentiated from that later inaugurated by Cain, an order historically preserved through the descendants of Adam. Cain kills Abel, but Seth replaces Abel. Violence floods the earth, but Noah and his family escape. Abraham is called out of a pagan culture to become the father of faith for all the world. As a consequence, Gentile converts to the Christian faith are deemed "grafted in" to the historical embodiment of the Biblical revelation, forming an organic unity with Israel and not merely as having superseded it. The Jewish followers of Jesus are not called out of Israel as from a pagan political order, but to a restoration of a way of life consistent with Torah and with the counter-sacrificial practice established by Abraham.

#### Akedah and the Counter-Sacrificial Gospel

The counter-sacrificial revelation of the Hebrew Scriptures begins in the Genesis prehistory but takes a radical turn when God calls Abraham into a relationship with himself. The epidemic consequences of the Fall are here opposed by an act of divine and world-historical conciliation. Where Adam and Eve are evicted from the Garden, Abraham is led by God to a promised land.<sup>59</sup> Flouting the one, modest prohibition in paradise the first humans seize for themselves the right to decide good and evil. Abraham is found on Mount Moriah submitting to God's demand of something monstrous, an obedience beyond morality. Abraham will inaugurate the historical reversal of the Fall, with the promise in Genesis 12:1-3 that this "other way of life" would be offered to all the world.

Abraham's obedience to God's demand for the sacrifice of his son Isaac (the Akedah, or "binding" of Isaac) stands at once for the reversal of human rivalry with God and of God's expulsion of humankind from his presence. Abraham reestablishes a relationship with God based on obedience and submission. His descendants are the continuing incarnation of this relationship. God gives a son to Abraham with the promise that Isaac will be the vehicle of blessing to Israel and the nations. Abraham's future and the fulfillment of God's promises to him turn on Isaac, so that his offering of Isaac is an offering of his own very hope and life, a return to God who initiated the gift.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Cf. Gen. 12:3.

<sup>60</sup> The New Testament confirms that Abraham's offering was not a *disinterested* sacrifice, but that

Obedying God *for no other reason than simply to obey*, Abraham repudiates the pride of usurpation and Adam's grasping after divinity. He renounces the rivalry of Adam and Eve and refounds submission as the model for human relationship with God. For his part God recapitulates the avowal of Genesis 12:1-3, enlarging it to incorporate Abraham's obedience.<sup>61</sup>

The prohibition against murder in the Noachide laws and the condemnation of Cain's fratricide argue against the view that the Akedah is a mere polemic against murder or human sacrifice. Furthermore, the tacit approval of animal sacrifice earlier in the Genesis text by Abraham, Noah, Abel and even God himself when he covers the man and woman with animal skins in the Garden renders the deflection of violence from human to animal victims inessential to the meaning of the Akedah. Similarly, Torah's prohibition of child sacrifice<sup>62</sup> makes the Akedah superfluous as a condemnation of the practice.

Neither Abraham nor Isaac was divinized in Israel, nor were they found guilty of any crime, arguing against the Akedah as an instance of the ubiquitous sacred violence. Although God intervenes at the last moment to prevent Abraham from immolating his beloved son, it is not because God is himself bound to a higher moral law. The Hebrew Scriptures know nothing of "natural law" or a set of universally valid ethical claims independent of God's command. Isaac is liberated from his bondage and rescued from death by the offering "God will provide for Himself,"<sup>63</sup> the self-offering of God in response to Abraham's obedience. Abraham and Isaac are rescued from obligation to the sacrificial order of Cain and freed from the slavery of sin. All future sacrifice in Israel will recall both their forgiveness and the high cost of liberation.<sup>64</sup>

Abraham's obedience to God is mirrored and magnified in Isaac's obedience to Abraham. Isaac takes the form of the victim in the Akedah. Israel is identified with Abraham in his radical obedience to the commandment of God, but is further identified

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he also expected a return of Isaac; Heb 11:19: "(Abraham) considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead; figuratively speaking, he did receive him back." The idea of return can also be seen in God's offering Christ in response to Abraham's offering of Isaac.

<sup>61</sup> Gen. 22:15-18: "And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, 'By myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore. And your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.'"

<sup>62</sup> Lev 20:1-5: "The Lord said to Moses, 'Say to the people of Israel, Any man of the people of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn in Israel, who gives any of his children to Molech shall be put to death; the people of the land shall stone him with stones. I myself will set my face against that man, and will cut him off from among his people, because he has given one of his children to Molech, defiling my sanctuary and profaning my holy name. And if the people of the land do at all hide their eyes from that man, when he gives one of his children to Molech, and do not put him to death, then I will set my face against that man and against his family, and will cut them off from among their people, him and all who follow him in playing the harlot after Molech.'"

<sup>63</sup> Gen 22:8.

<sup>64</sup> One tradition puts Isaac's age at 37 at the time of the Akedah. The reasoning is as follows: Sarah

with Isaac as the innocent victim. Even though Abraham's hand was stayed against Isaac, Jewish tradition credits Abraham for the sacrifice of his son. Similarly, although Isaac is spared, it is as though he had been immolated, and he becomes a "resurrected" sacrifice. Where Israel is described as a priestly nation in identification with Abraham, the high priest of the human race, it is likewise a nation of living sacrifices through Isaac.<sup>65</sup> After the Akedah, God incorporates identification with the victim into the divine promise of Genesis 12:13.

We see then that "all social structure, the entire scapegoating machinery, is revealed as delusional, a delusional quality we are not permitted to see fully unless we observe the victim 'after death' so to speak."<sup>66</sup> It is the resurrection of Isaac that converts Abraham. Isaac's "apparent resurrection is the subjective correlative of something most objective and real, (Abraham's) renunciation of (Adam's) bad desire."<sup>67</sup> The innocence of the victim upon which Cain founded the first city is forever revealed *for Israel* in the resurrection of Isaac, and the people of Israel become the incarnation of the Akedah revelation.

The Levitical sacrifices prescribed by the Torah have meaning to the extent that they participate in the meaning of Isaac's self-offering, and are offered in the spirit of Abraham's self-sacrificial obedience. The nature of the Levitical sacrifices - innocent animals, kosher and unblemished - strengthens the identification with Isaac as innocent victim. The insistence that the sacrifices be offered only on Mount Moriah, the present day Temple Mount, underscores the physical connection between the Akedah and the Levitical sacrifices. The Temple sacrificial system contemporizes the Akedah in Israel's history. God's revelation is thereby preserved until the coming of the Messiah when revelation is proclaimed to the entire world. The Levitical sacrifices are of a qualitatively different nature than those practiced among the nations for the temporary expulsion of violence, pointing back in time to the Akedah and forward to the Messiah's sacrifice.

Careful analysis of the later prophetic critique of sacrifice reveals they were directed at sacrifices without repentance and not at sacrifices as such. The prophetic critique condemns sacrifice that has renounced the spirit of the Akedah and has become instead a mere imitation of what mimetic theory terms the single victim mechanism. However, alongside the many prophetic passages condemning sacrifices<sup>68</sup> stand many extolling

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was 90 years old when she gave birth, 127 years old at her death. When Abraham told Sarah what he had been commanded to do, Sarah dropped dead at the thought. 127-90=37.

<sup>65</sup> Paul may also allude to Isaac in Rom 12:1: "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."

<sup>66</sup> Sandor Goodhart, "Response to Willard Swartley's Book," paper presented at 2001 COV&R Conference, available from [http://www.ufsia.ac.be/flw/nieuws/Sandor\\_Goodhart.doc](http://www.ufsia.ac.be/flw/nieuws/Sandor_Goodhart.doc); Internet; accessed 31 October 2001.

<sup>67</sup> Rene Girard, "The Crime and Conversion of Leontes in *The Winter's Tale*," *Religion & Literature* 22/2-3 (1990): 218.

<sup>68</sup> See, for example, Mic 6:6-8; Is 1:10-17; Jer 6:20; Hos 5:6, 6:6, 9:11-13; Amos 5:21-25.

the virtue of obedient sacrifice and predicting the triumphant return of faithful sacrifice in Israel.<sup>69</sup> The prophets are here seen to condemn sacrifice to the extent that it does not partake of the meaning of the Akedah revelation.

The Gospel revelation is that Jesus entered and brought to light that dark place in our culture where we accuse and execute innocent victims to relieve our own confusion, violence and sin. The heart of the single victim mechanism is dark because its true nature is concealed, as it must be in order to be effective. The veiled reality of this mechanism finds a parallel in the holiest place of the Temple, set apart by a veil, and the Gospels record the rending of the veil at the moment of Jesus' death, and the revelation of that dark place by the light of truth. Israel, of course, always knew what was going on behind the veil in the Temple, even if the revelation remained mysterious in its effects: when the veil was finally removed, the mystery of the Akedah was exposed to all the world. The Gospel revelation is a mystery, but it, too, is a mystery patified. The once-secret knowledge of the single victim mechanism is now forever brought to light: the Akedah was the Gospel announced to Israel; the Gospel is the Akedah for the nations.

In his life, death, and resurrection Jesus Christ echoes and confirms all of the great realities of the Akedah: self-offering, obedience, identification with victims, and salvation from the sacrificial order of Cain. In his perfect submission to the will of God and self-sacrificial love towards all Jesus embodies positive mimesis, mirroring and magnifying Abraham's, and amplifying the blessings of the Akedah from Israel to the nations, as promised in Genesis 12:1-3. Christ's resurrection fulfills the meaning of the Akedah and announces the counter-sacrificial revelation to all the world.

The relationship of interdependence between Israel and the nations is ultimately intrinsic to God's revelation to the world. God's invitation goes out from Israel to all the families of the earth to embrace the self-sacrificial character of the innocent victim and to join the family of God in submission and obedience to God. The differentiated unity of the Akedah and the Gospel mirrors the divinely intended and enduring relationship between Israel and the nations. The localized Temple sacrifice is universalized in Christ. The temporary sacrifices of Israel are made eternal in Christ. It is in this sense that Christ has come to *complete* the Torah, by the universal extension in time and space of the Biblical revelation and the inclusion of all people across history in the family of God.

#### Torah and Law

Israel is the continuing incarnation of the salvation of Abraham out of the existing political order and his passage from the compulsory morality of the Fall to the freedom of obedience to God's commandment. The story of Joseph marks the transition from Abraham to Israel in the Biblical narrative. Here the elements of the divine revelation are all clearly discernible. Joseph's brothers covet his favored status and conspire against him, selling him into slavery. The brothers are then forced by famine many

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<sup>69</sup> See Mic 4:1-2; Is 56:6-7; Jer 17:24-26; Jer 33:17-18.

years later to seek aid from the Egyptian government, of which Joseph is now second in command. Joseph insists that the brothers bring Benjamin, the youngest son and now his father's favorite, in exchange for assistance, at which point his brother Judah volunteers to take Benjamin's place. Joseph, moved by his brother's offer, forgives his brothers and the family is reconciled. Even so, his brothers' initial jealousy and their expulsion of Joseph result in their descendants' eventual enslavement in Egypt. Giving in to covetousness and rivalry brings the family into the bondage of the pagan political order of Cain. Self-offering and forgiveness mark the way of redemption.

Israel is the community then of the Exodus from Egyptian captivity. The Passover lamb refers to the lamb of the Akedah "which God will provide for Himself." It signals redemption from slavery and forgiveness for sin. Having been liberated, the Israelites are able to respond to the Torah given by God, not as to a legal document, but as to the commandment spoken by God to a people who freely answer.<sup>70</sup>

Their liberation exposes the sacrificial order of Cain as well as the content of the "other way of life" God intends for Adam, Abraham, and his descendants. God does not deliver the Israelites from slavery in Egypt only to obligate them again under a contractual serfdom. The heart of the Torah is the Levitical sacrificial system that incarnates the salvation and conversion of Abraham and Isaac. The Levitical sacrifices describe God's forgiveness of sins not in the simple stroke of an accountant's pen, but at the cost of bearing one another's burdens. The Ten Commandments define a way of life free from rivalry with God: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me"; and free of conflict among people: "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's."<sup>71</sup>

Girard points out that the Torah contains prohibitions that subvert prohibition. The Torah offers prohibitions like those resulting from sacred violence, yet also contains prohibitions that controvert ritual prohibition, e. g. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself,"<sup>72</sup> which precludes covetousness, interrupts rivalry, and obviates prohibition. In fact the Torah regularly upsets the secular order of exchange relations: the seventh day Sabbath depreciates the brutal necessity of work; the seventh year redemption of slaves and rest from cultivation of fields undermines the compulsion to exhaust nature and other people as if they had only utilitarian value; the prescriptions for fasting and tithing challenge the determination to consume and to possess.

Salvation in Christ, the "living Torah," is salvation out of the pagan political order into the Jewish familial order, conversion from the coercive legalism of the Fall into

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<sup>70</sup> The well-known tradition that God offered the Torah to all peoples, but the Israelites were the only ones who responded and accepted, indicates that obedience to the Law was not *imposed* upon Israel, but rather freely given.

<sup>71</sup> Ex 20:1-2, 17.

<sup>72</sup> Lv 19:18; Girard, *Things Hidden*, 155.

the freedom of obedience to God. Again, Jesus did not come to destroy the Torah and the Prophets, but to fulfill. St. Paul's "all things are lawful" does not contradict the correct practice of the Torah.<sup>73</sup> Rather, the same freedom beyond morality originally attributed to Adam before the Fall is reestablished by Abraham, offered to Israel in the Torah, and extended through Christ to all the world. The offer of grace has been extended from Israel to the nations, and those who respond are grafted onto the tree, Israel.

Fallen humanity by long habit and a stubborn blindness garbles the radical nature of this liberation, inverting it to fit the sacrificial pattern inherited from Cain. It is precisely this misapplication of the Torah Jesus condemns in his scathing indictments of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and others who make "the commandment of God of no effect."<sup>74</sup> The individual is not set free by God only to submit to slavery under the political order. "Legalism" is a common term in American evangelical circles referring to a kind of sham obedience that seeks to appease an unforgiving god. Unfortunately, legalism is often attributed to the Torah, from which, it is argued, Christ has set us free. The perversity of this reasoning is exposed by putative "Christian Values" that erect a new legality while suppressing their pagan origins by scapegoating the Torah. Compelling Jewish converts to eat pork as proof of their renunciation of "the Law" provides us an especially egregious and risible instance of this tendency from early church history. No less uncomprehending are modern American efforts to legislate Christian morality (prayer in schools, abortion, the debate over posting the Ten Commandments in courtrooms), as if the Christian revelation consisted, like the secular order it oppugns and reverses, in the "restraint of beasts," those afoot in society at large and lurking in oneself.

#### Salvation and Conversion

The concealed and concealing nature of the secular order is its strength. The innocence of the victims of arbitrary violence is denied and the unjust foundation of law and order suppressed. A godless and self-righteous morality is masked by the appearance of false gods of violence whose anger must be continuously appeased.<sup>75</sup> The individual

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<sup>73</sup> The ongoing formation of halakhah testifies to the Jewish understanding of Torah not as a disembodied and absolute document, but as a living word from God to be constantly reappropriated and renewed. Halakhah corresponds to the relative Christian ethics Jacques Ellul ceaselessly championed that would prevent examples of relative ethics or halakhah from the New Testament from becoming ossified into absolute law. An example would be Paul's instructions concerning female headdress and behavior in the church, which were apparently important issues in certain early congregations but have little relevance today beyond a general need for order within the community. Like Christian morality, halakhah had a propensity to become legalistic, and it is this legalistic misinterpretation, not Torah itself, that Jesus condemns.

<sup>74</sup> Mt 15:6; Girard, *Girard Reader*, 281: "The mythical mentality can take (the Gospels) and construe them mythically, but quintessentially they are the destruction of myth." The complicity in the condemnation of Jesus on the part of the Jewish people, who were in possession of the revelation of the Hebrew scriptures, indicates that the Biblical narratives, including the Gospels, can be misconstrued.

<sup>75</sup> Girard, *Things Hidden*, 255: "Humans have always found peace in the shadow of their idols - that

is deceived and self-deceiving, both a victim of and a participant in the structures that enslave him. Salvation for the individual consists then in the overcoming of personal "legalism" and his deliverance from secular power,<sup>76</sup> but emerging from the obfuscations of the sacrificial order requires the intervention of something or someone from outside of its closed system.<sup>77</sup>

The Biblical stories are mythic in form yet subvert myth. From Abel onwards, they reveal the innocence of the victims of sacred violence and take their side, disrupting the victimary unanimity upon which the proper functioning of the sacrificial mechanisms depend. In the Gospels, God himself takes the form of the victim and suffers the predictable and fatal outcome of his encounter with the secular order. By unveiling the complicity of myth and ritual in the maintenance of an unjust order, the Biblical narrative decodes mythology and desacralizes the gods and rituals of the violent sacred.<sup>78</sup> It is only in terms of its own truth that the Bible can be interpreted, while at the same time it deconstructs all other mythologies. Milbank observes:

The relationship of the Biblical narratives to the pagan myths is necessarily asymmetric: the former could not be critically read through the latter because it belongs to the mythic grammar to conceal and not to expose arbitrary and fundamental violence. The latter can be critically read through the former because the Biblical narratives constitute and renew themselves through a breaking with sacrificial violence which exposes its social reality.<sup>79</sup>

Both the political order and the legalistic consciousness of the individual are the result of the original sin, rejection of God. The Biblical narrative represents a break with and an exposure of the secular order. It then invites the individual to make that same break.<sup>80</sup> This break, or conversion, involves an identification with the victim and the simultaneous disavowal of complicity with the murderous mob.<sup>81</sup> The individual emerges from the mob when he takes the side of the victim *against* the violence of the

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is to say, of human violence in sacralized form."

<sup>76</sup> Milbank, "Essay," 220: "Salvation is precisely, *out of* this political domain which constantly reproduces 'original' sin."

<sup>77</sup> Girard, *Things Hidden*, 153: "Rehabilitating the victim has a desacralizing effect." Also, Rene Girard, "Is There Anti-Semitism in the Gospels?" *Biblical Interpretation* 1/3 (1993): 350: "If the first Christians managed to secede from the mimetic consensus, it was not their own strength that did it, according to the Gospels, but God's own Spirit . . . he dismantles the consensus against the victims."

<sup>78</sup> Ellul, *New Demons*, 121: "Behind and beyond the myths one discerns the sacred of which they are an expression. It is by a kind of geography of the myths that one can discover the axes of the sacral world."

<sup>79</sup> Milbank, "Essay," 213; compare Girard, *Things Hidden*: "The three great pillars of primitive religion - myth, sacrifice, and prohibitions - are subverted by the thought of the Prophets." And Ellul, *False Presence*, 206: "How can we fail to realize that scripture, *in precisely the same way in which the myths contained in scripture itself are treated*, is the true destroyer of myths?"

<sup>80</sup> Ellul, *Subversion*, 133: "Just as conversion always means a break in individual life, so the intervention of revelation means a break in the whole group, in all society, and it unavoidably challenges the institution and established power, no matter what form this may take."

<sup>81</sup> Girard, *Girard Reader*, 279: "Faith emerges when individuals come out of the mob."

political order<sup>82</sup> and *against* the coercive morality of the Fall. "The proclamation of the Gospel implies, for the liberation of the person to whom it is proclaimed, the indictment of that which holds him captive."<sup>83</sup> In the encounter with the Gospel revelation, the individual is persuaded to take the side of Jesus, the innocent victim, and to admit his own participation in the persecution of innocents. Jesus' forgiveness of his persecutors enables the individual to forgive others, and to be forgiven for his own complicity. The fatal necessity of the pagan order is set aside in the witness of the Biblical narrative that invites the individual, liberated from the political order and from a sinful consciousness, to participate in that witness.<sup>84</sup>

#### Positive Content of the Life of Faith

The crucifixion of Jesus unmasks the violent nature of the political order, and this revelation sets the individual free from the necessity of that order. The individual may decline the "way of the Cross," and still the offer is made. He is presented with another option and may respond to God's love made manifest in the suffering atonement of Christ, or continue as best as he can to "sleep peacefully in his religious dream."<sup>85</sup> God's forgiveness in Christ interrupts the "pagan sacrificial chain of offense and revenge"<sup>86</sup> binding individuals to the legal requirements of the city of Cain and its vindictive gods. Christ is the incarnation of a love that cannot be integrated into the Society of Technique. He opposes to its means and ends a perfectly 'useless' truth, something fatal to its order, *ipso facto*.<sup>87</sup>

The Gospels are the record of a small minority who disassociated themselves from the social order that executed Christ and instead proclaimed his innocence, his cancellation of the fatal necessity of that order, and his victory over the finality of death. The Gospels and other New Testament writings bear witness to a community who participate in Christ's crucifixion through a penitential way of life and a forgiving practice that liberates and preserves freedom in opposition to the political order.<sup>88</sup> The imitation of Christ in his refusal of violence, his concern for victims, and his suffering endurance of evil constitute the freedom of life "in Christ."<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Ellul, *Violence*, 86: "Masked violence is found at all levels of society. Economic relations, class relations, are relations of violence, nothing else."

<sup>83</sup> Ellul, *False Presence*, 208.

<sup>84</sup> John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 397: "Knowing the shape of sin, and the shape of its refusal, we can at last be radically changed."

<sup>85</sup> Ellul, *New Demons*, 207-8; compare Girard, *Girard Reader*, 278: "The Gospels cannot guarantee that people will act the right way; they are not some kind of recipe for the good society. What the Gospels do is to offer more freedom and to set the example."

<sup>86</sup> Milbank, "Essay," 215.

<sup>87</sup> Ellul, *What I Believe*, 182.

<sup>88</sup> Girard, *Girard Reader*, 278: "What are the prescriptions of the Kingdom of God? Basically, give up a dispute when mimetic rivalry is taking over. Provide help to victims and refuse all violence."

<sup>89</sup> Ellul, *Ethics*, 15: "In Jesus Christ, who is fully obedient and also fully free, the will of God is freedom... The action of Christ takes effect in daily life through the mediation of our freedom."



Given the divine unveiling of the secular legal system, the followers of Christ understand the contradiction inherent to Christian participation in the legal order.<sup>90</sup> Writing to the church at Corinth, Paul asks, "Dare any of you, having a matter against one another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?"<sup>91</sup> Paul harbored no illusions about the nature of secular power or its "convertibility."<sup>92</sup> All surveys of the Biblical critique of power, however, come up against Paul because Romans 13:1-7 seems to challenge all that the Bible, including Paul, has to say on the matter.

Some exegetes have reasoned that Paul's comments in 13:1-7 are too radical a departure from the subject matter surrounding the verses, so that these verses must be a later insertion by redactors. If these verses are deleted, 13:8 seems to follow reasonably from 12:21. Others attribute the traditional interpretation of the verses to Paul, but add counsel concerning extreme cases of political evil not accounted for in Paul's apparently absolute consecration of the powers. Ellul agrees that the verses do come from Paul, but must be properly contextualized both within the epistle and within Paul's other writings. The discussion prior to Romans 13 concerns loving and being at peace with others, both friend and enemy. The last verse of chapter twelve, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good,"<sup>93</sup> leads into the discussion of political power, which is an evil that must be endured. Paul is far from advocating revolution or violent resistance, counseling submission instead. If we owe taxes, we pay them, nothing more. We recognize that these *exousia*, or powers are ultimately subject to God alone, but we know, too, that as Christians we have been called to struggle against these *exousia*.<sup>94</sup> While these powers are already defeated by Christ, for the time being we experience and admit their necessity, but never their legitimacy.

Mark D. Nanos has recently suggested Paul's epistle has to do with the ordering of the community of faith at Rome, which at the time was a synagogue community consisting of Gentile Christians along with both believing and nonbelieving Jews. In the context of the letter, then, Romans 13:1-7 is "not concerned with the state, empire, or any other such organization of secular government."<sup>95</sup> Instead, Paul's concern is "to address the obligation of Christians, particularly Christian *Gentiles* ...to subordinate themselves to the leaders of the synagogues and to the customary 'rules of behavior' that had been developed in Diaspora synagogues for defining the appropri-

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<sup>90</sup> Ellul, *Subversion*, 158: "(Christian faith) does not change either the structure or the functioning of the state or politics. It sets up a relationship of conflict."

<sup>91</sup> I Cor 6:1; compare Rene Girard, *"To Double Business Bound": Essays on Literature, Mimesis, and Anthropology* (Johns Hopkins, 1978), 228: "'Violent excess' on the one hand, 'law and order' on the other have always fed on each other. What else could they feed upon? If they did not, we would be rid, by now, of both of them."

<sup>92</sup> Ellul, *Jesus and Marx*, 172-3: "There is no given Christian form of power... the only Christian political position consistent with revelation is the negation of power: the radical, total refusal of its existence, a fundamental questioning of it, no matter what form it may take."

<sup>93</sup> Rm 12:21.

<sup>94</sup> Eph 6:12.

<sup>95</sup> Mark D. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans* (Fortress, 1996), 291.

ate behavior of 'righteous Gentiles' seeking association with Jews and their God."<sup>96</sup> Paul's advice is based not on arguments for the legitimacy of power, but rather on his previous arguments in chapters 9-11 concerning the historical, present, and future relationship between Jews and Gentiles. Paul is concerned to insure that the community in Rome continues to maintain a "different way of doing things," that the witness of the reconciled community against the secular order is not undermined by a failure to demonstrate the present reality of its eschatological hope.

In any case, Paul does not suggest that the community of faith will or should seek to overthrow secular government, or that the Kingdom of God will either suddenly or by steady advance appear as the inevitable progression of earthly affairs. His imagery in the letter to the Romans suggests instead the Church as a remnant, a minority whose encounter with the political order will inevitably produce results in "the way of the cross."<sup>97</sup> These seven verses in Romans have become *the* text on secular power and the conduct of the church toward it, in spite of the overwhelming witness of the Biblical record *against* political power. It is unsettling to speculate on the sociological and psychological reasons that lead exegetes to value a few verses more highly than the vast collection of contradictory passages, and allow one brief passage to neutralize the entire thrust of the Scriptures on this matter. In light of our arguments in this essay, the traditional interpretation of the passage results from internalization of the violent order of the state and a secret reflection and validation of secular power. Christian statism is correlative to the "sacrificial reading" of the Gospels. Although they never advocate a fugitive or criminal practice toward the state, both Jesus and Paul consider the state to be neither legitimate nor divinely constituted. Paul was arrested, tried, and executed by the same court system that condemned and crucified Jesus. Their witness attests that the exigencies of secular power are to be suffered rather than sanctioned.<sup>98</sup>

#### Conclusion

"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them," Jesus says, ["*Yet it shall not be so among you.*"]<sup>99</sup> Jesus' refusal of power resulted in his crucifixion, a signal of his failure to overturn the secular

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.; It is beyond the scope of this paper to detail Nanos' recontextualization of Paul's letter, but it is worth noting that Nanos is principally concerned with a coherent reading of Paul's letter, not a polemic against the state. Even so, Nanos concurs that "the call to subordination in Judaism carries an implicit, if not always explicit, judgment against foreign governments, even if God was somehow using their evil intentions to accomplish his ultimate goals."(Nanos, *Mystery*, 299).

<sup>97</sup> Ellul, *False Presence*, 209: "The church should always be the breach in an enclosed world: in the world of Sartre's private individual as well as in the world of the perfection of technology, the totalism of politics or the strongbox of the kingdom of money."

<sup>98</sup> Ellul, *New Demons*, 177: "If Christianity remains faithful to its inspiration and object, the God of love, it is incompatible with the exercise of political power. The combination of the two came about by accident."

<sup>99</sup> Mt 20:25-6, emphasis mine.

order. Paradoxically, it is this failure which is also the victory over the powers,<sup>100</sup> and the Church is called to participate in that failure. Ellul writes:

It is truly a *fight* ...against a power that can be changed only by means which are the opposite of its own. Jesus overcame the powers - of the state, the authorities, the rulers, the law, etc. - not by being more powerful than they but by surrendering himself even unto death.<sup>101</sup>

The Biblical revelation calls the Church to be the continuing incarnation of God's atonement, to endure the powers rather than sanctify them,<sup>102</sup> and to bear the burdens of those who inevitably suffer under secular power: "In every situation of injustice and oppression, the Christian - who cannot deal with it by violence - must make himself completely a part of it as *representative of the victims*."<sup>103</sup> Apart from God resistance to the powers amounts to mere Stoic self-denial and masochistic self-sacrifice. Our confrontation of the powers instead proceeds from *concern for the victims* of secular dominion:

Freedom can be obtained only when we strive for it; no power can give freedom to people. Challenging power is the only way to make freedom a reality. Freedom exists if the negation of political power is strong enough, and when people refuse to be taken in by the idea that freedom will surely come tomorrow, if only.No, there is no tomorrow. Freedom exists today or not at all. When we shake the edifice, we produce a crack, a gap in the structure, in which a human being can briefly find his freedom, which is always threatened. In order to bring this bit of play into the system, however, we must bring to it a radical, total refusal. Any concession to power enables the totality of power to rush into the small space we have opened.<sup>104</sup>

Political power cannot self-limit and tends in every case to expand beyond all bounds. The *myth* of its necessity clears the way by paralyzing all resistance. Into this world of fatal necessity, Christ comes announcing liberty to captives: deliverance from the harsh supervision of unmerciful morality and freedom to refuse power's exchange of happiness for servitude. Christ's resurrection defeated death, the true end of all necessity. In Christ we know that *our lives will not always be this way*, and the present hope of our resurrection enables the Church (Jew and Gentile) to insinuate freedom into an otherwise ironclad system. We proclaim by our words and demonstrate in our action that another path exists beyond the constraints of the illusory "freedom" purchased or wrested by force from the hand of power. Freedom is realized only when we create it by our radical negation of power and our absolute refusal to submit again to a yoke of slavery under the state.

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<sup>100</sup> Girard, *Things Hidden*, 166: "The Passion is first and foremost the consequence of an intolerable revelation, while being proof of that revelation."

<sup>101</sup> Ellul, *Violence*, 166.

<sup>102</sup> Ellul, *False Presence*, 36: "The works of the world remain works of darkness, but darkness into which a light has come, which does not validate or justify the darkness."

<sup>103</sup> Ellul, *Violence*, 151-2.

<sup>104</sup> Ellul, *Jesus and Marx*, 174.

”See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil.”<sup>105</sup> Life beyond morality and beyond the narrow choice that passes for freedom is no simple *idea*. The radical transformation of conversion in Christ holds the promise of a different way of life, not tomorrow, not in heaven, but here in the present world. Today, men and women around us will be set free, or continue to wither under a pitiless master. If we refuse to rescue those for whom Christ suffered and died, we surrender again to the forces of death. Today, brothers and sisters, we are either free men, or slaves.

*An abridged form of the essay under the title “Restraint of Beasts: Christianity, Violence and Anarchy,” appeared in Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture, vol. 11 (Spring 2005).*

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<sup>105</sup> Deut 30:15.

## A Conversation With Rene Girard

*David W. Gill made the pilgrimage from Berkeley to Stanford on April 12, 2005, to interview Professor Girard at his home.*

David W. Gill: Professor Girard, you and Jacques Ellul have been two of our most creative and penetrating analysts of contemporary society with all of its religion, technology, conflict and ferment. And you were both Christian in a deep way. This is not a normal situation among French intellectuals. Did you and Ellul ever meet each other?

Rene Girard: In 1970 I sat next to him at a dinner party organized by some friends. We had a nice interaction then and at several other brief contacts over the years but always in circumstances where we were interrupted a lot. So I never had a real, serious conversation with him.

I am mostly interested in his views as a sociologist of religion in the modern world. By contrast, I am an anthropologist of religion interested in the contact and opposition between archaic religious phenomena and Christianity. But I find in Ellul many ideas that I share with him completely. In some ways I am trying to do something similar to what he has done.

Gill: Is it true that you became a Christian as an adult?

Girard: My mother raised me as a Catholic but I abandoned it when I was about thirteen. She was quite liberal and didn't force her children to go to church. I didn't return until about 1961 at age thirty-five and then it was because of my work. But I am now a fairly active member of the St. Thomas Aquinas parish here at Stanford.

About the time I returned to the church is when I also encountered Ellul's work. So I'm a little rusty but I have re-read some of his work recently, including *Ce Que Je Crois [What I Believe]*, a powerful book which hasn't lost any of its relevance since it was first written.

Gill: Your work places a central emphasis on sacrifice and the scapegoat—whereas Ellul places a central emphasis on Scripture and the word.

Could this be because Ellul was Reformed while you are Catholic?

Girard: I don't think so. The reason is that the relationship between archaic religions and the biblical religion is fundamental in my view. I am very interested in religious anthropology and I believe that there is an enormous break that comes with the Bible and Christianity. I believe in the basic unity of all religions. Religion is always oriented towards peace. Archaic religious phenomena are primarily scapegoat phenomena, a kind of mimetic gathering against victims that are fundamentally random. The killing of the initial scapegoat reconciles the disrupted, divided community. Sacrifice is fundamentally, deliberately reenacting that pattern, with carefully chosen victims, in order to make peace.

Christianity begins fundamentally with that same phenomenon. Jesus is the innocent victim, the scapegoat. But in archaic religion, the victim is believed to be powerful because he too is guilty and violent. Christianity tells us that it's not true. God is totally different from what we think. He is nonviolent. Fundamentally he is himself the

innocent victim who dies for us. So Christianity is both the same and radically different from archaic religion.

Gill: Does this ultimate sacrificial act liberate us to make peace without finding another scapegoat to blame?

Girard: That's what Christianity should be.

Gill: Do we recapitulate that sacrifice by forgiving and bearing the pain of a conflict rather than blaming others (like the Muslims are often blamed today for all that is wrong)?

Girard: Not only the Bible but all of human religion is prophetic in somewhat the same sense—the victim is innocent, whether Joseph, or Job, or the innocent victim of a lynching. It is always prophetic of Christ.

Gill: With this long and continuing story of sacrifice, blame, violence, and threats, and with a contemporary culture that evades responsibility and searches for scapegoats, what do you say?

Girard: We are always practicing some kind of expulsion and victimization and this is becoming increasingly violent because of technology, bringing us closer and closer to total destruction. But the Bible and Christianity direct us against victimization, against viewing the enemy as less than ourselves. Those faced with conflict have to face the truth. There is no shortcut. We cannot be satisfied with half measures and compromises and not looking at the oneness of the world.

Gill: So authentic Christianity should unmask the reality of life so that we can face the truth and cease scapegoating others, especially the innocent?

Girard: Authentic Christianity explicates this truth. Much of the anti-Christian feeling of our own era is because of the way today's church often replicates archaic religious practices. We must see the similarity—as well as the difference—in Christianity. Christianity must denounce its own scapegoating and say it is people who act this way, not God.

Gill: Regarding technology, you have

suggested that it only became possible when people stopped looking for scapegoats (for disease and other misfortunes of life) and developed science and technology.

Girard: In an archaic community, if a roof falls in there must be a culprit somewhere. But as long as you think that way you will not improve your building and construction techniques. Magical explanations are always scapegoating phenomena. The old anthropologists like Fraser often made this point. Christianity preconditioned the type of rationality required by technology. Far from being anti-scientific or anti-technology, Christianity made them possible.

Gill: In *The New Demons* Jacques Ellul argues that Technique has become our new sacred, at the center of our culture. The old religious demons have been exorcised but there are new ones. People look to technology as they used to look to God. Questioning technology is treated as profaning God's name used to be. Ellul would say we must desacralize technology.

Girard: *The New Demons* was very

prophetic. Religion is back in a big way. All the cliches of the Enlightenment are collapsing. Our technology is like the sorcerer's apprentice. It threatens us and must be controlled or restrained in some way.

Gill: How would you describe the "sacred" in today's society?

Girard: The sacred always has aspects of violence mixed up in it. The shift in Christianity was from a violent sacred to love. The great mystery and paradox is that religions begin with a violent sacred in order to suppress violence. If we stay in an archaic atmosphere we sacralize technology, we sacralize power, which means that ultimately we sacralize violence. So to worship technology today, rather than being modern, is really to return to the archaic. The danger from our technology is becoming very obvious.

Gill: What do you make of the rise of Islam? This was something that concerned Ellul.

Girard: For Islam, God is essentially power. There is a great distance between the people and the omnipotent God. With Ellul, I would argue that Christianity shows us a God of non-power, something very different even from nonviolence. God chooses not to use the power he has but instead to leave humanity free. The question is whether people will be capable of exercising this freedom. I think the great mistake of Christianity today is to try to reassure people, to make things more palatable. They think that people want to be reassured. No. They want the truth!

# Re-View

## The New Demons

### Ellul's Genius: Unmasking the New Demons of Postmodernity

by Darrell J. Fasching

*The New Demons* by Jacques Ellul. Translated by C. Edward Hopkin. Crossroad Book, The Seabury Press (NY: Crossroad Books, Seabury Press, 1975.) *Les Nouveaux Possedes* (Librairie Artheme Fayard, 1973).

Twenty four years ago, when I first published my book on *The Thought of Jacques Ellul*. I footnoted my first citation of *The New Demons* with this comment: "This book contains Ellul's sociological analysis of the religiosity of the technological society. It is, I believe, the key to unlocking and understanding the relationship between his sociology and his theology and in that sense his most important work." I still hold that view. And it certainly has been the book that has had the most impact on my own publishing career. If there is one work of Ellul's that has formed the backbone of virtually every one of the seven books I have written it is Ellul's *The New Demons*.

When Ellul's work first began to be published in United States in the sixties and seventies, his readers *were* grouped into two camps - his sociological fans and his theological fans, each often unaware of Ellul's "other side". This was especially true of those who followed Ellul's sociological works. They were typically unaware of his theological writings and many would not have known what to make of them if they had been aware. For Ellul, the separation was deliberate. Science should not be confused with theology and vice versa.

Ellul explained his dual authorship identities by saying that in his sociological works he was simply analyzing the challenges of the new technological society that had emerged since Marx. Ellul's analysis was typically branded deterministic and hopelessly pessimistic. But for Ellul, human beings do not live by science alone. The business of science is to analyze the causal chains that determine our lives. This, however, does not mean that there can be no constructive response to such determinisms. But the response is not something that can be accounted for in terms of sociological causal interactions. Human freedom is not rooted in necessities but the apocalyptic eruption of the Wholly Other in Christian freedom through faith and hope. Necessity is the product of the sacralization of society which seduces humans into placing all their hope in technique and so makes them unable to challenge its necessities. The eruption of the holy, he argued, challenges and desacralizes the human social world. Freedom occurs



when hope becomes apocalyptic. This is a hope that breaks with this world and places its hope in the Wholly Other, manifesting itself in a life of holiness that invites the transgression and desacralization of the supposed necessities of a technological society.

To the best of my knowledge it was in *The New Demons* that Ellul, for the first time brought his two identities together. The book is a sociological analysis of the religiosity of a technological society but at the end he added a postscript entitled “Coda for Christians.” I have often called *The New Demons* the Rosetta Stone of Ellul’s work because it offered the key to understanding Ellul’s total strategy by finally directly interfacing his sociology and his theology. Up until I read *The New Demons* I had not really grasped the significance to the constant references to the sacred in his book *The Technological Society*. I had noted them in passing as if they were “just metaphors.” Now it was as if the lights were turned on and I could really see what he was doing. Ellul was a revolutionary who understood the power of the word made flesh.

For some time now I have been puzzling over what relationship there may be between Ellul’s work and postmodernism. I have finally come to the conclusion that Ellul’s work is even more revolutionary than I gave him credit for. Ellul’s analysis of the religiosity of technological civilization is a description of the shift from a modern to a postmodern society. Postmodernity is defined, says Jean-Francois Lyotard by the collapse of metanarratives (*The Postmodern Condition*, University of Minnesota Press, 1979)..

The emergence of a mass media technological consumer society has inundated all civilizations with an acute and intimate awareness of the pluralism of cultures, values and religions. This awareness results in a sociological relativizing of every culture’s metanarratives, so that the grand public stories of a Christian civilization, a Hindu civilization, or an Islamic civilization, and even modern secular civilization, are reduced to the private stories that individuals embrace at their option. As a result every culture is threatened with the loss of its normative center, including the modern cultures integrated around the Enlightenment myths of science and progress.

This realization in its Western cultural form has often been expressed in terms of “the death of God” and the resurgence of a kind of polytheism of values in its place. This is a key theme of *The New Demons*. When Ellul analyzes a technological civilization by comparing into to ancient polytheistic civilizations he is really mapping the new terrain of postmodern civilization created by the emergence of a consumerist technological society. The response to the powers of technology is analogized to the sacral awe attributed to the powers of nature in polytheism. The function of politics is analogized to the function of ritual in polytheistic societies and the function of mass media is analogized to the materialist/consumerist elements of polytheistic myths that invoke the gods to bring prosperity and the acquisition of the goods of life.

By drawing these analogies, Ellul shows that modern secular technological civilization really leads back into the “sacred heart” of the kind of society once found in ancient polytheism - a decentered, pluralistic and relativistic society. These qualities in turn provoke the reactionary ascendancies of various forms of absolutism –of dominance

through the will to power. So we vacillate between vicious political absolutism (today often taking the form of fundamentalism and even terrorism) and vacuous relativistic consumerism. The fear of relativism breeds absolutism as a reaction and the fear of absolutism breeds the counter-reaction of relativism. This is the unending dialectic of the sacred and the profane, Ellul argues, from which only the way of holiness can liberate us.

This leads us into the second way in which *The New Demons* might be considered postmodern - a postmodern critique of postmodern relativism and the propensities to absolutism that it feeds. I can only be suggestive here. I am still working out the details in my new book which I am currently writing on sabbatical - tentatively entitled: *Deconstructing Terrorism*. Ellul's theology and ethics interfaces the sacred and the holy whose dynamics are first detailed with clarity in *The New Demons*. The defining quality of the sacred is that it always generates its opposite the profane. The sacred divides the world into polar opposites and by polarizing society invites violence. The holy desacralizes the sacred in order to protect and welcome the alien and the stranger who are rendered profane in a sacralized society. The holy undermines the dialectics of necessity (the dialectic of the sacred and profane) leading to the apocalypse of freedom and introduces a justice that escapes this dialectic and makes all things new.

This is where I see Ellul's work, predicated on the distinctions made in *The New Demons*, intersecting with the deconstructionism of Jacques Derrida. A recent book *Philosophy in a Time of Terror* (University of Chicago Press, 2003) by Giovanna Borradori publishes interviews with Jurgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida, followed by her own commentary on each. Borradori summarizes Derrida's deconstructive project as involving four steps: (1) identify the dualisms operative in the text and in society (the one leads to the other), (2) identify the hierarchy of the dualisms in the text and in society, (3) invert or subvert the dualistic hierarchies by showing what would happen if the negative and positive sides of each dualism were reversed as a way of exposing the ideology of the will to power involved in the dualistic classifications, and finally (4) produce a third term "which complicates the original load-bearing structure beyond recognition" and so deforms and reforms into a new a liberating configuration. To make my case as briefly as possible - steps one and two are what Ellul accomplishes when he analyzes the sacred sociologically, steps three and four are accomplished when he responds theologically and ethically and transgresses the sacred in the name of the holy, introducing transcendence, freedom and justice.

Now justice is not a word that immediately comes to mind when I think of postmodernism. For years I have dismissed deconstruction as irresponsible relativism. In the hands of many of its practitioners it probably is. But I have changed my mind on this with respect to Derrida after I began reading some of his later work, which is deeply indebted to Immanuel Levinas. Derrida's later work is dominated by the themes of grace (the gift), hospitality, the messianic - and also the surprising insistence that justice is the one thing that cannot be deconstructed (*Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, edited by Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld and David Gray Carlson, (Routledge,

1992), Chp. 1). The law can be deconstructed but only in the name of the demand for justice. In fact Derrida insists that justice is the driving force of deconstruction - that they are one and the same. For Derrida, justice, like Ellul's apocalypse of the holy, comes from the outside, as a gift - a gift that subverts all dualisms and makes new beginnings possible. In the concluding chapter of *Deconstructing Terrorism* I hope to make the case that Ellul is a religious postmodernist and that religious postmodernism is able to deconstruct the endless dialectic of absolutism and relativism that plagues secular postmodernism and so exorcise the "new demons" of the postmodern world.

# In Review

## Clever as Serpents: Business Ethics and Office Politics

by Jim Grote & John McGeeney.

Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1997.viii, 149 pp.

Reviewed by David W. Gill

*Clever as Serpents* was first published eight years ago but it deserves review in this issue of *The Ellul Forum* as an insightful, “Girardian” approach to business ethics.

In Part One of *Clever as Serpents*, “Theory,” Grote and McGeeney use Rene Girard’s insights to analyze workplace dynamics. At almost every turn the authors challenge the conventional wisdom and propose a different way of looking at things. Rather than a market that thrives on freedom and is inhibited by regulation, today’s markets exist only because of various regulations. Governments are not disinterested spectators but active participants in markets. Like “freedom,” “competition” is also a myth. In reality, cooperation is at least as productive as competition (business reality as well as ecological reality).

If not free competition, what is the secret of market economics? Grote and McGeeney propose Girard’s concept of “borrowed desire” or “mimetic desire.” It is envy and covetousness, exacerbated by marketing and advertising. We are motivated by desire to keep up with the Joneses and have what someone else has, or thinks desirable. Internally, the secret of management is to assign blame or even to find a scapegoat who can be sacrificed.

In Part Two, Grote and McGeeney turn to “Practice” and provide a great deal of practical counsel on how to survive and perhaps even find happiness in this toxic environment. The “currency of blame and credit” is gossip. The authors counsel detachment “from the fear of blame and the craving for credit” to “avoid being swallowed up (p. 80). They teach the “ethics of survival” (dealing with the boss and the mob) through “low visibility and high utility.” Don’t crave anything too much (wages, credit, visibility) but be sure you are of significant value to others.

The “ethics of success” (dealing with competitors) revolves around pursuing your true goals rather than being sidetracked by craving for others’ goals. Grote and McGeeney give lots of practical “political” advice here. A bit too calculating and even cynical for my taste but maybe they are right. The “ethics of service” (dealing with

customers) requires true leadership and the meeting of the needs of others, especially the need to be free; now this I like!

Survival, success, and service: this three-fold practical ethics culminates in a reflection on “the wisdom of tradition: work.” The purpose of work is not just to transform the earth but to transform the self. The authors provide great discussion questions to go with each chapter, which makes this not just a good individual read but a great choice for a group study—maybe by your nearest or your favorite executive team. The power of Rene Girard’s insights to illuminate our daily reality is certainly made clear in *Clever as Serpents*. This is not about a literary theory but about life.

## Islam et judeo-christianisme

by Jacques Ellul.

Paris: Presses universitaires de France (6, avenue Reille, 75014 Paris), 2004. 108 pages

Reviewed by David W. Gill

Thanks to the tireless efforts of Dominique Ellul, a new book by her late father has recently appeared in France. *Islam et judeo-christianisme* [*Islam and Judeo-Christianity*] contains a 20-page Preface by Alain Besancon, an 8-page Foreword by Dominique Ellul, a previously unpublished 50-page essay on Islam by Jacques Ellul, “The Three Pillars of Conformism,” and a 15-page reprint of Ellul’s introduction to a 1985 book on the Dhimmi (non-Muslims living in Muslim countries). In discussions of a possible publication of an English translation (no contract just yet!), some of us have urged that Ellul’s 20-page chapter on “The Influence of Islam” in *The Subversion of Christianity* be reprinted as part of any English-language edition. We’ll see.

During the 1980s Ellul often spoke of a book he was preparing on Islam but found publishers reluctant to publish the sort of critical perspective he felt essential. Events also moved rapidly and his manuscript needed substantial updating after these publishers’ delays. In the end the chapter in *Subversion* (and the rather obscure introduction to the book on the Dhimmi) was all we had on Islam from Ellul. The new book is therefore a great help in more fully understanding Ellul’s take on Islam.

Ellul’s essay addresses three common assertions about Islam and its relations with Christianity and Judaism. First, Ellul disputes the value of the assertion that “we are all the children of Abraham.” The three “Abrahamic religions” are often claimed to share an affinity. Ellul insists that Isaac alone of Abraham’s children received the divine and paternal blessing—not Ishmael or the other children. Moreover, according to Jesus, it is not blood lineage but living faith that renders one a true child of Abraham.

Second, Ellul disagrees that avowing “monotheism” brings Christianity, Judaism, and Islam into a close and positive relationship. To begin with, Muslims and Jews often dispute that trinitarian Christians are monotheists. More importantly, it is not the fact of having one god that unites people (other religions and even secular “religions”

sometimes have one sacred center, one object of worship and center of meaning). No, it is the *identity* of that God that decides everything. Ellul shows how the Muslim Allah is dissimilar to the God known in Jesus Christ and the Bible.

Third, Ellul rejects the idea that Islam, Judaism, and Christianity are united in being “religions of the book.” It is partly about the nature of the holy writing and how it is viewed that establishes big differences; it is supremely about the content of the books—including the ways the Koran contradicts the teaching of the Bible.

Ellul’s Introduction to Bat Ye’or’s *The Dhimmi: Jews and Christians under Islam* (1985) reviews and defends the author’s research which carefully examined a long history and found that Jews and Christians had a varied experience under Islam, some good, some bad situations. It is not correct to say that they were always protected and flourishing under Islam (today’s politically-correct viewpoint), nor were they always persecuted.

Ellul’s writings on Islam display his usual passion and intensity. He is taking an unpopular position in a French intellectual milieu that, partly out of guilt over a colonial past and the presence of large numbers of impoverished Muslim immigrants, tended to go to extremes to glorify Islam in an uncritical way. Ellul, on the other hand, fought to protect Jews during the Nazi occupation and for biblical and theological reasons saw a special place for Israel in history. This is a context in which straight talk and candid opinions can be difficult. To have Ellul’s views on Islam in this new book is a welcome addition.

What new readers of Ellul need to be aware of is that he was by nature and choice very dialectical in thought and expression. He felt free to express in extreme form either pole in a given controversy. Thus, his criticism of Islam is harsh. But remember that Ellul wrote ten times as much in harsh criticism of the subversion of Christianity, of its mediocrity, conformism, and guilt. And his critique of the religion of Technique is even stronger. In any case, Ellul had no use for violence or nationalism (common reactions to fears of Islam or Christianity in today’s world).

*Islam et judeo-christianisme* is a challenge to re-think Islam (and Judaism and Christianity), to cast off political correctness and comforting myths we may hold, to face the truth with courage, to speak with candor, and then to move forward toward a genuine peace and understanding.

## News & Notes

— **International Colloquium on Ellul: POITIERS, 21-22 OCTOBER 2004**

More than 150 scholars gathered at the University of Poitiers for a colloquium on Jacques Ellul’s thought and its continuing importance, ten years after his death. Organized by our sister society, the Association Internationale Jacques Ellul, led by Poitiers Professor of Political Science, Patrick Chastenet, the Poitiers colloquium was characterized by excellent papers and animated discussion. Randall Marlin (Ontario),

David Gill (California), and Jean Robert (Mexico) were among the program participants. Veteran scholars such as Ellul's friend and colleague, Prof. Etienne Dravasa, were side-by-side with a number of younger scholars now finishing graduate studies in various universities. Sociologists, political scientists, and communications theorists interacted with pastors, ethicists, and theologians. The papers from the colloquium are now being edited for publication in book form. Bravo to Patrick and our AIJE friends.

— CONFERENCE AT BEGLES

Just a few weeks after the Poitiers colloquium, the regional Ellul-Charbonneau Association sponsored a colloquium in Begles, a town near Bordeaux. IJES member Joyce Hanks (University of Scranton) reports that the Begles meeting was also attended by more than 150 people and was "absolutely terrific." Plans are underway to publish the colloquium papers.

— CHRISTIANITY & ANARCHISM CONFERENCE AUGUST 5-6, 2005, CHICAGO

IJES member Andy Baker invites IJES members and friends to a two-day conference "Practically Speaking: Anarchism and Christianity in Word and Deed" to be held August 5-6 at the International Conference Center, 4750 North Sheridan Road, Chicago IL.

For information visit: [www.JesusRadicals.com](http://www.JesusRadicals.com)

— CAHIERS JACQUES ELLUL

*Pour Une Critique de la Societe Technicienne*

The third issue of *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*, an annual journal edited by Patrick Chastenet and published by our sister society, L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul, is now off the press. It is available for 20 euros (postage included) to individuals outside France, and for 25 euros to libraries. Further information at [www.jacques-ellul.org](http://www.jacques-ellul.org). Write: *Cahiers Ellul*, 21, rue Brun, 33800 Bordeaux.

— **Special Issue of Reforme**

A special issue of the French publication *Reforms* was devoted to Jacques Ellul in December 2004. The first half (20 pages or so) is devoted to biography, bibliography, and recollections of Ellul by Patrick Chastenet and others. The second half is a reprint of various short articles Ellul published in *Reforms* between 1945 and 1989. A fascinating collection. Web site: [www.reforme.net](http://www.reforme.net) E-mail: [reforme@reforme.net](mailto:reforme@reforme.net). Write: Reforme, 53-55, avenue du Maine, 75014 Paris, France. Six euros plus postage and handling.

## Resources for Ellul Studies

[www.ellul.org](http://www.ellul.org)

& [www.jacques-ellul.org](http://www.jacques-ellul.org)

Two indispensable web sites

The IJES/AIJE web site at [www.ellul.org](http://www.ellul.org) contains (1) news about IJES and AIJE activities and plans, (2) a brief and accurate biography of Jacques Ellul, (3) a complete bibliography of Ellul's books in French and English, and (4) links and information on other resources for students of Jacques Ellul. The new AIJE web site at [www.jacques-ellul.org](http://www.jacques-ellul.org) offers a French language supplement.

**The Ellul Forum CD: 1988-2002**

The first thirty issues of *The Ellul Forum*, some 500 published pages total, are now available (only) on a single compact disc which can be purchased for US \$15 (postage included). Send payment with your order to "IJES," P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705 USA.

**Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works** by Joyce Main Hanks. Research in Philosophy and Technology. Supplement 5. Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 2000. xiii., 206 pages. \$87. ISBN: 076230619X.

This is the essential guide for anyone doing research in Jacques Ellul's writings. An excellent brief biography is followed by a 140-page annotated bibliography of Ellul's fifty books and thousand-plus articles and a thirty-page subject index. Hank's work is comprehensive, accurate, and invariably helpful. This may be one of the more expensive books you buy for your library; it will surely be one of the most valuable. Visit [www.elsevier.com](http://www.elsevier.com) for ordering information.



**Issue #36 Fall 2005 — Ellul and  
the Bible**

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**For the Critique of Technological Civilization**



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*"[T]he criterion of my thought is the biblical revelation, the content of my thought is the biblical revelation, the point of departure is supplied by the biblical revelation, the method is the dialectic in accordance with which the biblical revelation is given to us, and the purpose is a search for the significance of the biblical revelation concerning ethics.*

*"This rigor in no wise implies that this is a book for Christians. To the contrary, I would expect all its value to come from a confrontation... Every man in our decaying Western civilization is asking questions about the rules of his life. Still less, finally, is the biblical revelation limited to the narrow circle of the elect. It speaks first about all the others. "*

**-Jacques Ellul To Will & To Do: An Ethical Research for Christians (1969)**

# Information on The Editorial Board & More

## **The Ellul Forum**

### **For the Critique of Technological Civilization**

#### **Founded 1988**

The Ellul Forum is published twice per year, in the Spring and Fall. Its purpose is to analyze and apply Jacques Ellul's thought to our technological civilization and carry forward both his sociological and theological analyses in new directions.

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## From the Editor

The special focus of Issue 36 of *The Ellul Forum* is Jacques Ellul's use of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. The quotation that graces our cover, from the beginning of Ellul's introduction to ethics, *To Will and To Do*, provides a typical sample of Ellul's passion for the message of the Bible. And yet, as the quotation makes clear, Ellul never thought the Bible was simply for the edification of some holy club withdrawn from the world.

Although Ellul published many studies of biblical themes and passages, he remains much better known for his sociological critique of technique (and its implications for politics, economics, social change, communications, etc.) than for this side of his work. But, just as we don't fully understand Kierkegaard's philosophical works without his edifying discourses (and vice versa), the living dialectic between Ellul's theological and sociological works cannot be ignored.

Ellul's biblical studies are always provocative at the same time they are extraordinarily learned. Many of his readers attest to an experience of finding themselves in disagreement with Ellul on various points—and yet naming him the most helpful, illuminating Bible teacher they ever knew. It is almost impossible to ever view a biblical text the same way after Ellul gets done with it. The secret? Ellul gets us to a place where we can truly hear the text, where the living word comes through the forms of the written word.

We are honored to have a wide range of contributors in this issue, several for the first time. These authors come from very different places but all have an informed, critical appreciation of Ellul's biblical studies. Both older and younger scholars are represented, clergy as well as laity, Christian and otherwise. Their articles and reviews range across many different studies by Ellul. We have also included reviews of theological and biblical studies by four of Ellul's own favorite discussion-partners and fellow students of theology and Scripture: Claude Tresmontant, Gabriel Vahanian, Alphonse Maillot, and Andre Chouraqui.

After volunteering to "guest edit" this issue for our intrepid Editor, Cliff Christians, I can only say "welcome back" to Cliff. He and Darrell Fasching before him have performed an awesome service to us all these past 18 years as editors of *The Ellul Forum*. I can hardly wait to have only my "Associate Editor" and "publisher" hats on again.

*David W. Gill, Associate Editor IJES@ellul.org*

## Jacques Ellul as a Reader of Scripture

by Anthony J. Petrotta

*Re-view of Jacques Ellul, Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes (Eerdmans, 1990), translated by Joyce Main Hanks from La Raison d’Etre: Meditation sur l’ecclésiaste (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1987).*

*Anthony J. Petrotta is Rector of St. Francis of Assisi Episcopal Church (Wilsonville OR) and long-time adjunct professor of Old Testament for Fuller Theological Seminary. He is a graduate of Fuller Seminary (M.A.) and the University of Sheffield (UK)(Ph.D.). He is co-author of the Pocket Dictionary of Biblical Studies (InterVarsity Press, 2002) and author of many articles and reviews.*

When I started my studies at Fuller Seminary nearly thirty years ago, I took an elective class, “The Ethics of Jacques Ellul,” taught by David Gill, then finishing his Ph.D. studies on Ellul across town at USC. At that time I was taking classes mostly in Semitic Languages and wanted to go on in Old Testament studies. Ethics and theology were “recreational” reading for me. I had some interest in Ellul since a friend was urging me to read his books and the class fit my schedule. I managed to talk Professor Gill into allowing me to write a paper on Ellul’s hermeneutics and he enthusiastically—as David often does!—accepted my proposal.

I found Ellul to be not only a sociologist, ethicist, and theologian, but somebody who had a deep interest in the biblical text and was conversant with the field. I found that a number of his concerns about interpretation were also being voiced by prominent biblical theologians (in particular, Brevard Childs).

Now, a generation later and with all that has gone on in the field of biblical studies, how does Ellul stand as an exegete, as a reader of Scripture?

I want to center my thoughts on Ellul as a reader of Scripture by looking at *Reason For Being*, his “meditation” on Ecclesiastes. Ellul says that Ecclesiastes is the book of the Bible that he has explored more than any other book. It is a book he read, meditated upon, and taught for more than fifty years. I also want to compare what Ellul has said against two more recent (and more traditional) commentaries on Ecclesiastes: Ellen Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs* and Michael Fox, *Ecclesiastes*.

Ellul begins by reflecting on his reason and method for writing *Reason For Being* in his “Preliminary, Polemical, Nondefinitive Postscript,” which, of course, appears as Chapter One, an instance of paradox that fits with Ecclesiastes’ program of throwing contradictions together for the effect and truth they create. This chapter is very instructive; he reveals a lot about *how* he reads, and by implication, reveals some of what he considers the shortcomings of commenting upon Scripture in the modern sense of the term (Ellul *is* polemical).

Ellul is keenly aware that he is not going about his task as an academician might. He has not compiled an extensive bibliography and he has not interacted with the literature on Ecclesiastes during his writing of *Being*. That is not to say, though, that

he has not done the requisite work for writing an informed book on Ecclesiastes. Over the years he has read important studies on Ecclesiastes, and he notes those. More importantly, he “slogged” through the Hebrew text and *nine* other translations as he was writing. After writing *Being* he went back and read through the literature again on Ecclesiastes and though he saw no reason to change what he had written, he did check his thoughts against others who also have studied and written on the book. His reactions to these “historians and exegetes” he put in footnotes after the manuscript was completed.

Ellul says: “This approach seemed to me to be consistent with Ecclesiastes: once you have acquired a certain knowledge and experience, you must walk alone, without repeating what others have said” (p. 3).

I’m not sure that Ellul has “walked alone,” at least in this sense: he has read the studies by those who have spent a lifetime reading Ecclesiastes (Pedersen, von Rad, among others). But I think his point is well taken. Ellul has absorbed the thoughts of others *into his thoughts*, arranged them, and set them down through his own extensive—and slow! (“slogged”)—reading of the text itself. Ellul is not simply writing what he “feels” but what he has experienced as a reader; his experience of the text itself involves listening to those who have read the text and written through their knowledge and experience. Ellul is in a company of readers, but writing out of his own voice. The distinction is important because he thus steers clear of merely reflecting the studies or opinions of others or lapsing into a pietism.

In an important footnote, Ellul spells this approach out a bit more by invoking the Jewish tradition of four kinds of interpretation: literal, allegorical, homiletical, and the “seed of life, from which new mysteries of meaning continually spring up.” He believes that Qoheleth (the Hebrew term for the “preacher” and the name of Ecclesiastes often used in Jewish writings regarding this book) has given us a text where “new mysteries of meaning spring up, with or without new scientific methods” (p. 7). Here quite clearly Ellul points to what he considers the limits of modern commentary and hints at why he writes without those aids ready at hand. Ellul recognizes that however important philological and historical research is, and he clearly values these researches, a text is brought to life as readers open themselves to the forms and thought of the book, and then respond thoughtfully.

The point that reading a text is more than simply understanding the words on the page is worth belaboring a tad. Nicholas Lash talks of “performing” Scripture, of taking the marks on the page and making them alive in our life much as a musician takes the notes of a sonata and realizes them in a recital. “The performance of scripture

is the life of the church”<sup>12</sup>. Ellul does not use this language, but it is implicit in his reading. In his discussion of this point, Lash similarly adheres to the importance of the historical-critical method, but also its limitation. Ellul and Lash (and others) see the reader doing more than making critical notes on a biblical text; as readers of Scripture, we move beyond simple comment to truths that must be lived out in our lives.

It is worth noting that both Davis and Fox make similar assertions about the role of interpretation. Fox, interacting with the tradition of Jewish *midrash*, recognizes that one role of an interpreter is to draw out “the fullness of meaning potential” in a passage (Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, p. xxii)<sup>3</sup>. Davis speaks of the medieval practice of “chewing” on the words of scripture. She wisely writes, “We are now a society that ‘processes’ words rather than one that ponders them” (Davis, *Proverbs*, p. 3). They are, however, more restrained in their comments than Ellul, as we shall see, but this is an editorial constraint I suspect, more than an authorial one.

An example might help show how the subtle differences between Davis, Fox, and Ellul play themselves out. Ecclesiastes 12: 12-14, the “epilogue” to the book, poses problems. For one, Qoheleth is spoken of in the third person and no longer in the reflective first person that we find throughout most of the book (e.g., Ecclesiastes 1:13-14). There are also interpretive problems, what certain words mean in this context, and what they refer to beyond simple translation of a term.

Davis, Fox, and Ellul all agree that these verses are not a “pious” conclusion that is tacked on to an otherwise radical book, as has often been a line of interpretation with the rise of historical criticism<sup>4</sup>. Rather, these words are in keeping with the scope of the book; fearing God and God’s judgment are not alien to the book. Fox cites Ecclesiastes 3:17 and 11:9 on the judgment of God and 5:5 and 7:18 on the fear of God. In adopting this approach, all three are trying to come to terms with the complexity of the book as a literary document, but also the complexity of the thought of Qoheleth.

To what, however, do the words “they were given by *one shepherd*” refer? The translation is transparent (there is nothing ambiguous about the words). But to whom do they refer? We find different ways of explaining the “one shepherd” in Davis, Fox, and Ellul. Davis appeals to the shepherd as a moral authority, one who “goads” the sheep to new pastures where they will thrive and not overgraze the very ground that feeds them. She goes on to ask who might fulfill this role in our society. She answers,

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<sup>1</sup> Ellen F. Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000). Michael V. Fox, *Ecclesiastes* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004). These commentaries are not randomly chosen. They are commentaries in a more traditional sense than Ellul’s study, but both authors are writing for lay people, pastors, and rabbis, and I know both to be very good readers of Scripture.

<sup>2</sup> Nicholas Lash, “Performing the Scriptures,” in *Theology on the Way to Emmaus* (London: SCM, 1986), p. 43.

<sup>3</sup> *Midrash* refers to both ancient Jewish writings on Scripture and to a method of interpretation.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, G.A. Barton, *Ecclesiastes* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908). Barton calls the whole section a “late editor’s praise of Qoheleth, and the final verses as a “Chasid’s [a pious person’s] last gloss” (p. 197).



“Few teachers or clergy, or even fewer politicians”( Davis, *Proverbs*, p. 226). She reflects on the role advertising has had on our attention to words and how slogans, euphemisms, and so forth have curtailed our ability to grapple with the complexity of truth, and to change our way of thinking and acting. These reflections, I think, would delight Ellul, though it is not the line of interpretation that he takes with this passage.

Fox has a rather lengthy discussion of “shepherd.” In the traditional interpretations of the rabbis, the term almost always referred to God. Even, Fox informs us, the words of someone as unconventional as Qoheleth derive from God, say the rabbis. The rabbis often have this “extraordinary openness” to different interpretations of *Torah*. Fox questions this interpretation, however. Rather, the metaphor of shepherd usually refers to protecting and providing, not the giving of words. The words of the wise are not, in Fox’s view, like that of law or prophecy. Fox settles on “sages” (not God) prodding people; hence the warning that follows: be careful, sages can overwhelm you with all their ideas (vs. 12). This interpretation is similar to Davis in saying that the “shepherd” are the sages, not God, but differs in that Davis is lamenting the lack of sage advice in our society, whereas Fox focuses on the warning of endlessly listening to other people’s advice. Ellul, I think, would find this last part sage advice from Fox, but again, this is not the approach that he takes.

Ellul goes in another direction. He focuses on the words “all has been heard,” and interprets this line in two ways and at considerable length. First, God has heard all and “collects” these words, for which you will be judged (citing Matthew 12:37). Second, all has been heard, we cannot go beyond the words of Qoheleth; we have reached “Land’s End.” From this interpretation, the injunction to fear God and keep his commandments is all that need be said, and Ellul reflects on what “fear-respect” and “listeningobedience” mean for the Christian. It is from these two poles that “the truth and being of a person burst forth” (p. 299).

However, in a footnote (presumably written after Ellul’s initial meditation on the text), Ellul draws upon a doctoral dissertation by Jacques Chopineau who ties the phrase *one* shepherd to Ps 80:1, “O Shepherd of Israel, hear . . . “ and interprets the reference to God (as in the traditional interpretation). Ellul admits that he “spontaneously wanted” to interpret these words as a reference to God (and, hence, God’s revelation), but felt “uncertain” and therefore did not mention that in the reflection proper (p. 291-2, n. 56).

Ellul then goes on in the footnote to reflect on this interpretation<sup>5</sup>. If God is the *true* shepherd (“one”; Hebrew ‘*echad*), then this ties and contrasts with Abel/*hevel* (“vanity”), Abel being a shepherd also. God, the true shepherd, is the opposite of *hevel*/vanity. The book is thematically structured around the various vanities, but God is opposite by giving us his commandments, which constitute the “whole person” when we live by them. Chopineau, thus, gives Ellul further support for his interpretation

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<sup>5</sup> It is not clear to me if this reflection is part of Chopineau’s interpretation or Ellul carrying it forward in his own inimitable way. I suspect the latter.

of the Epilogue as a whole, that fearobedience, the encounter with God, and our listeningobedience liberates our whole being. God as the One Shepherd gives us the commandments. In this respect Ellul goes beyond both Davis and Fox, though Davis might be more sympathetic to the revelatory nature of the shepherd/sage and the connection with the commandments.

Davis, Fox, and Ellul agree that fear of God and keeping commandments are the sum of the teaching of Ecclesiastes. Davis concludes her comments by invoking the *Book of Common Prayer*: “Therefore, orienting our lives toward the commandments enables us, ‘while we are placed among things that are passing away, to hold fast to those who endure” (Davis, *Proverbs*, p. 228; the citation comes on p. 234 of the *Book of Common Prayer*). Ellul would quite agree, and Fox says, “The book allows readers to probe the ways of God and man, wherever this may lead, so long as we make the fear of God and obedience to the Commandments the final standard of behavior” (Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, p. 85).

To answer my question at the beginning, how does Ellul stand the test of time, the answer, I think, is that he stands rather well. Granted, in picking Davis and Fox I am perhaps not being entirely fair since they are both interested in writing for the laity and clergy of the Church and Synagogue, but that is Ellul’s audience as well.

Ellul lingers more in his reflections than either Davis or Fox. His is, after all, a “meditation” and not a commentary in the narrow sense. Ellul, though, stays close to the text, the Hebrew text in this case. Even in his “gutlevel” interpretation of “shepherd” as God, he relegates his comments to a footnote; he is fully aware that this interpretation is not universally accepted, but still in consonant with critical possibilities (a point that Fox makes more sharply than Davis).

I do find it a bit curious that Davis and Fox do not entertain the shepherd-God connection more than they do. That the shepherd is described as “one” seems suggestive in a book that uses words carefully and even “playfully” in the sense that Qoheleth wants to tease the reader to consider that the obvious and the not obvious can occupy the same space. Certainly God as the shepherd is not obvious or necessary; but the fact that commentators have long split on this issue keeps it as a live option to consider. Curiously, Barton notes the options and says that since “shepherd” is usually an epithet of God, it is “probably so here” (*Ecclesiastes*, p. 198).

A final note on my reading of Ellul this time. In my journey as a reader of Scripture, I have found that good readers of Scripture are often those who have honed their skills as readers generally, not just those who are trained to do exegesis in the narrow sense that is taught in books on exegesis for seminary students. What I mean is that a good reader is one who is not just a technician, but one who has, as Proverbs teaches, learned to “acquire skill, to understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles” (Proverbs 1: 5b-6). Ellul weaves into his meditations thoughts and interactions with biblical scholars (Christian and Jewish), as we should expect, but philosophers, anthropologists, novelists, poets, and so forth. Ellul’s reading experiences are wide and

that is why he can bring his experiences to the task of writing on Scripture, and write with the depth and thoughtfulness that he does.

Ellul's skill as a reader comes out again in his "Preliminary, Polemical, and Non-definitive Postscript." Ellul objects to commentators that *must* find a "formal, logical coherence" in Ecclesiastes. This text is not like any other; scholars treat works on Roman law with more "congeniality" than many biblical scholars treat Ecclesiastes. The scholars would have a "purer, more authentic text" than the one we have received in Scripture (I think Ellul has his tongue firmly in cheek at this point!)<sup>6</sup>.

Ellul does not say it this way, but the issue at stake is *receiving* this text as a Hebraic text, I think, and not as a Western text. However much Qoheleth may be interacting with Greek philosophical thought, he is still very much a Hebrew and employs Hebrew forms and Hebrew "logic." The ability to receive a text as it is written is a skill that most of us need to develop as readers of the Bible, especially since our current translations often go out of the way to obscure the differences between the world of biblical texts and our world<sup>7</sup>. We need to learn the language, structure, forms, conventions, and so forth before we can become competent readers of Scripture<sup>8</sup>.

The end of the matter is this: Ellul is a model reader for all of us, though he would be disappointed if we merely repeated what he has taught us and not built upon his work.

## Ellul on Scripture and Idolatry

by Andrew Goddard

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One of the distinctive features of Ellul's theological work is his conviction that it is Scripture that enables us to see the world aright. Rather than "demythologizing" the Bible, the Bible is the means by which God "demythologizes" our world. The classic example of this approach is undoubtedly his canonical, Christocentric study of the city in Scripture, *The Meaning of the City* (Eerdmans, 1970), but the same approach underlies his approach to many other phenomena. This article provides a brief introductory overview of how Ellul's reading of some biblical texts shapes his understanding

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<sup>6</sup> See pp. 6-16, *Being*, for a fuller treatment of Ellul's objections to some of the critical stances by biblical scholars.

<sup>7</sup> Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*. (NY: Schocken, 1995), is a wonderful counter example to the trend to be "contemporary."

<sup>8</sup> I am thinking here not so much of form-criticism but Hebraic rhetorical forms of narrative and poetry. Form criticism often becomes reductionist rather than illuminating the poetic elements in a psalm, for example.

of idols and idolatry and how, in turn, that understanding leads to a critique of certain attitudes to the Bible and explains the heart of his biblical hermeneutic<sup>9</sup>.

Ellul's biblical discussion of idols and idolatry is not as thorough and focussed as his study of the city but it is particularly in *The Ethics of Freedom* and *The Humiliation of the Word* that we find his interpretations of key texts in - as one would expect from Ellul - both Old and New Testaments. Of particular interest is one Pauline text that shapes his account of the idols in relation to the powers<sup>10</sup>. On first glance, we Christians may want to treat idols and powers as synonymous terms and it must be admitted that Ellul himself (here, as in many other areas) is not always consistent and does not always strictly follow his own distinctions that he draws from the biblical text. Nevertheless, when he is careful, he does distinguish his understanding of these two phenomena and he does so because he believes Scripture does so.

The crucial biblical text for Ellul is Paul's discussion of food offered to idols in 1 Corinthians 8, especially verses 4 to 6. There the apostle writes, "Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that 'no idol in the world really exists,' and that 'there is no God but one.' Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as in fact there are many gods and many lords—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist."

Ellul takes great care in his analysis of this text, drawing attention to the paradox that Paul here seems to say both (a) that no idol really exists and (b) that there are many gods. Rather than dismiss Paul's statements as incoherent and confused, Ellul seeks to clarify why Paul affirms both these statements. He claims that gods exist in the following sense: "They are part of the powers that claim to be allpowerful or salvific, etc, and that attract people's love and religious belief. They exist. And they pass themselves off as gods" (*The Humiliation of the Word* (Eerdmans, 1985), p 89). Thus Ellul believes that in order to understand the text and the world we have to see that the language of 'gods' is equivalent to (or, perhaps better, a subset of) the category of the powers. As a result, Ellul insists - against the demythologizers and with such writers as Caird, Berkhof, Wink and Stringfellow - that there are real, spiritual powers and forces which influence human lives and societies. These, we learn from Scripture, set themselves up as powerful and redemptive and, by being viewed as such by humans, they stand as a challenge to the one true God.

In his interpretation of Scripture on the powers, Ellul rejects the Bultmannian demythologization project (that dismisses the language of powers as a worldview we must now reject in the light of modern knowledge) but he also refuses to embrace the common popular evangelical and fundamentalist belief in traditional demons that is often understood as the main alternative. Instead he moves between two other ways

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<sup>9</sup> For a fuller discussion of this, on which this article partially draws, see my forthcoming article in Stephen Barton (ed), *Idolatry in the Bible, Early Judaism and Christianity* (T&T Clark, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> The powers are a subject on which Ellul wrote much more extensively and which, particularly through the work of Marva Dawn, have become prominent in recent Ellul studies.

of interpreting this biblical language of “gods” and “powers.” At times he views them as “less precise powers (thrones and dominions) which still have an existence, reality, and... objectivity of their own.” Here they are seen as authentic, spiritual realities which are independent of human decision and whose power is not constituted by human decision. At other times - particularly in his later writings - the powers are viewed more as “a disposition of man which constitutes this or that human factor a power by exalting it as such” (*The Ethics of Freedom* (Eerdmans, 1976), p 151) and so “not objective realities which influence man from without. They exist only by the determination of man which allows them to exist in their subjugating otherness and transcendence” (*Ethics*, pp. 151-2).

Ellul’s concern in this understanding is to avoid the idea of powers or demons doing their own work apart from human beings. He therefore stresses that the powers find expression in human works and enterprises. It is this important link between the spiritual powers and the material world, especially of human works, that helps us to understand his view of idols. “The powers seem to be able to transform a natural, social, intellectual or economic reality into a force which man has no ability either to resist or to control. This force ejects man from his divinely given position as governor of creation. It gives life and autonomy to institutions and structures. It attacks man both inwardly and outwardly by playing on the whole setting of human life. It finally alienates man by bringing him into the possession of objects which would not normally possess him” (*Ethics*, pp 152-3).

These powers are the false gods that Paul says in 1 Cor 8 really exist. But what are “idols” and why does Paul say that they do not exist? The key feature of idols - in contrast to the powers to which they are linked - is that they are visible and material entities. Although this would seem to give them a more substantial existence, Ellul argues that idols do not exist because “the visible portrayal of these powers which is perceived by the senses, has no value, no consistency, and no existence” (*Humiliation*, p. 89). Any idol is really just “a natural, social intellectual or economic reality.” It is strictly a material object under human control. Ellul therefore believes that Scripture distinguishes false gods from idols because the latter are simply “a creation of man which he invests with a value and authority they do not have in themselves” (*Ethics*, p. 156). Idols, according to Scripture, are simply part of the visible created reality and though linked to the gods or spiritual powers they are to be distinguished from them.

In explaining how it is that, in Paul’s words, “no idol in the world really exists,” Ellul gives the example of money. He claims that money as a power (Mammon) certainly exists. However, a banknote - the material means by which the power works - strictly does not exist because “it is never anything but a piece of paper” (*Humiliation*, p. 89). Here we see a central paradox: idols seek to make the invisible false gods and powers visible and concrete but by this very fact of seeking to mediate a spiritual power in the material world they do not themselves exist. We may today think of the Nike Swoosh, the McDonalds Golden Arches or other symbols and logos as contemporary idols which

on their own are meaningless and powerless but are mediators of some of the global powers of our age<sup>11</sup>.

Faced with them we need to remember that idols are not only part of the ancient biblical world but still a reality in our post-modern “secular” world and to recall Ellul’s judgment based on Paul’s words: “They exist neither as something visible and concrete (since in this sense they are really nothing) nor as something spirituals (since they cannot reach this level). They have no kind of existence precisely because they have tried to obtain indispensable existence beyond the uncertainty of the word” (*Humiliation*, p. 89).

Idols therefore, according to Scripture, lack existence per se and are the attempt by humans to domesticate and bring into the visible, material world the invisible spiritual powers that do exist. “Idols are indispensable for mankind. We need to see things represented and make the powers enter our domain of reality. It is a sort of kidnapping. False gods are powers of all sorts that human beings discern in the world. The Bible clearly distinguishes these from the idol, which is the visualization of these powers and mysterious forces . . . Things that can be seen and grasped are certain and at our disposition. It is fundamentally unacceptable for us to be at the disposition of these gods ourselves, and unable to have power over them. Prayer or offering cannot satisfy, since they provide no sure domination. If, on the contrary, a person makes his own image and can certify that it is truly the deity, he is no longer afraid. Idols quiet our fears” (*Humiliation*, pp. 86-7).

This linking of idols to the material or visual, as distinct from the spiritual powers, leads to the second emphasis in Ellul’s interpretation of the biblical witness: the priority of listening over seeing.

Ellul reads the narrative of humanity’s primal rebellion in Genesis 3 as demonstrating the significance of this - the spoken word is doubted and visible reality is taken as the source of truth (see *Humiliation*, pp. 97ff). The same problem is repeated within God’s people Israel. Here Ellul’s interpretation of the narrative of the golden calf (Exodus 32) is of crucial importance. It also illustrates that, although (as in relation to 1 Cor 8) Ellul can take great care and wrestle with the literal or plain sense of the biblical text he is also willing to offer a more spiritual interpretation in order to discern Scripture’s message. Thus, drawing on a study of Fernand Ryser (a French translator of two of the great influences on Ellul’s theology and biblical interpretation - Barth and Bonhoeffer), he highlights that a source of the gold for the calf is the Israelite’s ear-rings (v2). He quotes Ryser, “Aaron dishonours the ear; it no longer counts; now just the eye matters. Hear the Word of God no longer matters; now seeing and looking at an image are central. Sight replaces faith” (*Humiliation*, p. 87). It is this attempt to argue for a biblical basis for the priority of the word and hearing over the material image and sight that is a central theme of *The Humiliation of the Word* as a whole and of its exegesis of key biblical passages.

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<sup>11</sup> I am grateful to Alain Coralie for his work on Nike Culture that has helped me make this

Finally, Ellul's claim for a biblically based prioritization of hearing over seeing must also be applied to the Bible itself. Although Scripture and biblical interpretation play a central part in Ellul's theology and ethics he is clear that Scripture, as a permanent, written record has the ambiguity of all written words. Drawing on the biblical narrative of Moses breaking the stone tablets (Exodus 32.19), Ellul is adamant that this challenges a common Christian attitude to the Bible for the Bible "is never automatically and in itself the Word of God, but is always capable of becoming that Word - and as a Christian I would add: in a way denied to all other writings" (*Living Faith* (Harper & Row, 1983), p 128).

Rather, than treating the Bible as a visible divine word Ellul insists that "The destruction of this single, visible, material representation of God ought to remind us continually that the Bible in its materiality is not the Word of God made visible through reading. God has not made his Word visible. The Bible is not a sort of visible representation of God's Word must remain a fleeting spoken Word, inscribed only in the human hear . . ." (*Humiliation*, p. 63).

Of course, as Ellul acknowledges elsewhere, God has in fact made his Word visible but he has done so uniquely in the person of Jesus Christ and it is, therefore, Christ the incarnate Word who is the key to the Scriptures.

Ellul, therefore throughout his interpretation of biblical texts works with a thoroughly theological and Christo-centric hermeneutic and a relative disregard for the tools of historical-critical study<sup>12</sup>.

Ellul's biblical interpretation of some texts relating to idols and idolatry demonstrates that although Scripture plays a central role in his theology, his theological interpretation of those texts also makes him aware of the danger that Scripture may itself become an idol, a means of escaping the spoken Word of the living God. Ellul therefore challenges us to take Scripture seriously but not ultimately seriously, for ultimate seriousness is to be paid to the Word become flesh to whom Scripture - the Word written - bears witness and it is the living Word not the dead letter that is to be our concern. As a result, Christians are called to participate in a believing and attentive listening to hear the Word of God address us in and through the words of Scripture and to be confident that that Word is one which liberates us from the powers and un.masks all our idols as simply "the works of our hands".

## If You Are the Son of God

by Andy Alexis-Baker

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connection.

<sup>12</sup> For Ellul's fullest account of hermeneutics see his "Innocent Notes on 'The Hermeneutic Question'" in Marva Dawn's translation and commentary on a number of Ellul articles, *Sources and Trajectories* (Eerdmans, 1997), pp 184-203.

*Review of Jacques Ellul, Si tu es le Fils de Dieu: Souffrances et tentations de Jesus. Paris: Centurion & Zurich: Brockhaus Verlag, 1991. 110 pp.*

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*Si tu es le Fils de Dieu: Souffrances et tentations de Jesus (If You Are the Son of God: The Sufferings and Temptations of Jesus)* is probably one of Jacques Ellul's least read works. A search through the WorldCat database indicated that only fifteen libraries worldwide own a copy. When I went to the Notre Dame library, which has a copy, I found it snug in the shelf, with crisp clear pages, as if it had never been moved since initial shelving, let alone read by a single soul. Perhaps this is partially due to the fact that this work has never been translated into English. I have taken up that task and have completed a version and hope to get it published before long. I will be using my own English translation when I quote Ellul in this review.

Having lived with this work for some time now, I am convinced that it is one of Ellul's most important works. First, this book is his most extended meditation on the life and work of Jesus Christ. Second, this particular meditation on the sufferings and temptations of Jesus provides some rather unique biblical interpretations that add a lot to our understanding. Finally, this book makes a great introduction to Ellul's thought. All of the themes found in his other works are found here: technique, arguments for a kind of biblically based anarchism, placing Jesus at the center of every thought, personalism, etc.

The book is divided into three parts: Introduction; Sufferings; Temptations. At the outset of the book, Ellul claims that Christians have not retained the "total life and teachings of Jesus, the reality: He suffered." This can be seen for example in the way we recite and write down the Creed. We say that, "He suffered under Pontius Pilate" (p. 9). But Ellul claims that this is a distortion of the Latin construction and theologically unsound. The Latin construction is: "He suffered; under Pontius Pilate he was crucified." This reading brings out the fact that Jesus was the Suffering Servant throughout his life. Our version makes suffering a momentary event for Jesus, that is salvific in and of itself.

But Ellul's purpose in this meditation is not to create a "theology of suffering." For Ellul it is not a question of us participating in Jesus' sufferings, but of Jesus participating in ours. A theology of suffering leads to a kind of "morbid orientation" in Christianity: we focus on the gore of the cross and make Jesus into an ethereal creature who could endure great suffering, suffering which in and of itself saves us.

For Ellul, salvation comes through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus in its entirety. So he directs most of his attention to the life of Jesus and the ways he suffered throughout his life. He focuses on the way Jesus suffered because of rejection, being the object of ridicule, and the ways in which he suffered through the normal pain of living, such as hunger. For Ellul it is important that Jesus experienced and lived a truly human experience.



Suffering is fundamentally changed by Jesus in two ways. First, when we suffer we can know that we are not alone in our suffering any longer. Lest we think Ellul is engaging in some sentimentality, he likens this knowledge to a friend who stays at the death bed of another and holds their hand until they pass. This is an act of profound mercy and comfort. God is that friend at our death bed.

The second way suffering is actually changed by Jesus' actual sufferings is that suffering is no longer a condemnation but a fact of material forces and absurdities. Jesus took on the real significance of suffering so that we no longer have to live in the shadow of eternal damnation. Our suffering takes on a temporal aspect, some of which we can overcome but some of which we must learn to live with and become more like Jesus.

Ellul's meditation on Jesus' temptations is just as insightful and relevant. All temptations boil down to two main categories as revealed in the Gospels: Covetousness, or greed, and lust for power. These two temptations are bound up with one another. We can only overcome them by a radical reading of the Gospel and following Jesus' way of "non-power."

For Ellul, all temptation is about humanity tempting God. We tempted Jesus precisely because he was the son of God: He had power and an ability to increase his earthly power; therefore we demanded that he use it. In doing so we tempt the God of love not to be the God of love anymore, but a God of terrible violence.

This book provides a welcome correction to many theological and popular meditations on Jesus and his suffering and temptation. Theologians are loathe to remember that Jesus refused to take power to rule over others, and that he demanded that his disciples do likewise. Ellul does not shy away from this aspect of Jesus but points out that it is central to his mission. It might be helpful to put Ellul in dialogue with a friendly reader such as John Howard Yoder who also examines the three temptations of Jesus in the desert in terms of their political and economic significance.

Yoder wrote that "all the options laid before Jesus by the tempter are ways of being king" (*The Politics of Jesus* (Eerdmans, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1994), p. 25). For Yoder, Jesus' temptation was to set up a kind of welfare kingdom, in which he would rule as a benevolent head of state. But Ellul, goes farther than Yoder does, and examines this temptation in terms of techniques of production. Since Jesus had the ability to satisfy his hunger, we therefore demand that he use his power for himself. Thus Jesus is tempted to prove his divinity in the same way we today "prove" our own divinity: through production. We think we are divine because we are able to transform raw materials to satisfy needs that are also created. "By the miracle of production humanity *proved* that it was divine!" (p. 73). So the temptation for Ellul is both Yoder's welfare king, and also a temptation to power that is godlike and therefore religious.

Likewise, Ellul goes beyond Yoder when he examines the way in which Jesus is tempted to political power. Yoder comments that the temptation to "bow" before Satan is a discernment of the idolatrous nature of state politics. Ellul makes a similar claim but in much more stark terms: "all those who have political power, even if they use it

well . . . have acquired it by demonic mediation and even if they are not conscious of it, they are worshippers of *diabolos*” (p.76).

Ellul provides helpful corrections to popular understandings of the sufferings and temptations of Jesus as well. Mel Gibson’s recent film, *The Passion*, perhaps exemplifies popular treatments of the sufferings of Jesus: a fixation on gore and a view of suffering as salvific in and of itself. Jesus is thereby reduced to an entertaining and momentary event, who is less than God but not quite human. Ellul’s entire work provides a correction because he examines Jesus entire life rather than just the passion narratives. How much did Jesus suffer when his own family misunderstood him? How much must Jesus have suffered when his own disciples repeatedly tempted him to power, misunderstood him, and finally left him alone and abandoned? Ellul examines in detail how Jesus experienced physical, moral and psychological sufferings throughout his entire life. The cross was merely the culmination of a life of suffering and temptation.

I cannot resist mentioning one point in his treatment on suffering that brought up contemporary images for me. In his reflection on the way Jesus was ridiculed and mocked, Ellul points out that the soldiers who mocked him at his arrest, put a veil (a hood) over his head and then proceeded to punch him, all the while taunting him to do a superfluous miracle...to simply tell them which one just hit him, knowing he could not see. The images of Iraqis in American-run prisons in Iraq immediately comes to my mind. “When we are tempted to make fun of our fellow people, we should always remember that Jesus was the object of mockery” (p. 55).

This is a valuable book. It deserves more attention than it has heretofore been given: this work deserves and needs an English translation. This book might introduce Ellul’s thought to a wider Christian audience, and provide a powerful tool for dialogue with others for those of us who believe Ellul’s works are still of contemporary importance.

## Ellul’s Apocalypse

by Virginia W. Landgraf

*Re-view of Jacques Ellul, Apocalypse: the Book of Revelation (Seabury Press, 1977), translated by George W. Schreiner from L’Apocalypse: architecture en mouvement (Desclee, 1975).*

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Jacques Ellul’s eschatology deserves to be better known, because it offers an alternative to some popular eschatologies which seem to negate either the truth of God’s love for humanity and creation in Jesus Christ or the reality of God’s judgment. However, the style in which Ellul’s commentary on Revelation is written may be forbidding to a newcomer. (A more prosaic exposition of some of his eschatological beliefs is avail-

able in *What I Believe*). It could be termed “prismatic,” because he tosses up multiple meanings for a given symbol depending on the angle from which it is viewed. The French subtitle, “architecture in movement,” indicates that the five sections into which he divides the book - of seven churches, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls, and seven visions of the new creation, framed by doxologies - are in dynamic relationship with each other.

Appropriately, the book is written not as a verse-by-verse commentary from beginning to end, but starting at the middle, where he thinks that the meaning of the work and person of Jesus Christ are shown “as in silhouette.” The sections on either side - of the church with its Lord, of the meaning of history as revealed only by Jesus Christ, of divine judgment (yet executed by the Son of Man!) as stripping human beings of their works, and of the new creation - are inexplicable without this core. He presumes that the author of Revelation meant to write “a theological book” which is “a Christian book,” saying that the relative absence of Jesus Christ in this section shows precisely God’s non-power in history. One may doubt that such a move makes exegetical or theological sense. Yet the vision of eschatology which follows is worth wrestling with, because it is more compelling than some others which have either popular Christian or secular currency.

*First*, Ellul’s eschatology can provide a healthy antidote to premillennialist eschatologies which emphasize the “rapture” of the church away from the earth and God’s destruction of creation. Such an eschatology seems to go against both the love of God shown in Jesus Christ and the Noachic covenant. Often these theologies are associated with a belief in Revelation as a chronological prophecy of future events. By contrast, Ellul sees Revelation as expressing a recurring dialectical movement of witness, judgment, and new creation, made possible by the atonement achieved by Jesus Christ. The catastrophes in Revelation are not primarily inflicted by God upon humanity but arise because of creation’s shocked reception of the news that God has become human and because people are so bound up with works and powers and principalities which are destroyed by God’s judgment. The church and Israel (the two witnesses) are separated from the world not to escape worldly tribulation in a physically removed heaven but to witness to God’s truth within a world which rejects them. The New Jerusalem is not a substitute for the old creation but God’s assumption of those human works which are fit to enter it (a motif which Ellul developed earlier in *The Meaning of the City*).

*Second*, Ellul’s doctrine contrasts with an eschatology of human progress, whereby human beings incrementally build up God’s kingdom on earth and derive meaning and optimism from this task. Whether in the Christian form of “postmillennialism” or as a secular doctrine of progress, this kind of belief seems to contradict the reality of radical evil. Advances in healing power may be accompanied by advances in killing power, and so forth. Ellul rejects a doctrine of progress and disconnects hope from optimism (a theme he took up in *Hope in Time of Abandonment*). He sees Revelation as “the unique example . . . of the meaning of the work of humanity and, equally, of its

nonmeaning.” There is no sure way to know which human works will go into the New Jerusalem. But that is not to say that they should not be done; he compares them to eating, which should be done, but is still “strictly relative.”

History, Ellul believes, does not reveal any meaning by itself. This revelation must be provided by Jesus Christ, who comes from outside this history to reveal the catastrophes that would have had to occur upon the world if he had not taken God’s judgment upon himself. Only because witnesses to the Word of God testify to something from beyond the play of forces in history can they introduce freedom into history. Similarly, Ellul distinguishes hope (contrary to visible evidence) from optimism about the products of human effort. (This contrast reflects his distinction between truth, communicable by the Word, and reality, manifested by visible evidence, which he treated most fully in *The Humiliation of the Word*). It is precisely because God seems to be absent in the central section of Revelation (punctuated by the seven trumpets) that Ellul can call this a section expressing hope. The “pessimistic” stance of Ellul’s sociological works, which often show vicious cycles that seem closed in terms of worldly developments (of technique, politics, religiosity, revolutions, etc.), does not contradict this hope but rather provides a context for it.

*Third*, Ellul’s theology provides relief from belief systems (whether religious or secular) that try so hard to be non-judgmental that they cannot acknowledge the existence of personal or structural sin in the world. When these kinds of doctrines predominate among Christians, they often take the form of ignoring eschatology entirely, perhaps seeing Revelation as a book whose catastrophic visions are strictly the result of historical persecutions. This kind of theology does justice neither to prophetic calls for repentance and promises of liberation throughout the Bible, nor to persons’ and systems’ real needs for repentance and redirection, nor to the impossibility of achieving the repentance needed without God’s action. Against this impasse, Ellul strictly distinguishes judgment from condemnation. Judgment is an expression of God’s love and is liberation, because human beings will be stripped from the works by which they have tried to save themselves and the powers which enslave them. The spirit of rebellion against God and trying to save oneself, the subordinate powers which it breeds (political power, sexual lust, etc.), and the historic incarnations of these powers (such as political empires) will be condemned. But all of the people and some of their works (without the people’s previous relationship of idolatry vis-a-vis their works) will be taken into the New Jerusalem. He sees mentions in the text of people left outside the new creation as referring to their *previous conditions* as idolaters, fornicators, etc., not to the people themselves. (Ellul believes in universal salvation, but he identifies this belief as a “conviction,” not a “doctrine” - meaning that his position on what the church should teach as doctrine is perhaps closer to what George Hunsinger calls “reverent agnosticism” with regard to salvation - universal salvation is possible, but the decision belongs to God).

*Fourth*, Ellul’s thought contradicts any tribalism or theology of political conquest, whereby the people on “God’s side” will win over “God’s enemies” and establish the

kingdom of God on earth politically. Such a doctrine - rarely held so simplistically by serious Christian thinkers (e.g., careful liberation theologians) as their ecclesiastical opponents would have us believe - risks denying the universality of sin, the universality of God's love, and the limits of the ability of external structures to change the heart. Not only does such a doctrine raise some of the same problems as the doctrine of progress treated above, but in Ellul's thought, *all* people are in need of judgment. *No* human beings can be presumed to be condemned. God may surprise us by taking some works which we frowned upon as good religious or political people into the New Jerusalem (which is not an excuse for license in things which do not build up - cf. Ellul's dialectic between "All things are permitted" and "Not every thing builds up" in *The Ethics of Freedom*). In fact, according to Ellul, it is as non-power that God enters history and introduces freedom into history. Political conquest can never bring freedom. Empire building, by whatever side, is not the way to defeat the "axis of evil" but feeds into it. (The absolute contrast between freedom and love, on the one hand, and power, on the other hand, does raise problems which will be addressed below.)

*Fifth*, Ellul's doctrine of judgment breaking into history contrasts with simplistic popular misunderstandings of Christian eschatology which one might label "creeping works-righteousness" even if they are not based upon external works. In these schemas, God keeps a balance and rewards people after death based on various criteria: their works, or right beliefs (faith as works), or perhaps right religious experiences (although any of these might be alternatively seen as gifts within this life from an arbitrary God who rewards some people and not others). By contrast, for Ellul, works do not save, either in this life or the next. Faith is witness to the living God and a relationship venturing forth with this God, and it is not reducible to a set of static beliefs (although, despite his contrast between belief and faith in *Living Faith*, one can analyze Ellul's beliefs about God and find that they do have cognitive content - which he seems to have admitted by writing *What I Believe*). God's decision to seem particularist in choosing Israel and the church is not a matter of saving some and not others, but of revealing God's self to some so that they can witness to others. And the new creation is not something to be hoped for only beyond death but may break into our life here and now, although it is not presumed to be a completed process in this life. Jesus Christ has already won the victory, and it is that from which we are to live; yet we are still in a world which, by visible evidence, is in bondage to the spirit of power and its consequences.

Thus a sketch of Ellul's eschatology can be drawn by means of contrast (for the full prismatic treatment, which is rewarding not only as an intellectual but also a devotional exercise, read the book). It should take its place with serious Christian alternatives to the popular eschatologies listed above. Yet its attractive features do not mean that it does not have problems. One searches in vain for a systematic resolution of the already and the not yet. Is it in the future? Ellul denies that the sequence in the book of Revelation is meant to be chronological, so the new creation does not occur at some future end time. Does it occur after death? Ellul might dismiss such a

presumption, or even the wish for such a resolution, as speculation not provided for by the biblical witness. A more problematic issue for this-worldly ethics is the absolute contrast between love and freedom (which are of God, and of witnessing to God's Word in the world) and power (which is rebellion against God and enslaves both its exercisers and their victims). As this essay is being written, physical, technical power is badly needed to restrain flood waters on the United States' southern coast. It may be true that God appears in history as non-power, but does that mean that God never wants technical power to be exercised? Is there not a third option between love which can only witness, waiting for a free response, and power which crushes - something akin to artistic creation respectful of one's materials? (The argument that human beings should have built in a way more respectful of wetlands' capacity to act as flood buffers comes to mind.) Such are the questions raised by Ellul's treatment of the Apocalypse. Nevertheless, we are all in his debt for a beautiful, provocative book.

## Is God Truly Just?

by Patrick Chastenet

*Re-view of Jacques Ellul, Ce Dieu injuste...? Theologie chretienne pour le peuple d'Israel (Paris: Arlea, 1991; Reedition Poche/Arlea, 1999)*

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"For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all." (Romans 11:32)

Why, if God determines everything, would He punish those forebears he himself created to serve as witnesses to his wrath? If God, exercising his sovereignty as he thinks best, "saves" some and "rejects" the others, how can we accept that those foreordained to be irresponsible should suffer damnation? If God is good, He can do no evil; if he allows evil to be done, he is not good.

But can we really measure out God's goodness or justice? God is "arbitrary," just as love is "arbitrary." To claim that God is "unjust" would imply that there are values over and beyond the values of he who was characterized by Kierkegaard as the "Unconditioned One," the "Wholly Other": God, in other words, is not God.

The Bible, however, makes plain that what is good is wrought by God alone —as Jacques Ellul, the nonconformist Protestant theologian, reminds us in the last book he was to publish during his lifetime. Making full use of all his finely-honed dialectical

skills, he develops a masterly analysis of three of the most neglected and misunderstood chapters 9-11 of Paul's Epistle to the Romans.

In *Ce Dieu injuste ...?* Ellul does not forget that he is also –perhaps even primarily – a historian and sociologist. His exegesis, in sum, eschews the purely intellectual exercise. What Ellul sketches out here amounts, instead, to a Christian theology for the people of Israel, in which he confronts the spiritual roots of anti-Semitism: a highly useful project indeed when we realize that certain sectors of the Catholic Church have still not relinquished their old demons.

What has become of the Jewish people? Has it been cast aside ever since the coming of the Messiah? No! Far from being deicidal, the people of Israel serves as the bearer of God in Jesus Christ. The chosen people remains the “chosen” people. This, however, does not mean “saved,” but specially “set apart to bear witness,” to confirm that the God of the Bible is One, that he is the Lord of the Ages, and that his love is the only truth. Israel's vocation, therefore, is to live out, in accordance with the Law, a historical adventure whose goal is the desire to change the world.

There have, however, been three errors: (1) The Jews have mistakenly considered that the Torah embodies God's will and justice, though God himself refuses to be imprisoned within any text. His justice is not some perfect recompense for “pious deeds,” nor can his will ever be fully known. (2) Though entrusted with proclaiming that God's liberation includes everyone, they forgot just how universal this message was. (3) The Jews reserved the Revelation, Covenant and Election for themselves alone.

Hence the “temporary, partial” rejection of Israel which, found wanting in the divine plan to broadcast God's will to set all people free, was replaced by Jesus Christ, the ultimate “remnant of Israel.” Whereas the Torah itself is set aside for the Jewish people, Jesus Christ, the Torah's fulfillment, is a gift offered to all people. However, even if it still refuses to consider the Lord as the “Eternal One,” Israel–chosen by God for its weaknesses and not its virtues–is not guilty, according to Ellul.

It was, indeed, the “fall” of the Jews which was to bring about the salvation of pagans. “There, where sin abounded, grace abounded even more.” Isaac and Ishmael, Moses and Pharaoh, the “Yes” and the “No”: each complements the other. Israel is always both simultaneously chosen and rejected: the “positivity of negativity,” as it were, inasmuch as such disobedience serves God's ultimate design. If most Jews have not recognized the Messiah in Christ, it is so that all shall know divine grace and election.

The onus now is on the church to stir up Israel's jealousy by proclaiming an ethic of human liberation. But, as Ellul has previously demonstrated, as long as Christians continue preaching morality, dogmatics, constraint and austerity, instead of salvation, joy, freedom and love, the Jews can legitimately refuse to recognize in Jesus the Son of God.

The Holocaust must force us to undertake a radical rethinking of the whole of Christian theology, condemned to remain a very rickety construct if Israel is left out. Ellul goes on to conclude by establishing a link between Judaism and the end of time:

the Jewish people is, “willingly or unwillingly, the wedge lodged within humanity’s heart of oak, and it will stay right there until that selfsame heart of oak has been changed into a heart of flesh.”

## Dieu et-il injuste?

by Patrick Chastenet

*Jacques Ellul, Ce Dieu injuste...? Theologie chretienne pour le peuple d’Israel (Paris, Arlea: 1991; Reedition Poche/Arlea, 1999).*

« Car Dieu a enferme tous les hommes dans i’infideiite afin de faire misericorde a tous » (Rom. XI, 32).

Si Dieu decide de tout, pourquoi punirait-Il ceux qu’Il a crees d’avance pour temoigner de sa coiere? Si Dieu - absolument libre dans sa souverainete - ”sauve” les uns et ”rejette” ies autres, comment accepter que de teis irresponsabies soient damnes? Si Dieu est Bon Il ne peut faire ie Mai, s’Il iaisse faire ie Mai c’est qu’Il n’est pas Bon.

Mais pouvons-nous juger de ia bonte ou de ia justice de Dieu? Dieu est ”arbitraire” exactement comme i’amour est arbitraire... Pretendre que Dieu est ”injuste” signifierait qu’ii existe des vaieurs au-dessus de ceii qui Kierkegaard nomme precisement *l’Inconditionne*; ce qui reviendrait a dire que Dieu n’est pas Dieu !

La Bibie nous montre que ie Bien c’est uniquement ce que Dieu fait, rappeeie Jacques Eiiui qui tente de sortir de cette serie de contradictions iogiques par une pensee diaiectique deja soiidentement eprouvee (Cf. notamment *La raison d’etre. Meditation sur l’Ecclesiaste*, Paris, Seuii, 1987, reedition Seuii, 1995). Ce theiogien protestant non conformiste a consacre ie dernier iivre publiie de son vivant a i’anaiyse des trois chapitres (IX, X, XI) de i’Eptre de saint Paui aux Romains ies plus ignores ou ies plus mai compris.

Eiiui dans ce texte n’oubie pas qu’ii est aussi -et peut-etre avant tout- historien et socioiogue. Son exegese a donc fort peu a voir avec un simple exercice inteiiectuei. Il s’agit ni plus ni moins dans ce texte d’esquisser une theologie chretienne pour ie peuple d’Israei et de combattre ies racines spiritueiies de i’antisemitisme. Projet particuliere-ment utiie iorsque i’on sait que certains secteurs de i’Egiise cathoiique n’ont toujours pas renonce a ieurs vieux demons.

Que devient donc ie peuple juif depuis i’avenement du Messie? Est-ii rejete? Loin d’etre decide, Israei est ie peuple porteur de Dieu en Jesus-Christ. Le peuple eiu reste ie peuple ”eiu”. Ce qui ne veut pas dire ”sauve” mais « mis a part pour temoigner ». Sa mission est d’attester, que ie Dieu bibiique est unique, que ce Dieu est maitre de i’Histoire et que son Amour constitue ia seule verite. Ainsi ia vocation d’Israei est de vivre seion ia Loi une aventure historique caracterisee par ie desir de changer ie monde.

Mais trois erreurs ont ete commises: 1) ies juifs ont confondu ia Torah avec ia justice et ia voiente de Dieu, or Dieu ne se iaisse pas enfermer dans un texte. Sa Justice n’est



pas l'exacte retribution des "oeuvres" et Sa Voionte est impossible a connaitre dans son entier 2) charges de la proclamation du Dieu liberateur pour tous, ils ont oublie l'universaiite de leur message 3) les juifs se sont appropries la Revelation, l'Aliance et l'Election.

D'ou le rejet « temporaire et partiel » d'Israei qui a de^u le projet divin de transmettre Sa voionte liberatrice a tous, et son remplacement par Jesus-Christ: l'ultime reste d'Israei. Aiors que la Torah est reservee au seul peuple juif, Jesus-Christ est un don offert a tous les hommes, autrement dit la Torah accomplie. Mais ce la les juifs refusent toujours de considerer le Seigneur comme l'"Eternel". Choisi par Dieu pour ses faiblesses et non pour ses vertus, Israei n'est pas coupable selon Eiiui.

La "chute" des juifs a en effet permis le "sauve" des païens. « La ou le peche a abonde, la grace a surabonde. » Isaac et Ismaei, Moise et Pharaon, le "oui" et le "non", vont de pair. Israei est toujours et en meme temps le peuple élu et rejete. On peut aiors parler de "positivite de la negativite" dans la mesure ou cette desobeissance meme sert le dessein ultime. Si la majorite des juifs n'a pas reconnu le Messie en Christ, c'est pour permettre a tous les hommes de connaitre la grace et l'election.

Il revient donc a l'Eglise, aujourd'hui, de susciter la jalousie d'Israei par une ethique d'homme libere. Or, comme l'avait deja montre (Eiiui *La subversion du christianisme*, Paris, Seuil, 1984 ; reedition Paris, La Table Ronde/ La petite vermillion, 2001), tant que les chretiens precheront une morale, une dogmatique, une contrainte, une austerite en lieu et place du sauve, de la joie, de la liberte et de l'amour, les juifs pourront legitiment refuser de reconnaitre les Fils de Dieu en Jesus.

La Shoa doit nous conduire a penser autrement toute la theologie chretienne, theologie a jamais bancaire sans Israei. Et l'auteur de conclure en etablissant un lien entre le judaisme et la fin de l'Histoire: qu'il le veuille ou non, le peuple juif « est le coin enfonce dans le coeur de chene du monde et il y restera jusqu'a ce que le coeur de chene soit change en coeur de chair ».

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## **Ellul's God's Politics**

by Chris Friesen

*Re-View of Jacques Ellul, The Politics of God and the Politics of Man (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), translated by G. W. Bromiley from Politique de Dieu, politiques de l'homme (Paris: Nouvelle Alliance, 1966).*

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Once a person has tasted some of Jacques Ellul's biblical interpretation, he or she looks to another of his studies with the expectation, Okay, he's going to crack this text open for me. He's going to think through it as far as anyone can and press beautiful new meanings out of it, some of which will become lodged in my own imagination as the actual Word of God contained in this or that biblical passage. Yes, I'm going to have to read and re-read to keep pace with the surge of his rhetoric, and I'm going to raise an eyebrow here and there, sometimes even become downright annoyed, but in the end he's going to win me over to many of his interpretations because of the vibrant God-and neighbor-loving place at which they arrive.

In all these respects, *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man* does not disappoint. It is in fact a classic example of Ellulian hermeneutics. The same familiar features are here: the non-negotiable (though not un-nuanced) high view of the text's origin and authority, the trans-canonical reasoning, the robust Christocentrism, the constant thrust of existential application. Jacques Ellul takes the Bible as a richly-intertwined, self-illuminating unity of divine revelation intended to speak concrete direction to the desires, decisions, and actions of individuals and communities today the same as ever; with Jesus Christ, and God's saving work in Jesus Christ, as primary interpretive key.

Ellul's essential method of study in this volume, an idiosyncratic commentary/meditation on the Old Testament book of Second Kings, is outlined in an early footnote: "We shall adopt the simple attitude of the believer with his Bible who through the text that he reads is ultimately trying to discover what is the Word of God, and what is the final meaning of his life in the presence of this text" (p.12). Readers are advised to listen for some polemical tone in and around that statement. Ellul had little patience for either the methodological dogmas of historical and form criticism or the orthodoxy of skepticism embodied in Rudolf Bultmann's program of demythologization. Thus, although he gives the nod here and there to historical approaches and has clearly enriched his own store of knowledge by them, Ellul in the main handily sets aside a scientific orientation as he does his own critically incorrect work of extemporizing (so it seems) on the narrative as if his life, and ours, depended on it.

The particular aspect of life's meaning that Ellul as believer constantly chews on is the possibility for authentic action in this world on the part of both individual Christians and the gathered church. What is to be done? How is it to be done, and why? What can it accomplish? What is the world's typical mode of action, especially in its politics? What is God's? If God in Christ has already done everything, what is left to do? What is life for, anyway? These are the questions that drive Ellul's "simple" turning to the text of Second Kings in *The Politics of God/Man*. (Incidentally, for a consideration of similar issues from a secular, sociological perspective, an inquirer

should turn to this book's antecedent companion volume, *The Political Illusion* [Knopf, 1967]).

The introduction of *Politics* identifies the primary revelatory significance of Second Kings as twofold. Firstly, as "the most political of all the books of the Bible," Second Kings specially demonstrates the interventions of God in, and the judgment of God upon, human politics (defined by Ellul as, properly, "the discharge of a directive function in a party or state organism"). Secondly, Second Kings displays a live-action, historical elaboration of the old problem of human freedom within and over against divine sovereignty. The main body of Ellul's work investigates these two elements, politics and freedom, in a selective study of major personalities in Second Kings, which, for its part, presents a theo-historical narrative of Israel and Judah's international relations from the death of Ahab to the Exile, in counterpoint with the activity of the prophets Elijah and Elisha.

Ellul reflects deeply upon the careers of Naaman, leprous general of Aram; Joram, abdicating and faithless king in besieged Samaria; Hazael, scourge of Israel; Jehu, genocidal "religious cleanser"; Ahaz, pragmatic political deal-maker; Rabshakeh, Assyrian propagandist; and finally Hezekiah, paragon of prayerful humility. Interspersed throughout the virtuosic demonstration of paradigm-oriented hermeneutics (type three of ethicist Richard Hays' four modes of appeal to Scripture; cf. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* [HarperCollins, 1996]) are reflections on the crucial role of the prophet within and beside the maelstrom of political events, as well as dense excurses on themes such as the ultimate salvation of those undergoing judgment in earthly life ("They are put outside God's work but not his love" [p. 54]), the problem of Christian efficacy ("We have simply to be... a question put within the world and to the world" [p. 141]), and the role of the supernatural in history ("All other miracles receive their significance from this. that God enters into the life of man even to the point of this death" [p. 186]). The book concludes with a brief "Meditation on Inutility" that flirts with the pessimism of which Ellul is prone to be accused but ultimately issues in an encouraging affirmation of the true character of Christian freedom.

Of particular interest in the series of personality studies is the chapter on Jehu, both for its occasional hermeneutical fragility (e.g. the attribution of Jehu's whole murderous career to the supposed unauthorized modification of Elisha's message by an intermediary) and for its poignant relevance to our own time. "[Jehu] is a man of God, but he uses all the methods of the devil" (p. 99), judges Ellul. "He wants to do what God has revealed but he confuses what God has shown will come to pass with what God really loves" (p. 115). Indeed, we meet in Jehu the prototype of religious voluntarism who substitutes his own efficient means for God's, who "uses prophecy in the interest of politics while pretending to use politics in the service of prophecy."

Notwithstanding Ellul's convincing reading of the man, however, Jehu's adventure poses a significant interpretive challenge for Ellul because of his equally strong convictions about both biblical authority and violence. Ultimately, his attempt to insulate Elisha and God from specific responsibility for Jehu's purges retires to a daring theod-

icy, in what is one of the most memorable passages in the book: “When Jehu fulfilled the prophecy, it was on God himself that his violence fell. It was God whom he massacred in the priests of Baal, none of whom was a stranger or unimportant to God, since the Father had numbered all the hairs of their heads too. All the violence of Jehu is assumed by Jesus Christ... It is in this way and in these conditions that Jehu does the will of God. In his zeal for God, it is God himself that he strikes” (p. 110).

How does Ellul resolve the focal issue of his study, that is, the question about the interaction of human and divine freedom? Does the God of Second Kings boss people and history around? In paraphrase, the richly-argued sequence of positive and negative character paradigms comes together to communicate the following: God does indeed act (God’s “politics”!) within human history, but not in a coercive manner and rarely even in an obviously supernatural manner. Rather, God relies on a whole nexus of real human decisions taken in the presence of his sometimes ambivalent and always contestable word (which, for its part, can be transmitted by the humblest of folks). Many human acts done according to purely human calculations (e.g. the reconnaissance of the Syrian camp by the four lepers) accomplish “just what God had decided and was expecting,” while many others, particularly those which aim for assured results and appear most successful (e.g. Ahaz’ adoption of an Assyrian altar) accomplish nothing at all and are swallowed up in the crushing fatality of history. Nevertheless, “in this medley, this swarm, this chaos, this proliferating incoherence of man, there is a choice that is God’s choice” (p. 70); and so, like Elisha and Naaman and Hezekiah, we must make it, accepting the humble means of the kingdom and leaving the results to the Holy Spirit.

Particularly for the Christian this choice has become authentically possible. For through the once-for-all-time, redounding Event of the cross, Jesus Christ has shattered fatality and set in motion the power and possibility of true freedom within the course of history. A preeminent sign of its appropriation, surprisingly enough, will be the apparent uselessness of actions subsequently undertaken. Ellul avers, “To be controlled by utility and the pursuit of efficacy is to be subject to the strictest determination of the actual world” (197). By contrast, “To do a gratuitous, ineffective, and useless act is the first sign of our freedom and perhaps the last” (p. 198). Thus, in the teeth of a world that values only the measurable accomplishment, Christians perform their childlike acts of prayer and witness with the joy of unconcerned, freely chosen obedience, living out a love that does not seek “results.” Life exists to provide scope for this freedom in love.

To whom would I recommend this book? I should confess that, in terms of my own ongoing sojourn as a believer trying to discover the final meaning of his life in the presence of the Bible, it was an interesting time to read both Second Kings and Ellul’s meditation on it. I found myself continually distracted by critical concerns in my preliminary study of the Old Testament chapters: Who wrote these things down? When and why? How did they come to know or conceive of the events and explanations they related? Underneath my fitful deconstructive speculation ran the unspoken question,

What can be trusted in all this? What is really true here? I realize these are the typical and chronic symptoms of that modern affliction, “looking at the beam” (cf. C. S. Lewis’s “Meditation in a Toolshed”), but it seems to happen all by itself. Nevertheless, forthwith Ellul comes along and says, by his own example, Look *along* the beam. The story itself can be trusted. The story is true. As a heuristic discipline, give the narrative the benefit of the doubt, taking it on its own terms. In its movement “we are in the presence of life itself at its most profound and most significant. We must not let it slip away from us” (p. 16). In this way Ellul refocuses one’s literary attention to a depth of field closer to the surface of the text, making the narrative itself sharp for real-time signification.

That being said, I do have a persevering critical question. That is, If God really deals with human beings in the way Ellul describes (and I believe that God does), then did not the same flexibility, the same tolerance for error, the same non-coerciveness, the same incomprehensibly humble willingness to adapt to human choice and preference and to assume human attempt and aspiration, obtain for those human beings who spoke and inscribed the words of human language which have become our Scripture? Saying so would not be to imply that those words can’t limn our faith and practice reliably, can’t witness to capital-T truth and capital-D doctrine; but it would be to imply that the absolute non-negotiable of Revelation which often gives Ellul’s interpretive debate a certain punch might need to be held a little more loosely. Is there authentic Christian faith that takes the Bible less as an unbreakable rock and more as a kind of river or wind or vegetable garden? What does such faith look like in practice? I’m not exactly sure, but I realize that Jacques Ellul acts as a kind of helpful tether on my leg as I wander out and back trying to find examples.

I need to tie up my earlier question: Who should read *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*? Remember, one doesn’t pick up one of Ellul’s biblical studies for a careful reconstruction of historical and redactive contexts or a catalogue of alternative critical perspectives autographed with his own judicious vote; one picks it up to see just what variety of narrative details will get caught in his widely-flung, imaginative hermeneutical net and how he will gut, fillet, and fry them up in a vigorous flurry of argument that never fears to imply, “Thus saith the Lord.” Therefore to “Who should read?” I would answer, in partial echo of Ellul himself, both Evangelical deists who fancy themselves saving souls from eternal hell while the Father files his nails in the study, and all manner of other good-hearted people strung out on too much responsibility for establishing the shalom of the kingdom. I would also answer, Bible-olatrous theocrats pulling strings to get the right flags saluted in the public squares of villages local and global. And I would especially suggest, people like me, who may experience Holy Scripture’s Word-of-God-ness as a variable phenomenon and who are always deeply grateful when a flaming mind like Jacques Ellul’s takes the text and reveals revelation in it once again.

## Judging Ellul's Jonah by Victor Shepherd

*Re-view of Jacques Ellul, The Judgment of Jonah (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), translated by G. W. Bromiley from Le Livre de Jonas (Paris: Cahiers biblique de Foi et Vie, 1952).*

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Repeatedly Jacques Ellul's *Judgment of Jonah* reflects his characteristic love/grief relationship with the church, the church's lack of discernment, and an ecclesiastical agenda that finds the church somnolent, feckless and desultory. As sad as he is scathing, Ellul notes, "A remarkable thing about even the active Christian is that he (*sic*) never has much more than a vague idea about reality. He is lost in the slumber of his activities, his good works, his chorales, his theology, his evangelizing, his communities. He always skirts reality. . . .It is non-Christians who have to waken him out of his sleep to share actively in the common lot" (p.31).

More foundationally, *Judgment* exudes Ellul's characteristic conviction concerning the pre-eminence of Jesus Christ. While the book of Jonah is deemed "prophetic" among Jewish and Christian thinkers, Ellul understands prophecy strictly as an Israelite pronouncement fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

As readers of Ellul know from his other books (e.g., *Apocalypse* and *The Political Illusion*, commentaries on the books of Revelation and 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings respectively), Ellul has little confidence in the expositions of the "historical-critical" guild of exegetes insofar as their preoccupation with speculative minutiae blinds them to the substance of the text; namely, the word that God may wish to speak to us through that text. . Unlike many in the the professional exegetical guild, Ellul sees Jesus Christ present in the Older Testament. Ellul regards the guild's preoccupation with the history of the formation and transmission of the text as a nefarious work wherein the guild "dissects Scripture to set it against Scripture".(p.74) Exegetes often deploy their "expertise" just as the Bible describes the tempter in both the Garden of Eden and the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness—undermining its status as God's word. In light of this it's no surprise that only three-quarters' way through *Judgment* Ellul left-handedly admits that the book of Jonah was "rightly composed to affirm the universalism of salvation" (p.77), when exegetes customarily insist that the sole purpose of the book of Jonah was to protest the shrivelling of post-exilic Israel's concern, even to protest the apparent narrowness, exclusiveness and concern for self-preservation found in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

If what is crucial to most is peripheral to Ellul, then what is the epicentre of the book of Jonah? It is certainly not a compendium of moral truths, let alone a test of credulity (which test Christian apologetics paradoxically attempts to eliminate by finding rational explanations for the miracle of the great fish). Neither is the book an extended allegory; nor even an instance of the prophetic literature found in Scripture

since the book shares few of the concerns of the prophetic books (e.g., no prophetic address is spoken to Israel) while features of the book aren't found in prophetic literature (e.g., the books named after Jeremiah and Amos don't feature biographical portrayals). The core of the book lies, rather, in its depiction of Jonah himself as a figure, a type, of Christ. Having argued for this position, Ellul brooks no disagreement: "If one rejects this sense, there is no other." (p.17)

As *Judgment* unfolds it reflects the major themes of Ellul's social and theological thought as well as aspects of his own spiritual development. With respect to the latter, Ellul's understanding of Jonah's vocation mirrors his own self-effacing, autobiographical statements in *In Season, Out of Season* and *What I Believe*: "Everything begins the moment God decides to choose... We can begin to apprehend only when a relation is set up between God and us, when he reveals his decision concerning us" (p21).

As for characteristic aspects of Ellul's thinking, *Judgment* re-states and develops them on every page. For instance, those whom God summons are freed from the world's clutches and conformities in order to be free to address and spend themselves for a world that no longer "hooks" them even as the same world deems them "useless" to it. In this regard Ellul writes of Jonah, "The matter is so important that everything which previously shaped the life of this man humanly and sociologically fades from the scene..Anything that might impel him to obey according to the world has lost its value and weight for him" (p..21). In other words, any Christian's commission at the hand of their crucified Lord is necessary *and sufficient* explanation for taking up one's work and witness.

While vocation is sufficient explanation for taking up their appointed work, Christians cannot pretend their summons may be ignored or laid aside, for in their particular vocations *all* Christians have been appointed to "watch" in the sense of Ezekiel 33. Disregarding one's vocation is dereliction, and all the more damnable in that the destiny of the world hangs on any one Christian's honouring her summons: "Christians have to realize that they hold in their hands the fate of their companions in adventure" (p.35).

Readers of Ellul have long been startled at, persuaded of, and helped by his exploration of the "abyss," the virulent, insatiable power of evil to beguile, seduce, and always and everywhere destroy. (See *Money and Power* and *Propaganda*). Ellul's depiction of evil in terms of death-as-power - rather than in terms of "a kind of lottery...turning up as heart failure" (p.51) - finds kindred understanding and exposition in the work of William Stringfellow and Daniel Berrigan.) The "great fish" *sent* to swallow Jonah (God uses evil insofar as he is determined to punish) is a manifestation of such power.

While in the "belly of the great fish" Jonah is subject to God's judgment upon his abdication as he is confronted defencelessly with the undisguised horror of the abyss. Awakened now to his culpable folly, Jonah understands that even as he is exposed to "absolute hell"(p.45) he hasn't been abandoned to it. At no point has he ceased being the beneficiary of God's grace. *Now* Jonah exclaims, "Thou hast delivered me" - i.e., *before* the "great fish" has vomited him to safety. Deliverance for all of us, Ellul herein announces characteristically, occurs when we grasp God's presence and purpose for us

(and through us for others) in the midst of the isolation that our vocation, compounded by our equivocating, has brought upon us. Percipiently [new word?] Ellul adds, “[T]he abyss is the crisis of life at any moment.”(p.52)

Typically Ellul points out ersatz means of resolving the crisis: we look to “technical instruments, the state, society, money, and science. idols, magic, philosophy, spiritualism..As long as there is a glimmer of confidence in these means man prefers to stake his life on them rather than handing it over to God.”(p.57) While these instruments can give us much, they can’t give us the one thing we need in the face of the all-consuming abyss: mercy. No relation of love exists between these instruments and us; they merely possess us. The person who “loves” money, for instance, is merely owned. The crisis is resolved incipiently when we “beg in any empty world for the mercy which cannot come to [us] from the world.”(p.58) The crisis is resolved definitively as we hear and heed the summons to discipleship and thereafter obey the one who can legitimately (and beneficently) claim us inasmuch as he has betaken himself to the abyss with us.

Here Ellul’s Christological reading of the book of Jonah surfaces unambiguously: “The real question is not that of the fish which swallowed Jonah; it is that of the hell where I am going and already am. The real question is not that of the strange obedience of the fish to God’s command; it is that of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and my resurrection.”(p.63)

Just because the book of Jonah is a prolepsis of Jesus Christ, the book is full of hope. To be sure, signs of grace come and go in all of us - even as grace never disappears. (Recall the gourd given to provide shade for Jonah, even as the gourd soon withered.) While God’s people frequently and foolishly clutch at the sign instead of trusting the grace therein signified, the day has been appointed when the sign is superfluous as faith gives way to sight and hope to its fulfilment. At this point the “miracles” that were signs of grace for us will be gathered up in “the sole miracle, Jesus Christ living eternally for us”.(p.67)

The note of hope eschatologically permeating the book of Jonah (and Ellul’s exposition of it) recalls the conclusion to *The Meaning of the City*. There Ellul invites the reader to share his vivid “experience” of finding himself amidst a wretched urban slum in France yet “seeing” *the* city, the New Jerusalem. While Ellul’s “exegesis” of the book of Jonah will be regarded as idiosyncratic in several places, its strength is its consistent orientation to the One who remains the “open secret” of the world and of that community bound to the world. For decades Ellul’s own life illustrated a statement he made in *Judgment* concerning the prophet Jonah: “Everything circles around the man who has been chosen. A tempest is unleashed”(p.25). Ellul’s writings indicate *passim* that as much characterizes all who discern their vocation and pledge themselves to it without qualification, reservation or hesitation.



## In Review: Tresmontant, Vahanian, Mailot, & Chouraqui

Claude Tresmontant, *The Hebrew Christ: Language in the Age of the Gospels* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1989); Trans. By Kenneth D. Whitehead from *Le Christ Hebreu: La*

*Langue et l'Age de Evangiles* (Paris: O.E.I.L., 1983).

Reviewed by John L. Gwin

John Gwin lives in Beloit, Wisconsin, where he does some building security and maintenance work while pursuing his interests in language and culture.

By the fall of 1990 I had read and admired Jacques Ellul for perhaps 20 years and had occasionally corresponded, asking questions about his works and related topics. He graciously responded, often taking the time to answer my questions. With the buildup for the Gulf War nearing completion, and concerned that it might lead to a world war, I decided to take a week off work, and bought a cheap, night flight, round trip ticket to Paris.

An interesting side note to this, which reflects poorly on me, but favorably on JE, is that after I bought my ticket, I wrote to him of my plans and asked if I might visit him. He responded by return mail, "No, do not come. My wife is ill, I am busy with preparation for a conference that weekend, and with the hierarchy of the protestant denomination that has closed our little congregation. Can you please rearrange your visit for another date." My ticket, being non refundable, I quickly wrote him back asking if I might attend the conference, but for the whole month preceding my scheduled departure. I heard nothing. I chose to take the flight anyway, and arrived at about 8AM on a Thursday in Paris. I made my way to the little Librairie Protestante which was going out of business, and they so kindly, without charge, made several long distance calls. One was to Prof. Ellul to arrange for me to attend the conference on "Man and the Sacred" at the Andre Malraux Center in Bordeaux. The second call was to Dr. Brenot, chairman of the conference. "We have around 1000 signed up for the 800 openings. What's one more?" was his generous verdict.

At the conference I met a number of very kind and gracious people. At the book table on Sunday, the last day of the conference, Prof. Ellul invited me to meet with him the following day. During our 2-hour visit at his home, professor Ellul spoke with me at length. He introduced me to his wife, who had recently had a stroke. He also gave me copies in French of two books of his, *L'impossible priere*, *La genese aujourd'hui*, and a copy of his friend Bernard Charbonneau's book, *Je fus, essai sur la liberte*, for which he had arranged the printing. Professor Ellul also recommended that I get a copy of a new book by Claude Tresmontant, entitled *Le Christ hebreu*. While in Bordeaux, I picked one up at the Librairie Mollat. I worked through it in the next few months, and located by library loan a copy of Tresmontant's retroversion and notes of *L'Evangile de Jean*. I was delighted by what I found.

Contrary to that which is taught in Sunday School, and in New Testament classes in college and seminary, Tresmontant presents an alternative hypothesis as to the origins of the gospels that makes such perfect sense that I wonder why I had never heard it before.

We know that those who first heard Jesus of Nazareth included at least a few scribes, and Pharisees. Why have we assumed that no one took notes? According to the teachings of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century form critical school in Germany, a long oral tradition of 40 or 50 years preceded the step of setting pen to papyrus or parchment to record the memorable words of this most unusual rabbi. Does it not tax the imagination to think of the People of the Book waiting years before actually writing something down! The prevalence of anti-Semitism in Europe of that time provides a perhaps, more or less, unconscious motive for impugning the accuracy of the writing of the gospels and epistles, and the belief in a long oral tradition removing the written record farther from its Source could serve this end.

Tresmontant presents evidence for the hypothesis that the gospels were written first, and early, in Hebrew and almost simultaneously, and literally, into Greek. This was done, not esthetically to please the Greek ear, but literally, to accurately convey the original meaning to the Diaspora readers no longer fluent in Hebrew.

Jean Psichari, Professor of Greek in the Ecole des Langues Orientales Vivantes, himself of Greek origin, described the literal Greek rendering of the Septuagint as very different from the normal Greek of that time. In his *Essai sur le Grec de la Septuagint* he writes, "It is not just the syntax, it is not only the word order that follows Hebrew use. The style itself is perpetually contaminated. It is not Greek."

Tresmontant has proposed that the translators of the Gospels into Greek of the First Century AD used essentially the same Hebrew/Greek lexicon used by the translators of the Hebrew Scriptures into the Greek of the Septuagint. He proposes that the Gospels were derived from notes of Jesus' talks taken during or shortly after they were spoken, and later assembled into collections by various members of His audience, and almost immediately translated into Greek for the Diaspora.

Tresmontant, in four separate volumes translates in reverse the Greek of each of the gospels into Hebrew using the corresponding Hebrew words from which the Greek of the Septuagint was translated and then into French using the insights and meanings gleaned in the process. The wealth of meaning restored to, and depth of insight into long familiar as well as difficult passages; the great amount of information restored to the sacred text, and even the accuracy of words used to translate are all part of what is gained in this process

Tresmontant compares the effect of this uncovering of the Hebrew meaning to uncovering a work of art. "If you put the Venus de Milo beneath a covering, it is difficult to see her form. Passing from the modern (French or English) translations to the originals, that is of the Greek Gospels is a first uncovering. When one uncovers the Hebrew that one finds beneath the Greek translation, one has made a second discovery. The

equivalent of the living woman who sat as model for the Venus de Milo" (*Le Christ hebreu*, p. 36).

Several years ago, I found that *Le Christ Hebreu* had been published in English in 1989, the year before I visited Prof. Ellul, as *The Hebrew Christ* (trans. Kenneth D. Whitehead; Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press).

Tresmontant has done a remarkable work of service both to the world of biblical scholarship and to all those interested in the content of the gospels and related writings. His *Evangile de Matthieu: Traduction et Notes*, is also available in English as *The Gospel of Matthew, Translation and Notes* (Front Royal, VA: Christendom Press, 1986). A volume containing his French versions of all four gospels was published by F.X. De Guibert/ O.E.I.L. but is now out of print,

In at least two of Tresmontant's other major works, *Essai sur la pensee hebraique*, and *L 'histoire de l'universe et le sens de la creation*, he compares and contrasts Greek and Hebrew philosophy, and posits that the predominant and continuing dualism of Western (Greek) thought includes a total misunderstanding of the Hebrew ideas of creation, incarnation, freedom, etc. The former philosophy, fostering an ongoing devaluation of the physical world seen as illusory, evil, "descended" from and a shadow of the "Ideal" and resulting in a more or less low-level depression, frustration, and lack of hope for anything new and "creative" in the future. The latter, Hebrew revelation, with its understanding of all things as "created" and declared to be "good" by a transcendent Creator, gives life an ongoing "real" meaning and content and hope of a future completely new and unexpected.

In *The Hebrew Christ*, Tresmontant mentions several other authors, including John A. T. Robinson, whose *Redating the New Testament* is "absolutely decisive" in its argument for the earlier dating of the New Testament texts, and Fr. Jean Carmignac, whose *Naissance des evangiles* (Paris: O.E.I.L., 1984; ET: *Birth of the Synoptics*, Franciscan Herald Press, 1987) presents arguments also supporting the Hebrew origins of the NT.

While translating the Dead Sea Scrolls, Jean Carmignac frequently noticed connections with the New Testament. Upon completion of the translation he had so many notes of correlations that he thought of making a commentary on the NT in light of the Dead Sea documents. Beginning with the Gospel of Mark, and in order to more easily compare the Greek Gospels to the Qumran Hebrew, he began on his own to re-translate Mark into Qumran Hebrew. He became convinced of Mark's derivation from a Hebrew original. Not knowing Hebrew well enough to be incapable of making errors, and so that competent scholars would not dismiss his effort, he had to assure himself that no errors of Hebrew usage got by him. To do this he decided to compare his work of retroversion with many other translations of the NT into Hebrew, beginning with Delitsch's of 1877. Carmignac also began editing and publishing a multi-volume series of Hebrew translations of the New Testament. He died in October of 1987 hoping that this work would be taken up by others.

All this seems to be an example of certain Catholic theologians paying close attention to the Scriptures in ways that perhaps many Protestant theologians, taking

these Scriptures for granted, had not considered. This is reminiscent of the favorable reception by many Roman Catholic theologians of the work of Karl Barth, especially his enormous *Church Dogmatics*. And in a similar vein, I am grateful for Karl Barth's reminder in his *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, that no age is ever "dead." "There is no past in the Church, so there is no past in theology. 'In him they all live. '... The theology of any period must be strong and free enough to give a calm, attentive and open hearing not only to the voices of the Church Fathers, not only to favorite voices, not only to the voices of the classical past, but to all the voices of the past. God is the Lord of the Church. He is also the Lord of theology. We cannot anticipate which of your fellow-workers from the past are welcome in our own work and which are not. It may always be that we have especial need of quite unsuspected (and among these, of quite unwelcome) voices in one sense or another."

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## **Gabriel Vahanian, *Anonymous God***

(Aurora, Colorado: The Davies Group, 2001)

Reviewed by Darrell J. Fasching

Professor of Religious Studies, University of South Florida, Tampa; founding editor of *The Ellul Forum*.

From his earliest best seller at the beginning of the 1960s, *The Death of God*, through *God and Utopia* (1977) to his most recent *Anonymous God* (2001), to name three of his many books over the last forty years, Gabriel Vahanian's message has become consistently clearer, more forceful and more poetic. In the first we learned of our "cultural incapacity for God" in a scientific and technological civilization. In the second we learned that biblical faith is capable of migrating from one cultural world to another in its journey toward a new heaven and a new earth. This journey of faith can carry us beyond the death of God through its utopian capacity to transform human self-understanding, whether that understanding is in terms of nature (ancient & medieval), history (modern) or technology (postmodern).

Now in *Anonymous God* (translated by Noelle Vahanian), Gabriel Vahanian teaches us how to be poets, speaking a new language of faith, a technological utopianism. *Anonymous God* is both a translation and revision of his 1989 book *Dieu anonyme, ou la peur des mots* (Desclee de Brouwer, Paris 1989). It is a fearless poetic exploration of the utopianism of our humanity in trinitarian terms, unfolding in four densely packed stanzas (or chapters) over one hundred and fifty-five pages. Chapter One explores the iconoclasm of language in relation to technology and the utopianism of faith. Chapters Two, Three and Four show how this iconoclasm of the word –in which we live, move and have our becoming –is one yet three as we move from “Language and Utopia: God” to “Salvation and Utopia: The Christ” to “Utopianism of the Body and the Social Order: the Spirit.”

”The Bible,” says Vahanian, “is not a book to be read but to read through” like a pair of glasses (xv). The task is not to accommodate our selves to some foreign and long gone cosmology that asks us to choose the past over the future but to see in our present world in a new way, in an iconoclastic way that will allow us to invent our humanity anew. Whether we are speaking of the ancient, medieval, modern or post-modern worlds - the world is always in danger of becoming our fate—a prison from which we can escape only by changing worlds. The task today is to do for our technological civilization what those of the first century’s eschatologically oriented biblical communities did for theirs, open one’s world to an “other” world, a new world rather than “another” world. In any age, we can only be human, Vahanian seems to say, when we have the imagination, courage, ingenuity and grace to invent ourselves anew and so end up changing the world to facilitate our humanity rather than giving up and seeking to change worlds. This biblical eschatological task is the utopian heritage of the West - “eschatology prevails over cosmogony, even over cosmology. And, in short, utopia prevails over the sacred” (xviii).

As human beings, our capacity for technology is given with out capacity for language, which is to say, for God. Faith has no language of its own (27) and so in every age must iconoclastically appropriate what is available, whether it be the medieval language of metaphysics, the modern language of history or the postmodern language of technique. The advent of technological civilization, Vahanian seems to say, in important ways makes this task easier rather than more difficult. For far from being totally alien to the eschatic orientation of Christian faith, technological civilization has a greater affinity with it than either the medieval language of metaphysics or the modern language of history, for technology like eschatology shares the utopian orientation toward making all things new. And utopia is not some impossible ideal but the iconoclastic possibility of realizing the impossible, of reinventing one’s humanity in any world, especially a technological one.

This utopianism is predicated on an understanding that always and everywhere –in the beginning is the word and the word is God. God is given with our capacity for language. God is the God who speaks. We do not claim language, language claims us. “We do not speak for God but are spoken for” (2). Metaphor is not one type of language,

language is metaphor - using and yet contesting established meanings to invent the new, and so give birth to a language without precedent. Such language unleashes the utopian possibilities of the human that body forth into culture, making all things new.

Prophecy, *poesis* and *techne* are but three faces of the same capacity, the capacity to invent our humanity and in the process reinvent the world as a new creation - the word made flesh. Being “spoken for,” Vahanian tells us, we must “speak up.” We must speak up prophetically to change the world, and yet must do this poetically. The poet, as the ancient Greek language testifies, is a wordsmith, someone who has the *techne* (technique or skill) “to make or do.” Our humanity comes to expression in and through the word, and is not so much natural or historical, or even technological, as it is utopian – a new beginning that encourages us not to change worlds but to change the world.

This “good news” is not news reserved for some sacred saving remnant but rather given once for all. It is good news for the whole human race. All language, says Vahanian, presupposes otherness. The appeal to any god who excludes others is an appeal to an idol. Whenever and wherever language is iconoclastic, there is no other God than the God of others. Indeed, being “in Christ” is just having this God in common so that Christ “is the designation of our common denominator instead of only the Christian’s mere Jesus” (91).

For Vahanian, the God of the biblical tradition is a God who can neither be named or imaged and so remains always “anonymous” - the God of others and the God for others. And so for him, “Christ is much less a believer’s Christ than he is a Christ for the unbeliever” (82), for every person whose flesh is claimed by the iconoclasm of the word that makes the invention of our humanity ever and again possible as the “worlding” of the word - the Word made flesh in the structures of our world (87). When the word is made flesh the kingdom of God draws near and God reigns, all in all.

For Vahanian eschatology prevails not only over cosmogony, cosmology and the sacred but also over soteriology. Far from being a religion of salvation, he argues, Christian faith liberates us from obsession with salvation, to embrace our new humanity and new creation, here and now. Christ cannot be reduced to Jesus any more than Jesus can be identified with God. For Vahanian, Jesus is no half-god-half-man but rather, as the Council of Chalcedon insisted, without confusion or mixture Christ is where the radical alterity of God and humanity meet, giving both the words “God” and “human” their authentic meaning (97). “God is the measure of humanity even as our humanity is the measure of God” (96).

When the church assumes its iconoclastic and utopian vocation as body of Christ it becomes the “the laboratory for the kingdom of God,” desacralizing both the world and religion. As such its liturgy or “public work” invites both believer and unbeliever to bring to this new world their talents. The public work of the church is to create jobs that hallow and therefore desacralize the social order, and so further social justice by making the invention of our humanity once more possible. Even as the church once created monasteries, hospitals and universities that transformed the human landscape, so today, far from being asked to reject or escape our technological civilization, the

church, is called to embrace those “skills and crafts through which the human being is being human” (134) and so demonstrate that even (or especially) in a technological civilization our humanity can be reinvented. The biological process of evolutionary hominization, says Vahanian should not be confused with the utopian project of humanization. Indeed, only by continual reinvention, he suggests, can we really be human.

This is not a book for the theologically timid who only want to think “orthodox” thoughts and so betray the tradition by repeating it instead of continuing it. To repeat the tradition is to bring it to an end and make it seem as if our only option is to “change worlds.” But Abrahamic faith is, after all, a setting out on a journey without knowing where we are going (Hebrews 11: 8). Vahanian’s iconoclasm overturns everything in such a way as to make possible the tradition’s continuance and in the process encourages us to change the world instead of abandoning it.

The theologically adventurous will find this a book rich with insight. From this perspective, I have only one quibble with Vahanian’s poetic adventure - he is more convincing in what he affirms than in what he sometimes denies. His occasional comparative reflections are not nearly as nuanced as those aimed at Christianity. He tells us, for instance, that “the Western tradition is beckoned by the utopian paradigm of religion, in its Greek as well as in its Hebrew (Judeo-Christian) version. While for Eastern religions the spiritual life aims at exchanging worlds, the West, for its part, came and still comes under the preview of a diametrically opposed approach which aims at changing the world” (xvii-xviii).

Later in his argument he makes this observation specifically with reference to Buddhism. Such large contrasts ignore the profound shift from an “otherworldly” to a “this worldly” orientation that came fairly early with the shift from Theravada to Mahayana Buddhism and is also typical of Neo-Confucianism in China. To make his claim work, even for Western religion, Vahanian has had to elevate the eschatological strand and reject the soteriological within Christianity, but he does not seem to see similar strategies at work in other traditions. For example, I think one could argue that Thich Nhat Hanh’s “socially engaged Buddhism” does in its own way for Buddhism what Vahanian does for Christianity.

*Anonymous God* is an extraordinary poetic work of metaphorical transformation. The words are all familiar and yet what is said is quite unfamiliar, new and unprecedented. In a typical book, one might expect the author to offer one, two or possibly three new insights per chapter. In this book one finds one, two or three per paragraph. The poetic density therefore is at times overwhelming. One feels the need to stop frequently and come up for air, lest one get dizzy from an overload of insight. It is a book that is best read slowly and then revisited if you wish to avoid the vertigo that comes with having everything that seems so familiar rendered unfamiliar too suddenly. The final outcome of that patience - -startlingly illumination of the new world that surrounds us -makes it all worth while.

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## **Andre Chouraqui, Les Dix Commandments Aujourd'hui: Dix Paroles pour reconcilier l'Homme avec l'humain (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2000).**

Alphonse Maillot, *Le Decalogue: Une Morale pour notre temps* (Paris: Librairie Protestante and Geneve: Labor et Fides, 1985).

Reviewed by David W. Gill

President, International Jacques Ellul Society

In my recent book *Doing Right: Practicing Ethical Principles* (InterVarsity Press, 2005), the two authors with the most citations in my author index were Alphonse Maillot (37 citations) and Andre Chouraqui (34 citations). *Doing Right*, part two of my introduction to Christian ethics, is structured around the Decalogue, seen through the lenses of the double Love Commandment and the biblical calls to justice and freedom. I see the Ten Commandments as the ten basic ways to love either God or a neighbor ("made in God's image and likeness, therefore..."), the ten basic principles of justice, and the ten fundamental guidelines in a life of freedom.

During my 1984-85 sabbatical in Bordeaux I actually started working on this project (sidetracked a lot by other projects for fifteen years but picked up again with passion



and attention during a study leave in Bordeaux the first half of 2000—there’s something about Bordeaux and ethical research, I have to conclude!). I shared some of my early chapter drafts with Jacques Ellul during our Friday afternoon meetings at his home that year. I specifically remember him urging me to start acquiring and studying the writings of Alphonse Maillot. In subsequent years, Ellul also mentioned Andre Chouraqui to me. These authors became two of the three most important modern sources for my understanding of the ethics of the Decalogue (the other was Czech theologian Jan Milic Lochman).

Alphonse Maillot (1920-2003) was a pastor and theologian in the Reformed Church of France. He published several biblical commentaries, including three volumes on the Psalms, a major study of Romans, and a brilliant little work on the Beatitudes.

*Le Decalogue: Une morale pour notre temps* begins with Maillot rejecting the simplistic and false association of the Decalogue with a legalistic attitude. “We forget that legalism was not created by the Decalogue but by the listener . . . Above all we forget the liberating character of the Decalogue: promise, future, and joy. The Torah (I reject the term ‘Law’) is not only holy and just, it is *good*. Good for us. It is this liberating goodness of the Decalogue, expressed in particular by the first commandment, that I don’t find very often among the commentators” (pp. 7-8; my translation).

Among Maillot’s emphases as he works his way through the Decalogue: this is guidance addressed to laity, not just clergy; there is no separation between the religious or worship side of life and one’s affairs out in the world—and Maillot warns against a too-strict division of two table in the Decalogue, something that has always seemed misguided to me as well; despite an initial impression of negativity (“Thou shalt not”), the Decalogue opens up a hundred positives for every negative; while the Decalogue is given to the Covenant people liberated from Egyptian slavery, and it must never be imposed on those around us, the message is for “all who have ears to hear”; the first command (“no other gods before me”), is the critical foundation—the next nine spell out the implications of have Yahweh as God.

In discussing the command against idols and images Maillot shows how far-reaching are its implications—rejecting our theological and philosophical images of God as much as our physical ones, and warning against viewing people through images and stereotypes. It is a question of life and vitality being replaced by narrow, lifeless substitutes, for God or for others.

In every discussion, Maillot shows his grasp of the historical and linguistic issues but then he takes his readers to the heart, the essential message, of each commandment, both in its negative and positive reach. His discussions and applications are brilliantly insightful and even exhilarating. I never got to meet Maillot in person but I did have the pleasure of reaching him by telephone at the retirement home where he spent the last years of his life, and thanking him for his extraordinary gifts to his readers.

In February of 2000, taking a short break from my work in Bordeaux, on a visit to Sarlat, east of Bordeaux, I was surprised to see in the window of a little book store the title *Les Dix Commandements Aujourd’hui*. This is not a popular theme of retail

books in France (or the USA!). I was further surprised and pleased to see that it was written by Andre Chouraqui, whose name I knew thanks to Ellul.

Chouraqui (born 1917 in Algeria) studied law and rabbinical studies in Paris and worked with the French Resistance during WWII. He settled in Jerusalem in 1958 and served as an advisor to David Ben-Gurion (1959-63) and later in the 60s as elected Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem under Teddy Kollek. Chouraqui is the only person to have published original translations of the Hebrew Bible, New Testament, and Koran. He is the author of many other books.

*Les Dix Commandments* is a remarkable study by any measure. Chouraqui was friends with Rene Cassin, the primary editor of the UN Declaration of Universal Human Rights and dedicated this book to him. Chouraqui says that we need a declaration of universal human *duties* to go along with the *rights*—and the Ten Commands serve that purpose. Chouraqui reviews how each of the ten has been interpreted and applied in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—and how each could help us today. The Decalogue should be a helpful foundation for common understanding and reconciliation. This is a brilliant and wise contribution.

## News & Notes

— JEAN-FRANCOIS MEDARD

Professor Jean-Francois Medard died on September 23, 2005, at the age of 71. Medard was a student of Jacques Ellul and later a colleague at the Institute for Political Studies at the University of Bordeaux. He was an expert in sub-Saharan African history, politics, and culture, as any bibliographic or web search will quickly show. He was the founding president of the local “association Jacques Ellul” and, more recently an active member of the Association Internationale Jacques Ellul. The conversation and debate were animated and the welcome warm for legions of visitors to the home of Jean-Francois and his wife Burney over the years. Our sincere condolences go to Burney and the family.

— JACQUES ELLUL, PENSEUR SANS FRONTIERES

A collection of articles from the fall 2004 colloquium at Poitiers on Jacques Ellul’s thought and its continuing importance, ten years after his death is now available for purchase from Editions l’Esprit du Temps, BP 107, 33491 Le Bouscat Cedex, France. Send 21 euros plus 5 euros for shipping and handling.

Edited by Patrick Chastenet, the collection includes “Jacques Ellul’s Ethics: Legacy and Promise” by David W. Gill, “Some Problems in Ellul’s Treatment of Propaganda” by Randall Marlin, “Peut-on lire sans trahir” by Didier Nordon, “La Technique et la chair” by Daniel Cerezuelle, “Jacques Ellul et la décroissance” by Alain Gras, “L’Idée de révolution dans l’oeuvre de Jacques Ellul” by Liberte Crozon, “Le Droit technicien” by Claude Ducouloux-Favard, “Critique de la Politique dans l’oeuvre de Jacques Ellul” by Patrick Chastenet, “L’historicité de l’ère technologique: convergences et différences

entre Ellul et Illich” by Jean Robert, “La Pensee juridique de Jacques Ellul” by Sylvain Dujancourt, and other essays. This is an essential volume for students of Ellul’s thought.

— WIPF & STOCK TO PUBLISH ELLUL SERIES

Wipf & Stock Publishers (199 W. 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Suite 3, Eugene OR 97401, USA) has recently published the first two volume of their project “Ellul Library” series. Patrick Chastenet’s interviews of Ellul are now available as *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology, and Christianity* (Wipf & Stock, 2005) after being expensive, unavailable, or very difficult to find for several years. Marva Dawn’s translation and edited introduction to *Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul That Set the Stage* has also been reprinted by Wipf & Stock (previously published by Eerdmans).

The IJES is working with our friends at Wipf & Stock to return as many Ellul books into print as possible. Stay tuned for further announcements.

— DOES YOUR LIBRARY SUBSCRIBE TO THE ELLUL FORUM?

Does your library subscribe to The Ellul Forum? Princeton Seminary, the University of South Florida, and Wheaton College all have ongoing subscriptions (among others). But what about Penn State? Cal Berkeley? Notre Dame? Illinois? Scranton? Ohio State? Fuller Seminary? What about your school library? Your alma mater?

Many schools have a standard form for faculty members to submit a request that the library subscribe to a publication. Another strategy would be to donate a subscription for two or three years to help them get the habit.

**Hommage a Jacques Ellul**

Dominique Ellul, with the help of Jean-Charles Bertholet , has now published a beautiful little 100 page volume entitled *Hommage a Jacques Ellul*. The occasion was a conference in May 2004, ten years after Ellul’s death. Included are reflections on Ellul’s importance by Michel Leplay, Michel Bertrand, Sebastien Morillon, and Jean Coulardeau. Yves Ellul provides some introduction to Ellul’s long—and long-awaited—ethics of holiness, on which manuscript Yves has been working for several years. Brief testimonials are included from Jean-Francois Medard, Alphonse Maillot, Andre Chouraqui, Elizabeth Viort and others. For more information contact:

*diffusion.ellul@wanadoo.fr.*

## Resources for Ellul Studies

[www.ellul.org](http://www.ellul.org) & [www.jacques-ellul.org](http://www.jacques-ellul.org)

Two indispensable web sites

The IJES/AIJE web site at [www.ellul.org](http://www.ellul.org) contains (1) news about IJES and AIJE activities and plans, (2) a brief and accurate biography of Jacques Ellul, (3) a complete bibliography of Ellul’s books in French and English, (4) a complete index of the contents of all 36 issues of *The Ellul Forum*, and (5) links and information on other resources

for students of Jacques Ellul. The new AIJE web site at [www.jacques-ellul.org](http://www.jacques-ellul.org) offers a French language supplement.

**The Ellul Forum CD: 1988-2002**

The first thirty issues of *The Ellul Forum*, some 500 published pages total, are now available (only) on a single compact disc which can be purchased for US \$15 (postage included). Send payment with your order to "IJES," P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705 USA.

Back issues #31 - #35 of *The Ellul Forum* are available for \$5 each (postage and shipping included).

**Cahiers Jacques Ellul**

*Pour Une Critique de la Societe Technicienne*

The annual journal, *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*, is edited by Patrick Chastenot and now published by Editions L'Esprit du Temps, distributed by Presses Universitaires de France; write to Editions L'Esprit du Temps, BP 107, 33491 Le Bouscat Cedex, France. The theme of Volume 1 was "L'Annees personnalistes" (cost 15 euros); Volume 2 was on "La Technique" (15 euros); the current Volume 3 focuses on "L'Economie" (21 euros). Next year's volume 4 will focus on "La Propagande" (21 euros). Shipping costs 5 euros for the first volume ordered; add 2 euros for each additional volume ordered.

**Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works** by Joyce Main Hanks. Research in Philosophy and Technology. Supplement 5. Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 2000. xiii., 206 pages. \$87. ISBN: 076230619X.

This is the essential guide for anyone doing research in Jacques Ellul's writings. An excellent brief biography is followed by a 140-page annotated bibliography of Ellul's fifty books and thousand-plus articles and a thirty-page subject index. Hank's work is comprehensive, accurate, and invariably helpful. This may be one of the more expensive books you buy for your library; it will surely be one of the most valuable. Visit [www.elsevier.com](http://www.elsevier.com) for ordering information.

**Alibris—used books in English**

The Alibris web site ([www.alibris.com](http://www.alibris.com)) lists thirty titles of used and out-of-print Jacques Ellul books in English translation available to order at reasonable prices.

**Librairie Mollat—new books in French**

Librairie Mollat in the center of old Bordeaux ([www.mollat.com](http://www.mollat.com)) is an excellent resource for French language books, including those by and about Ellul. Mollat accepts credit cards over the web and will mail books anywhere in the world.

**Used books in French:**

**two web resources**

Two web sites that will be of help in finding used books in French by Jacques Ellul (and others) are [www.chapitre.com](http://www.chapitre.com) and [www.livre-rare-book.com](http://www.livre-rare-book.com).

**Reprints of Nine Ellul Books**

By arrangement with Ingram and Spring Arbor, individual reprint copies of several Ellul books originally published by William B. Eerdmans can now be purchased. The books and prices listed at the Eerdmans web site are as follows: *The Ethics of Freedom*

(\$40), *The Humiliation of the Word* (\$26), *The Judgment of Jonah* (\$13), *The Meaning of the City* (\$20), *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man* (\$19), *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes* (\$28), *The Subversion of Christianity* (\$20), and *The Technological Bluff* (\$35). *Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul* translated by Marva Dawn is also available (price unknown).

Have your bookstore (or on-line book dealer) “back order” the titles you want. Do not go as an individual customer to Eerdmans or Ingram/Spring Arbor. For more information visit “Books on Demand” at [www.eerdmans.com](http://www.eerdmans.com).

### **Ellul on Video**

French film maker Serge Steyer’s film “Jacques Ellul: L’homme entier” (52 minutes) is available for 25 euros at the web site [www.meromedia.com](http://www.meromedia.com). Ellul is himself interviewed as are several commentators on Ellul’s ideas.

Another hour-length film/video that is focused entirely on Ellul’s commentary on technique in our society, “The Treachery of Technology,” was produced by Dutch film maker Jan van Boekel for ReRun Produkties (mail to: Postbox 93021, 1090 BA Amsterdam).

If you try to purchase either of these excellent films, be sure to check on compatibility with your video system and on whether English subtitles are provided, if that is desired.

**Issue #37 Spring 2006 —  
Propaganda and Ethics**

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## For the Critique of Technological Civilization

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"Propaganda seems therefore to be, as is the case for most technical elements, a purely neutral instrument in itself, and one which therefore can be used for any kind of cause—a 'good cause' such as peace or the reconciliation of classes or Christianity, an 'evil cause' such as militarism, revolution, or atheism. In reality, nothing is further from the truth!

"No technical instrument is neutral; it carries its own logic within itself and... the most beautiful ideal, once it is carried by propaganda, is modified in its very essence and nature. "

-Jacques Ellul

"The Ethics of Propaganda" (1981)

### Information on The Editorial Board & More

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For the Critique of Technological Civilization

### **Founded 1988**

The Ellul Forum is published twice per year, in the Spring and Fall. Its purpose is to analyze and apply Jacques Ellul's thought to our technological civilization and carry forward both his sociological and theological analyses in new directions.

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## From the Editor

*Propaganda* was the first of Ellul's books I ever read, now more than three decades ago. It was required reading then for students of communications and it hasn't yet been surpassed. *Propaganda*, along with *The Technological Society*, and *Political Illusion*, has always been one of the critical foundations of his sociology of the modern world.

Ellul's programmatic little 1948 manifesto, *The Presence of the Kingdom*, already devoted a brilliant chapter to "The Problem of Communication" (which inspired IJES President David Gill's column on p. 23 below). Ellul followed his original publication of *Propagandes* (1962), with many other studies of communication, including an 83-page article on public relations, information, and propaganda in *L'Annee sociologique* (1963), *Histoire de la Propagande* (1967; Reviewed in this issue of the *Ellul Forum*), and *The Humiliation of the Word* (1981, ET 1985; also Reviewed in this issue). *Humiliation* is of particular interest in that it adds a theological counterpoint to the sociology of communication.

In 1981, Ellul wrote an essay on the "Ethics of Propaganda" for *Communication*, a small, theory-oriented journal that is no longer published. This essay circulated among communication scholars, but not much beyond. We are delighted to give it a wider circulation here as our lead article. It is not an easy read, partly because of the rather wooden literalism of the translation, and partly because of Ellul's long, complex sentences. But it is full of challenging, illuminating insights and observations and well worth our study.

Randal Marlin, whom we also welcome as a new member of our IJES Board, is an expert on propaganda and communication studies. He translated (and published as a pamphlet) Ellul's essay on *FLN Propaganda in France During the Algerian War* (Ontario, Canada: By Books, 1982), which Ellul had handed to him in person during his 1979-80 research year in Bordeaux. Prof. Marlin's re-view of Ellul's *Histoire de la Propagande* and his major paper on "Problems in Ellul's Treatment of Propaganda" are two major gifts to this issue of the *Forum*. Marlin's appreciative but critical back-and-forth with Ellul's ideas is exactly the sort of constructive conversation Ellul loved and the sort of thing the *Ellul Forum* is all about.

Also in this issue, Prof. Jay Black provides a superb introduction to the larger context of propaganda studies over the past century, and shows us where Ellul fits in this tradition. Russell Heddendorf re-views Ellul's *Humiliation*, and J. Wesley Baker and David Gunkel review important new books in communication and media studies in this issue.

Our next (Fall 2006) issue of the *Ellul Forum* has "politics" for its main theme. Our world could use some helpful insight on this topic and we know a great figure to get us started on our reflections. Issue 39 in Spring 2007 will focus on Ellul's ethics. Your contributions and ideas are always welcome.

This Spring, in addition to Randal Marlin, we are delighted to welcome Dr. Virginia Landgraf (ATLA, Chicago) and Prof. Mark Baker (Mennonite Seminary, Fresno) to our IJES Board of Directors.

*Clifford G. Christians, Editor editor@ellul.org*

## The Ethics of Propaganda

by Jacques Ellul

*This article first appeared in Communication, 6 (1981): 159175. Translated from the French by D. Raymond Tourville.*

At first glance, the question of ethics and propaganda, or of "the ethics of propaganda," seems to be readily resolved: there is no morality in the propaganda game, and therefore it serves no purpose to render a moral judgment on propaganda. It belongs to one of those closed and impenetrable areas where ethics loses its rights. To declare that "to make propaganda" is wrong is irrelevant: the propagandist does not concern himself with such judgments and the propagandee lives with the fact that what his leader or his group says is not propaganda. Ethics in a moral or philosophical sense is strictly without power in this politicosocial activity, and a positive or negative judgment can in no way change this fact. Yet, one can quickly enough realize that this very fact raises a certain number of difficulties.

Propaganda does indeed obey a certain ethic, not taken in the moral sense, but rather as a rule of behavior. Moreover, it, itself, in short constitutes a morality for crowds, for peoples, for groups, for classes, for nations. Finally, and this is the most important fact, it appears more and more that what propaganda builds in man cannot be destroyed by the experience of facts, contrary to what has been normally believed or falsely proven. All this leads me to unveil the ethical criteria which I myself use to underscore the amorality of propaganda.

### Propaganda Is a Morality

Propaganda obviously obeys a certain number of working rules. I have studied it as a technique. But as is the case each time one is dealing with a technique affecting men, it can no longer be a question of purely abstract and mechanical rules as if one were dealing in techniques to change a physical or chemical environment. One has to take into account the specific reactions of its being on the one hand and of the human being on the other. In other words, even though for the propagandist or the publicist it is simply a question of applying seemingly rigorous and technical methods, this whole procedure must take on an ideologico-moral appearance, because man does not react in a neutral manner: he cannot admit to being or consider himself simply a manipulated object: in order for him to believe, to follow the desired path, he must receive a satisfaction which is moral in nature.

Thus, in itself, propaganda doesn't follow an ethic, but it is obliged to use one and to build one. As a system of intervention, it is purely practico-formal; as an integrated

part of social reality, it needs to have a content of a moral nature, which in no way means that it obeys its content. But it must carry it and have it assimilated. Nor can it be only an ideological content. It is not only a question of the person who is being swayed receiving ideas, an interpretation of the world: in addition, he must be convinced that he himself, his party, his class, his nation are right, that they represent Good and Justice. It is this conviction that is decisive and which effectively sways man into the field of propaganda.

We are, in this situation, in the presence of one of the conditions required for the efficacy of propaganda, and there is no recurrence of this "good" to propaganda itself. Consequently we must now eliminate a prior question: propaganda seems therefore to be, as is the case for most technical elements, a purely neutral instrument in itself, and one which therefore can be used for any kind of cause—a "good cause" such as peace or the reconciliation of classes or Christianity, an "evil cause" such as militarism, revolution, or atheism. In reality, nothing is further from the truth! No technical instrument is neutral; it carries its own logic within itself, and I have already shown in *Propaganda* that the most beautiful ideal, once it is carried by propaganda, is modified in its very essence and nature. In reality, a positive "ideal" has no meaning unless man personally accedes, conquers, and adheres to it through deep conviction and becomes himself a germ of this truth. Otherwise, he is nothing more than a robot, "beyond dignity and freedom," which removes all positive value to this adherence, and by this very fact, to the ideal to which one adheres. For if one adheres to an ideal in such a manner, this means that one could accept any other content, and could uphold, with the same conviction, the opposite ideal.

If, therefore, we are sure that a cause is just, not by measuring it against an infinite ideal, or against some absolute reigning in an Empyrean, but rather in the exact measure in which its supporters themselves are just, and where their own justice renders the cause itself just (and not the reverse), then all propaganda action, which tends to make man act without even being aware of his actions and aware he has chosen, destroys in itself justice and good.

But we are obviously here at a crossroads: 1) Either we consider humanity as a simple means to a superior action, and it is therefore legitimate to manipulate it, to modify the human brain, to artificially produce behavior— but this means that one obeys some sort of in-human truth, which is in no way a guarantee that this truth is super-human (and if it is super-human we have but two choices: either it is unknown to us, and this is what was called the way of negative theology, or it has come down to our level of comprehension, and that is what biblical theology calls the Word (of God) and incarnation); 2) Or one considers that truth can only be human, but in this case, it implies that the particular truth in question cannot be transmitted by means of manipulation, nor by treating man as a pure object, but only by a voluntary adherence. In other words, one can in no way disassociate the means of propaganda from what it claims to carry. It is a particular example of the great debate over "the

ends justifies the means," or "the means corrupt the end," a debate accentuated by the fact that, here, the object upon which the means act is man.

I am certainly not going to take up the entire problem again here, but rather point out the conclusion I reached a long time ago (in *Presence of the Kingdom*): that is to say, that the end never justifies the means because there isn't a differentiation in nature between the two, but, on the contrary, a continuity: that is to say, that no abyss exists between the means and the point to which these means lead us, but rather that the end is the exact result of the means used. In other words, violent means will produce a violent situation and never one of peace. Unjust means will produce an unjust regime and never one capable of exercising justice, and corrupt means will bring about corruption of the final result.

There is, therefore, no distinction to be made between the instrument, that would be neutral, and the cause, which would be good or not good. The instrument participates in the cause, and the latter is shaped by the instrument. To the extent that propaganda rests on a contempt for man viewed as an object to shape and not as a person to respect, this signifies that the cause defended by propaganda implies a de-gradation of man, the impossibility of his acceding to his majority, to his personal responsibility, and that propaganda is evidently a negation of a freedom, either natural, acquired, or to be acquired. Now, propaganda cannot be anything other than what it is: an instrument of manipulation to obtain an objectively conforming behavior (orthopraxy). That is to say, that it obeys, exclusively, principles of efficacy, technical rules of a psychological or sociological nature, the usage of instruments which are themselves techniques.

It is, therefore, necessarily part of the means that corrupt the ends. It cannot be subordinated to anything but its own end, which is efficacy. Propaganda, in reality, includes in itself both the "apparatus" and "techniques" of propaganda and the message which is transmitted. For it is very evident that in addressing men, it carries a message. It is not merely a signal (although at times it can be reduced to this!). But this message can only be chosen, calculated, combined in relation to and with respect to the efficacy of the complex apparatus. In other words, even if the message is apparently noble and generous, it is integrated into a whole which rests on the one and only concept of "man as object." Propaganda can have no other reference point, no other external value to which it could be subject and from which one could judge it. It is nothing less than its end integrated into its means. And that is why there is no way to make an ethical judgment on it, and those that one could formulate have no common measure with its reality.

#### Propaganda Creates An Ethic

But here we touch upon a new dimension of the problem: propaganda itself creates a morality, an ethic, a certain type of wished-for behavior. It furnishes man with a criterion for good and evil. This is therefore a rather new situation with respect to traditional societies. We are out of the normal framework of reflection on morality, both the one suggested by Bergson as well as that of Max Weber, the "morality of responsibility—the morality of conviction." We are in the presence of the making of

an artificial and ideological morality, and I mean by that a morality which imposes itself upon a group of humans who have not chosen it; neither was it developed slowly through usages and customs, trials and errors, uncertainties and choices, nor was it passed on from generation to generation by a slow cultural transmission, but rather as a whole of systematic behaviors obtained by rapid and active technical means (from whence comes the great difference from the "reproduction" of morality through the flow of the generations), and always with a totalitarian goal, that is to say, encompassing all of man, leaving no latitude of choice nor any field undetermined, which would be completely destructive to propaganda.

It is indeed a question of morality, since, based upon this infusion, man is going to judge what is good and evil; he is going to choose his conduct (but it is simply a question of a choice programmed by his conviction which allows no hesitation on the behavior to be followed, the whole concept having been integrated). But it is a morality with roots neither in personal experience, nor in the past, nor in thought; it is a purely artificial morality, created and diffused outside any context of conviction. The conviction is produced by the system. And it is an ideological morality insofar as the behaviors demanded result from ideological choice.

There is a comparison with religion to be made here. A religion supposes a faithful adherence to certain truths, and this adherence brings with it certain actions, a certain practice. "Christian faith" must translate into "works." In the same manner, political ideology (nationalist, communist, fascist, etc.) or economic ideology (of productivity, of profit, of profit-earning capacity) require certain behaviors: sacrifice for the cause, consumption, work, etc. These are narrowly determined by the ideology one was successful in implanting. There are no choices, there is no distance, much less than in the religious domain, where, even in non-liberating and inveigling religions, the distance between God and the faithful brings about the possibility for the latter to choose certain behavior patterns rather than others. In propaganda, the exact identity of the group ideology and of its behavior excludes any deviations. And we arrive thus at the conclusion announced in the beginning: it is by nature impossible to render a significant moral judgment from the outside on the work of propaganda which is itself a creator of a new type ethics.

We are, therefore, in the presence of a dilemma comparable to the one in which Kautsky had trapped Bernstein, when the latter was making a critique of Marx: Marx created a new *Weltanschauung*, a global conception. To be able to make a useful criticism of it, one has to situate oneself within the system or vision. It is in applying Marx's method that one can criticize it; it is by using its own premises and its own system as a point of departure that the criticism can become meaningful and efficacious. If not, if one situates one-self in a different perspective, for example religious or liberal or idealist, one can say what one wants to, it would in no way begin to touch Marx's system. That is why philosophical objections based on a dualist or idealist perspective could in no way modify Marx's thought, just as criticism based on a liberal economy as

a starting point simply had no common measure with the goal of a socialist economy: therefore, the entire procedure was useless.

It is exactly the same in this case for propaganda: it constitutes a psycho-political universe, it unleashes an "imaginary" (in the strongest meaning of modern thought) producer of myths and a reconstitution of the universe for whomever adheres to it, which means that if one situates one's self in this universe (for example, in the consumer world, when it is a question of that commercial propaganda known as advertising) and the criticisms that one can make will surely be heard and efficacious, but they will simply add to the reproduction, the reinforcement, and the growth of propaganda. They will bring about a greater interiorization of the imperatives and the rules of conduct, but, of course, no revision of the morality of the propaganda. On the other hand, if one situates oneself on the outside, one can make a very accurate, judicious, and exact moral (or intellectual) critique but which will never begin to touch any structure erected by propaganda, whether on the psychological or sociological level.

Morality and ethics have no power over the results of propaganda action because the latter makes the propagandee live in an ethical rather than in a political or economic universe; these indeed are the realities of the matter, but propaganda has as its goal to hide this reality within an ideological discourse which acts as a justifier because it is moral. To the democrats, Hitler affirmed unceasingly that national-socialism permitted access to a superior type of democracy, one that was more total, more egalitarian, etc. And reciprocally, a "capitalistic" morality has never touched a Soviet. We have witnessed religious conversions which are of another kind. And if there is at the moment a challenge to the universe of Soviet propaganda, this can happen only through the intermediary of those who, having been in this universe, have left it (by conversion) and can speak the exact language which is appropriate, but which has nothing to do with an ethical language: it isn't starting with morality, but rather, on the one hand, with the facts that were revealed (a typically Marxist process!), and on the other hand, with the opposition of one religious attitude to another. The cases of Solzhenitsyn, Maksimov, Sakharov, Vlasov, A. Zinoviev, Yuli Daniel, Sinyaysky, etc., are precisely characteristic of this.

#### The Useless Experience

There is an affirmation often proposed in these domains, namely, that faced with the facts, propaganda is useless, and that its results are quickly destroyed. It suffices to make known the facts. But it is precisely propaganda that prevents the facts from being perceived as such. The unveiling to which I alluded can only be brought about by those who have been through this universe.

But there is another aspect of the problem which I would like to discuss: that is the renewal of those who are taken in by propaganda, the continual apparition of new generations for whom the experience of their elders is of absolutely no use. And this is a moral problem; in a universe which tends towards anomie, no values are passed from one generation to the other, and by this very fact no experience of the preceding generation is validated in the eyes of the succeeding generation. We have

made political mistakes and would like to have our sons profit from the lesson learned from our mistakes. That is impossible; our discourse goes unheard because it is not inscribed in a commensurate ethical universe, and we see them going down the same paths we did. We can't spare them their mistakes. Popular wisdom has long said: each generation must experience things for themselves. But in a traditional society, this is limited. In our society of global and accelerated changes, this attitude is disastrous, and yet now it is even more widespread than before. I shall take an example relative to propaganda bearing on this triple phenomenon: confrontation of propaganda and fact—the impossibility of transmitting experience to a new generation—the innocence of this new generation given over to propaganda.

The example is the relation of the young people in France to communist propaganda. The young people of my generation, in the years around 1930, were extremely seduced by marxism, by the success of the revolution, by the fantastic accomplishments of the USSR, by the criticisms leveled against the weaknesses of democracy and the injustices of capitalism, and finally by the fact that communism seemed to be the only valid answer to fascism. We were completely sensitive to the communist propaganda and an entire generation drew nearer to the Party.

Then a number of experiences frightened us. First of all, there were the Moscow trials of 1936—the trials in which we saw the great ones whom we had learned to admire, Zinoviev, Kamenev, and subsequently Bukharin himself, condemned to death in trials which immediately appeared to us as scandalous and deceitful. It was absolutely unbelievable to have accused these men of complicity with capitalism, and to have brought them to the point of accusing themselves.

Now during the same period, we experienced other events just as upsetting: the frightening attitude of the Spanish communists toward the anarchists during the Spanish war. It has been said, but it can never be said enough, that Franco's best ally was the Spanish communist party. For the true resistance by the Republic was led by the anarchists. But the communists have such a hatred of the anarchists (and also of the socialists) that, during the war, they preferred to attack the anarchists from behind and resolve the differences between them by violence, rather than help them fight against the fascist rebellion. Now, all those who took part in the republican resistance were able to see this. We came out of these experiences desperate and hostile toward communism.

One last experience: the German-Soviet treaty of 1938 by which, in reality, Stalin left Hitler free to attack Europe. Curiously, there was a progression in the influence of these facts: the trials left the communist mass indifferent; it, in fact, accepted the explanations and believed the propaganda. The anti-anarchist activity upset only those who participated in the war; on the other hand the "pact" provoked a great crisis in the entire party, and countless members left. Be that as it may, the men of my generation, after this triple experience, could be lucid and would never again be entrapped by communist propaganda.

This wasn't to be, for everything was renewed: the war and the Resistance, the fraternal cooperation with the communist resistors, their heroic actions, the admiration. Older people such as myself remained more distrustful, but powerless; we saw the young people in their twenties enter into an entirely new relationship with the Communist Party: to speak to them of our experience in 1935-1939 meant nothing to them.

Buried memories: what could these do against an all new and fresh propaganda, both by word and ex-ample; we were making moral judgments, and if one had to draw the line, we were the ones who were not to be trusted. We suspected these pure heroes of sinister designs. When the Liberation came, these young people, moralized by the propaganda and the actions, refused to see the "mistakes" the communists were guilty of (massive executions without trials, liquidation of the rightist under-ground by the communist underground), and, when Tito committed the abominable treason of having the real leader of the Yugoslav resistance, Mihailovic (who was clearly anti-communist), arrested and shot, the young people accepted without flinching the idea that this man, who had reorganized the Yugoslav army as early as 1941, and engaged in the resistance a year before Tito, was a traitor and was in the pay of the imperialists. One had to be forewarned as we were to see, simply to see, what was happening.

Now this young generation of the resistance knew in turn some psychological shocks which, for many, led them to abandon the illusions of their youth and of the resistance: the worker's revolt in Berlin in 1953 against the Soviet regime, the Hungarian and Polish revolts of 1956, and finally the revelations of Khrushchev to the XXth congress. What shocks, what disillusiones. Many in turn dropped out of the party. The astonishing thing was that it wasn't a complete rout. That shows the weakness of fact against the morality acquired by propaganda, for in all these cases it is a question of a recuperation by morality: communism committed errors, but it was the only one to defend the poor and oppressed, to want liberation of peoples; therefore all that was critical of the party was a betrayal of these poor.

This propaganda argument, apparently superficial, but playing on the moral sentiment also created by propaganda, reached even intellectuals such as J. P. Sartre; and one can find the same explanations that were given in 1938 on the legitimacy of the proletarian revolution, on the threat of imperialism which is the true menace to mankind, and which is responsible for the riots in Berlin and Hungary: the USSR having done nothing more than to limit itself to respond and to protect peoples who had been wronged by a handful of traitors.

It is remarkable to see how little propaganda renews itself. It is exactly the same moral and justifying discourse which was used in 1938, in 1956, in 1968: morality and virtue are integrated in the propaganda which appears simply to make them explicit. And all will soon be erased by a new generation, for those who were twenty in 1958, for example, the events of the last ten years were totally unknown to them; the only thing left, for example, in France was the evidence of the Algerian war where the Communist Party became once again the protector of the poor, of the colonized, the evidence that



the theory of Lenin on imperialism was correct, and that the only abomination was capitalism: propaganda had digested the facts.

But in turn, this new generation of pure and innocent militants, who saw everything through images furnished by the party, received a profound and double shock: the revolt of the young people in 1968 and the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Faced with the young people's revolt, the French Communist Party took an attitude of extreme harshness, of condemnation, and this was in perfect conformity with the attitude it had always held with respect to anything which might have an anarchist orientation. The Communist Party fears being overwhelmed from the left; it prefers to ally itself with the reactionary right than to allow a leftist and spontaneous revolution to take place. Lenin always condemned leftist tendencies (a childhood disease of communism) and worker spontaneity, for which he had a profound distrust.

But it was difficult for the hard-core militants of the French Communist Party not to be sensitive to the call of the revolution, to the vigor of the slogans and to the authenticity of youth in the streets, who seemed capable of overthrowing the power structure. There was at that point a very strong tension, and the discipline of the party had a most difficult time imposing itself, exactly as in 1938 or in 1956. And even more so, since at the same time the hope of a "socialism with a more humane appearance" was suddenly shattered by the Soviet invasion. It seemed totally unjust to prevent Czechoslovakia from choosing its own way and the argument of a "menacing imperialism" seemed to be miscarrying.

However, in spite of many criticisms and a few rejections, the Communist Party remained stable, and in no way changed its line and propaganda, and decided in favor of a purely formal "disapproval" of the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia. These "disapprovals" are part and parcel of the "integrated propaganda" to valorize morally the subsequent resumption of contact. The French Communist Party continues to affirm itself in the "general line" with a purely formal divergence. But the militants are disturbed. Nevertheless, from 1970 on, there is no more discussion; the whole affair is dead.

Except for the appearance of Solzhenitsyn. And here we are in the presence of a moral phenomenon of great importance: we have just shown that facts change nothing in the attitude produced by propaganda. The most evident facts submitted to a moral judgment, contrary to all moral norms, are completely helpless faced with their reinterpretation by propaganda. Or more exactly, on the one hand, for adults, we note a certain instantaneous puzzlement, certain questions which arise, which for an insignificant minority mean a rejection and an abandoning of the party; but for the majority, the explanation will produce a situation of moral justification and of sufficient satisfaction. On the other hand, we are dealing here particularly with the new levels, the new generation, and the problem here is simply to obliterate, to have disappear into a continuous history, without contradiction, the facts which had caused the scandal and the moral judgment.

Propaganda has, therefore, as its essential task, to reproduce innocence from generation to generation (in both meanings of the word: ignorance and non-moral culpability). And it can do this precisely insofar as the generations succeed each other, while the apparatus of the party, which makes the propaganda work, remains constant and the party, as in the USSR, believes that communism has eternity in front of it to win the battle. What will bring about the real crisis of the intellectuals and of the leaders of the French Communist Party will not be the fact itself, but the publication of books whose time has arrived (contrary to Kravehenko's), in a favorable climate, and, especially, supported by a remarkable propaganda, which is going to require certain moral questions, heretofore completely hidden by propaganda., to be asked.

In other words, it is the apparition of a "credible" propaganda which is going to arouse the good moral conscience. It was made "credible" by the personality of the witness. Solzhenitsyn's analysis and testimonial are going to brusquely provoke a crisis of moral conscience among communist intellectuals. But it isn't the discovery of the fact itself (the fact of the existence of Soviet concentration camps has been very well known ever since 1948 at least); it is the impact of the propaganda on a humanitarian and moral base.

Communist intellectuals who have been examining moral problems since 1968 are going to make a critique of what they have lived and believed for more than twenty years. But it is that very generation that experienced the period of the resistance: the innocents of 1940-1944. Their departure from the party, their criticisms, are going to have great repercussions and are going to cause great discussions, but only insofar as it is a question of intellectuals using the media. Their departure is spectacular. But there are large factions of the party which disappear thusly at each crisis. It is estimated that about 70,000 members of the French Communist Party leave it each year. And in times of crisis, such as we have previously mentioned, the figures reach 200,000. We don't speak about these defectors because they are ordinary people, obscure people; they hold no rank, and they are immediately replaced by new adherents, ardent and innocent militants, young people who discover the universe through the truth of communism, and they ignore everything, the trials, the Pact, the Hungarian revolt, and the crushing of Czechoslovakia. And now they ignore everything about Solzhenitsyn: the whole matter is settled. The moral shock caused by his books is over. The party had to become a little more liberal, in appearance, for a few years, and the new intellectuals who now adhere to the party no longer feel the need to critique it; the generation of Gar-audy, P. Daix, etc., is gone.

I have just seen a television program on the Communist Youth Congress. I saw the young innocent faces that I have always seen there, the same enthusiasm, the same absolute confidence in the words of the leaders, the same certitude about the revolution and about the excellence of the USSR, and the same admiration for the revolution of 1917. Everything has disappeared. So much so that the Afghanistan invasion raises for these neophytes, once again, an agonizing problem: how can the country of justice, of the struggle against imperialism, of anticapitalism, conduct itself thusly? A stupor

seizes the world: "Never before has this been seen." It has been forgotten that all this has been seen ten times before. And we find anew exactly the same laborious explanations: it's the fault of the Americans who occupy Pakistan; it's the fault of the Pakistanis who are the true aggressors; it's the fault of the rebel minorities; it's the Afghan "people" who have called to the USSR for help. Why bother to make a correct analysis and to invent new arguments since experience shows that this propaganda, in the long run, snuffs out all moral indignation and erases the facts? Yes, there will be a few thousand defectors from the party. And a new generation will appear; they will ignore Afghanistan as well as the rest. In other words, propaganda being strictly anti-moral, spread out over the years, is at the same time creator of a new morality and of a new mental universe founded on instantaneousness, and on the absence of the past.

#### From Ethics to the Amorality of Propaganda

It is evident that to judge the amorality of propaganda, and the incompatibility between ethics and propaganda, one must admit to the existence of an ethic founded on values; one must construct a certain type of human existence; one must have a certain idea of man. That is why I could say earlier that propaganda is also a conferrer of morality, while at the same time being essentially amoral. To go back to the Marxist-Leninist example, it is evident that if one adopts Lenin's criteria for behavior, one builds a certain morality. Criteria: "All that is favorable to the proletariat in the struggle between classes is good, and all that is unfavorable to it is evil" (the State and the Revolution). And it will justify propaganda favorable to the proletariat, but what we have here is a utilitarianism without values. I am certainly not going to furnish a catalogue of the values by which I was able to appreciate the amorality of propaganda, but rather present the existential attitudes in which I situated myself.

First of all, there is the question of autojustification. Propaganda functions in the following manner: it represents the passage from "there is power" to "it is right and just that there be this power." In other words, it has, in effect, a justifying moral content. Always, even when it is revolutionary and contestant, all propaganda is a process of autojustification (by the denunciation of the other as being evil). It offers justification to the individual adherent as well as being the justification of the group which organizes and diffuses it. But by this very fact, it leads inevitably towards totalitarianism, because, from the moment it is granted that "it is just and good that there be this power," one passes immediately to: "therefore there can only be this power, and all others are consequently unacceptable and to be eliminated."

Each propaganda is by nature totalitarian, and tends to disclaim all pluralism. Now, it appeals to a need, to a request, to a desire of modern man who is looking first and foremost to justify himself, to be justified, to be declared just precisely because he lives in a universe which is very disputed, because he feels himself being drawn into unjust acts and also because he no longer has the resource of a religious reference, for example Christianity, which was precisely a religion of justification. But the great difference is due to the fact that Christianity never gives a justification as such; it never declares to

man that he is just, but only saved, pardoned, justified; and that this is not something acquired but a gift. But modern man, the modern parties, want to be declared just.

#### A Threefold Critique

I would say that therein lies my first element of appraisal: All processes of autojustification, at whatever level they might be, appear to me to be false, dangerous, and entrapping. It's the gateway to all the present destruction of values and of ethics. All ethical behavior seems to me to imply a questioning of self, a reassessment, and the acceptance of one's values being questioned by others. It is the price that must be paid both to measure oneself to the value, and to have a possible relation in truth. Here, it is neither a question of auto-criticism as it can be practiced in the communist party (in the Middle Ages it was in the Church) nor of culpability as understood in psychoanalysis. One can very well recognize oneself as a liar or as being vain without living in some sort of morbid culpability. But the self-examination, the examination of conscience (as it was called in the old Christian vocabulary), the acknowledgment of one's faults, and the refusal to search at any cost to be just, seem to me to be constituent elements of any ethical life, of any relationship.

It was first of all based upon my objection to autojustification that I was brought to view propaganda as amoral and leading the propagandee to a dangerous behavior (which fact was verified for all propaganda, included among these advertising, which developed consumer bulimia as a being's justification, with all the dangers that carried at all levels, and which are revealing themselves now, in the area of hygiene or in the economy!).

The second axis of my ethical reflection is closely related to my description of the second paragraph of this article: there is no moral existence unless it be rooted in the past, situated in a continuity—the continuity of one's own life just as much as that of one's group or of the history of one's country. There is no morality of instantaneousness. It is false to think that man is in a zero stage and that at each moment he must choose and make decisions. It would be a freedom like that of Buridan's ass.

Man has no moral existence except with reference to the totality of his experiences, or of those which were handed down to him and from which a "lesson" is drawn; and the "Wisdome of nations" is a sort of composite of these reflections. This supposes, therefore, a historical continuity, a recall, a recapitulation, an anamnesis, as the experience occurs, an explanation of what has taken place. I'm not speaking here of the great moral principles and values, but of moral existence. And in the area of faith (Christian), ethical existence supposes "repetition" (in the Kierkegaardian sense of the term). No morality exists when one pre-tends to situate one's self simply in the present, in the instantaneous.

This was clearly evident when around the 1930's the idea of a morality of "successive sincerities" was spread by Andre Gide, for example, but also by T. H. Lawrence. "When I say this today, I am completely sincere and true, but in an hour, or tomorrow, I shall feel otherwise, I shall understand other things; I shall therefore be able to say and do the opposite and still be just as sincere" (a very serious problem, for example, of

fidelity towards the other in the couple). This is the very negation at one and the same time of ethics and or moral existence.

Yet, it is precisely in this state of actuality, of the immediate present, of the obliteration of the words and acts of the past, that propaganda places us. There is no greater obstacle to propaganda than history (continuity of generations) and philosophy (explicative reflection on the experience of events). Propaganda is, therefore, destructive of the possibilities, of the foundations, of the basic premises of ethics. But if I judge it thusly, it is, evidently, because I believe that morality exists only in this process (already mentioned) of rootedness and of reflection or anamnesis.

Finally, the third critical theme, the third criterion of ethics (valid for everyone, for I'm not speaking here specifically of a Christian ethic), is the fact that for me there is no possibility of the building of ethics and moral existence except with reference to others, in dialogue and in reciprocal participation in a common life. All ethics is necessarily an ethics of encounter. One doesn't have a moral behavior alone. And it is the exchange of words which allows me to construct myself on the moral level, while at the same time my words allow the other to behave. Together, we choose an orientation (even if it's a question of breaking off, of separating, of differentiating). Ethics presupposes the interplay of differences without exclusions. It dies when it becomes a rigid law imposed from with-out. The process which permits sociability is the interiorization of the law by the child, but this law is not made up of abstract, objective, anonymous commandments; it can only be acquired and interiorized if there is relationship, dialogue, research together and, first and foremost, between the child and his parents. Relationship to the other is creator at the same time of both personality and moral existence.

Yet, we have seen specifically that propaganda substitutes for this relationship a sort of collectivity, where each person remains completely alone and yet still belongs to a collective mass, where there are no interiorizations of a law, where behaviors stem from an external impetus, from a manipulation of which man remains completely unconscious. It is, therefore, by its nature the very opposite of any moral existence; and by this very fact, at least according to the three criteria which I have adopted, it can in no way produce an ethic nor be submitted to an ethic. It is the very opposite of any possible ethic.

## **Problems in Ellul's Treatment of Propaganda**

by Randal Marlin

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Jacques Ellul, *Penseur sans frontieres (LeBouscat: L'Esprit du Temps, PUF, 2005) 370 pp. ISBN 2-84793-068-0.*

That Jacques Ellul is one of the world's leading thinkers in the area of propaganda becomes clearer with each passing decade. Not only has his book, *Propaganda*, stayed continuously in print, but the output of works taking account of his views continues in a formidable stream. What is special about his approach to the subject is the way in which it becomes incorporated into a whole vision of the human being, with all the material and spiritual needs connected with that being. So we find Ellul exploring not just the most extreme and obvious forms of propaganda such as can be found in Nazi tyranny, but also the myths widespread in nominally democratic societies. These myths, of progress, happiness, work, race, the hero, and suchlike, operate on a broader spectrum than merely the political, but they can also diminish human freedom. Witness the person who struggles to keep up payments on the fancy car, which was purchased out of a false sense of the happiness it would bring.

Ellul's most valuable contributions to the study of propaganda include his notion of pre-propaganda, meaning the dissemination and acceptance of certain myths or general assumptions that are especially useful for the purpose of mobilizing human action. Another is his classification of propaganda into eight different types, consisting of two opposed sets of four groupings. The first set readily encompasses what is easily recognized as propaganda: the political, vertical, agitative, and irrational forms. The second set is less readily so recognized: the sociological, horizontal, integrative, and rational forms. Particularly with the movement of deconstruction, it has become clearer over the decades how minds have been manipulated through the use of various strong images, deliberately fostered to create affinities or aversions to some authority, policy, or commercial product. Various symbols create feelings of national pride and serve to integrate a population to the nation-state. Other symbols can fuel hatreds of other people and can foment wars. Ellul has put us on guard against seemingly rational facts and figures when these are presented in a form that does not allow for proper analysis, so that the rational form gives way to an irrational effect in a given audience. Much has already been written in appreciation of Ellul's contributions to propaganda theory, and as I have intimated his contribution is of immense and enduring value. He has spotlighted the phenomenon of modern technological society, with the self-augmentation of different applications of "la technique" and the misplaced faith in the power of politics, science, law and economic activity to solve our problems. As with all genuinely creative thinkers who deal extensively with difficult subjects, there are problems with his theory, and I believe it will be rewarding to focus on these problems both as a means of clarifying inherent and inescapable difficulties, or as a means of finding solutions where such exist.

The problems fall into two categories. The first is that of interpretation. It is not difficult to find inconsistencies between what he says about the phenomenon of propaganda and the way in which he defines the term. How should we react to these inconsistencies? Is this careless thinking? Can his ideas be re-expressed in ways that

avoid inconsistency? The second problem concerns the ethics of propaganda. In a nutshell, he sometimes treats propaganda as amoral, at other times as immoral. Yet he also feels that under some circumstances propaganda cannot be avoided. Can we derive from all that he says about the subject of propaganda some ethical norms and clear guidance as to how one should deal with the pervasive phenomenon of propaganda in our time?

Before attempting to answer these questions it is appropriate to describe the overall purpose and plan in Ellul's writings. He was not an ivory-tower academic. He wrote for general as well as academic audiences, and he seems to have tailored his language carefully to his different audiences, in true rhetorical style. If Ellul had one single mission, it was to liberate his contemporaries and perhaps future readers as well, from the many, sometimes subtle, ways in which human beings are enslaved. In true Christian fashion, he does not divide the world into one evil group that wants to dominate a good group. As Camus wrote, we all carry the plague within us, and if people are enslaved by propaganda, it is partly because they want to be. So he has importantly drawn attention to the fact that the modern human being, cut loose from so many family, religious and community ties, is looking for some kind of security anchor and finds it by fitting in with the mass consciousness shaped by the current media. Ellul's aim is to shake his contemporaries out of the passive frame of mind, and he does this with various tropes of language. To persuade and give dispassionate analysis are two different things, each of which has ethical pluses and minuses. Which should be uppermost will generally depend on circumstances. Because his writings engage with his readers, tropes suitable for persuasion sometimes take precedence over the philosopher's demands for consistency. Perhaps that is one reason why Ellul preferred not to call himself a philosopher, and seemed to think, like Emerson, that a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds. But if a consistent theory can be constructed which incorporates both the theoretical and pragmatic aspects of his writings, then there will be a better basis for theoretical evaluation of his work.

#### Consistency of Definition and Interpretation

I turn now to the problem of consistency, starting with the problem of definition. An example is the following: Ellul defines "propaganda" as a "means of gaining power by the psychological manipulation of groups or masses, or of using this power with the support of the masses" (Larousse, *La Grande Encyclopedie*, 1975, p. 9888), yet his discussion of the phenomenon of propaganda appears to extend the boundaries of the concept so-defined. It's not clear, for example, that sociological propaganda is always disseminated for the specific purpose of manipulating the masses to acquire or maintain power. This may be one reason why he distances himself, in *Propaganda*, from the project of defining the term., saying in the Preface "I will not give a definition of my own here" (xii).

Some of his statements about propaganda have definitional implications that are at odds with both his stated definition and some of his discussions of the subject. He writes: "Propaganda must be total" in a context where he is not just saying that

propaganda will be more effective if it is total. For he continues with “The propagandist must utilize all of the technical means at his disposal...” and “There is no propaganda as long as one makes use, in sporadic fashion and at random, of a newspaper article here, a poster or a radio program there..” (9). My point is that psychological manipulation of the masses can be partial in its means and in its effect and still contribute to the gaining of power, thus satisfying the definition. I think most of us would concede, for example, that Michael Moore’s documentary film *Fahrenheit 9/11* can be viewed in some of its aspects, as propaganda (even though it exposes a lot of propaganda on the “other side,” and might on balance be better described as counter-propaganda).

The principle of charity in interpretation requires us to look for the best possible resolution of apparent contradictions. One explanation is that Ellul operates with different understandings of “propaganda” in different contexts. He himself has allowed that “propaganda” has a broad and a narrow sense (xiii). He also makes reference to “extreme propaganda” (11) when he refers to Nazi or Soviet propaganda. So it makes sense that when talking about the impact propaganda has on the human psyche, he should have in mind propaganda that is pervasive. A second reason why he should make statements about the necessity for propaganda being total is that he has his eye on the everexpanding political and commercial public relations specialists, spin-doctors, advertisers and the like. As with “la technique” generally there is an inherent expansionist tendency.

So there is an Aristotelian and Hegelian component to his definition, one which looks organically at a phenomenon, projecting how it will develop according to its inherent nature. Its nature is such that it is impelled toward total domination of the human psyche. This explanation is also applicable to another oddity in Ellul’s treatment of propaganda: his claim that modern propaganda is totally different from persuasion in previous centuries. Surely, it might be said, Aristotle’s treatment of rhetoric deals with some of the basic ideas governing propaganda as well. Differences there surely are, but they are not “total.” Not so, on this interpretation of Ellul. There really is a striking difference, in that the ancient rhetorician might want to praise a person or promote a policy, but was not bent on reconstituting another person’s whole mind. By contrast, modern technological society shows a remarkable convergence of the political, ideological and commercial as Disney takes over the news and McDonald’s engages in myth-making, as its Ronald character rivals Santa Claus for recognition by young children. Were it not for the power of the Internet I suspect that the whole myth about saving Private Jessica Lynch might have gained acceptance instead of being repudiated as it was in the end.. Art and entertainment have become commercialized and politicized. Ellul was right about the direction in which propaganda was headed.

On this interpretation, Ellul does not have to deny that devious presentations, sly presentation of facts an imagery, are propaganda. All he needs to say is that while these are usefully designated as manifestations of propaganda, they don’t reveal propaganda in its essence, which is expansionist and totalitarian. Put another way, one might consider misleading presentations aimed at gaining power over large audiences



to fit the definition of propaganda as commonly conceived, but in saying this an important reality about propaganda becomes, to use Heideggerian terms, covered over. In trying to uncover the truth about propaganda, Ellul looks more profoundly into the phenomenon as it has existed with the advent of modern industrial civilization.

Other questions connected with Ellul's definition remain, but are not especially difficult to resolve. Are propagandists necessarily power hungry? For Ellul it is important to distinguish between the Christian message as propounded by crusaders seeking wealth and glory, from that disseminated by monks at Cluny who believed their message would lead to liberation of souls from slavery to false values. The latter is not propaganda for Ellul. Other propaganda theorists would demur, either because they accept a definition according to which propaganda is value neutral (thus including both) or because they believe that sincerity and belief in an influence as liberating is not sufficient to disqualify persuasive communication from being propaganda (thus also including both, but not by reason of value neutrality). The case of the sincere Nazi can be adduced. My attitude on these questions joins Ellul's where he observes (xii) that there is simply no agreed upon definition of propaganda. How one defines the term, explicitly or implicitly, may vary according to the context and circumstances of a given communication. A person should use the word with caution. One who describes certain materials as propaganda, meaning it in a neutral sense, may convey the wrong message to an audience that believes propaganda is inescapably tied to wrong-doing.

#### On the Ethics of Propaganda

More formidable still is the question of the ethics of propaganda, about which Ellul again seems to have had views of contradictory import. Propaganda is opposed to human freedom. On the face of things, this should make it wrong. Yet Ellul appears in places to accept that propaganda is amoral. It isn't immoral, it just is, he claims. Supporting this position is his view that propaganda is necessary in the modern world. Without, so far as I know, him spelling out the reasoning, there are philosophical arguments that can support this position. If we follow Kant and his "ought" implies "can," along with its *modus tollens* that "cannot" implies that there is no "ought," (meaning for example that I'm not obliged to jump into deep water to save a drowning person when I cannot swim) then necessity frees us from a moral obligation. If I have no option but to engage in propaganda then I can't be blamed for doing so.

This view is very problematic, both as an interpretation of Ellul's overall considered view, and as an account of the truth about the ethics of propaganda. For example, Kant's stated views about lying might lead us to question whether "we have no option" when it comes to engaging in propaganda. It is hard to accept that Ellul would dissociate propaganda completely from morality. He has made it clear that propaganda, considered in its entirety, is deeply antithetical to human freedom. So one would think that a proper ethical stance should not be to dismiss it as amoral, but rather to expose it and thereby detoxify its pernicious effects. Since propaganda on one side of an issue generates counter-propaganda on the other side, any foray into it should be governed by principles akin to those applicable to so-called just wars. "Dirty hands"

ethics requires one to limit such activity to the minimum necessary to accomplish a just objective, and to seek at the same time to offset the bad effects of one's own norm-violations when the opportunity arises.

In my conversation with Ellul (in 1980), he appeared to agree with this. As an example, he thought that the French government might have offset Nazi propaganda in France in the late 1930s by subsidizing those Leftist publications in France that were foundering with the victory of Franco. These publications were the natural rallying grounds for anti-Nazi feeling in France and with help would have kept alive an important source of opinion formation there, and provided greater support for resistance to Hitler during the period of the "phoney war" before the May Blitzkrieg. Supporting groups who freely express themselves would be less intrusive on freedom than the government directly imposing its own viewpoint upon the public. In calculating the effects of a government engaging in propaganda, one would need to factor in the likelihood of a discounting effect if the source of this propaganda were to be known to the public. The result of this factoring would likely be a need for an increase of propaganda to counter that discounting.

How then do we account for his statement that propaganda is amoral? The resolution to this exegetical question can be convincingly found in his article, "The ethics of propaganda: propaganda, innocence, and amorality" (*Communication* 6 (1981): 159-175; reprinted in this issue of the *Ellul Forum*), where he makes it clear from the beginning that he thinks propaganda is profoundly related to morality, or more precisely (I would add) to immorality. At the conclusion of that essay, he sketches the nature of ethics and moral existence, maintaining that these are only possible "with reference to others, in dialogue and in reciprocal participation in a common life. All ethics is necessarily an ethics of encounter." Ethics requires the "interplay of differences without exclusions" and it "dies when it becomes a rigid law imposed from without." Yet propaganda "substitutes for this relationship a sort of collectivity, where each person remains completely alone and yet still belongs to a collective mass, where there are no interiorizations of a law, where behaviors stem from an external impetus, from a manipulation of which man remains completely unconscious." (174-5). So propaganda appears to be the antithesis of morality. Why not, then, call it immoral?

One answer to why he chooses not to treat propaganda as simply immoral is connected to the definitional question dealt with earlier. If we think of propaganda as something total and pervasive, which in its essence, in Ellul's view, it is, then we need to take into account that it incorporates its own moral system. It becomes an ideological system impervious to critique from without. If we compare it to a legal system it is like the basic norms which form the constitution. The constitution can be changed, but legally only within the structure and norms provided by the constitution itself. The system which propaganda imposes, bearing in mind that the propaganda is total, contains its own morality with it, whether we speak of Communism, Nazism, or any other highly propagandized societies, whether theocracies or technique-dominated liberal and commercial democracies.

That being the case the propagandized system cannot be effectively criticized on the basis of moral philosophies which do not accept the premises of that system. It would be like going to a court of law in the United States and arguing on the basis of Soviet legal practice. To take another pertinent analogy, the propaganda system is like one of Kierkegaard's three spheres of existence. Within each sphere the argumentative base cannot be effectively argued against from the standpoint of one of the other spheres. The aesthete's ideological framework is insulated from the ethical, and the ethical from the religious. One is tempted to say that the relation to Kierkegaard's spheres of existence is not just analogical: propaganda institutes its own ethical sphere. Even a theocracy when established by propaganda negates true faith, which in its essence involves free embracing of beliefs. One recalls Kierkegaard again, and his statement that the truth established by 10,000 yelling men becomes by the means of its dissemination the very opposite of truth.

This account seems to me one way to satisfy the exegetical problem. Ellul believes propaganda to be the reverse of morality, but he can call it amoral insofar as he recognizes that like absolute monarchs and God it is above the law which it imposes. This or that propaganda system is in play, with the consequent morality that it establishes, and any critique based on opposing values will simply not get a hearing, assuming it could even find a way of expressing itself. (If I may be permitted a political aside here I notice that in the presidential debates the idea that the United States should forgo any claim to Iraq's oil so as to prove the purity of its intentions in invading Iraq simply is not raised. The underlying premise of the need for continued U.S. dominance of the world is not subject to debate.)

But this is not the whole story. Traditional thinking about immorality links us with intentional wrong-doing, the deliberate transgression of moral norms. There is room also for wilful blindness, recklessness and negligence. But so-called invincible ignorance has been held to remove the stigma of guilt. Ellul's message is often to the effect that we are deceived, not necessarily through our fault, about the effects of technology ("la technique" more precisely) and of propaganda on ourselves. So that would be a different reason for treating propaganda as amoral. But it is not a reason that can persist in cases where invincible ignorance turns into wilful blindness, and Ellul's efforts help to bring about such a transformation.

When we come to pass from the exegetical question to the substantial question about the ethics of propaganda, then I believe we need to make adjustments to the Ellulian account. We do have freedom of expression, though it is curtailed or devalued by many different influences coming from concealed sources. Among the competing propagandas we still have the freedom to pursue our different faiths with their spiritual and moral messages. From that moral dimension, we can indeed treat propaganda as antithetical to morality, and immoral for that very reason. As Ellul himself says, echoing St. Augustine, the good end does not justify the bad means; rather the means chosen tells us something about the ends and are not to be separated from those ends (recall also Camus on this point).

If we return to the idea that not all of what we term propaganda is total, and that what goes by that name does not always exclude respect for the freedom and integrity of the other, then we have a basis for evaluating each propaganda exercise in its context on a case-by-case basis. What Ellul would have us do is think about the danger of, for example, shortcuts to persuading mass audiences, and to concentrate on the phenomenon of propaganda as a whole, in the context of modern technological society.

I believe that the reason he did not take the case-by-case approach is that he was acutely aware of the imperviousness of his audience, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, to arguments based on moral principles. Positivism was still a reigning influence. To reach and affect an audience, appeal to scientific arguments were needed. By claiming to eschew morality, and by setting up propaganda as an amoral phenomenon to be analysed scientifically, he had exactly the right approach to gain a sympathetic hearing. The moral message comes through in that book, though somewhat problematically, and it helps to have his elucidation in 1981 to reinforce that message. It is a message that bears pondering as we confront a world where the leader of a country with the most powerful military weaponry wants to spend huge amounts to expand its technological capabilities while his opponent would like to expand scientific stem cell research to combat illnesses. In neither case are the moral implications thoroughly confronted in the public debate, and the power of various myths, of freedom, progress and the like, appear once again to be uppermost. Without presuming the answers to these policy matters, one can at least recognize the poverty of the discourse in which they are presented to the public.

## Semantics and Ethics of Propaganda

by Jay Black

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Early Approaches to Propaganda

One implication of the term propaganda, when it was first used in the sociological sense by the Roman Catholic Church, was to the spreading of ideas that would not occur naturally, but only via a cultivated or artificial generation. In 1622, the Vatican established the Congregatio de Propaganda Fide, to harmonize the content and teaching of faith in its missions and consolidate its power. As Combs and Nimmo maintained (1993, p. 201), this early form of propaganda was considered by the Church to be a moral endeavor.

Over time the term took on more negative connotations; in a semantic sense, propaganda became value laden, and in an ethical sense, it was seen as immoral. In 1842 W. T. Brande, writing in the Dictionary of Science, Literature and Art, called propaganda something "applied to modern political language as a term of reproach to secret associations for the spread of opinions and principles which are viewed by most governments with horror and aversion" (Qualter, 1962, p. 4).

Following World War I, R. Wreford (1923) maintained that propaganda had retained its pejorative connotations as "a hideous word" typical of an age noted for its "etymological bastardy" (Qualter, 1962, p. 7). At that time, the forces of propaganda, public relations, and psychological warfare had become inextricably intertwined in the public's mind. Social scientists and propaganda analysts, strongly influenced by models of behaviorism, tended to depict a gullible public readily manipulated by forces over which it had little control (Institute for Propaganda Analysis, 1937; Lee & Lee, 1988). This depiction offended humanists and progressives who feared propaganda as a threat to democracy and saw public enlightenment through education as the best defense against the inevitability of propaganda (see Michael Sproule, 1989 & 1997). In 1929, for instance, Everett Martin wrote (p 145):

Education aims at independence of judgment. Propaganda offers ready-made opinions for the unthinking herd. Education and propaganda are directly opposed both in aim and method. The educator aims at a slow process of development; the propagandist, at quick results. The educator tries to tell people how to think; the propagandist, what to think. The educator strives to develop individual responsibility; the propagandist, mass effects. The educator fails unless he achieves an open mind; the propagandist unless he achieves a closed mind.

In a 1935 book, Leonard Doob drew a further distinction between education and propaganda by saying that

If individuals are controlled through the use of suggestion . . . then the process may be called propaganda, regardless of whether or not the propagandist intends to exercise the control. On the other hand if individuals are affected in such a way that the same result would be obtained with or without the aid of suggestion, then this process maybe called education, regardless of the intention of the educator. (p. 80).

Harold Lasswell (1927) offered the first attempt to systematically define propaganda to assure some degree of validity and reliability in studies of the phenomenon. Propaganda, Lasswell wrote, is "the control of opinion by significant symbols, or, so to speak, more concretely and less accurately, by stories, rumors, reports, pictures, and other forms of social communications" (p. 627). A year later George Catlin (1936) defined propaganda as the mental instillation by any appropriate means, emotional or intellectual, of certain views. He said the "instillation of views may be animated by no strong sense of moral or political urgency," and that "it may amount to little more than the distribution of information, public acquaintance with which is advantageous to the institution concerned" (pp. 127-128). The 1930s and 1940s saw propaganda's definitions reflecting social science's struggles between behaviorism (the "stimulus response"

model) and a more value neutral stance. At the same time, propaganda was applied to increasingly broad categories of social and political phenomena.

Edgar Henderson (1943) proposed that no definition of propaganda can succeed unless it meets several requirements: (a) it must be objective; (b) it must be psychological, or at least sociopsychological, rather than sociological or axiological; (c) it must include all the cases without being so broad as to become fuzzy; (d) it must differentiate the phenomenon from both similar and related phenomena; and (e) it must throw new light on the phenomenon itself, making possible a new understanding of known facts concerning the phenomenon and suggesting new problems for investigation (p. 71). Given these criteria, Henderson claimed previous definitions fell short, and proposed that "propaganda is a process which deliberately attempts through persuasion-techniques to secure from the propagandee, before he can deliberate freely, the responses desired by the propagandist" (p. 83).

Doob (1948) defined propaganda as "the attempt to affect the personalities and to control the behavior of individuals toward ends considered unscientific or of doubtful value in a society at a particular time" (p. 240). Doob employed propaganda in a neutral sense "to describe the influence of one person upon other persons when scientific knowledge and survival values are uncertain," indicating that "propaganda is absolutely inevitable and cannot be exorcised by calling it evil-sounding names" (1948, p. 244).

#### Past Half Century

Following World War II, propaganda was often defined in accordance with constantly shifting perspectives on political theory and the processes / effects and structures / functions of mass communication. Some scholars, such as Alfred McClung Lee (1952), stubbornly held to earlier models of humanity-as-victim when defining propaganda as something that was vivid, emotional, and attempted to override common sense. Increasingly, however, as media and organized persuasion enterprises in and of themselves were seen to have diminished mind-molding influences, definitions (and, we presume, fears) of propaganda softened.

Many of the midcentury explorations of propaganda considered the phenomenon in terms of the totality of persuasive characteristics of a culture or society. More recently, definitions have incorporated concerns about subtle, long-term but difficult to measure media effects. Also, many modern approaches to the subject have allowed that propaganda need not necessarily be deliberately and systematically manipulative of consumers-cum-victims, but may merely be the incidental by-product of our contemporary technological and/or information society.

Terrence Qualter, in his 1962 book on propaganda and psychological warfare, called propaganda

The deliberate attempt by some individual or group to form, control, or alter the attitudes of other groups by the use of the instruments of communication, with the intention that in any given situation the reaction of those so influenced will be that desired by the propagandist. (p. 27)

Qualter (1962) argued that the phrase "the deliberate attempt" was the key to his concept of propaganda, because, as he claimed, he had established "beyond doubt" that anything may be used as propaganda and that nothing belongs exclusively to propaganda. The significance, he said, was that any act of promotion can be propaganda "only if and when it becomes part of a deliberate campaign to induce action through the control of attitudes" (p. 27).

French social philosopher Jacques Ellul (1964, 1965), whose ideas have significantly informed the propaganda research agenda in recent decades, held a sophisticated view construing propaganda as a popular euphemism for the totality of persuasive components of culture. Ellul (1965) saw a world in which numerous elements of society were oriented toward the manipulation of individuals and groups, and thereby defined propaganda as "a set of methods employed by an organized group that wants to bring about the active or passive participation in its actions of a mass of individuals, psychologically unified through psychological manipulations and incorporated in an organization" (p. 61). Propaganda performs an

indispensable function in society, according to Ellul (1965):

Propaganda is the inevitable result of the various components of the technological society, and plays so central a role in the life of that society that no economic or political development can take place without the influence of its great power. Human Relations in social relationships, advertising or Human Engineering in the economy, propaganda in the strictest sense in the field of politics—the need for psychological influence to spur allegiance and action is everywhere the decisive factor, which progress demands and which the individual seeks in order to be delivered from his own self. (p. 160)

Although recognizing the significance of the traditional forms of propaganda utilized by revolutionaries and the heavy-handed types of propaganda employed by despots and totalitarian regimes—"agitation" and "political" propaganda, Ellul (1965) focused more on the culturally pervasive nature of what he called "sociological" and "integration" propaganda. What Ellul (1965) defined as "the penetration of an ideology by means of its sociological context" (p. 63) is particularly germane to a study of mass media persuasion. Advertising, public relations, and the culturally persuasive components of entertainment media are all involved in the "spreading of a certain style of life" (p. 63), and all converge toward the same point.

In a sense, sociological propaganda is reversed from political propaganda because in political propaganda the ideology is spread through the mass media to get the public to accept some political or economic structure or to participate in some action, whereas in sociological propaganda, the existing economic, political, and sociological factors progressively allow an ideology to penetrate individuals or masses. Ellul (1965) called the latter a sort of persuasion from within, "essentially diffuse, rarely conveyed by catchwords or expressed intentions" (p. 64). He added that it is instead "based on a general climate, atmosphere that influences people imperceptibly without having the appearance of propaganda" (Ellul, 1965, p. 64). The result is that the public adopts new

criteria of judgment and choice, adopting them spontaneously, almost as if choosing them via free will—which means that sociological propaganda produces “a progressive adaptation to a certain order of things, a certain concept of human relations, which unconsciously molds individuals and makes them conform to society” (Ellul, 1965, pp. 63-64). In contemporary society this is “long-term propaganda, a self-reproducing propaganda that seeks to obtain stable behavior, to adapt the individual to his everyday life, to reshape his thoughts and behavior in terms of the permanent social setting” (Ellul, 1964, p. 74)

It is significant to point out that those who produce sociological or integration propaganda often do so unconsciously, given how thoroughly (and perhaps blindly) they themselves are invested in the values and belief systems being promulgated. Besides, if one is an unintentional “integration” propagandist merely seeking to maintain the status quo, one’s efforts would seem to be *prima facie* praiseworthy and educational. However, when considering propaganda as a whole, Ellul (1981) concluded that the enterprise was pernicious and immoral—a view shared by many but not all other students of the subject. Ellul (1981) argued that pervasive and potent propaganda that creates a world of fantasy, myth, and delusion is anathema to ethics because (a) the existence of power in the hands of propagandists does not mean it is right for them to use it (the is-ought problem); (b) propaganda destroys a sense of history and continuity and philosophy so necessary for a moral life; and (c) by supplanting the search for truth with imposed truth, propaganda destroys the basis for mutual thoughtful interpersonal communication and thus the essential ingredients of an ethical existence (Combs & Nimmo, 1993, p. 202; Cunningham, 1992; Ellul, 1981, pp. 159-177; Johannesen, 1983, p. 116).

Persuasion researcher George Gordon’s (1971) eclectic definition of propaganda suggested that most teachers and most textbooks, except those involved in teaching abstract skills, are inherently propagandistic. (In his chapter on “Education, Indoctrination, and Training,” Gordon argued that one failure of the American educational system is that there is not enough propaganda in the lower grades, and too much in graduate schools.)

John C. Merrill and Ralph Lowenstein (1971) published the first mass media textbook in the modern era that seriously analyzed propaganda and its employment in media. The authors generalized that from the numerous definitions of propaganda they had read they discerned certain recurring themes or statements or core ideas, among them “manipulation,” “purposeful management,” “preconceived plan,” “creation of desires,” “reinforcement of biases,” “arousal of preexisting attitudes,” “irrational appeal,” “specific objective,” “arousal to action,” “predetermined end,” “suggestion,” and “creation of dispositions” (pp. 221-226). They concluded:

It seems that propaganda is related to an attempt (implies intent) on the part of somebody to manipulate somebody else. By manipulate we mean to control—to control not only the attitudes of others but also their actions. Somebody (or some *group*)—the



propagandist—is predisposed to cause others to think a certain way, so that they may, on some cases, take a certain action. (p. 214)

Notwithstanding the work of Gordon, Merrill, and a few others whose textbooks containing observations about propaganda were published in the 1970s, an honest appraisal of propaganda scholarship shows a void of what Cunningham (2000) called "front-line academic research" between the 1950s and early 1980s. Cunningham (2000) went so far as to call propaganda a "theoretically undeveloped notion" during that period, and lauded the recent Ellulian-motivated resurgence of propaganda scholarship (p. 2). Some of that recent research and commentary (see especially Combs & Nimmo, 1993; Edelstein, 1997; Jowett & O' Donnell, 1999; Pratkanis & Aronson, 1992; Smith, 1989) has painted propaganda with a wider brush that covers the canvas of media, popular culture, and politics, and posits that propaganda need not necessarily be as systematic and purposive as earlier definitions demanded. Indeed, the likelihood of unconscious or accidental propaganda, produced by unwitting agents of the persuasion industry, makes the ethical analysis of contemporary propaganda ever more intriguing.

Consider only a few of the most recent definitions and discussions of propaganda (Cole, 1998). Ted Smith (1989), editor of *Propaganda: A Pluralist Perspective*, called propaganda "Any conscious and open attempt to influence the beliefs of an individual or group, guided by a predetermined end and characterized by the systematic use of irrational and often unethical techniques of persuasion" (p. 80). Jowett and O' Donnell (1999) recently echoed that perspective, calling propaganda "The deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist" (p. 279). In Smith's (1989) edited volume Nicholas Burnett (1989) defined propaganda simply as "discourse in the service of ideology" (p. 127).

Pratkanis and Aronson (1992), in *Age of Propaganda: The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion*, used the term propaganda to refer to "the mass persuasion techniques that have come to characterize our postindustrial society," and "the communication of a point of view with the ultimate goal of having the recipient of the appeal come to 'voluntarily' accept this position as if it were his or her own" (p. 8). Media scholar Alex Edelstein, in his 1997 book *Total Propaganda: From Mass Culture to Popular Culture*, said "old propaganda" is traditionally employed by the government or the socially and economically influential members in "a hierarchical mass culture, in which only a few speak to many"(p. 5). It is intended for "the control and manipulation of mass cultures" (p. 4). He contrasts this with the "new propaganda" inherent in a broadly participant popular culture "with its bedrock of First Amendment rights, knowledge, egalitarianism, and access to communication" (p. 5).

#### Social Psychology of Propaganda

Scholarly analyses of propaganda tend to focus on either the political or semantic/rhetorical nature of the beast. An equally intriguing set of insights has been offered by social psychologists, concerned as they are with the nature of belief and value systems

and the various psychological needs that a phenomenon such as propaganda tends to fulfill. Until recently, philosophers have been noticeably absent from the fray.

Throughout the 20th century, various schools of sociology and psychology (and, recently, the hyphenated pairing of the two) have concluded that propaganda is produced and consumed by individuals with particular sociopsychological characteristics. What Ellul (1965) has described as sociological and integration propaganda has been the focus of their attention, as it is ours.

The past half-century's concerns over media propaganda have been based on the often stated assumption that one responsibility of a democratic media system is to encourage an open-minded citizenry—that is, a people who are curious, questioning, unwilling to accept simple pat answers to complex situations, and so forth. Mental freedom, the argument goes, comes when people have the capacity, and exercise the capacity, to weigh numerous sides of controversies (political, personal, economic, etc.) and come to their own rational decisions, relatively free of outside constraints.

#### Open and Closed Mind

A growing body of research on perception and belief systems seems to be concluding that individuals constantly strive for cognitive balance as they view and communicate about the world, and that individuals will select and rely on information consistent with their basic perceptions. This holds true for mass media practitioners as well as for their audiences. A *Journalism Quarterly* study by Donohew and Palmgreen (1971), for instance, showed that open-minded journalists underwent a great deal of stress when having to report information they weren't inclined to believe or agree with because the open-minded journalists' self-concepts demanded that they fairly evaluate all issues. Closed-minded journalists, on the other hand, underwent much less stress because it was easy for them to make snap decisions consistent with their basic world views—especially because they were inclined to go along with whatever information was given to them by authoritative sources (Donohew & Palmgreen, 1971, pp. 627-39, 666).

Social psychologist Milton Rokeach (1960), in his seminal work *The Open and Closed Mind*, concluded empirically that the degree to which a person's belief system is open or closed is the extent to which the person can receive, evaluate, and act on relevant information received from the outside on its own intrinsic merits, unencumbered by irrelevant factors in the situation arising from within the person or from the outside (p. 57). To Rokeach (1960), open-minded individuals seek out sources (media and otherwise) that challenge them to think for themselves rather than sources that offer overly simplified answers to complex problems. Open-minded media consumers seek independent and pluralistic media because they value independence and pluralism—even, on occasion, dissonance—in their own cosmology, interpersonal relationships, and political life. Closed-minded or dogmatic media consumers, on the other hand, seek out and relish the opposite kinds of messages, taking comfort in simplified, pat answers (usually relayed by "authoritative sources"), in conformity, in a world in which the good guys and the bad guys are readily identifiable, in which there is a simplistic and direct connection between causes and effects (Rokeach, 1954, 1960, 1964).

## Belief Systems and Media Propaganda

One of the dominant themes in media criticism for much of the past half century or so has been the tendency of media to mitigate against open-mindedness. Recent assessments reinforce the 1922 lamentations of Walter Lippmann concerning the stereotypical pictures in the heads of people, the incomplete reflections of political, economic, and social reality from which individuals make choices and public opinion is produced. If people lack time, opportunity, and inclination to become fully acquainted with one another and with their environment, it is only natural for them to act as Rokeach's (1954, 1960, 1964) dogmatic, closed-minded media consumers—prompted and fulfilled by media whose stock in trade is production of such public opinion-molding propaganda.

There is, of course, an argument that people need media to provide them with predigested views because they can't experience all of life first-hand. By definition, media come between realities and media consumers, and we are certainly not arguing for the elimination of those media. (Some have noted that online media and the Internet may appear to eliminate the mediating, and hence propagandistic, function of traditional media, but that argument falls when one considers that a prime reason to use new media is to pander to self-interest and to reinforce preexisting prejudices.)

The logic of Ellul (1965) is compelling in this regard, as he argued that people in a technological society need to be propagandized, to be "integrated into society" via media. As Ellul (1965) saw it, people with such a need get carried along unconsciously on the surface of events, not thinking about them but rather "feeling" them. Modern citizens, Ellul (1965) concluded, therefore condemn themselves to lives of successive moments, discontinuous and fragmented—and the media are largely responsible. The hapless victims of information overload seek out propaganda as a means of ordering the chaos, according to Ellul (1965). If our nature is to eschew dissonance and move toward a homeostatic mental set, the crazy quilt patterns of information we receive from our mass media would certainly drive us to some superior authority of information or belief that would help us make more sense of our world. Propaganda thus becomes inevitable.

Most of the foregoing emphasizes the propagandee's belief system, showing parallels between dogmatic personality types and the "typical" propagandee. Not much of a case has been made to maintain that propagandists themselves possess the basic characteristics of the dogmatist, but there is much evidence suggesting that communicators who are intentionally and consciously operating as propagandists recognize that one of their basic tasks is to keep the minds of their propagandees closed. The conscious propagandists can operate most successfully by raising themselves above their messages and goals, conducting propaganda campaigns as a master conductor plays with an orchestra. (As Eric Hoffer, 1951, reminded us, Jesus was not a Christian, nor was Marx a Marxist [p. 128]). Unconscious propagandists are another matter; they may have unconsciously absorbed the belief and value system that they propagate in their daily integration or socialization propaganda. Their unexamined propagandistic lives

reflect a cognitive system that has slammed shut every bit as tightly as the authorities for whom they blindly "spin" and as the most gullible of their propaganda's recipients.

As Donohew and Palmgreen (1971) implied, it appears to be very difficult and stressful for both media practitioners and media consumers to retain pluralistic orientations. If people are not undergoing any mental stress, it may be that they aren't opening their minds long enough to allow discrepant information to enter. This is not to say that stress and strain in and of themselves make for open-minded media behavior. They may just make for confusion and result from confusion. However, if media personnel and audiences never find themselves concerned over contradictory information, facts that don't add up, opinions that don't cause them to stop and think, then they are being closed-minded purveyors and passive receivers of propaganda.

#### Propaganda Revisited

At this juncture, insights from propaganda analysts, media critics, social psychologists, and semanticists can be amalgamated into reasonably objective insights into the propagandistic nature of contemporary society. The insights can be applied to the producers of propaganda, the contents of propaganda, and the consumers of propaganda.

The emerging picture of propagandists / propaganda / propagandees and their opposites, as uncovered by the preceding discussions, reveals several definite patterns of semantic/belief systems/ethical/and so forth behavior. Note that on one hand the dogmatist (typical of propagandist and propagandee, and revealed in the manifest content of propaganda) seeks psychological closure whether rational or not; appears to be driven by irrational inner forces; has an extreme reliance on authority figures; reflects a narrow time perspective; and displays little sense of discrimination among fact/inference/value judgment. On the other hand, the nondogmatist faces a constant struggle to remain open-minded by evaluating information on its own merits; is governed by self-actualizing forces rather than irrational inner forces; discriminates between and among messages and sources and has tentative reliance on authority figures; recognizes and deals with contradictions, incomplete pictures of reality, and the interrelation of past, present, and future; and moves comfortably and rationally among levels of abstraction (fact, inference, and value judgment).

The preceding typologies help lead us to an original synopsis of propaganda, one meeting the criteria laid down by Henderson in 1943. It is sociopsychological, broad without being fuzzy, differentiates propaganda from similar and related phenomena, and sheds new light on the phenomena. In addition, it describes the characteristics of propagandists, the propaganda they produce, and propagandees—something sorely lacking in most other definitions. The synopsis is as follows:

Although it may or may not emanate from individuals or institutions with demonstrably closed minds, the manifest content of propaganda contains characteristics one associates with dogmatism or closed-mindedness. Although it may or may not be intended as propaganda, this type of communication seems noncreative and appears to have as its purpose the evaluative narrowing of its receivers. Whereas creative communication accepts pluralism and displays expectations that its receivers should conduct

further investigations of its observations, allegations, and conclusions, propaganda does not appear to do so. Rather, propaganda is characterized by at least the following six specific characteristics:

1. A heavy or undue reliance on authority figures and spokespersons, rather than empirical validation, to establish its truths, conclusions, or impressions.
2. The utilization of unverified and perhaps unverifiable abstract nouns, adjectives, adverbs, and physical representations rather than empirical validation to establish its truths, conclusions, or impressions
3. A finalistic or fixed view of people, institutions, and situations divided into broad, all-inclusive categories of in-groups (friends) and out-groups (enemies), beliefs and disbeliefs, and situations to be accepted or rejected in toto.
4. A reduction of situations into simplistic and readily identifiable cause and effect relations, ignoring multiple causality of events.
5. A time perspective characterized by an overemphasis or underemphasis on the past, present, or future as disconnected periods rather than a demonstrated consciousness of time flow.
6. A greater emphasis on conflict than on cooperation among people, institutions, and situations.

This synopsis encourages a broad-based investigation of public communications behavior along a propaganda -nonpropaganda continuum. Practitioners and observers of media and persuasion could use this definition to assess their own and their media's performance (Black, 1977-1978). The definition applies to the news and information as well as to entertainment and persuasion functions in the media. Many criticisms of the supposedly objective aspects of media are entirely compatible with the aforementioned standards. Meanwhile, because most people expect advertisements, public relations programs, editorials, and opinion columns to be nonobjective and persuasive, if not outright biased, they may tend to avoid analyzing such messages for propagandistic content. However, because those persuasive messages can and should be able to meet their basic objectives without being unduly propagandistic, they should be held to the higher standards of nonpropaganda. (For what it's worth, persuasive media that are propagandistic, as defined herein, would seem to be less likely to attract and convince open-minded media consumers than to reinforce the biases of the closed-minded true believers, which raises an intriguing question about persuaders' ethical motives.)

#### Conclusions

We are not suggesting that the necessity for mediating reality and merchandising ideas, goods, and services inevitably results in propaganda. Far from it. Yet we do suggest that when there is a pattern of behavior on the part of participants in the communications exchange that repeatedly finds them dogmatically jumping to conclusions, making undue use of authority, basing assumptions on faulty premises, and otherwise engaging in inappropriate semantic behavior, then we can say they are engaging in propaganda. They may be doing it unconsciously. They may not be attempting to propagandize, or even be aware that their efforts can be seen as propagandistic, or

know that they are falling victim to propaganda. It may just be that their view of the world, their belief systems, their personal and institutional loyalties, and their semantic behaviors are propagandistic. But this doesn't excuse them.

It is sometimes said, among ethicists, that we should never attribute to malice what can be explained by ignorance. That aphorism certainly applies to propaganda, a phenomenon too many observers have defined as an inherently immoral enterprise that corrupts all who go near it. If instead we consider propaganda in less value-laden terms, we are better able to recognize ways all participants in the communications exchange can proceed intelligently through the swamp, and we can make informed judgments about the ethics of particular aspects of our communications rather than indicting the entire enterprise.

It is possible to conduct public relations, advertising, and persuasion campaigns, plus the vast gamut of informational journalism efforts, without being unduly propagandistic. In a politically competitive democracy and a commercially competitive free enterprise system, mass communication functions by allowing a competitive arena in which the advocates of all can do battle. What many call propaganda therefore becomes part of that open marketplace of ideas; it is not only inevitable, but may be desirable that there are openly recognizable and competing propagandas in a democratic society, propagandas that challenge all of us—producers and consumers—to wisely sift and sort through them.

A fully functioning democratic society needs pluralism in its persuasion and information, and not the narrow-minded, self-serving propaganda that some communicators inject—wittingly or unwittingly—into their communications and which, it seems, far too many media audience members unconsciously and uncritically consume. Open-mindedness and mass communications efforts need not be mutually exclusive.

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# Re-Viewing Ellul

## Histoire de la Propagande

Jacques Ellul

Presses universitaires de France (Que sais-je?), 1967. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1976. 128 pp.

Reviewed by Randal Marlin

*Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada*

This immensely useful, highly compact historical study of propaganda somehow never made it into English translation, but perhaps that situation will one day be remedied. The book is a classic, in the sense that one can revisit it thirty years later and still find insights newly applicable to changing historical circumstances. His earlier *Propaganda* shared this feature and continues to sell well today, more than 40 years after first publication. Ellul's *Histoire de la Propagande* was published in 1967 by P.U.F. as part of its *Que Sais-Je* series, with a second edition appearing in 1976. The series put a premium on highly concise, well-organized writing and Ellul delivers superbly well.

The book spans a European time frame from Ancient Greece to World War I, giving us many stimulating and sometimes provocative judgments along the way. As he defines propaganda for purposes of his study, it involves the sum of methods used by a political or religious power (he doesn't include commercial communication) with a view to obtaining ideological or psychological effects. Was Greek tragedy propaganda? It might have helped mould Hellenic identity and thereby shape political power, but he sees it as more existentially than politically motivated. Pisistratus on the other hand qualifies as propagandist with his false news, creation and exploitation of victim status, and portrayal of himself as under Athena's special protection –an early version of "God on his side."

He traces propaganda from Roman imperial times through the rise of Christianity to the development of the nation state, the French revolution, and the postrevolutionary need to address the general population. Propaganda in the fullest sense he links to the arrival of modern means of mass communication and the ability, first seen in the Soviet Union, of sustained and more or less total control of communication by a centralized body.

Ellul is very careful to distinguish politically motivated discourse and action, which he includes as propaganda, from that which is driven by religious or other motivations.

Some crusades were the result of propaganda, others not. Histories can be propaganda, as when the history of a crusade was written in such a way as to stimulate another.

What is freshly relevant? In a passage with uncanny resemblance to what some people see transpiring in the current U.S. situation under President George W. Bush, Ellul writes how Rome originally appealed to other peoples not only by its administrative efficiency, but also by virtue of its democratic and liberating character, its overthrow of tyranny, and its goal of making people responsible for themselves. But just at the time when Roman virtues were fading and freedom disappearing, the myth about these things was expanding. In my moments of pessimism I also anticipate that Ellul's sharp observations about Inquisition propaganda may have special application in years ahead, if they have not already done so.

## The Humiliation of the Word

Jacques Ellul,

Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1985. xiii, 285 pp. Translated by Joyce Main Hanks from

*La Parole humiliée* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1981)

Reviewed by Russell Heddendorff

Professor Emeritus of Sociology,

Covenant College, Lookout Mountain, Georgia

In this book, Ellul returns to a theme first presented in *The Presence of the Kingdom*; communication loses the meaning it had in Creation as it is dominated by the technical. This is because words are humiliated as they are devalued by media and people are denied the truth they were promised. Gradually, these broken promises have led to a broken humanity.

The dominant influence of technology in our modern world has led to this confusion of reality and truth. The meaning of Creation is inverted as we come to believe that truth is found in the image rather than in the word. For this reason, we give priority to seeing the image rather than hearing the word. The result has been "the triumphal progress of the image and the regression of the word in our society."

Ellul does not intend a complete condemnation of images. Rather, his concern is for the distortion of the place images have assumed in modern communication. Words have been "humiliated" by images when they are considered necessary for the proper interpretation of the word. Thus, we affirm the belief that a picture is worth a thousand words. Although Ellul tries to distance himself from the role of a prophet, his understanding clearly anticipates the increased influence of technological control of images and, consequently, the control of people who accept the reality conveyed by the image.

Ellul claims the unique value of language lies in truth which is created by the word and is not limited by public opinion. For this reason, the word has iconoclastic and

paradoxical power while the image becomes idolatrous as it conforms to opinion. There is no mystery in the image and the Wholly Other no longer exists. Ultimately, there is a struggle between “religions of sight” and the “proclamations of the Word”, a struggle which favors the former in a culture controlled by technology.

With this struggle, Ellul returns to the important distinction he makes in his work between “created reality” (the Word) and “constructed reality” (the image.) It is a struggle between the artificiality of man’s work expressed in culture and the transcendent quality found in God’s work expressed in dialogue. And it is in the paradoxical quality of language that the Word “is true to itself when it refers to Truth instead of Reality.”

It is as “the Creator, founder, and producer of truth” that the word finds its most important expression and provides the speaker with a “call to freedom.” This freedom is possible because the second most important characteristic of the word is that it is paradoxical; it always falls outside of accepted opinion and calls that opinion into question. It is this paradoxical quality which produces the final characteristic of the word; the fact that it is mystery whenever it transcends the assumptions about God or the person and we hear an “echo, knowing that there is something more.”

Ellul reminds us that the struggle between image and word is not new; for centuries, the Church has allowed sculpture and glass to arouse religious imagination. But the intended mystery has been replaced by efficacy as images replaced the word in piety and theology. Paradoxically, the Church, as an institution, stimulated the humiliation of the word and the negation of Christian faith. With an emphasis on visible reality, “the illusion of images becomes our ultimate reference point for living.”

This illusion has become so dominant in our culture that “the image-oriented person” now relies on an intellectual process that depends more on emotion than reason. Facts are grasped because of intuition, not logic. Consequently, reality is defined in terms of the image so that “whatever is not transmitted audiovisually does not matter.”

Ellul is characteristically hopeful despite the pessimism he brings to the problem of modern communication. The image and word may be reconciled but not with any reliance on technology. Rather, there must be an iconoclastic spirit which separates the image from any claims to truth. Further, language must remain open; “it must remain susceptible of being newly filled with unexpected content.” In this way, language “permits a continual adventure.” And it is in this adventure that Ellul finds the hope that will move us to a genuinely religious dialogue of man with God.

# In Review

## **Perspectives on Culture, Technology and Communication: The Media Ecology Tradition** edited by Casey Man Kong Lum

(Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc., 2006).

**Reviewed by J. Wesley Baker** Professor of Communication Arts, Cedarville University, Cedarville, Ohio

The thought of Jacques Ellul is most often ignored in the fields of communication and media studies. The few references to him in that literature tend to be dismissive, writing him off as a pessimistic technological determinist based upon a reading of the most familiar of his sociological analyses. It is refreshing, then, to find a group of communication and media scholars who consider Ellul to be “one of their own” and who have a good grasp of the whole of his work—sociological and religious. In this collection of essays, edited by Professor Casey Man Kong Lum of William Paterson University, Ellul is embraced as one of the seminal thinkers whose writings contributed to the development of media ecology as a way of understanding media. This embrace is not surprising when one considers that the eclecticism in sources and unorthodoxy in methodology which leave Ellul at the fringes of media scholarship mirror media ecology’s “pulling together likeminded ideas and theories from disparate academic disciplines under one roof” (pp. 22-23) in a conscious “revolt against . . . the dominant paradigm in communication” (p. 25).

Lum is among a small group of scholars uniquely positioned to write and edit a volume on media ecology because of his work as a graduate student at New York University with Neil Postman (to whom he credits the naming of the approach) and his close involvement in the development of media ecology as a branch of communication studies in its own right (he was one of the five founders of the Media Ecology Association). His introductory chapter, “Notes Toward an Intellectual History of Media Ecology,” provides both an introduction to the approach and a history of its development. Since this “intellectual tradition” largely developed through the Media Ecology program at NYU under Postman, it may be unfamiliar to those who are unfamiliar with that program. Lum’s essay thus provides an important contribution in chronicling the emergence of media ecology. “This book was conceived,” Lum explains, “to give the readers a general historiographic framework for understanding some of the

issues, theories, or themes, as well as some of the major thinkers behind them that define the paradigm content of media ecology as a theory group and an intellectual tradition” (pp. 38-39).

Lum’s introduction is followed by twelve chapters that “focus on a short list of media ecology’s foundational thinkers and some of the key theoretical issues they share” (p. 39). Postman’s important contribution is recognized in a chapter that publishes remarks he originally delivered as a keynote address to the first convention of the Media Ecology Association. The next set of chapters tend to follow the same structure: provide a “brief intellectual biography” of one of the theorists, then explain the “themes or theories” of that writer and how they contribute to the media ecology tradition (p. 40). Mumford, Ellul (covered in two chapters), Innis, McLuhan, Postman, Carey, and Worf and Langer each receive this treatment. The next two chapters are more integrative as the organizing principle changes from intellectual biographies to communication epochs—Orality & Literacy and Typography. In a short final chapter, Lum describes the current state of the media ecology tradition and suggests future directions for it as a theory group.

The rationale for two chapters on Ellul illustrates the degree to which the media ecologists (unlike most other media scholars) understand Ellul’s dialectic approach. Randy Kluver of Nanyang Technological University in Singapore focuses on Ellul’s sociological works while Ellul Forum Editor Clifford Christians examines how those sociological works relate to his theological writings.

Although Kluver concentrates on the sociological works, he does not present the kind of limited reading of Ellul that comes from those who have read only those works. His explication of *la technique* and propaganda are informed by a solid understanding of Ellul’s theology and his citations include the less read works in which Ellul more explicitly describes what he is about and how his works are in interplay. While Kluver’s review will go over familiar ground for most readers of *The Ellul Forum*, it is refreshing to find such a well-informed and balanced approach to Ellul finding circulation to a wider audience. His section “Criticisms of Ellul and His Work” clearly lays out four common criticisms of Ellul and thoughtfully counters each. He points out the adverse effect the clash in methodology and orientation between the “social scientific bent” of the field and Ellul’s “humanistic, critical approach” has on an understanding of Ellul (p. 111). Kluver also rejects the characterization of Ellul as a pessimist and a technological determinist by drawing from the religious works in which Ellul argues that a “realistic” view from outside the technological system provides an opportunity for hope. Kluver is weakest in dealing with the criticism that Ellul’s negative treatments of *la technique* “don’t correspond with our positive responses to technology” (p. 111). Here he tries to extrapolate a position from his assumption that “Ellul, undoubtedly, made use of the best medical technology he could when he was ill” and that he “used the modern media system to disseminate his own writings” (p. 111). Kluver’s argument would be bolstered by some statements from Ellul that suggest a tentatively positive view of the potential of “microcomputers” and the networked communication they provide for local groups

of citizens. If networked personal computers could be used for decentralized decision-making, Ellul suggested, they could be “a tool which will allow the society to transform itself.” (Interestingly enough, Ellul makes this assessment in an interview published in *Etc.*, *A Review of General Semantics*, in 1983—when Postman was serving as editor.) Kluver’s “Suggestions for Further Exploration” provide suggestions that resonate with the Forum’s purpose of “carry[ing] forward both [Ellul’s] sociological and theological analyses in new directions.”

While Kluver provides an overview of Ellul’s thought, Christians plumbs the depths of the personal and intellectual roots that inform that thought. His essay and Kluver’s, he notes, enable “readers of this anthology to evaluate Ellul in the terms he himself has specified” (p. 119). Christians chronicles how Ellul’s conversion first to Marxism and shortly thereafter to Christianity set up the sociological and theological poles for his dialectic to be dealt with in counterpoint and never reconciled. He then develops Ellul’s “theology of confrontation” in *The Meaning of the City* (which served as a counterpoint to *The Technological Society*) (p. 120). From there Christians moves to the impact of Karl Barth’s neo-orthodoxy on Ellul, with its theme of freedom and “biblical dialectic” of “both the No and the Yes of God’s word over the world” (p. 124).

The depth of Christians’ work in human intellectual history are revealed in his discussion of Ellul’s development of *la technique* and the triumph of means. Here Christians looks to Galileo as the figure that establishes the materialist assumptions of modern science which privilege empiricism as the test of truth, severing science from philosophy and “relegat[ing] all supernaturalism to the fringes of human experience” (p. 126). Christians then develops in much greater detail what Kluver had time to only touch upon—the “revitalization” (p. 128) that a religious perspective makes possible. But Ellul’s Christian understanding of the effects of the Fall sets up yet another dialectic—between “necessity” and “freedom” (p. 131). In order to break free of the triumph of the means and necessity, desacralization of *la technique* is necessary. Once again, what Kluver introduces Christians is able to develop more thoroughly— those who “attack Ellul’s pessimism fail to realize that his vigorous desacralization is but one element in a larger perspective, the first step in a longer journey” (p. 133). Christians ties together the threads developed over the course of the essay to show how they offer a hope that such desacralization is possible through a “spiritual reality” (p. 133).

In terms of presenting an intellectual biography of Ellul, Kluver and Christians combine to provide a full and rich understanding of him. Kluver provides more of an overview and summary, while Christians develops this understanding in a way that is often limited to volumes that are dedicated exclusively to a study of Ellul. In terms of making connections between Ellul and the development of the media ecology analysis, Kluver is much more specific. Christians deals with Ellul’s connections with Mumford and McLuhan briefly (and often on general points rather than the media in particular; see esp. pp. 119 & 126-127) and provides an even briefer discussion of Postman and Innis (p. 134). Kluver, on the other hand, has a section headed “Ellul and Media Ecology” (pp. 106-110) in which he does much more to explicate the connections. He identifies

three points of connection between Ellul and McLuhan, Postman, Innis, Mumford and Ong. The first is agreement on “the ubiquity of media and its necessary degeneration into propaganda” (p. 108). The second is the common “emphasis on technology as the defining characteristic of modern society” (p. 108). The third is “the issue of the word, or the means of different technologies of communication” (p. 108), which Kluver develops in some detail. The difference in the directness of connections to media ecology is also reflected in the conclusions at which each of the two authors arrive. While Kluver bemoans the “absence of response to Ellul” (p. 114) by media scholars and suggests specific ways in which Ellul’s analysis could be incorporated into media scholarship today, Christians concludes more generally, arguing that “Ellul’s explicitly Christian framework” (p. 135) “must meet the standard of religious diversity to be credible” (p. 136).

The essays in this volume suggest the opportunity for Ellul scholars to find a sympathetic and interested audience among media ecologists. One disappointment is that that has not already occurred to a greater degree. Amidst all of the discussion of Ellul, there is only one reference to an article from the Forum—and that was an article dealing with Mumford, rather than Ellul—even though articles that could inform a greater understanding of Ellul’s thought and analysis have appeared in the Forum. Conversely, I don’t recall having read anything in the Forum that indicated the

degree to which Ellul’s ideas form a part of this school of media studies. It is to be hoped that the essays in this volume will help encourage further dialog and provoke continued scholarship that accomplishes the Forum’s goals.

## Digital Matters: The Theory and Culture of the Matrix

by Paul A. Taylor and Jan Harris  
(Routledge, 2005), 210 pp.

Reviewed by David J. Gunkel

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*Digital Matters: The Theory and Culture of the Matrix* is one of those books where the title says everything. In the first place, *digital matters* is a deliberate oxymoron, pregnant with ambiguity. It denotes, on the one hand, a concern with the subject matter of digital technology and culture. And in indicating this, the phrase inevitably calls to mind the essential immateriality that has been the subject of so much theorizing about new media technology and computer systems. Being digital, as individuals like Nicholas Negroponte have argued, is all about a transformation from the antiquated culture and slow-moving economy of atoms—large, heavy, and inert masses—to a new

world of weightless and ephemeral bits of information that circulate through global networks at the speed of light.

On the other hand, *digital matters* can also be interpreted in a much more literal and material sense. In this way, the title names the inescapable and often ignored material circumstances (e.g. the working and living conditions of individuals involved in chip manufacturing, the unequal distribution of and access to information technology, the environmental impact of toxic waste from discarded IT components) that make the digital and its utopian promises of immateriality possible in the first place. *Digital Matters* is a book that not only plays on this double meaning but, most importantly, demonstrates how and why the material conditions of digital technology do in fact matter for all things digital. In this way, the book identifies and critically examines techno-culture's *im/materiality*, a neologism introduced by Taylor and Harris in order to name and give expression to this complex issue.

Second, the subtitle deploys and trades on the polysemia that has accrued to the word "matrix." Clearly the immediate reference for many readers will be the Wachowski brother's cinematic trilogy, not just because of the films' popularity but also because of the numerous academic books and articles that have offered interpretations of the narrative's social and philosophical significance. *Digital Matters*, although employing these popculture materials as a recognizable point of departure, does not mount a direct critical assault on the film and its interpretations. Instead Taylor and Harris address the trilogy indirectly by investigating the larger cultural and theoretical matrices that already inform, animate, and structure the im/material ideology that is articulated by this particular techno-myth.

For this reason, *Digital Matters* understands and deploys "matrix" in the full range of its multifarious meanings, including: environment that shapes, supporting structure of organic form, signal transposition, and the place of reproduction. Understood in this way, Taylor and Harris's investigation can be categorized as an innovative and more sophisticated articulation of *media ecology*, where media technology does not just frame new social environments but innovations in technology are also situated in and informed by a socio-cultural matrix that already shapes and informs technical developments. In other words, *Digital Matters* tracks down and examines both the social and cultural material in which digital technology has developed and the very real social and cultural environments that this immaterial information helps to create.

In order to get at this, Taylor and Harris marshal an impressive array of theorists, many of whom are not usually considered part of the official pantheon of cyberstudies and new media technology. Instead of concentrating on the work of self-stylized techno-theorists like Lev Manovich, Nicholas Negroponte, N. Katherine Hayles, et al., Taylor and Harris turn their critical eye toward Jacques Ellul, Martin Heidegger, Friedrich Kittler, Michel de Certeau, and Walter Benjamin. This is not just an exercise in "old school" theorizing. Instead Taylor and Harris demonstrate how these thinkers' ideas already structure our understanding of digital technology and how they might be repurposed to introduce innovative methods for critically rewiring the matrix of our



technological present. Consequently, *Digital Matters* does not simply apply, for example, Ellul's work to digital technology, but opens up a critical dialogue between Ellul's theorizing and contemporary media *praxis* that has the effect of transforming both. In the final analysis, *Digital Matters* is a remarkable book that pushes the envelope in new media theory. It should be of interest to anyone concerned with media, technology, and contemporary theory.

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The IJES (with its francophone sister-society, L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul) links together scholars and friends of various specializations, vocations, backgrounds, and nations, who share a common interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), long time professor at the University of Bordeaux. Our objectives are (1) to preserve and disseminate his literary and intellectual heritage, (2) to extend his social critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) to extend his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

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## **The Word of Jacques Ellul**

by David W. Gill

### **President, International Jacques Ellul Society**

"In the sphere of the intellectual life, the major fact of our day is a sort of refusal, unconscious but widespread, to become aware of reality. Man does not want to see himself in the real situation which the world constitutes for him. He refuses to see what it is that really constitutes our world. This is true especially for intellectuals, but

it is also true for all the people of our day, and of our civilization as a whole" (*Presence of the Kingdom* (1948), p. 99).

We live in a world of shadows and myths, Ellul says, oscillating back and forth between the particular and the general, both of which poles are detached from reality. On the one hand, there are particular phenomena, "facts," which come at us like a tsunami. News bites, slogans, bits and pieces of information, survey numbers, a flood of images: this is our normal environment. But it is a world of shadows because these "facts" have no connection to a past or present, and rarely are they verified by our own lived experiences and relationships. In fact, they are a distraction and substitute for lived experiences and relationships.

But people cannot navigate through this flood of images and shadows without seeking some kind of interpretive help. Our psychological survival requires it. And this is where the "explanatory myth" comes in. Ellul mentions the popular post-WWII "bourgeois myth of the Hand of Moscow" (exhibited in the American McCarthy era) and the "Fascist myth of the Jews," among others.

In today's USA, the myth of "the Liberals" (the source of all evil) is embraced by millions; the myth of the "Religious Right" is embraced by others. The myths of technological salvation, of consumer happiness, and of global free market capitalism have great power alongside the myths the advertising and entertainment industries play on. The myth provides a ready-made, simple framework for evaluating all bits of information that one encounters.

One of the most remarkable insights of Ellul's *Propaganda* is that propaganda does not just foist lies and falsehoods on its target audiences. It mobilizes its audiences to embrace and act upon accepted "facts" and the orientation of their mythologies. Propaganda plays on prejudices, it doesn't just create them.

We need to remember Ellul's challenge to the intellectual classes here: this vulnerability to drowning in shadows and being misled by myths is not just a problem of couch potato cable television watchers, Google-happy celebrity gossip addicts, and check-out counter tabloid purchasers. It is not just a problem for dazed worshippers listening to ranting Elmer Ganttrys.

Propaganda is everyone's challenge, including IJES members and friends. So Ellul writes that "the first duty of a Christian intellectual today is the duty of awareness: that is to say, the duty of understanding the world and oneself . . . in their reality" (*Presence of the Kingdom*, p. 118). And this challenge is certainly not confined to Christians.

Ellul gives us a fivefold strategy to get past the blur of shadowy images and the lure of dehumanizing explanatory myths. *First*, he says, is "a fierce and passionate destruction of myths." "Myth-buster" is our first role. It's about raising critical, uncomfortable questions, questioning authority, leaving the "Amen Corner" of our own enclaves, profaning what has been exalted to sacred status in our society, and fulfilling a more critical/constructive role.

But we must not be satisfied with an exclusively negative stance and strategy. The *second* move is “the will to find objective reality, to discover the facts of the life led by the people who surround me” (p. 119). Not shadows, not abstractions, but reality. The will not just to deconstruct and demythologize but to penetrate past the shadows and myths to reality—that’s the second step.

*Third*, this reality of our civilization must be grasped on the human level. We don’t just seek to understand what life is like for a generic “neighbor” but for our actual “neighbor Mario,” Ellul writes, a man with flesh and blood, a face and a name. The implications are very clear: let’s get out of our ivory towers and spend time with the people. Let’s get to know our actual neighbors, the people we work with, our students, even those we may think of as our enemies. Any time any of us prefers to treat a colleague through a stereotype or image, rather than actually get to know that person through two-way conversation and common experiences, we are yielding to the veil of ignorance, which begets fear, which begets conflict . . .

The *fourth* part of Ellul’s counsel is to look at “present problems as profoundly as possible . . . to find, behind the facts presented to us, the reality on which they are based . . . the true structure or framework of our civilization” (p. 121). Ellul sometimes used the metaphor of the ocean: the surface waves can be so mesmerizing that we fail to look at the great maincurrents below which are the real drivers in the occurrence of storms and surface events.

Faithfully reading “McNews” or watching the bits or pieces of CNN/HNN, or similar activities, isn’t going to take us to the deeper awareness of social reality. Among the strategies are reading more history, seeking longer, deeper analyses of topics, learning other languages and listening to what others outside of our linguistic, cultural, philosophical, vocational enclave have to say. It’s about depth, breadth, and comparative perspectives. It takes time and reflection.

This is where Ellul’s writings have such a brilliant and unique impact: he takes us toward an understanding of the maincurrents of our civilization (concerning technique, the state, propaganda, the sacred, etc.) and also in biblical studies (dialectic, the city, money, hope, freedom, etc.).

The *fifth* element is an “engagement (or act of resolute commital” (121). We are not done when we write our books or give our speeches. We must act upon the truth in the reality of our neighborhood—or we are still part of the problem.

## Resources for Ellul Studies

**www.ellul.org & www.jacques-ellul.org** The IJES web site at [www.ellul.org](http://www.ellul.org) contains (1) news about IJES and AIJE activities and plans, (2) a brief and accurate biography of Jacques Ellul, (3) a complete bibliography of Ellul’s books in French and English, (4) a complete index of the contents of all *Ellul Forum* back issues; and (5)

links and information on other resources for students of Jacques Ellul. The new French AIJE web site at [www.jacques-ellul.org](http://www.jacques-ellul.org) is also a superb resource.

### **The Ellul Forum CD: 1988-2002**

The first thirty issues of *The Ellul Forum*, some 500 published pages total, are now available (only) on a single compact disc which can be purchased for US \$15 (postage included). Send payment with your order to “IJES,” P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705 USA.

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### **Cahiers Jacques Ellul**

*Pour Une Critique de la Societe Technicienne*

An essential annual journal for students of Ellul is *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*, edited by Patrick Chastenet, published by Editions L’Esprit du Temps, and distributed by Presses Universitaires de France Send orders to Editions L’Esprit du Temps, BP 107, 33491 Le Bouscat Cedex, France. Postage and shipping is 5 euros for the first volume ordered; add 2 euros for each additional volume ordered.

Volume 1: “L’Annees personnalistes” (15 euros)

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Volume 3: “L’Economie” (21 euros).

Volume 4 (forthcoming): “La Propagande” (21 euros).

**Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works** by Joyce Main Hanks. Research in Philosophy and Technology. Supplement 5. Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 2000. xiii., 206 pages. \$87. ISBN: 076230619X.

This is the essential guide for anyone doing research in Jacques Ellul’s writings. An excellent brief biography is followed by a 140-page annotated bibliography of Ellul’s fifty books and thousand-plus articles and a thirty-page subject index. Hank’s work is comprehensive, accurate, and invariably helpful. This may be one of the more expensive books you buy for your library; it will surely be one of the most valuable. Visit [www.elsevier.com](http://www.elsevier.com) for ordering information.

### **Librairie Mollat—new books in French**

Librairie Mollat in the center of old Bordeaux ([www.mollat.com](http://www.mollat.com)) is an excellent resource for French language books, including those by and about Ellul. Mollat accepts credit cards over the web and will mail books anywhere in the world.

### **Alibris—used books in English**

The Alibris web site ([www.alibris.com](http://www.alibris.com)) lists thirty titles of used and out-of-print Jacques Ellul books in English translation available to order at reasonable prices.

### **Used books in French:**

#### **two web resources**

Two web sites that will be of help in finding used books in French by Jacques Ellul (and others) are [www.chapitre.com](http://www.chapitre.com) and [www.livre-rare-book.com](http://www.livre-rare-book.com).

### **Reprints of Nine Ellul Books**

By arrangement with Ingram and Spring Arbor, individual reprint copies of several Ellul books originally published by William B. Eerdmans can now be purchased. The books and prices listed at the Eerdmans web site are as follows: *The Ethics of Freedom* (\$40), *The Humiliation of the Word* (\$26), *The Judgment of Jonah* (\$13), *The Meaning of the City* (\$20), *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man* (\$19), *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes* (\$28), *The Subversion of Christianity* (\$20), and *The Technological Bluff* (\$35). *Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul* translated by Marva Dawn is also available (price unknown).

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### **Ellul on Video**

French film maker Serge Steyer’s film “Jacques Ellul: L’homme entier” (52 minutes) is available for 25 euros at the web site [www.meromedia.com](http://www.meromedia.com). Ellul is himself interviewed as are several commentators on Ellul’s ideas.

Another hour-length film/video that is focused entirely on Ellul’s commentary on technique in our society, “The Treachery of Technology,” was produced by Dutch film maker Jan van Boekel for ReRun Produkties (mail to: Postbox 93021, 1090 BA Amsterdam).

If you try to purchase either of these excellent films, be sure to check on compatibility with your video system and on whether English subtitles are provided, if that is desired.

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Resources for Ellul Studies

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"We must try to create positions in which we reject and struggle with the state, not in order to modify some element of the regime or force it to make some decision but, much more fundamentally, in order to permit the emergence of social, political, intellectual, or artistic bodies, associations, interest groups, . . . totally independent of the state, yet capable of opposing it, able to reject its pressures as well as its controls, and even its gifts. These organizations must be completely independent, not only materially but also intellectually and morally, i.e., able to deny that the nation is the supreme value and that the state is the incarnation of the nation. "

-Jacques Ellul

*The Political Illusion* (1965; et 1967), p. 222

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**The Ellul Forum**

**For the Critique of Technological Civilization**

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## From the Editors

In this issue of the *Ellul Forum* we barely scratch the surface of a large arena for study: Jacques Ellul on politics and the state. While Ellul is rightly known best for his work on technique/technology, the topic of politics and the state is never far from sight.

*The Political Illusion* is his best known analysis of modern politics and its illusions. *The Technological Society* had a major section on “Technique and the State,” of course. The volumes on propaganda, revolution, violence, and the sociology of religion all address politics and the state at length from one angle or another. The untranslated, multi-volume *Histoire des Institutions* demonstrated Ellul’s profound grasp of the history of political ideas and institutions.

*The Politics of God, the Politics of Man* was Ellul’s primary biblical study of politics, focusing on II Kings in the Hebrew Bible. But *Apocalypse, Meaning of the City*, and other theological-biblical writings often addressed political topics as well.

Ellul’s ethical and other writings emphasize the threat of a growing, technicized state and political milieu. The first task is to understand this reality and dispense with rhetoric and illusions. What is at stake is nothing less than our humanity, individuality, and freedom. For a Christian, the challenge is to recover one’s identity as prophetic ambassador of another way of life and truth—and reject all forms of this-worldly political illusion, nationalisms, etc.. And for everyone, it is to recover a life outside the state, outside ordinary politics. Anarchism is the only sufficiently radical strategic position to take, Ellul argues.

We remember Ellul’s oft-repeated point that his purpose was to provide his readers with some assistance in figuring out the meaning and direction of their own existence in the world; there is no “Ellulian” orthodoxy in politics. Ellul also loved the Christian theme of “incarnation”—that God comes into a given historical milieu, “appropriates” aspects of the situation, then creates a dialectical contradiction, and finally “expropriates” aspects of the old into a greater new reality.

We are grateful to AIJE President (and IJES Board member), University of Poitiers Professor of Political Science, Patrick Chastenet for his masterful lead article in this issue. Four colleagues offer their personal reflections on how Ellul has affected their politics; and we re-view four of Ellul’s important political books.

Next issue (Spring 2007) our focus will be on Ellul’s ethics. And we will return to the political topic by 2008.

*Clifford G. Christians, Editor editor@ellul.org*

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# The Political Thought of Jacques Ellul A 20th Century Man

by Patrick Troude-Chastenet

*Patrick Chastenet is Professor of Political Science at the University of Poitiers, founding President of the Association Internationale Jacques Ellul (www.jacques-ellul.org), editor of the annual review Cahiers Jacques Ellul, and author or editor of several books on Jacques Ellul. This article was translated from the French by Eugenia A. Tumanova*

We'll start with the banal suggestion that political thought cannot be understood without considering the context which gave rise to it. In the case of Jacques Ellul, this context was at once rich and tragic. The fact that he was born in Bordeaux, on January 6, 1912, might be of interest only to historians. Still, it is tempting to point out that the author of *The Technological Society* was born six months prior to the sinking of the largest ship in the world, considered unsinkable! In its effect on public opinion, the *Titanic* catastrophe, which claimed 2,196 lives, could be easily likened to a kind of aquatic 9/11. The shipwreck occurred at a time when blind faith in technological progress prevailed and was soon to experience its first gory disillusion. As for the rest, Ellul would be witness to two World Wars, the 1929 economic crisis, the Paris riots of February 6, 1934, the Spanish Civil War, the Popular Front, the German Occupation, the Holocaust, the French Resistance, Liberation and purge trials, the Cold War, the French Fourth Republic, the crisis of May 13, 1958, Gaullism in French government, May 1968, the list goes on.

What else should we note, as we probe deeper for elements that may have defined his relationship to political thought, which for now we will temporarily refer to as “detachment through action”<sup>1</sup>?

Since his high-school days, Ellul retained a strong aversion to xenophobic nationalism, the brutal effects of which he saw first-hand. His “cosmopolitan” roots - son of a French-Portuguese mother (*ne* Mendes) and an Italian-Serbian father born in Vienna - made him immune to the virus of nationalism which reigned in those days. At the Law Faculty, where the great majority of his fellow students sympathized with the far right and demanded “France for the French!,” his individualism let his disagreement show. Jacques Ellul had been involved with minority movements since the early 1930s, since by that time he was already engaged in the personalist movement (more on that later). He found himself on a search for a middle path between American-style liberal individualism and mass-produced “political soldiers,” branded Fascist or Communist, resulting in his well-known decision to never join the ranks of the French Communist Party.

The great economic crisis plunged his family into poverty. In fact, the first time Ellul heard about Marx was at the university in 1929. For young Ellul, Marx's work, which

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick Troude-Chastenet, *Lire Ellul. Introduction a l'oeuvre socio-politique de Jacques Ellul*,

he read voraciously, provided a theoretical explanation for his father's unemployment: capitalism as a factor in crises, a condemnable regime condemned by history. With great enthusiasm, he read *The German Ideology* and established contacts with communist workers which, to his great disappointment, turned out to be more preoccupied with the party line than with Marxist hermeneutics. Thus, Ellul became "Marxian," not "Marxist," in his thinking method. Moreover, he always insisted that Marx was the one who asked the good questions and that he owed a great part of his intellectual development to him (along with Kierkegaard and Barth).

Despite never having joined the Communist Party, he often joined militant socialists and voted for the Popular Front during the 1936 legislative elections (the one and only time in his life he voted). Together with his spouse Yvette and likeminded Bordeaux natives, he helped the Spanish republicans procure weapons, even though he disapproved of the "internal" strife, which pitted the Anarchists against the Communists.

Under the Occupation, when the Strasburg Faculty was moved to Clermont-Ferrand, Ellul criticized Petain. He was denounced to the French police by one of his students, but was ultimately dismissed by the Vichy government because of his father's status as a foreigner under a law that sought to "Frenchify" the French civil service<sup>2</sup>. On his return to Gironde in the summer of 1940, he settled in a small village to do subsistence farming and prepare for university instructor examinations in Roman law. He also aided the Resistance efforts. He hid escaped prisoners and Jewish families in his house, supplied false documents, served as a mailbox for Gironde resistance fighters, and as a guide to the demarcation line located nearby. He maintained contact with the *Combat* movement, whose motto he liked: "From Resistance to the Revolution."

With the Liberation, he presided over several trials of collaborators and worked to keep the purges from leading to any excesses. He was a member of the Bordeaux city council, presided over by the socialist Fernand Audeguil. This experience lasted just six months, from October 1944 to April 1945, but it is essential for understanding his perception of politics. His brief involvement with the Bordeaux city hall permanently left him with the belief that elected officials were at the mercy of "committees," and that political professionals were powerless in the face of technocrats, the influence of the civil service, and the experts. This conclusion explains his frequent absences from public city council meetings (the important decisions were being made elsewhere and earlier!) and his militant abstentionism (what was the point of voting in a system where elected officials did not govern and in which citizens could not exert any control over the decision-making system?).

Although he refused to be on the list of socialist candidates in municipal elections in the spring of 1945, Ellul actively participated in the October 1945 general elections. That was the one and only time when he participated in "politician" politics! He was

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1992, p. 185.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Ellul's paternal grandfather was born in Malta and Joseph, Jacques' father, held a British passport.

third on the list of candidates from the Democratic and Socialist Union of the Resistance<sup>3</sup>. He was completely committed to this electoral campaign. The results were not commensurate with the effort he expended. The UDSR won less than 5% of the cast votes and not a single deputy seat. At 33 years of age, he watched helplessly as the old parties of the Third Republic returned to power. This experience left him with a profound sense of defiance vis-a-vis politics, and would later lead him to refuse to be a running mate of Jacques Chaban-Delmas during the Bordeaux city elections of 1947. However, in reality, his distrust targeted (political) power in general, leading him to decline the post of prefect in the Nord department of France. Ultimately, Ellul would choose an oblique path, one he had already picked during his personalist years.

### **Personalism of the 1930s**

Ellul's political thought was deeply influenced by two movements/reviews: *Ordre Nouveau* and *Esprit*. Far from being simple provincial clones of the non-conformist intellectuals in Paris, Ellul and his friend Charbonneau would lead a third trend within the personalism movement. This "Gascon" approach was resolutely half-way between the *Ordre Nouveau* and *Esprit* approaches. When Alexandre Marc writes that Christianity is "the source of all revolutions," Ellul can only acquiesce, which does not mean that the "Bordeaux group" would not make its own voice heard over the personalist hubbub of the 1930s.

This third kind of personalism sought a path between liberal individualism and collective tyranny, between capitalism and totalitarianism. These young bourgeois revolting against the "established disorder" were keenly aware of their position as a "minority within an aged society." Ellul and Charbonneau seemed to be marginal in a movement that in itself was very much a minority. They met Mounier in Paris in 1933 and decided to merge their little group with *Esprit*. With time, they moved closer to the leaders of *Ordre Nouveau* and had a falling out with Mounier in 1937, caused by the latter's centralist authoritarianism and uncompromising Catholicism.

What distinguished them was their belief that the political process is rendered powerless by science and technology: what Bernard Charbonneau called the "Great Shedding" ["la Grande Mue"] and Ellul "Technique." At twenty years of age, they already had that fundamental intuition that would tie together their entire body of work. The two friends would come to represent the most individualist, libertarian, regionalist, federalist, and above all, the most environmentalist faction of the personalist movement. They sought to develop an appreciation of nature in the most concrete sense of the word, to protect diversity, to create households that can lead autonomous lives but remain connected to others through networks.

How? By organizing camps in the Pyrenees. By encouraging regional encounters and building horizontal connections between these small selfmanaged groups. These camps, placed in the natural environment, demonstrated defiance towards Parisian centralism

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<sup>3</sup> The UDSR was created in June 1945 to unite noncommunist elements of the Resistance. Francois Mitterrand is one notable member.

and were the first practical implementation of that winning slogan: “Think globally, act locally.” They stressed the “carnal” aspect of the revolution. They condemned contrived escapes, individual judgment yielding to that of the “crowd” conditioned by propaganda. The authentic revolution must start “inside each individual,” revolution of oneself and together with others, a permanent revolution. To change the political regime, first “start by changing people’s lives.” The true struggle is spiritual in nature, and the political dimension is secondary.

Therefore, the “necessary revolution” does not happen by taking power at the helm of the State, but through the creation—at the local level—of small, self-managed groups, federated amongst themselves. Functioning like counter-societies, within a global society, these exemplary small groups would embody the new social order that needs to be built and would serve as a testament, here and now, to the immediate revolution. Bit by bit, like a contagion, a beneficial virus or a universal *patch*, this from-the-ground-up network would be capable of extending itself beyond national borders destined to disappear off the face of the earth.

Utopian? Nonetheless, from here on Ellul would advocate “down to earth” political realism and daily resistance to the fatalities of modern society. “It is when revolution becomes impossible that it becomes necessary,” affirmed Denis de Rougemont. This vision is summarized in a 1935 text cosigned by Ellul and Charbonneau: “Directives for a Personalist Manifesto.” This manifesto expounds the thesis that made Ellul famous in the United States thirty years later: the powerlessness of politics in the face of the supremacy of technology.

### **The Primacy of Technique**

Differences between political regimes are secondary to the universality of technique. Fourteen years before Heidegger’s first lectures on the subject, Ellul already thought that technique and not politics was now at the “heart of things.” The ends intersect, even while the means diverge! Heidegger’s work included metaphysical questioning of the essence of modern technique, the *Gestell*, the framework, while Ellul proposed a sociological description of the traits of the technical system based on the construction of a Weber-style ideal type.

Technique gives rise to a society characterized by its “fatalities” and its “gigantism”<sup>4</sup>. The fatality of war: technology renders death banal! The fatality of Fascism: the fruit of the marriage of economic liberalism and technology. The fatality of inequality between different levels of production caused by technological progress and urbanization. Gigantism, signifying the concentration of production, capital, the State, and the population. In the modern city, nature’s primary needs are replaced with even more oppressive (in-)human constraints. “When man resigns to living in a world not built on a human scale, he is dispossessed of all sense of measure.” Put the economy at the service of mankind, not vice versa! Starting from the mid-1930s, Ellul thinks of technology as a

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<sup>4</sup> P. Troude-Chastenet, « Jaques Ellul: une jeunesse personaliste », *Revue Française d’Histoire des Idées Politiques*, n° 9, 1<sup>st</sup> semestre 1999.

general process and not simply an industrial tool symbolized by the use of mechanization. The Ellulian concept of technology had already gone beyond a simple critique of mechanization as found in Duhamel's *Scenes de la vie future* (1930) and in less grotesque form in Aron and Dandieu, *Le cancer americain* (1931). According to Ellul, technological progress brings about widespread proletarianization, which goes beyond the one-dimensional economic analysis offered by Marx, and affects *all* people as well as *all* aspects of their life. As he will show later in *The echnological Society* (1954; ET 1964), technological progress is characterized by its ambivalence, not by its ambiguity. Technique is ambivalent because it frees as much as it alienates. It creates problems as soon as it resolves them and it feeds off itself through the solutions that it brings. What autonomous growth means is that in the context of a technical society, all human problems are transformed into technical problems and technique creates new problems for which humans try to systematically find technical solutions.

Gradually, Ellul would refine his own definition of technique but *The Manifesto* can be used to not only verify the prophetic aspect of Ellulian theses but also to show that, from the beginning, he was opposed not to technique itself, but to its autonomy. He recommended "reorienting technique" so that difficult tasks could be carried out by the "collective sector" in the form of "civil service." His definition of technique—"the search for methods having absolute efficiency in every field of human activity"—belongs to a historian doubling as a sociologist, not a philosopher. This also means that Ellul is not Heidegger and that he was not opposed to Technique for ontological reasons.

Not only would it be belittling to just call him a "technophobe," but it would also mean refusing to take into consideration the diachronic aspect of his work. In the mid-1930s, was it not Ellul who maintained that technique, which contributed to the rise of Fascism, could also work in the opposite direction and become an instrument of liberation?<sup>5</sup> This point of view was reaffirmed in 1982: "I kept showing that technique was autonomous; I never said that it could not be mastered."<sup>6</sup> Ellul explained how microcomputing provides self-management and council theories with the material means they seek. This new technique could be used to freely coordinate the free work of small self-managed groups which could lead to the creation of alternative networks and the institution of an authentic local democracy.

From the 1930s to the 1980s, reaffirming the primacy of technique over politics remained a constant: "Purely political movements are outdated" (1935). "Politics in its current form has no effect on technique and is perfectly predetermined" (1982). Ellul's thought remained faithful to itself while continuing to perpetually evolve. The adversaries of *Changer de revolution* (technophobes that were more Ellulian than Ellul himself) and those who looked at his work piecemeal, to make it easier to fossilize and to caricature its author as a reactionary writer, did not admit or understand this aspect of him. Which is why the historical element is so important!

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<sup>5</sup> J. Ellul, « Le fascisme, fils du liberalisme », *Esprit*, n°53, 1[er] fevrier 1937.

<sup>6</sup> J. Ellul, *Changer de revolution*, 1982, p. 224.

## From Hitler's Victory to Newfound Hope?

Historically, the combination of totalitarianism and technological power gave rise to the Moloch State. We should never overlook the fact that Ellul was the direct witness of the advent of the Italian Fascist state and of Nazism (before the war he had even attended a Nationalist Socialist meeting in Germany) and was a contemporary of the Communist dictatorships. With regard to technique and the State, Ellul adopted a comparable point of view: "Technique does not enslave us; rather, it is the sacred that is transferred to the technique" (1973). Without the sacred, without this process of divinization that paralyses our critical sense, technique could be made to serve human development. "The State does not enslave us, nor does the police state or the centralized state; rather, it is its sacramental transformation that makes us worship this amalgam of bureaucracy."

For better or for worse, just thirty years later, in 1973, mankind would adore the State, but this assertion should be reinterpreted in light of the paradoxical proposition according to which, ultimately, "Hitler won the war." This statement, at least mildly troubling, coming from a direct

witness doubling as a historian, should not be taken lightly. This is not a statement out of context or a misprint! This observation was first formulated in 1945, then repeated in two successive editions of *The Political Illusion*, and reaffirmed once more in 1987, in *What I Believe*: "Far from disappearing following the victory over Hitler, the Nazi model has spread across the entire world." To say that, is to say that the defeated had literally corrupted the victors. By choosing power, by opting for total war, to fight evil with evil, democracies perverted themselves by betraying their vital principles. Is it irreversible?

"The law of politics is efficiency. The one who wins is not the best, it is the strongest. In a technical world, efficiency becomes the only criterion for government legitimacy." Ellul concludes that in order to resist competition, "one must adopt the adversarial system... ..Hitler won the war after all!" Hitler showed the way to sacrifice man to the Moloch State, "this was his Satanic mission in the world."<sup>7</sup> To defeat him, the Allies used his own methods. His military undoing masked his political and moral victory. We are inexorably moving toward dictatorship (absolute power of the State, the primacy of the technicians) and toward universal totalitarianism.

In 1945, Ellul saw no political or technical means to stem this movement, which does not mean he advocated apolitism, "the telltale sign of a prefascist mentality." On the contrary, according to him, "what democracy begins in provoking a distaste for politics, a dictatorship brings to completion by eliminating this preoccupation altogether." This somber, if not desperate, vision should be put in perspective by juxtaposing it with another from 1982, found in the last chapter of *Changer de revolution*: "Toward an end of the proletariat?" Undeniably, here he gives the impression of opening a door, when his entire life he was reproached for being the prophet of misfortune, a pessimist puritan

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<sup>7</sup> J. Ellul, "Victoire d'Hitler?", *Reforme*, June 23, 1945, N°14.

contemptuous of technological progress and modernity in all its forms. A puritan who, by the way, insisted that it was possible to work just two hours per day for thirty years! After having shown how the technical society produced new forms of proletarianization - in addition to Marx's proletariat there was an

"impoverished proletariat" (unemployed, immigrants, fringe elements) and a "cultural proletariat" (the whole population with the exception of the technical aristocracy) - Ellul maintained that not all was lost.

The essence of socialism, that is to say the abolition of the proletariat and the end of alienation, remains the permanent objective, despite the adulterated means used to achieve it until now. Despite the mockeries of it in existence around the world, "socialism is the only possible political direction." But not just any kind! Not that of the regimes, not that of the socialist parties. He wants an ascetic socialism, founded on want and the refusal of the power of technique; socialism of freedom, which is revolutionary at the same time. Ellul is aware that here he is using concepts emptied of their meaning, having devoted two of his works to them, and this chapter provoked rancor and disappointment among many of his readers! Despite it all, he observes the transformations within the technical system and within socialism. In particular, what can politics still do to counter technique?

### **Politics in Technical Societies**

What are the consequences, in the political arena, of the search for efficiency at all costs, of the primacy of the means over the ends? What outcome is provoked by the combination of the existing political system and technical power? In the technical society, people believe technique is serving them and are serving it instead. Modern people have become the instruments of their instruments. The means has been transformed into the end; necessity has been elevated to a virtue! We live not in a "post-modern" society, but in a "technical society," a society where a technical system has established itself. This living society tends to increasingly blend in with the "technical system": the product of the union between technical phenomenon and technical progress. But it should be noted that for Ellul, the technical society cannot be reduced to a technical system and there are tensions between the two. The technical "system" is to the technical society what cancer is to the human organism. The existence of these tensions is what keeps hope alive that change is possible... change that is radical but which would not take the ways of political illusion, meaning, those of traditional politics! He concludes with an anarchist-inspired: "To commit oneself is to indenture oneself"<sup>8</sup>. Partisan political activism has deeper roots in sociological coagulation than in personal liberty.

In the technical society, politics is based on the Necessary and the Ephemeral. Those governing bustle about to preserve the appearance of initiative, which in reality is left to the experts. With marked Weberian undertones, Ellul condemns the rendering useless of politics through the use of bureaucracy. He observes the inversion of the

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<sup>8</sup> "L'engagement, c'est la mise en gage", J. Ellul, *L'illusion politique*, 1977, p.239.



democratic model where the administration was subject to the authority of elected officials, and where efficiency is now the only criterion for legitimacy. The technical society also confuses the political and social. Everything is political but politics are only an illusion! Politics has supplanted religion; the modern State has taken the place of God! “Everything is politics” expresses both “the ideology and this reality” where the entire social body is absorbed by politics. This politicization of society necessarily leads to State totalitarianism.

The State is totalitarian by its essence, no matter what its form! “The State regulates all aspects of people’s lives and decides what is true; it assumes all the functions. It penetrates to the most profound aspects of our consciousness... and it defines what Good is ”<sup>9</sup> State power is made more absolute by the fact that it refuses all constraints, whether legal or moral. In fact, not only is the State not subject to Law but it manipulates law as it sees fit.

This systematic defiance towards the State is one of the principal constants of Ellulian discourse. In a technical society, popular sovereignty is but a myth and universal suffrage becomes incapable of selecting good governments and keeping control over their actions. It is also an illusion to believe that people have control over their representatives, just as it is an illusion to believe that elected figures can exert control over the administration and the experts. The technical State is totalitarian by nature, independent of its legal or institutional form and its ideological or political outer skin. At night, it all looks the same! This has been a recurring theme in Ellul’s work since the 1930s... This explains his (relative) indifference to the East/West conflict, his refusal to pick one form of dictatorship over another, because *all* regimes pursue identical ends: efficiency and power. In other words, the combination of the modern State and the technical ideology makes politics illusory and also dangerous. Still, far from making a plea in favor of apolitism—just as illusory—which would only reinforce the grip of the State, Ellul’s message seeks to rehabilitate the virtues of a personal resistance to Leviathan. For mankind, existing is resisting! Therefore, we should build up the “tensions”—one of the key words in the personalist discourses—and encourage tensions against all attempts at social integration. He concedes that he is reinventing democracy which “has disappeared a long time ago.” And this is where we come to one of the most problematic aspects of his relationship with politics.

We can only agree when he insists on the intrinsic fragility of democracy: it is a formidable perpetual conquest, not a “normal, natural, spontaneous regime.” But then, although he had always called for a down-to-earth political realism, he repeats the same error as all idealists since Rousseau: due to his exceedingly demanding vision of democracy, he abandons the idea of distinguishing between its empirical manifestations—admittedly imperfect—and perfectly totalitarian regimes. Instead of admitting with R. Dahl that democratic doctrine has a potentially—because never fully realized—revolutionary dimension, or instead of stressing like C. Lefort its essentially indeter-

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<sup>9</sup> J. Ellul, *Exegese des nouveaux lieux communs*, 1966, p.110.

minate character, its permanent invention, its structural incompleteness, Ellul seems to believe that polyarchies, or pluralist democracies, are masked dictatorships. Even modern democracy itself is found lacking in his eyes!

In reality, what Ellul is very deeply opposed to is violence contained in all forms of political power, including when this violence claims to be legitimate, like that of the modern State according to Weber's realist definition. He would have none of it from either the great German sociologist or from Leon Duguit, the Dean of the Law Faculty in Bordeaux. Ellul refused violence as a specific means, as *ultima ratio*, not only of the State but of politics in general. Politics which, as Weber reminds us once again, has power as its only stake; politics which obeys merciless laws that are dangerous to ignore as an actor and naive to deny as an observer.

Ellul insisted on the catalytic role of the Christians, on this unique role of a sheep among the wolves. Ellul advocated not only non-violence, but also non-power, and he could have never shared Weber's admiration for the character in the *Florentine Tales* that declared that those who preferred the grandeur of their City to the salvation of their souls, should be congratulated. In reality, having turned his back on Weber, Ellul is even further from another illustrious realist: Machiavelli.

For Ellul, it is absolutely impossible to create a just society with unjust means. Evil shall not beget Good, and same goes for politics. Why? Simply because he had placed his faith, once and for all, in the Wholly Other, in the Unknowable, in the revelation of God in Jesus-Christ. For those who find it convenient to ignore the theological side of his work, let us remember that Ellul himself referred to his Christian beliefs in some of his sociology books<sup>10</sup>. Thus, we need to look further in his system of values if we wish to shed light on his relationship with politics. As the authors of *Melanges* justly observed: "The concept of totalitarianism as applied to all States has no meaning for Ellul except in relation to a religious belief."<sup>11</sup>

## The Theological Explanation

The metaphysical backdrop to Ellul's political thought takes us in two contradictory directions. We can focus equally on the hostile and pejorative description of this aspect of social activity or on the opposite, the positive role played by Christians in the modern world. This caricature-like vision of politics reduced to all that is underhanded and vain, was put into words during two colloquia and in Ellul's *A Meditation on Ecclesiastes*. "In the Western world of today, politics is the incarnation of the most profound evil." It is "the place of demons, the place of lies, and place of power" (1979). These statements echo others from a year earlier: "the essence of politics remains the same, and I say that in today's world, in these times, it is demonic."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. for example the last pages of *Changer de revolution*. Op. Cit.

<sup>11</sup> E. Dravasa, C. Emeri, J-L. Seurin, *Religion, societe et politique, Melanges en hommage a Jacques Ellul*, 1983, p.XIII.

<sup>12</sup> J-L. Seurin notes that in a democracy politics is not reduced to a desire for power but it is also

The modern man finds himself caught in-between. To take refuge in apoliticism, is to accept the State as one's destiny; by losing interest in politics, one plays the game of "the demonic divination of the State." Plunged into militant activism, he is surrounded by rivaling ideologies, that of the "diabolos" of the New Testament or the "divisor", and accentuates "diabolical politics."

## Terrorism and Politics

In the same way that the works of Marx could be re-read with the knowledge of the Gulag, Ellul tries to interpret the nature of modern politics through the prism of terrorism in Europe of the 1970s. The terrorists and their methods were not diabolical, by themselves, but politics brought it out of them. Terrorism unveiled what politics had become, here and now. Terrorism expresses absolute hatred of absolute power. Because State power tends toward absolutism the means to fight it cannot remain relative. The political enemy is considered to be like the religious incarnation of Evil. The refusal to discriminate among potential victims is the consequence of identifying the social body with the political body. Everyone is guilty! Collective responsibility, of the class, the race, or the nation! "Over time the indiscriminate moral or theoretical accusation of all necessarily turns into the execution of anyone, for lack of means to kill everyone." Any means are good as long as they are efficient! Terrorism is but a somewhat more brutal expression of the collective credo. "If we recoil in horror before terrorism, we should recoil in horror before our entire politics."

With *La raison d'être*, we leave the limited scope of the colloquia for what appears to be, to all appearances, the general conclusion of his work<sup>13</sup>. After having spent 50 years of his life examining texts that were rich in meaning, but all too often laconically simple, he picked his words for a final bouquet. And so, what does Qohelet say of political power? That power is always absolute, power is always power, whatever the constitutional form might be, power brings nothing new, and the adage "*vox populi, vox dei*" is not a lie. Power is nothing but malice, injustice, and oppression! The further one goes up the power hierarchy, the worse the people are. Chapter V starts with a long chain of tyranny described by La Boetie in the *Discours de la servitude volontaire*. Power of one man over another makes him unhappy. "The foolishness was placed at the highest summits." Vanity, oppression, foolishness! "*All power* is thus qualified—without reserve and without nuance!"<sup>14</sup>

But, though Ellul had fully integrated the radical pessimism of the Ecclesiastes, he draws no conclusions with respect to human power to invite his readers to turn back from the political path. He only considers it as absolute and relative and stresses that this is not the path to freedom! This is the thesis that he defends in *The Politics of*

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searching for an equitable order in P. Troude-Chastenet, *Sur Jacques Ellul*, 1994.

<sup>13</sup> J. Ellul, *La raison d'être, Meditation sur l'Ecclesiaste*, 1987.

<sup>14</sup> Op. Cit. p. 84. Italics from Ellul.

*God, the Politics of Man*<sup>15</sup>. The Church is not a spiritual affair and the politics is not devoid of interest for the Christian or for the modern man. Politics is even where the greatest affirmation of man's desire for autonomy manifests itself. The Christian, therefore, should neither become disinterested in it nor make it his chief preoccupation.

The position of Christians in the modern world is necessarily revolutionary. According to Ellul, the despair of modern man arises primarily from the fact that he no longer hears the promise of salvation and recapitulation; the purpose of Christians is precisely to announce the "good news." Thus, Christians are irreplaceable in this world. On one hand, they cannot make this world less sinful; on the other hand, they also cannot accept it as it is. They must permanently live with this tension! Salt of this earth, light of this world, the sheep among the wolves, Christians are the living sign of God's "politics." They must be God's ambassador and be the prophet of the return of Christ<sup>16</sup>. Christians are revolutionary for saving the world whose logical course leads inexorably towards suicide. They belong to two Cities that can never coincide. They are active in this world and at the same time are citizens of another kingdom. All the human solutions are temporary and marked with sin; Christians find themselves in a permanent revolutionary state, because they must tirelessly renew the divine demand, which is to try to bring a bit of freedom into the society in which they live. They are like leaven: a substance that determines the fermentation of another substance without being changed by the process.

With respect to politics, the role of Christians is that of a catalyst. They also play the roles of watchmen, sentries, as Ezekiel shows<sup>17</sup>. They are tasked with warning people, and they will be condemned if they do not fulfill this mission. The sentry is called to look for signs where the natural man only sees events. The Church is there to light the way and give direction to the human adventure, not to reproduce the divides found in traditional politics, nor to allow itself to be absorbed into the social body. Instead of behaving like a reactionary force faced with a progressive government or like a revolutionary force faced with a conservative regime, the Church must stand out by insisting on the decisive, but uncontested, point: the universal worship of power.

The Christian relationship with politics is characterized by a dialectical contradiction between taking politics seriously and also acknowledging its absolute and relative nature; between respecting the authorities and taking revolutionary action at the same time. From the Christian point of view, Ellul condemns liberal capitalism the same way he does apolitism, just as he had done in his secular writings.

What is really at stake is the ability to exercise choice, since no political Christian doctrine founded on the Revelation exists! The Christian does not need to look for theological legitimacy for his partisan engagement. The key is that he serves as witness to the word of Christ by being present among people, without forgetting that one

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<sup>15</sup> J. Ellul, *Politique de Dieu, politiques de l'homme*, 1966.

<sup>16</sup> P. Troude-Chastenet, *Lire Ellul*. Op. Cit. p.160.

<sup>17</sup> J. Ellul, *Les combats de la liberte*, 1984.

cannot serve two masters at once. During periods of intense politicization, he must contribute by putting politics in perspective, not to devalue it, but to cleanse it. The Christian's role is that of reconciliation and resolution, which he fulfills by refusing passion, hate, and exclusion. Ellul thus calls for a demystification and de-ideolization of politics, for finding an adversary behind the enemy, and a neighbor behind the political adversary. *If* democracy is the recognition that politics are relative, that competing viewpoints are valid, that power should be limited, minorities respected, *then* this regime offers a Christian a greater possibility for expressing his liberty in Christ.

But, as we have already noticed in his sociological writings, Ellul calls for revolution because he does not consider polyarchies as authentic democracies. This call seems to be a leitmotiv: "In order to save the world, an authentic revolution is now necessary" (1948), "the Christian attitude in the face of History is necessarily revolutionary" (1950), "the duty of every Christian is to be revolutionary" (1969). Although, to be sure, the meaning of this word as penned by Ellul does not refer to either the theology of freedom or any communist or conservative revolution.

### **"Necessary" Revolution & Ascetic Socialism**

A close evaluation shows that for Ellul, the actor and the observer, the Christian and the scientist, become one! Faced with the "established disorder" the revolution is urgently needed<sup>18</sup>. Since their "Directives for a Personalist Manifesto" in 1935, Ellul and Charbonneau proposed the creation of a personalist society within the global society. In light of the impending self-destruction of the current society, this counter-society will prepare the leaders of tomorrow. Its members, who must maximally limit their participation in the technical society, will be guided by a new mentality inspired by a different life style.

This daily behavior, a true incarnation of the doctrine, will be the only external sign of this engagement. A revolution without uniforms, banners, or flags! Elective communities would replace large urban centers. Within these small groups of volunteers, the individual could feel he is rooted somewhere, and in this "city on a human scale," authentic politics, founded on direct communication between those who govern and those who are governed, would exist in full transparency. Federalism alone can be used to fight against "gigantism" and "universalism," or the triumph of a single model of society. The "large countries" will be divided into sovereign, "autonomous regions," to the detriment of the central State, which would only carry out the simple functions of providing council and arbitration. The federal structure will enable both greater internal participation of the citizens and, by reducing the power of the states, it will reduce the risk of armed conflicts. Technique would be used to reduce time spent on work and the race for growth.

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<sup>18</sup> The term "the necessary revolution" already appeared in the work of Aron and Dandieu, *Deca-*

This text precedes essays on political ecology of the 1970s (Illich, Castoriadis, Schumacher) centered around the principle of “voluntary austerity,” and the more recent writings from the supporters of *decroissance*, or “de-growth/reverse growth.” While the idea of reducing time spent working is a topic that is already relevant to the left’s ideological universe, here the ecological aspect dominates the view of the whole.

For example, Directive 61 provides for control of technique intended to hamper certain types of production “the growth of which would be useless from the human point of view.” This text very openly affirms that economic growth is not synonymous with personal development and closes with a call in favor of building an “Ascetic city where people could live...” Here, a “free vital minimum” is available to all and a “minimum of balanced life” for everyone, both material and spiritual. In addition to the idea of “universal allocation”, this text contains two classic elements which will later constitute the ecological argument: defense of the quality of life and the principle of social solidarity. “Man is consumed by the intense desire for material pleasure, and for certain others to not have this pleasure.”

Isn’t it hard not to think of theories that would later examine the concepts of the consumer society and the dual economy? One should also note the process of productivism in a period of global crisis where France’s industrial production was still much lower than its 1928 levels. Their idea of the “ascetic city” focuses on the qualitative and anticipates the notion of “voluntary austerity” currently developed by supporters of “degrowth.” Consume less to live better! This text cannot be disqualified for being the product of youthful thinking, because the same ideas inspire works written later in life, like *Changer de revolution*. In this major work, Ellul, conscious of using tired terminology, nonetheless advocates for a “revolutionary socialism of freedom” and pins his hopes on small self-managed groups. “Various fringe elements, apolitical ecologists, separatists, feminist movements, Christians seeking to restore themselves, new hippies, spontaneous communities” to which he adds certain intellectuals, “would permit” us to leave behind the two socialisms that have failed.<sup>19</sup>

Ellul explicitly inscribes his revolutionary project in the affiliation of non-violent anarchism, revolutionary socialism, and the word of Christ. He simultaneously castigates the vacuity of political activism in any form and also condemns mystical withdrawal. On one hand, he affirms that awareness is a necessary stage but not sufficient for effective change (he laughs at those who claim “internal freedom”), on the other hand, he elevates contemplation to the position of the only authentic revolutionary attitude. On one hand, he exhorts Christians to become involved in the revolutionary enterprise, and on the other, he condemns movements rooted in the theology of freedom by reminding us that the Second Coming should not be confused with the proletarian revolution and that the biblical condemnation of Mammon cannot be reduced to the anti-capitalist struggle.

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*dence de la nation francaise* (1931) before being used as the title of their crowning work published in 1933.

<sup>19</sup> J. Ellul, *Op. Cit.* p.245

Ellul puts the person at the center of his thought, in conformance with his anarchist convictions and secular view, and with his Christological perspective and theological view. In conclusion, it matters less whether Ellul should be labeled a Christian anarchist or an anarchist Christian, but to understand that his way of being both Christian *and* anarchist at once perfectly illustrates the permanent tension that drives his work and his life. Perpetually doing a balancing act, ever the eternal foreigner, the incarnation of otherness, an anarchist among the Reformed and a Christian among situationists, on the fringes of his own church, and alone among the minorities Politics should be taken seriously and, at the same time, be kept in perspective. Political illusion is reprehensible in the same way as blissful apolitism. Politics must be desacralized. Ellul invites us to make our detachment visible in action, which is to say, do not stay away from the struggles of the City, just keep your distance!

## Jacques Ellul on Politics & the State

From the political, social, and human points of view, this conjunction of state and technique is by far the most important phenomenon of history. It is astonishing to note that no one, to the best of my knowledge, has emphasized this fact. It is likewise astonishing that we still apply ourselves to the study of political theories or parties which no longer possess anything but episodic importance, yet we bypass the technical fact which explains the totality of modern political events, and which indicates the general line which our society has taken . . .

*Technological Society* (1954; ET 1964), p. 233.

The transformation of the state and the consequent predominance of technicians involves two elements: First, the technician considers the nation very differently from the politician. For the technician, the nation is essentially an affair to be managed . . . All that the technician can take into account is the application of his instruments—whether in the service of the state or something else is of small importance. For him the state is not the expression of popular will, or a creation of God, or the essence of humanity, or a modality of the class war. It is an enterprise with certain services which ought to function properly. It is an enterprise which ought to be profitable, yield a maximum of efficiency, and have the nation for its working capital. . .

The second element . . . is the progressive suppression of ideological and moral barriers to technical progress. The old techniques of the state were a compound of purely technical elements and moral elements such as justice. . . It therefore imposes limits on the pure technique of private persons. . . But when technique became state technique, when technical instrumentalities passed into the hands of the state, did the state adhere to its old wisdom? Experience must answer in the negative. The techniques, to which the state opposed checks when they were in the hands of private persons, became unchecked for the state itself. There is no self-limitation in this respect.

*Technological Society* (1954; ET 1964), pp. 263-6.

Finally, technique causes the state to become totalitarian, to absorb the citizens' life completely. We have noted that this occurs as a result of the accumulation of techniques in the hands of the state. Techniques are mutually engendered and hence interconnected, forming a system that tightly encloses all our activities. When the state takes hold of a single thread of this network of techniques, little by little it draws to itself all the matter and the method, whether or not it consciously wills to do so.

*Technological Society* (1954; ET 1964), p. 284.

The modern western technical and scientific world is a sacral world the modern sacred is ordered

entirely around two axes, each involving two poles, one pole being respect and order, the other transgression. The first axis is that of "technique/sex," the second is the "nation-state/revolution" axis

The nation-state is the second ordering phenomenon of our society. That and technology are the only two. . .

That the state is one of the sacred phenomena of this age seems hard to dispute. . . The state is the ultimate value which gives everything its meaning. It is a providence of which everything is expected, a supreme power which pronounces truth and justice and has the power of life and death over its members. It is an arbiter which is neither arbitrary nor arbitrated, which declares the law, the supreme objective code on which the whole game of society depends. . .

Finally, this sacral status will be carried to the summit, to the point of incandescence, through the fusion of the state with the nation to form the nationstate.... the state is taking the nation in hand It

resolves all national problems. Conversely the nation finds its expression only in a powerful state, which is the coordinator if not the centralizer and the orderer. The fusion is complete. Nothing national exists outside the state, and the latter has force and meaning only if it is national.

*The New Demons* (1973; ET 1975), pp. 70-71, 80-83.

It is a stereotype in our day to say that everything is political. . . Politization is represented by the importance and growing frequency of ideological debates; and it is manifested by the tendency to treat all social problems in the world according to patterns and procedures found in the political world. . .

The essential element that must be taken into consideration if we want to understand the *total* phenomenon of politization is a fact that is, if not the cause, at least the moving force of this phenomenon. The fact is the growth of the state itself... The nationstate is the most important reality in our day.

*The Political Illusion* (1965; ET 1967), pp. 8-9.

In fact, values no longer serve us as criteria of judgment to determine good or evil: political considerations are now the pre-eminent value and all others must adjust to them. . . For example, women finally become human beings because they receive "political rights." . . . A person without the right (in reality magical) to place a paper



ballot in a box is nothing, not even a person. To progress is to receive this power, this mythical share in a theoretical sovereignty that consists in surrendering one's decisions for the benefit of someone else who will make them in one's place.

*The Political Illusion* (1965; ET 1967), pp. 16-17.

The idea that the citizen should control the state rests on the assumption that, within the state, parliament effectively directs the political body, the administrative organs, and the technicians. But this is pure illusion. . .

When we talk of a president, ministers, or an assembly, we have not yet said anything, for the state has become a vast body, dealing with everything, possessing a multitude of centers, bureaus, services, and establishments

A modern state is *not* primarily a centralized organ of decision, a set of political organs. It is primarily an enormous machinery of bureaus. It is composed of two contradictory elements—on the one hand, political personnel, assemblies, and councils, and, on the other, administrative personnel in the bureaus—whose distinction, incidentally, is becoming less and less clear.

*The Political Illusion* (1965; ET 1967), pp. 138-41.

We are therefore in the presence of the following dilemma: either we must continue to believe that the road to solving our problems is the traditional road of politics, with all sorts of constitutional reforms and “revolutions” of the Right and the Left—and I have already demonstrated that all that no longer has any significance, but merely represents shadow-boxing—or we turn away from the illusory debate and admit, for example, that public liberties are but “resistances,” admit that for man “to exist is to resist,” and that, far from committing oneself to calculating the course of history it is important above all never to permit oneself to ask the state to help us.

*The Political Illusion* (1965; ET 1967), pp. 221-22.

I have long affirmed the anarchist position as the only acceptable stance in the modern world. This in no way means that I believe in the possibility of the realization and existence of an anarchist society. All my position means is that the present center of conflict is the state, so that we must adopt a radical position with respect to this unfeeling monster.

*Jesus and Marx* (1979; ET 1988), p. 156n.

Christians allow themselves to be taken in by the prevailing vogue. They see everybody expressing their own ideas, so why shouldn't they do the same? That's all right, as far as I am concerned, only let them be less pretentious about it, less authoritative, less inclined to expect everyone to follow in their wake. And let them not claim to be representing Jesus Christ! . . .

[I]ncompetence, evident in writings and proclamations, is even more apparent in encounters with the Christian who is actively involved in a party or union. His beginner's training is usually very deficient, both from the point of view of biblical theology and from the point of view of politics and economics. But once he is involved the situation becomes worse, for participation in politics is very fascinating and absorbing.

*False Presence of the Kingdom* (1963; ET 1972), pp. 155-7.

Naturally it is better to run a city well than badly. If a Christian has a hand in this and is a good administrator, that is all to the good. But any person can be a good administrator. Being a Christian is no absolute guarantee that one will be a better politician or administrator. Seeking the good of a city is not a specifically Christian thing

Christians are needed in all parties and movements. All opinions should have Christian representatives. . . If . . . Christians take up different positions knowing that these are only human, and having it as their primary goal to bear witness to Jesus Christ wherever they are, their splitting up into various movements, far from manifesting the incompetence of Christian thought or the inconsistency of faith, will be a striking expression of Christian freedom.

*Ethics of Freedom* (1973; ET 1976), p. 379.

# How Ellul Influenced My Political Thought and Behavior

## Four Personal Reflections

### Mark Mayhle

*Mark Mayhle is a physician and former Boeing engineer in Seattle, who thanks another Boeing engineer, Arek Shakarian, for introducing him to Jacques Ellul.*

The year was 1980. I was 22, a newlywed and finishing up graduate school. The Carter “malaise” was under assault from the Reagan “optimism.” My father, nothing if not a patriotic American, was an administrator in a nearby school district and for a number of years it had been his responsibility to run the annual campaign for the district’s tax levy request. Under Washington law this required a supermajority of 60% to pass, and failure could be devastating to the afflicted district. Some years earlier, his district had passed their levy with *exactly* 60% of the vote—a single “yes” vote fewer would have doomed them to larger class sizes, loss of music and athletic programs, God knows what. So when he asked if I was planning to vote in the upcoming presidential election, it was mutually understood to be fraught with his passionate belief in the import of every individual vote. I replied to the effect that there was not a candidate I felt I could in clear conscience support. His somewhat sarcastic and largely rhetorical rejoinder was, “So, do you think *nobody* should vote?”

I thought for a moment and then answered, “Well, I don’t think it’s *necessarily* a sin to vote.” Needless to say, Dad was not amused. Regrettably, he passed away two years later, and we never had occasion to revisit the issue in any depth. But 26 years on, largely thanks to Jacques Ellul, I am inclined to stand by this offhanded and somewhat flippant remark of my more callow self. It was a few years after this episode that a friend loaned me *Jesus and Marx*, launching what I anticipate to be a lifelong engagement with Ellul’s thought. Intrigued as I was by that work, it was a few passing references to anarchism, even the seemingly-oxymoronic “Christian anarchism,” that especially piqued my interest.

When *Anarchy and Christianity* appeared in translation at the local bookstore a few years later, I was not disappointed. Ellul had given substantive articulation to my inchoate political philosophy. Here was (to me) a convincing argument that *choosing* not to vote could be, if not “responsible” in the Niebuhrian sense, certainly a faithful

response to the incredulity toward worldly power structures so evident in the teaching and example of Jesus (and, for that matter, of the apostle Paul.) This was reinforced by an encounter around the same time with the work of John Howard Yoder, and the combination resulted in a quiet conversion from the conservative evangelicalism of my youth to an Anabaptist orientation. That urban Mennonites too often these days seem to fall captive to what passes for the liberal wing of the current American political mainstream perhaps serves as a prudent reminder that no “ism” is ever truly our home, but that’s a story for another place and time.

## Randal Marlin

*Professor Randal Marlin teaches in the communication/media program at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada.*

Ellul has certainly had an important and continuing influence on my political views, but it is hard to characterize this influence in definite terms. When I first encountered Ellul’s ideas in the 1970s I had already been deeply immersed in civic activism. Our project had been to tame traffic in an older central residential area of Ottawa in order to reverse the decline of the neighbourhood. I had also been teaching existentialism and the debate between Sartre and Camus on violence was very much on my mind, inasmuch as the FLQ (Front de Liberation du Quebec) crisis involving a kidnapping of the British Trade Commissioner and murder of a Quebec Liberal cabinet minister in 1970 was part of recent Canadian history.

On just about any of the politically-oriented topics Ellul has dealt with, I find strong congeniality with my own views, but I frequently find some sticking point that stops me from wholeheartedly accepting the position he appears to be supporting. So, for example, I think I have more optimism than he has shown about the ability of democratic processes to deliver acceptable solutions to societal problems. I do not consider myself an anarcho-syndicalist. But I do agree (as mentioned in my re-view of *The Political Illusion*) that the process alone is not sufficient and must be supplemented by an alert and organized citizenry. I also support whole-heartedly the need to respect political opponents and to try to understand their points of view in a spirit of co-operation rather than hostility.

I have always been critical of some aspects of Sartre’s political philosophy, even while approving of his struggle against discrimination and colonial oppression. But I was taken aback somewhat by the vehemence of Ellul’s attack on Sartre in one of his lectures at the EUP (Institut d’Etudes politiques) in 1979-80. Likewise, in “FLN Propaganda in France during the Algerian War,” he wrote about Sartre: “Knowledge of these matters was of particular importance in an affair of this kind: the Algerian question was extraordinarily difficult, and it was a person unqualified in this area who decided on a whole orientation of essential propaganda.” This assessment of Sartre’s lack of historical awareness was confirmed in my own mind when I read an article in

which Sartre gave his support for the FLQ. I thank Ellul for reinforcing in my mind the need for careful assessment of factual realities before supporting a political cause, however attractively worded the cause may be.

Post-independence developments in Algeria have amply vindicated Ellul's position, and Sartre later conceded that Camus had been right on the issue of violence and Algerian independence.

I have found in Ellul a useful counterpoise to Sartre on other points as well. Both have freedom as central components of their ethical philosophy. But Sartre's vision of the human is egocentric, while Ellul's is other-and God-oriented. While Ellul guards against complacency, over-optimism, and disguised selfseeking, in the end his vision is hopeful and encouraging for those bent on making a political contribution to their community, in whatever form they choose to make it. I take from Ellul a very human-oriented political attitude, distrustful not only of myth-supported enslaving institutions, but also of threats to freedom that supposed liberators may bring along with their alternate set of myths.

## Sharon Gallagher

*Sharon Gallagher is editor of Radix Magazine (Berkeley CA). She interviewed Jacques Ellul at his Bordeaux home in 1988.*

Jacques Ellul's *The Meaning of the City* changed the way I view politics. The Christian subculture I grew up in was apolitical—as part of a general stance of suspicion and separation from "the secular culture," years before Evangelicals began wielding political power.

By the time I was living in Berkeley in the 1970s I'd become politicized and was passionately opposed to the Vietnam war. But reading *Meaning of the City* transformed my understanding of citizenship. My political stance at that time was mostly "anti"—anti-war, anti-racism, anti-sexism, anti-nuke, etc. *The City* gave me a sense of dual citizenship that that called for a positive response—working for the "welfare of the city."

One of Ellul's main texts for *Meaning of the City* was Jeremiah 29, which contains an exhortation to Israelite exiles living in Babylon. It concludes: "But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare."

Here's part of Ellul's commentary on the text: "We are clearly told to participate materially in the life of the city and to foster its welfare. The *welfare*, not the destruction. And the welfare of the *city*, not our own. Yes, we are to share in the prosperity of the city, do business in it, and increase its population . . . We must make it beautiful, because it is a work of man. And because it is such, God looks down even on it with love." (p.74)

In a city like Berkeley with its own foreign and domestic policies (the city council recently voted to impeach George W. Bush) the distinction between local and national issues isn't always clear. But it's often on a local level where we can actually make a difference—making sure that the poor can find places to live, that trees are planted, that all the old, beautiful buildings aren't torn down and replaced by strip malls.

Ellul's exposition of Jeremiah's text is rich. It addresses the individualism that marks American political and religious life—we're to seek the *common* good. We're to care about quality of life and to work toward it. This is a welcome antidote to the dispensationalist view of a doomed world that doesn't really matter. The question is not whether or not we'll be "left behind" but what good we're going to do while we're here.

## John Gwin

*John Gwin lives in Beloit, Wisconsin, where he does some building security and maintenance work while pursuing his interests in language and culture.*

Jacques Ellul is for me a witness of the Truth and of the power the love of God in Christ. All of his many works, both the theological and the scientific or sociological served as profound testimony of God's faithfulness and remind me that faith in Christ is a solid foundation for life today. In a sterile age of science and technology, here was a writer who courageously explored every aspect of this world and our frantic life in it. He saw, and explored the darkest, most terrifying realities and seductive falsehoods of modern life in his sociological writings, and through his many studies of the Hebrew Scriptures elaborated many instances in which God breaks into our world precisely where we have bricked up the doors and windows to keep God out. Ellul credited faith in God with permitting him to rigorously explore and question humanity's commonplace assumptions and to consider fearful realities.

In reading the work of Wm Stringfellow, I came across the forward that he had written to Ellul's English edition of *The Presence of the Kingdom*. I took to heart his recommendation to read Ellul and am thankful that I did.

In *Presence of the Kingdom*, he emphasizes the vital but neglected work of the Christian layman in preserving the world by resisting the temptations to simply follow the world's agenda of action, action and more action. When we neglect wisdom, study of Scripture, discernment and prayer guided by the Holy Spirit we fail to fulfill our God-given calling. In reference to the "terrible triumph of the Nazi spirit that we see everywhere in the world today," Ellul writes, "We have conquered (in WWII) on the material level, but we have been spiritually defeated. Christians alone could wage the spiritual conflict: They did not do so. They did not play their part in the preservation of the world." (p. 25) Quoting Paul in Colossians 4:5-6 and Ephesians 5:15-17, he finds "...an astonishingly living suggestion for the study of the situation of the Christian in the world .placed, as we might say, at the vital point, as a link between conduct

and preaching (or one's witness), between good works, the fruit of wisdom, and the knowledge of the will of God (p. 26), (which confronts us both as judgment and as pardon, as law and as grace, as commandment and as promise, (and) is revealed to us in the Scriptures, illuminated by the Spirit of God. P. 27)

Ellul saw the will of the world as "a will to death, a will to suicide," which we must not accept and which we must act to prevent. We are "obliged to understand the depth and the spiritual reality of the mortal tendency of this world; it is to this that we ought to direct all our efforts, and not to the false problems which the world raises, or to an unfortunate application of an 'order of God' which has become abstract; if we act thus we understand that the work of preaching necessarily accompanies all the work of changing material conditions.

"Thus it is always by placing himself at this point of contact (between the will of the Lord and the will of the world), that the Christian can be truly 'present' in the world, and can carry on effective social or political work, by the grace of God." (p. 28,29)

Early on, I read Ellul's *Violence*. My miserable cynicism concerning war and violence and the nation was turned on its head, and I was left to rethink my and my generation's capture by the multiple layers of propaganda flooding our world.

His *Violence* deals with the issues of war and peace and faith and illusion, and the church's tendency to conform to the ideologies of the time, whether they be the royalist, nationalist, leftist anti-war, or rightist pro-war ideology. Ellul also exposes various misunderstandings of the gospel such as the identification of the publicans and harlots with the "poor" and the Pharisees with the "rich." The assumption that the politically correct "poor" are the only poor, forgetting the misery of those who are scorned for their position in society. Also one of the most remarkable lessons I learned from this work in regard to violence is that "whatever its milieu, its motif, its basis or orientation, idealism always leads to the adoption of a false and dangerous position. The first duty of a Christian is to reject idealism." (p. 125)

If I had to personally sum up the impact of Ellul's work, it would be "Relief of Misery." His works, both sociological and scriptural in focus, resulted for me in a renewed comprehension of Biblical Faith and Hope in the midst of the world. Ellul's *Presence of the Kingdom* delineated a coherent and sensible explication of the call of a believer in this world so confusing to me. His *Violence* helped me see more clearly in the fog of the over-simplifications born of the various propagandas obscuring the complex issues of the Vietnam War. His as yet untranslated *Jeunesse Delinquant* describing the work of a club for "unadapted" street youth in Bordeaux gave a respectful portrayal of their lives and outlined the methods used to enable them, without patronizing them, to find their own way forward in a life that had been one of genuine misery.

# Re-Viewing Ellul

## The Political Illusion by Jacques Ellul

New York: Alfred A Knopf, Inc., 1967 and Random House, Vintage Books, 1972.  
Original edition *l'Illusionpolitique* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1965).

Reviewed by Randal Marlin

*Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada*

Forty years ago Konrad Kellen gave the American public a fine translation of *The Political Illusion*, along with an insightful introduction. This work builds upon Ellul's earlier *Technological Society* and *Propaganda*. A central question here is: How can a conscientious citizen in a modern democracy contribute to good government? Those with technical expertise can be expected to look out for their own special interests, not necessarily the public good. Withstanding corruption requires proper checks and balances. But this requires the appropriate knowledge, and who will supply that?

Ellul commonly devotes the bulk of his energies, in his social and political writings, to trenchant diagnosis of social problems. He points the way to solutions, but is careful above all not to encourage complacency. He sounds the alarm, saying in effect: beware the fancy imagery of democracy, behind which the mechanisms of tyranny may be crafted.

Passage of time has shown Ellul to be prescient. Certainly in the United States the Watergate debacle, the Iran-Contra dealings, and the current deceptions of the administration of President George W. Bush to bring his country and a coalition into war with Iraq, followed by use of torture and rights violations of detainees, surveillance of U.S. citizens without court authority, and the like, all reinforce the main claims in this book.

Central among these claims is the idea that uncritical faith in democratic processes, such as the party system and elections, to provide us with good government, is misplaced. The idea that such processes will guarantee democracy is undermined by awareness that votes are valuable only to the extent voters are informed. Once it becomes clear that government, technocrats and co-operative media shape the information and imagery reaching the public, the idea that the ordinary voters are the real determinants of political becomes very dubious.

Upton Sinclair and, more recently, Noam Chomsky have presented us with similar insights, but Ellul goes further in locating the problems as having their source in



popular attitudes and in the dominance of myths concerning progress, happiness, and the ability of the right technique to solve our problems.

The true source of democracy, for Ellul, lies in the attitudes of the people. "A personal conscience," he writes, ". . . is the only thing that can save both democracy and what is real in political affairs." (204) Enemies of democracy can be found even among those who profess to favour it. These enemies are fanaticism on one side, and inertia, leading to opting out of politics, on the other. You can't have genuine democracy without a deep-set respect for the opinions and aspirations of others, including minorities within the larger society.

The idea that happiness will be guaranteed if only we can get people to adjust and adapt to majority views, and if we can maximize material comforts, is one of those myths that emboldens political powers to intrude in the private sphere to encourage uniformity. Ellul refers here to Bernard Charbonneau (to whom he dedicates this book) and what Charbonneau calls the "lie of liberty," namely, liberty conceived as offered to the individual on a platter by a benevolent society. By contrast, "There is no liberty except liberty achieved in the face of some constraint or rule." (211) The aptness of the Saint-Just quotation at the front of the book makes itself felt here: "The people will fancy an appearance of freedom; illusion will be their native land."

Among the many wry observations about Bush's failed (as is currently acknowledged even by original supporters) Iraq war is that the supposed exporters of democracy were simultaneously undermining it at home. The recent November election switched the congressional power from Republicans to Democrats, but it remains to be seen whether much can now be done to reverse the beginnings of civil war there. What good is an election when the die, in the form of a quagmire, has already been cast?

Ellul thinks that unity in a political system means that life has gone out of it. Tension and conflict form personality, "not only on the loftiest, most personal plane, but also on the collective plane." I see a resemblance to Emmanuel Levinas and the latter's perception that the goal of ataraxy conflicts with the obligation to respect the otherness of the other. To avoid disturbances to our tranquillity we would like to make others the same as ourselves. But one only has to look at Canadian history and the effect of Lord Durham's goal of assimilating the French Canadians to see what enduring resentments this attitude can cause.

Ellul is conscious of writing largely from the experience of France since Louis XIV, but he need not apologize for thinking his ideas might have larger application. Centralizing forces exist the world over, and they need to be kept in check. He thinks it important to permit the emergence of social, political, intellectual, artistic, religious and other groups, totally independent of the state, "yet capable of opposing it, able to reject its pressures as well as its controls and even its gifts." (222)

He thinks these organizations and associations should be able to deny that "the nation is the supreme value and that the state is the incarnation of the nation." He allows that there is a risk in reducing the central power but sees this as "the condition of life."

Ellul wrote before the arrival of the Internet. We have seen that the ability of the centralized powers in the United States to shape opinion by false imagery failed spectacularly in the attempts to make war heroes out of Jessica Lynch and Pat Tillman - the latter former professional football star having been in fact a victim of “friendly fire.” Contrary credible evidence circulating through Web sites such as Truthout, Common Dreams, PRWatch and the like was sufficient to force the image-makers to backtrack.

But there is no guarantee that the freedom exercised by those Web site operators will continue indefinitely, and we can expect battles in this area as well as on other fronts, such as the attempts to force television stations that show government video news releases to acknowledge their provenance in a way that will minimize their deceptive propensities.

The trouble with illusions is that they are comforting, and if our vision of life is to maximize comfort, why bother attacking them? One reason is that illusions can lead to political mistakes which can have most uncomfortable outcomes. Another reason, though, is that other goals and conditions of a good life include such things as such as honesty, freedom, integrity, and respect for the Other, and these are incompatible with the pertinent illusions.

We have to be willing to engage in political life and work for our desired goals, but always in such a way as to preserve our respect for the freedom and dignity of others, even when our goals collide. “We should forever be concerned with the means used by the state, the politicians, our group, ourselves.” (238) We also have to track down those stereotypes and myths in our own thinking so as to free ourselves from them, for as long as they exist “no freedom or democratic creativity is possible.” (240) Coming from Ellul, the message is not new, but time and events (including dire environmental forecasts) have merely reinforced its urgency.

## Autopsy of Revolution

Jacques Ellul

New York: Knopf, 1971

Original edition *Autopsie de la Revolution* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1969)

Reviewed by Andy Alexis-Baker

Associated Menonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart IN

In this book Ellul delves into history arguing that until the 18<sup>th</sup> century revolt had been conservative and opposed to political and social change. These upheavals revolted against unbearable situations resulting from increased state functions. As such, revolution (or revolt) reacted *against* the expected course of history and usually wanted to restore a previous situation.

Then came the French Revolution which changed traditional revolt in two ways: a future oriented outlook and belief in the state as the bearer of freedom. The aristo-

cratic leaders envisioned a utopian society which a scientific outlook would bring about. Inspired by the French Revolution, Karl Marx made revolution part of history's evolution. Thus revolution became normalized and predictable. All that was needed were the right techniques to predict the conditions under which the masses would explode and to direct the explosions into seizing control of the state, which under the direction of new management would take on a totally new character: communist.

Ellul argues that in reality the state has its own internal logic and structure so that those who think they can control the state are under an illusion, instead that logic and structure controls the revolutionary. Revolution, rather than decreasing state power, has increased the state's reach. The dehumanizing, rationalized gaze of the state has penetrated into every area of life. It is state power, more than colonialism or class conflict, that truly threatens human freedom. Here Ellul becomes relentless in his attack on every aspect of the nation-state.

Ellul suggest that the alternative to state fetishism is a revolution invoking "direct personal responsibility" (282). Much contemporary discourse is still based upon the notion that where real "politics" or action occurs is in the impersonal machinery in Paris or Washington D.C. Ellul, however, insists that the only real thing is the person—spiritual, physical and mental. Call it anarchism, personalism or situationism (Ellul uses all these terms while recognizing differences), the idea is the same. Real change happens where people begin to take responsibility. For Ellul modern electoral democracy attempts to tame the inherent anarchy and unruliness contained in democracy.

Ellul does not call for traditional individualism. He makes clear how statism and the technological society *create* individuals who are incapable of making decisions that run against nationalist or technological ends. Yet because of his polemic against a herd mentality, he fails to make clear that rootedness and loyalty to a certain type of community helps individuals become whole persons, without which the lures of the technological society quickly overwhelm. For me—a Mennonite—Ellul's failure to place individuals in community is inexcusable. The state is primarily about creating individuals without attachment to healthy community and loyalties that make it possible to fight the technological society. At times Ellul seems to forget that while the great Fascist and Communist regimes depended upon massive public support, our own democracies depend upon mass apathy and individualization.

Despite his failure to name types of community that resist state expansion and the technological society, this book is valuable for *Ellul Forum* readers to re-read. The dominant emphasis from the *Ellul Forum* has been the pitfalls of the technological society. Yet Ellul insists, "Any revolution against the perils and the bondage of technological society implies an attempt to disassemble the state" (268).

Ellul's claim that the state is the object of revolution is also true for advocates of nonviolent techniques. Gene Sharp and others tout the great "nonviolent revolutions," but using Ellul's outlines it is best to point out that this is just another vulgarization of the word. No revolution has occurred in any Western nation since Ellul's book. What happened were in-house regime changes. No Western "revolution" has success-

fully dismantled the state and the technological apparatus (the Zapatistas in Chiapas, however, come closer to Ellul's vision).

Finally, if a future edition of this book were printed, it would benefit from a critical apparatus and an index. Ellul mentions and discusses numerous names, places and movements that North American readers cannot understand without editorial footnotes. Despite these flaws in the apparatus of the book, the content remains relevant for those of us concerned about the expected course of history. Ellul's call is for revolt against this dark future looming over us. And it remains as dark as Ellul ever predicted it would be.

## False Presence of the Kingdom

Jacques Ellul

New York: Seabury, 1972

Original edition, *Fausse presence au monde moderne*

(Paris: Les Bergers et les Mages, 1963)

Reviewed by Virginia W. Landgraf

American Theological Library Association, Chicago IL

*False Presence of the Kingdom* is a critique of certain kinds of Christian political activity as failing to live up to Christians' true calling. This failure has theological and sociological dimensions. Ellul goes into both aspects in more depth elsewhere. He admits that the book is best understood in the context of *The Political Illusion* and his work on Christian ethics (later published as *To Will and To Do* and *The Ethics of Freedom*). Also, the distinction between truth and reality, not fully elaborated until *The Humiliation of the Word*, is helpful for understanding this book, as is the image from *Apocalypse* of the Word of God (the white horse) providing counterpoint to the forces of history (the other three horses) in Rev. 6:2-7.

At this period in his thought, as developed in the essay "Rappels et reflexions sur une theologie de l'Etat," Ellul allows a legitimate role for political authority (not necessarily the abstract state) as administrator of common patrimony. Thus its responsibilities are within the realm of reality (visible, measurable results, accomplished by power); it goes beyond its bounds if it arrogates to itself the realm of truth (values and ultimate human destiny, communicated by personal words, the precondition for which is freedom). How far one agrees with Ellul's arguments depends largely on how far one agrees with his opposition between freedom and power. Legitimate political authority is in an awkward position: it needs to have a modicum of power over reality (in terms of administrative results), but it should not become possessed by that power, lest it give that power ultimate status, shut out freedom, and claim that reality is truth. Such legitimacy may be a chimera, since, as he states in *The Humiliation of the Word*, when we see reality we want to have power over it.

Once those presuppositions are clear, *False Presence* is the story of Christians grasping at reality instead of listening for truth. Ellul uses examples from the French Reformed Church in 1962. Although the “hot issue” was Algeria, the scenarios are familiar. Polarizing issues seem urgent, and a political solution is demanded. Christians on either side claim that their faith demands these reforms. Ellul thinks that such moralization is irrelevant to the actual world faced by political actors. Because politics is based on power, which is opposed to freedom, political action cannot make decisions based on values. And when Christians plunge fully into politics, they fail to speak a transcendent word because they are co-opted into the world’s assumptions: that increased technical power is an improvement; that the state can cure social ills; etc. Co-optation fails to provide the tension which Ellul thinks is necessary for a society to avoid entropy and have the resilience to meet challenges (an argument from secular information theory used in *The Political Illusion*). Therefore, Ellul thinks that this kind of Christian social action functions as the opiate of the people (Marx), “provid[ing] ideological and moral satisfactions to those who are in fact *incapable* of changing the situation” (49, ET 51). Theologically, identification of Christian living with political action betrays the biblical witness about the perils of political power and loses the dialectic between the “already” and the “not yet” of Christ’s lordship. Christ is by rights Lord over creation, and his resurrection is the first fruits of his triumph over death, but the prince of death is still the evident ruler of this world.

However, Ellul denies that withdrawal from the world is a Christian option. As in *The Ethics of Freedom*, he identifies specific tasks for Christians in the political realm. Among them are long-term thought about likely future problems; dialogue with political actors on their own terms, showing them the consequences of their positions; and involvement in political organizations on all sides, as people *relatively* committed to causes, ready to risk reconciliation and dialogue. Such practices do not require being convinced of the total opposition between freedom and power. Their presupposition is that legitimate administration of the reality we all face should be capable of long-term, self-critical, reconciling thought and action.

## Anarchy and Christianity

Jacques Ellul

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991.

Original edition *Anarchie et christianisme* (Lyon: Atelier de creation libertaire, 1988)

Reviewed by Don Surrency

University of South Florida

*Anarchy and Christianity*, in title alone, is undoubtedly controversial and contentious. However, in this book, as is common in all of Ellul’s work, we find a theological analysis of society and religion that still warrants evaluation nearly 20 years

after publication. This retrospective critique of *Anarchy and Christianity* will offer a brief summary of Ellul's argument, followed by a critique, and then concluded with some general remarks regarding the usefulness and importance of Ellul's theory in light of contemporary culture.

Ellul believed that the attacks on religion commonly launched by anarchists, which accuse all religions of leading to violence, are accurate. However, he makes the curious assertion that "the revelation of Christ ought not to give rise to a religion. . .the Word of God is not a religion. . ." (26). Ellul argues that the true Christian faith is not adhering to dogmas or doctrines, but trusting in Christ. Thus the Christianity that is present in the world is merely the "sociological and institutional aspect of the church. . .not the church." (10).

It is this position, fully articulated in his earlier work, *The Subversion of Christianity*, which serves as the premise for Ellul's critique of society and the Church, and his belief that the true political spirit of the Christian Bible, is a spirit of anarchy. This argument is based on the exegesis of various narratives found in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament that demonstrate the anarchist sentiment found at the core of Christianity. While this is not the proper place, nor is there adequate space, to engage in a hermeneutical critique of Ellul's idiosyncratic exegesis, it is important to note that his interpretation of Jesus as the silent anarchist who portrays "irony, scorn, noncooperation, indifference, and sometimes accusation" (71) in regard to political authority, probably would not be met with agreement in mainline Christianity.

It is in the distinction between "the true Christian faith" and the socio-historical Christian faith where Ellul's methodology is the most problematic. One can go to the sacred text of any religion that has sacred texts, and find differences between the values and teachings within the text and the present state of that religion, but this is not sufficient grounds to argue that the present manifestation of the religion is false. While this approach is common to religionists of many traditions, it is neither helpful nor particularly novel, even in the deployment of Jacques Ellul. The more significant critique might be whether Christian ideals are any more prone to failed embodiment, or, if any historical embodiments of those ideals have been more accurate than others.

*Anarchy and Christianity* is, indeed, a provocative and compelling analysis of society, politics, and Christianity that is as relevant now, if not more so, than it was when Ellul wrote it. In the post-9/11 world that we find ourselves in, the relationship between religion and political power is both problematic and pervasive. In this work, as well as his others, Ellul does a masterful job of analyzing this relationship, and forcing individuals to evaluate the contemporary cultural situation. In trying to establish a common ground between anarchists and Christians, Ellul illustrates the pivotal role religion has played, and can play within society.

What can be gathered from Ellul's thought is in line with the following observation made by Graham Ward in his critique of culture, *Theology and Contemporary Critical Theory*, "Religion is, once more, haunting the imagination of the West" (vi). This observation is given further analysis by Vincent Pecora in his recent work *Secularization*

*and Cultural Criticism* when he suggests that “there may be broader and deeper links than we generally acknowledge between the Western intellectual’s struggle with the semantic resonances of religious thought (as in Habermas) and the avowedly oppositional perspectives of various intellectuals (from Dipesh Chakrabarty and Asad to Nandy) struggling with the problem of secularization in the postcolonial world” (24). Both the function and the form of religion in postmodernity that is articulated in the aforementioned work, as well as various other current works, can, perhaps, be better understood when Ellul’s thought, particularly his idea of the proliferating sacred, is applied.

*Anarchy and Christianity* is an excellent example of Ellul’s attempt to understand the relationship between religion and society. His astute observations and insightful critiques of the Christian church and politics are important and applicable for any cultural critic. Thus, *Anarchy and Christianity* serves as evidence that Ellul’s thought can be applied as well today, as when Ellul applied it himself.

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The IJES (with its francophone sister-society, L’Association Internationale Jacques Ellul) links together scholars and friends of various specializations, vocations, backgrounds, and nations, who share a common interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), long time professor at the University of Bordeaux. Our objectives are (1) to preserve and disseminate his literary and intellectual heritage, (2) to extend his social critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) to extend his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

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## Suspicion, Accusation, Fragmentation by David W. Gill

*President, International Jacques Ellul Society*

One of my favorite Ellul books is *Hope in Time of Abandonment* (1972; ET 1973). I love the reflections on hope, of course. But a section of the book on “the age of suspicion” has always struck me as especially insightful.

Ellul writes: “Nothing is any longer itself. We have learned to look behind and beyond for the nameless, the elusive, the wriggly depths, the hidden forces, the secrets. Such is the supreme lucidity to which we are condemned. It is a strange evolution whereby, beginning with the thinking of a few, suspicion has spread through all the intellectuals, and from there is taking hold of everyone” (*Hope*, p. 48).

The three great “malefactors” here, according to Ellul, are Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. Marx taught us to look beneath the surface and discern the economic class interests which are the true reality and agenda behind our surface words and acts. Nietzsche taught us to see a manipulative quest for power behind everything. And Freud urged us to see unconscious sexual and psychological forces beneath the surface.

”School of suspicion—that, in fact, is what it all comes back to. We have learned no longer to place our confidence in anything, no longer to have faith in anyone, no longer to believe a person's word, nor in a sentiment, no longer to accept the lasting quality of a relationship, no longer to believe that it could be authentic or truly representative of the person. We have learned that every good feeling merely expresses some self-satisfaction or some hypocrisy, that all virtue is a lie, that all morality is false, that all devotion is vain or a sham, that all speech hides the truth” (p. 50).

”The era of a chance to hope is gone, for there is no hope where suspicion is king. Every time a possibility, a breakthrough, or a meaning takes shape, immediately the question bursts in on us, ‘From what social class, from what complex, from what ideology, from what myth, from what interest does this hope spring, since it is nothing but the falsification of a situation one has refused to face?’” (p. 52).

Alas, the loss of hope is not yet the end of suspicion's trail. When one does not keep one's suspicion to oneself but voices it as an *accusation*, the consequences are still more dire.



In *Apocalypse*, Ellul comments on the important text about the cosmic war between the angelic and demonic forces: “The Satan, the accuser, completes the work of the Devil in launching accusation, either before God to accuse men, or between men. *Every accusation is the work of Satan*” (*Apocalypse* (1975; ET 1977), p. 87; italics added).

Martin Luther is reported to have said that the Christian thing to do is always to “put the best possible construction” on other people’s words and deeds.

”People look on the outward appearance—the Lord looks on the heart,” God said to the prophet Samuel when he visited Jesse’s family looking for a future king to anoint. Of course, the heart, the feelings, intentions, and internal side, are critically important. But only God knows this reality. We human beings are pathetically off base in making judgments about people’s motives and intentions.

If we care about someone’s motivations, we should *ask them* about it—not just speculate and project our paranoid thinking on them—and then make it worse by spouting off our libelous accusations to those around us.

We don’t want to be gullible and naive but when there really is no *concrete* evidence of another’s bad faith, it is wrong and bad to go this route. It is incredibly destructive to go through life as a paranoid, suspicious accuser of others. It is anti-Ellulian and anti-Christian, if either of those matter. It is destructive of families, friendships, projects, churches, organizations, and important causes. It is withering and destructive of the paranoid self per se, which lives in darkness and bitterness.

Suspicion and accusation have poisoned and paralyzed political discourse. Example: Because former Clinton V-P Al Gore was the narrator, paranoid, suspicious American neo-cons reject without a hearing the photos, temperature readings, etc., regarding global warming in the recent documentary film *An Inconvenient Truth* (as though Gore himself faked the photos of receding glaciers and polar ice caps!).

But it’s not just a disease of big time politics: family members, colleagues who could be working together, people who should be on the same side, same team, sometimes allow their suspicion, paranoia, and accusation to fragment relationships. Whenever it’s up to us, let’s choose grace, hope, and community.

## Resources for Ellul Studies

**www.ellul.org & www.jacques-ellul.org** The IJES web site at [www.ellul.org](http://www.ellul.org) contains (1) news about IJES and AIJE activities and plans, (2) a brief and accurate biography of Jacques Ellul, (3) a complete bibliography of Ellul’s books in French and English, (4) a complete index of the contents of all *Ellul Forum* back issues; and (5) links and information on other resources for students of Jacques Ellul. The new French AIJE web site at [www.jacques-ellul.org](http://www.jacques-ellul.org) is also a superb resource.

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**Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works** by Joyce Main Hanks. Research in Philosophy and Technology. Supplement 5. Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 2000. xiii., 206 pages. \$87. ISBN: 076230619X.

This is the essential guide for anyone doing research in Jacques Ellul’s writings. An excellent brief biography is followed by a 140-page annotated bibliography of Ellul’s fifty books and thousand-plus articles and a thirty-page subject index. Hank’s work is comprehensive, accurate, and invariably helpful. This may be one of the more expensive books you buy for your library; it will surely be one of the most valuable. Visit [www.elsevier.com](http://www.elsevier.com) for ordering information.

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The Alibris web site ([www.alibris.com](http://www.alibris.com)) lists thirty titles of used and out-of-print Jacques Ellul books in English translation available to order at reasonable prices.

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Two web sites that will be of help in finding used books in French by Jacques Ellul (and others) are [www.chapitre.com](http://www.chapitre.com) and [www.livre-rare-book.com](http://www.livre-rare-book.com).

### **Reprints of Nine Ellul Books**

By arrangement with Ingram and Spring Arbor, individual reprint copies of several Ellul books originally published by William B. Eerdmans can now be purchased. The books and prices listed at the Eerdmans web site are as follows: *The Ethics of Freedom* (\$40), *The Humiliation of the Word* (\$26), *The Judgment of Jonah* (\$13), *The Meaning of the City* (\$20), *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man* (\$19), *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes* (\$28), *The Subversion of Christianity* (\$20), and *The*

*Technological Bluff* (\$35). *Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul* translated by Marva Dawn is also available (price unknown).

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### **Ellul on Video**

French film maker Serge Steyer’s film “Jacques Ellul: L’homme entier” (52 minutes) is available for 25 euros at the web site [www.meromedia.com](http://www.meromedia.com). Ellul is himself interviewed as are several commentators on Ellul’s ideas.

Another hour-length film/video that is focused entirely on Ellul’s commentary on technique in our society, “The Treachery of Technology,” was produced by Dutch film maker Jan van Boekel for ReRun Produkties (mail to: Postbox 93021, 1090 BA Amsterdam).

If you try to purchase either of these excellent films, be sure to check on compatibility with your video system and on whether English subtitles are provided, if that is desired

**Issue #39 Spring 2007 — The  
Ethics of Jacques Ellul**

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Jacques Ellul in his twenties

”We are entering into a new form of morality which could be called technological morality [Fr. morale technicienne], since it tends to bring human behavior into harmony with the technological world [au monde technique], to set up a new scale of values in terms of technology [en fonction de la technique], and to create new virtues. ”

-Jacques Ellul

To Will & To Do (1965; ET 1969), p. 185

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**For the Critique of Technological Civilization**

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## From the Editors

Our topical focus in this thirty-ninth issue of *The Ellul Forum* is ethics. What is the *right* thing—not just the technologically effective or financially profitable or popular thing—to do in this or that context? What can we say about—and how can we further—*good* character and community?

For more than thirty-five years these have been among the primary organizing questions of my life and work—and Jacques Ellul has been my most important source of insight and challenge on this journey. It is no accident that my work (both teaching and writing) has been in two domains: developing what I hope is a more authentic Christian ethics for the church and developing a better business ethics for the general marketplace and workplace. In the first article of this issue I have tried to summarize the ongoing legacy and promise of Ellul's ethics.

Of course, the late John Howard Yoder and many other students of ethics have drawn deeply and creatively on Ellul's thought. One of the best and most creative among contemporary thinkers drawing on the Ellul tradition is our own colleague Darrell Fasching, founding editor of this journal, and professor at the University of South Florida. Darrell's work on comparative religious ethics is a brilliant contribution, especially to be welcomed in our world of religious misunderstanding and conflict. His article begins on p. 11. Darrell's book on the topic (co-authored with his USF colleague, IJES Board member Dell DeChant) is given a glowing review later in these pages by Prof. Louise Doire.

Randy Ataide, a business leader who wrote a master's thesis on Ellul and who recently started teaching business at Point Loma University, wonders if, somewhere beyond where Ellul's technological experience ended, new technologies might contribute to human community and to a modification of our obsessions with private ownership. Interesting thought piece.

Matt Patillo re-views Ellul's intro to ethics *To Will & To Do*, and Andrew Goddard re-views the organization of Ellul's *Ethics of Freedom*. Daniel Cerezuelle's new book on Bernard Charbonneau (Ellul's closest friend and intellectual conversation partner through his life) gets a brief introduction by Carl Mitcham.

As with any topic we approach, there is something on almost every page of this issue to disagree with. It goes with the Ellulian territory. Dialectic, struggle, tension, wrestling . . . and finally some flaming insight or another.

And now back to *Ellul Forum* Editor Cliff Christians for the next issues!

*David W. Gill, Associate Editor IJES@ellul.org*

## Jacques Ellul's Ethics: Legacy and Promise

by David W. Gill



David W. Gill is President of the International Jacques Ellul Society; his first published book was a revised, abridged version of his Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Southern California: *The Word of God in the Ethics of Jacques Ellul* (Metuchen NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1984). This article was originally presented at a colloquium at the University of Poitiers and later published as a chapter in Patrick Troude-Chastenet, editor, *Jacques Ellul: Penseur sans frontieres (L'Esprit du Temps, 2005; pp. 61-77)*. Reprinted by permission.

## Introduction

Ten years after his death, it is clear that Jacques Ellul's contributions to the field of ethics and moral theology are of significant and enduring value. Nothing will ever rival Ellul's sociological contributions to our understanding of technique and technology but, like his work on politics, social change, propaganda, communications, history, religion, and biblical interpretation, his work on ethics stands the tests of time and criticism. In this essay we will explore eight important contributions made by Ellul's ethics and then consider two especially promising directions for further developing an Ellulian approach to ethics.

Of course, before Ellul's ethics can be fully assessed, and before any significant further development of his approach can be carried out, a great deal of preliminary work remains to be done. The first challenge is simply to make Ellul's full body of ethical writing available to readers. Specifically,

(a) his introduction to ethics, *Le Vouloir et le faire* (ET: *To Will and To Do*), is no longer in print in French or English;<sup>1</sup>

(b) it is uncertain whether any manuscript exists of the second half of this introductory work, promised by Ellul long ago, but the question of its status must be definitively resolved; even his rough notes on the subject would be a great help;

(c) while Ellul's *Ethique de la liberte* eventually appeared in three volumes in France, its English translation, *The Ethics of Freedom*, only represented volume one and an abbreviated, early draft of volume three of this important work. About 500 pages of the original 800 made it to the English translation. The entire work needs to be available in both French and English;<sup>2</sup>

(d) Ellul's thousand page manuscript on the ethics of holiness continues to be unavailable in both French and English; apparently Ellul's handwritten manuscript has now been painstakingly converted into a typescript and could now be edited and published, but various problems could still derail the project; the completion of this big project is absolutely essential;

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<sup>1</sup> *Le vouloir et le faire: recherches ethiques pour les chretiens*. Geneve: Labor et Fides, 1964. English translation by C. Edward Hopkin: *To Will and To Do: An Ethical Research for Christians*. Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1969.

<sup>2</sup> *Ethique de la liberte*, (Geneve: Labor et Fides) Tome 1, 1973; Tome 2, 1975; Tome 3 (*Les Combats de la liberte*), 1984; English translation by Geoffrey W. Bromiley: *The Ethics of Freedom*. (Grand

(e) Ellul's specific studies of the ethical virtues of hope and faith need to be republished;<sup>3</sup>

(f) while he did not prepare complete studies of love and the ethics of relationship (as he did with faith and hope and the ethics of freedom and holiness), he did write a few essays on love which could be brought together to help complete the overall architecture of his ethical thought;<sup>4</sup>

(g) Ellul's various articles (and extended sections in various books) on various aspects of ethics also deserve to be collected and made available to students of ethics. There are enough such articles and reviews to make up a substantial volume on its own.<sup>5</sup>

As this large body of writing becomes more fully accessible, the critical and constructive exploration of the implications and applications of Ellul's ethics can take place.<sup>6</sup> The general structure and logic of Ellul's ethics, including the points raised below in this essay, certainly deserve further attention. Additionally, Ellul's ethics invite specific application to challenges in such arenas as new technologies, the worlds of business, politics, and economics, and the life of citizens, disciples, nations, and churches.

The fact is that Jacques Ellul's ethical thinking is badly needed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. With an astonishing foresight Ellul anticipated the global dominance of technique, on the one hand, and the critical importance of religions old (Islam, Judaism, Christianity) and new (the "new demons/possessors") on the other. Long before postmodernism was fashionable, Ellul fought against, and called us beyond, the dehumanizing "raving rationalism" of the modern. While Ellul's *popularity* may have been greatest during the

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Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976).

<sup>3</sup> *L'Espérance oubliée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972); English translation by C. Edward Hopkin, *Hope In Time of Abandonment* (New York: Seabury, 1973); *La Foi au prix du doute* (Paris: Hachette, 1980); English translation by Peter Heinegg: *Living Faith: Belief and Doubt in a Perilous World* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983).

<sup>4</sup> For example, "Eros et Agape" and ". . . Et le Reste" in *Foi et Vie*, vol. 75, no. 2 (March-April 1976), pp. 62-81, 93-100; "Lifelong Love," in *What I Believe* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), pp. 6686.

<sup>5</sup> For example, "Notes en vue d'une éthique du temps et du lieu pour les chrétiens," *Foi et Vie*, vol. 59, no. 5 (Sept-Oct 1960), pp. 354-74; "The Ethics of Nonpower," trans. Nada K. Levy, in Melvin Kranzberg, ed., *Ethics in an Age of Pervasive Technology* (Boulder: Westview, 1980), pp. 204-212; "The Ethics of Propaganda: Propaganda, Innocence, and Amoralité," trans. D. Raymond Tourville. *Communication*. Vol 6, no 2 (1981), pp. 159-175; "Morale et technique," *Medianalyses: Cahiers de recherches communicationnelles*, no. 2 (May 1982), pp. 24-29; "Recherche pour une éthique dans une société technicienne," *Annales de l'Institut de philosophie et de sciences morales* (Université libre de Bruxelles, 1983), pp. 7-20.

<sup>6</sup> Several studies of Ellul's ethics have, of course, appeared over the years. The best recent study is Andrew Goddard, *Living the Word, Resisting the World: The Life and Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Carlisle UK: Paternoster, 2002), especially pp. 101-114; see also: Darrell Fasching, *The Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Lewiston NY: Mellen, 1981), especially pp. 93-176; David W. Gill, *The Word of God in the Ethics of Jacques Ellul* (Metuchen NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1984); and Gene Outka, "Discontinuity in the Ethics of Jacques Ellul," in Clifford G. Christians and Jay M. Van Hook, editors, *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1981), pp. 177-228.

1960s and 1970s, his greatest *importance* may be yet to come, as our tottering global civilization begins to come to the end of itself.

\* \* \*

Jacques Ellul made at least eight major contributions to the field of ethics. These are not just accomplishments of the past but promises for the future of the field.

1. “Lived morality” vs. theoretical morality. Ellul’s first contribution lies in his exposition of “lived moralities” vis-a-vis the various “theoretical moralities” of philosophy and religion.<sup>7</sup> The actual values by which people live deserve our attention much more than the theories advocated and debated by ivory tower intellectuals. It has been typical for students of ethics to spend much, if not most, of their time studying the ethical theories of Immanuel Kant, Thomas Hobbes, John Stuart Mill, David Hume, and others. But these are *theoretical* moralities. Ellul asks, “Who, apart from the specialists, is interested in Kant’s ethics? It is a matter for the philosophers, and the philosophers have no influence over morals. No one thinks to govern

his life according to the outcome of the quarrels among the specialists in philosophical ethics.”<sup>8</sup> These ethical theories tell us something not just about their philosophical authors but about the society, epoch, and intellectual environment in which they emerged. However, they also distract us from the reality of people’s actual ethical experience, character, decisionmaking, and behavior. A history and sociology of values, ethics, and morality will tell us a lot more about the essential character of ethics than a survey of the writings of the great philosophers.<sup>9</sup>

2. The integration of morality with the sacred. A second important emphasis in Ellul’s ethics is the inextricable relationship of morality to whatever is regarded as “sacred” in a society. “Every group is organized around what might be called a ‘principal motif’ . . . It is in relation to this principal motif that the group’s hierarchy of values is arranged.” “When a society no longer acknowledges a central motif . . . no morality can remain valid: or the same is true when the morality which is affirmed is out of harmony with the principal motif.”<sup>10</sup> In *The New Demons* Ellul describes how “it is important to have rules of behavior deriving from the sacred.”<sup>11</sup>

Another way to put it is that “our gods determine our goods.” Ethical reflection and ethical behavior is motivated, leveraged, and determined by what is our core purpose, our principal motif, our sacred. No ethical or moral reform is possible without addressing the question of what is our sacred, our mission, our god. This point is

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<sup>7</sup> See *To Will and To Do*, Chapter 7, “The Theoretical Moralities,” and “Chapter 9, “The Lived Moralities,” pp. 127-139, 159-171.

<sup>8</sup> *To Will & To Do*, p. 129

<sup>9</sup> Philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre has brilliantly called attention to the lessons of lived moralities and the flaws of theoretical ones in his influential works *After Virtue* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame, 2nd ed., 1984) and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1990). Jacques Ellul was already addressing this topic in the early 1960s.

<sup>10</sup> *To Will & To Do*, pp. 164, 165.

<sup>11</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The New Demons* (New York: Seabury, 1975), p. 65. Translated by C. Edward Hopkin from *Les Nouveaux Possedes* (Paris: Librairie Artheme Fayard, 1973).

utterly critical in the field of business and organizational ethics today: no improvement is possible without addressing the larger purposes of the organization. It has been common to try to separate ethics from religion and the sacred, on the assumption that the latter is necessarily divisive and is altogether dispensable to ethics and morality. Yet many people attest to the importance of religion as a source and shaper of their values and ethics; and those who do not, typically have some unacknowledged substitute sacred lurking just below the surface of their ethics and values.<sup>12</sup>

3. Technological morality as the dominant “lived morality” of our time. Third, Ellul identified and analyzed the dominant lived morality of our era, “technological morality,” with its core values of efficiency, normality, and success.<sup>13</sup> This technological morality is now deeply embedded in all sectors of our society, from business to education to religion. Ellul, far more than any other thinker, exposed the reality and nature of this enemy of an authentic ethics of life and freedom. Many have thought of technology as a “value-free” phenomenon. A means. Ellul showed that it has become a sacred “end,” the *telos* of our society, embedded with values. “The fact is that technology is felt by modern man as a sacred phenomenon. It is intangible, the supreme (in the cabalistic sense), unassailable operation. All criticism of it brings down impassioned, outraged, and excessive reactions in addition to the panic it causes.”<sup>14</sup>

In our postmodern context, it is often naively assumed that the only values to which we submit are those of our own personal choosing and that, in turn, we are (or we are the creators of) our own gods. Much of this is illusory and many postmodern individuals are unconsciously living out a worship of technique and a conformity to the values of technical morality. “We are entering into a new form of morality which could be called technological morality, since it tends to bring human behavior into harmony with the technological world, to set up a new scale of values in terms of technology, and to create new virtues.”<sup>15</sup> But this is not true merely with self-conscious postmodernists; technological morality has also invaded and colonized ethical thinking among Christians and other traditional groups, to a much greater extent than is realized.

4. The legitimacy of the morality of the world (the two ethics). Fourth, Jacques Ellul called attention to the value and importance of the morality of the world, alongside the ethics arising out of a relationship with God. These two ethics each have their legitimacy, their distinctives, and their limitations. Despite Ellul’s sometimes harsh critique of *both* of these ethical enterprises, his challenge to work at improving both of them is unmistakable.

”Life is possible within an ethical system. Apart from that it would be constant warfare, and interpersonal relationships would be unthinkable. Therefore we must respect this morality for its utility, since it is useful to man The Christian, because he

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<sup>12</sup> See David W. Gill, “Ethics With and Without God,” in David W. Gill, editor, *Should God Get Tenure: Essays on Religion and Higher Education* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 129-145.

<sup>13</sup> *To Will and To Do*, Chapter 11, “Technological Morality,” pp. 185-198.

<sup>14</sup> *New Demons*, p. 71.

<sup>15</sup> *To Will & To Do*, p. 185.

is a man, should lend a hand in making the world livable. Morality is part of that task, the common morality, the morality of the group, interpersonal morality. We must respect it, build it, and strengthen it in company with our fellows.”<sup>16</sup>

How do we do this? My view is that we begin by identifying the sacred, the central motif, the core purpose of any given group, large or small. What is it that is being treated as sacred? What is at the center of our attention, thinking, and purpose? Then, we critically reflect on whether this sacred stands as a worthy enough center of our common project. Finally, we work together to elaborate ethical guidelines that are in alignment with that “central motif.”

5. The necessity and urgency of Christian ethics. Fifth, Ellul was a pivotal figure in convincing a whole generation of Christian theologians (perhaps especially in America) that dogmatics were not enough, that the faith must be articulated in an ethics and lived out in faithful discipleship in the world. The conflict between Christian faith and modern culture was not to be played out merely as a contest of ideas and arguments (as Protestant orthodoxy and Fundamentalism were inclined) but rather in a whole style of life that included behavior as well as thought. But is the language of ethics and morality appropriate here? Ellul is at his most extreme dialectical contradiction in his answer. Christianity is not about morality but about faith, about a life in response to God’s presence and word. “The biblical concept of the good as the will of God immediately prohibits us from formulating an ethic. An ethic is always, ultimately, the formation of a good in itself.”<sup>17</sup>

”And yet a Christian ethic is indispensable,” Ellul says.<sup>18</sup> “The construction of a Christian ethic is necessary, first of all, because it is a guide, an indication given to faith, a real assistance to the brethren.”<sup>19</sup> Ellul’s dialectic highlights the radical difference between the ethics of the world and the ethics of the Word. What unites both disparate phenomena under the rubric of ethics is their common quest to know what is right and good. Beyond that, they are radically distinctive. The fact that Ellul himself set out to write a massive three-part introduction to a Christian ethics ought to put to rest any thought that Christian ethics is an unworthy pursuit.

6. A Christian ethics centered on Jesus and guided by Scripture. Sixth, in rebuilding a Christian ethic for our times, Ellul made a huge contribution with his insistent focus on Jesus and Scripture. “The word of God is fully expressed, explained, and revealed in Jesus Christ, and only in Jesus Christ, who is himself, and in himself, the Word.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> To Will & To Do, pp. 80-81.

<sup>17</sup> To Will & To Do, p. 202; see also “Moralism,” Chapter 4 of Jacques Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), pp. 69-73; Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley from *La Subversion du Christianisme* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1984).

<sup>18</sup> To Will & To Do, p. 245.

<sup>19</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Presence of the Kingdom* (New York: Seabury Press, 1967), pp. 21-22; Trans. Olive Wyon from *Presence au monde moderne* (Geneve: Roulet, 1948).

<sup>20</sup> To Will & To Do, p. 27.

“We know God fully only in Jesus Christ.”<sup>21</sup> And about Scripture, Ellul says “The criterion of my thought is the biblical revelation, the content of my thought is the biblical revelation, the point of departure is supplied by the biblical revelation, the method is the dialectic in accordance with which the biblical revelation is given to us, and the purpose is a search for the significance of the biblical revelation concerning ethics.”<sup>22</sup> Ellul’s work provided fresh, insightful, and powerful new understandings of the ethical implications of these core authorities in the Christian life.

After Ellul, Christian ethicists paid more—and better—attention to Jesus and Scripture, which simultaneously lends their work credibility in the church and revolutionary distinctiveness in the world. Part of what keeps our ethical systems and approaches humble and temporary, as Ellul urges, is that the criteria of the good and right are located in the authority of Jesus and Scripture. All commentaries, systems, traditions, and teachings are a step removed from these authorities.

7. The priority of a Christian ethics of “being” (over “doing”) Seventh, Ellul’s ethics emphasize “being” over “doing.” “Man always looks for a good which will determine a ‘deed’ —whereas in Jesus Christ it is always a matter of ‘being’.”<sup>23</sup> Ellul reflected at great length on the Pauline virtues of faith, hope, and love as accounts of the appropriate stance before the Wholly Other God. “When asked what to *do*, Paul answers by saying what we should *be*.”<sup>24</sup> While ethics will sketch out decision-and action-guidelines—indicatives if not imperatives—the heart of the matter in Christian ethics is to be brought into a stance of hope before God (to which God can give freedom), a stance of faith (to which God can provide holiness and distinctiveness), and a stance of love (to which God can respond with the gift of renewed relationships). In a Christian church deeply tainted by the modern scientific quest for abstract, universal laws followed by rational decision and effective action, Ellul’s call back to an ethics of stance and virtue, is a powerful antidote.<sup>25</sup>

8. The temporary, limited status of all Christian ethics. Eighth, and finally, Ellul’s emphasis on the “temporary” and humble status of any Christian ethic, including his own, is a rare but essential call to freedom and responsibility in the field of ethics. Ellul frequently wrote and said that he was not creating another system but rather trying to provide his readers with the means to think out for themselves the meaning of their

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<sup>21</sup> *The Ethics of Freedom*, p. 51.

<sup>22</sup> *To Will & To Do*, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> *To Will and To Do*, p. 28.

<sup>24</sup> *Ethics of Freedom*, p. 309. My own two-volume introduction to Christian ethics focuses first on *Becoming Good: Building Moral Character* (InterVarsity Press, 2000) and then on *Doing Right: Practicing Ethical Principles* (InterVarsity Press, 2004).

<sup>25</sup> Among those who have led the movement back toward virtue, character, and “being” in Christian ethics are Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1981), and *Character and the Christian Life: A Study in Theological Ethics* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1975), Peter Kreeft, *Back to Virtue: Traditional Moral Wisdom for Modern Moral Confusion* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), and Gilbert Meilaender, *The Theory and Practice of Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1984).

life or faith or ethics. It is an ongoing challenge to all who labor in this field, not to fix the work of Ellul or anyone else in stone but to stand on his shoulders, to learn from him and then push forward to an even better understanding of ethics for the time and place in which we must live. Ethics has so often been a means of judging, condemning, and rejecting others (and often enough oneself also) in an arrogant, domineering way. Ellul shows us a different path that is simultaneously bold and humble.

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## Preserving and Extending Ellul's ethical legacy

These eight contributions Ellul has made to the field of ethics are of no small importance to a world and a church that struggle to know what is the right thing to do in so many circumstances and domains. We should remember that Ellul would not be the first intellectual whose work grew in importance after the author passed from the scene. Soren Kierkegaard's biggest, if not also his greatest, work, the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* sold only a dozen or so copies in his lifetime. But after SK's death, various scholars and friends saw with growing clarity the value of his legacy and refused to let it disappear. Today there are hundreds of thousands of copies of *Postscript* being studied in dozens of languages. Jacques Ellul had greater impact on his contemporaries than did Kierkegaard but we face a similar challenge to promote the publication, translation, distribution, and study of his works. We should aim to do as well with Jacques Ellul's legacy as the intellectual heirs of Kierkegaard did with his.

## A Deeper Understanding of Character and Virtue in Ethics

As Ellul's ethical works become more fully available to serious students, one of the most important avenues of further study will be to consider in depth Ellul's work on the ethics that flows from the classic theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. The postmodern attack on modern moral theories (Kant, Mill, et al) has roots not just in the existentialist approach to ethics articulated in different ways by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche but in the virtue ethics traditions of pre-modern societies. How is Ellul's understanding of a theological virtue ethics similar and different to the approaches of moral philosophers and theologians, such as Alasdair MacIntyre and Stanley Hauerwas?

In his *Ethics of Freedom* Ellul provides us with some general comments on ethics and virtue as well as some specific insights into the virtue of hope and the ethics of freedom. Ethics "flows out of the relationship with Christ," Ellul writes.<sup>26</sup> Paul's theological virtues of faith, hope, and love provide a "mediation" of that relationship. Each of these virtues "expresses a specific type of behavior." Thus, hope is expressed

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<sup>26</sup> Ethics of Freedom, p. 7.

in freedom, faith in holiness, and love in relationship. Ellul published individual books on hope and faith, and extended articles and chapters on love. His three-volume ethics of freedom was published; his thousandpage manuscript on the ethics of holiness may yet be published. He did not write the ethics of relationship. Ellul believed that the hope/freedom studies were the most important studies for our era, a time of loss of authentic hope and freedom. Ellul presented faith/holiness and love/relationship as a dialectical relationship in which the first draws us away (producing a distinctiveness of identity) and the second sends us back (into relationships and presence in the world).

The language Ellul uses to describe hope and freedom helps illuminate what he understands virtue to be. Hope is a “response of man to God’s work for him,” a “response to God’s love and grace.”<sup>27</sup> Hope rests on the resurrection and victory of Jesus Christ. Hope is not just an emotion or feeling but an “actualization here and now” of an anticipated life and glory; it is a “way of living.” Freedom, in turn, is God’s gift and response to man’s hope. Freedom is a “situation made for us”—not an expression of our will or our being, a “fruit” rather than a “work,” in the traditional Pauline terminology. Freedom is not a virtue or a fragment of the Christian life but the “climate of all virtues.” “Freedom is first a power or possibility—a power to act and obey.”<sup>28</sup> Ellul says that there is “no incontestable outward sign” of freedom in a life but that there is nevertheless a qualitative difference perceived on a personal and relational level. The freedom that comes from hope characteristically strains toward the future, and leaves the old behind. Freedom is not sitting back and letting God work—it is knowing God’s will and doing it.”<sup>29</sup> By hoping in God, one is attached and linked to God’s future and thereby freed from and in the present.

Ellul’s expositions of hope and freedom are exhilarating, not just theologically but politically and culturally. What we can already see in his hints about faith and holiness, and about love and relationship, is equally promising. But how does Ellul’s work on virtue ethics relate to that of other ethical writers? From Aristotle onwards, virtues have been thought of as traits and habits of character. Long debate has taken place about the sources of virtue—to what extent is it the training of a natural endowment? To what extent are the virtues gifts of God (the “infused” virtues of Thomas Aquinas)? Whether gifts of nature or God, what are the roles of socialization and personal choice in the nurture and expression of a virtue like hope or love? What does it mean to value and pursue hope or another virtue in my own life? How do I proceed? Is it possible to make a *habit* of the stance of hope or faith? Or must it be an *existential choice* in every given moment and circumstance? Much of the virtue ethics tradition has argued that we must simultaneously seek to appropriate the virtue as an ingrained habit, capacity, and disposition and as a vital, existential stance in the moment. It is not either/or but both/and. And God is fully capable of doing a work of molding character as habit and

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<sup>27</sup> Ethics of Freedom, p. 13.

<sup>28</sup> Ethics of Freedom, p. 103

<sup>29</sup> Ethics of Freedom, p. 62. Other page references in this paragraph refer to this book.



embedded disposition as well as initiating a stance of hope or faith, in the existential moment. Ellul's language is distinctly tilted toward the Kierkegaardian individual in the moment. But there are also hints of possible connections to a more Thomistic approach.

The challenge is to go (with Ellul) beyond both schools of thought and articulate a virtue ethics appropriate to our time and place.

## **A Better Understanding of Individual and Community in Ethics**

A second promising avenue to explore in Ellul's ethics has to do with the role and importance of *community* (in its various forms). Ellul's work hints at such moral community but places far greater focus on the lone individual and the mass society, at the two extremes. Emile Durkheim's fear of the erosion of intermediate groups, with the anomistic individual pitifully subject to the impersonal mass, seems to have become our fundamental reality. But is this the end of the story? Ellul's dialectical form of expression often results in a very pessimistic answer to the question of moral community. But the same dialectic grounds our radical refusal to yield to such pessimism. Thus, the exploration of moral community is a path begging for ellulian attention.

Ellul argues that social transformation results from the accumulation of a vast number of individual decisions from below.<sup>30</sup> It is only the individual act of freedom that can break the technological system of ideology and belief (though the technological system of material correlation and integration is almost impossible for that individual to break)(195). Individual Christians have sometimes been free, he says, but not the church (289). His ethics is an *individualistic* ethics, not part of a commitment to a collective movement, but it is not *private* (210). This is hard for people to grasp or accept because the modern mind is used to collectivist thought. Sociology tends to give primacy to the group with no real safeguards for the force and validity of individuals, but the individual is key (296). Christian freedom is individual and personal in origin and execution but also necessarily collective in its reference and consequences because of the centrality of love (270). So it is the lay individual who is on the frontier of church and world where the decisive action and conflict takes place. "But it is only on the basis of a church which is a strong body and community that this is possible for the layman" (298).

Whatever the sociologists may say about the life of groups, communities, and institutions, Jesus and the Bible (Ellul's avowed authorities for his ethical thought) certainly provide strong and unrelenting calls to moral community. In a general sense, "it is not good for one to dwell alone" (Genesis 2:18). In a very specific way, the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount (the most famous ethical teaching of the Bible) were given to a community, not to an individual. Jesus sent his disciples out two-by-

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<sup>30</sup> Ethics of Freedom, p. 473.

two, not one-by-one. Jesus promised “wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst” and that whatever two or three “bound on earth” (a metaphor for moral decision-making) would be bound in heaven. Members of the “body of Christ” should value the other parts of the “body” and realize that it takes all parts of a body to make it function properly.<sup>31</sup>

It is certainly important to hear Ellul’s warnings about how groups can be the instruments of social conformity and are subject to laws of bureaucracy. It was sad to hear him confess (as he often did) that he never personally experienced community in any significant way that he could write about. Community seemed an impossible ideal to Ellul. He had a good eye for the hypocrisy and conformity of the church. Nevertheless, the actual communities of Israel and the early church are never presented in the Bible as anything other than flawed, imperfect phenomena; they are not dispensable just because they are so far from ideal. Indeed the community is essential for the individual’s *discernment* of the ethical right and good, and the community is essential for the *carrying out* of the right and good. The community is where character is formed and where individuals are taught the counter-narrative to the story of technological growth and goodness that otherwise becomes our central motif.

Ellul certainly hints at the importance of moral community, but it is largely undeveloped (much as it was in the writings of Kierkegaard). Perhaps Ellul’s work on the ethics of love/relationship would have developed this part of the picture. It is for us now, to pursue the project.

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Looking back at Jacques Ellul’s writings on ethics ten years after his death is as challenging and provocative an experience as it was to first encounter them in past decades. It is impossible to measure his influence on the field of ethics; while many scholars and writers owe him a great debt, he has never been a central figure in the “ethics establishment.” His role has been that of a prophet to the intellectuals—rather than a guru or creator of a school of disciples. But his legacy continues to challenge and inspire. It will be to our great loss if we do not explore and elaborate Ellul’s ethical thought during the coming years.

## Jacques Ellul on Ethics & Morality

### Ethical Theories

”It would, of course, be impossible to describe, however sketchily, the innumerable theoretical moralities developed in the course of time by philosophers, founders of religions, etc., the moralities of Moses, Confucius, Aristotle, Plato, the Stoics, Saint Thomas, Erasmus, Kant, Nietzsche . . .

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<sup>31</sup> See David W. Gill, “The Reality of Our Communities,” chapter 3 of *Becoming Good: Building Moral Character* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), pp. 43-61, for a discussion of community

"Let us recall, first of all, that theoretical morality is never 'pure,' that is, unaffected by its milieu. It is always to a greater or less extent, an expression of the environment in which it is elaborated. . . The intellectual, philosophical, religious, scientific trends of the moment strongly (but not totally) determine the moralist in the creation of a new system of ethics. Yet this moralist strives for an exact product. He wants to settle that which *should be* with the maximum of impartiality, to put a group of precepts together logically, to provide a rational justification for the requirements of the moral conscience of the moment, and in pursuing this ambition he goes far beyond the working morality of the group in which he finds himself

"All of this brings us to a consideration of the great weakness of theoretical moralities; namely, their lack of application. Whether applicable or not, they usually are scarcely applied in fact. The inhabitants of a city, the members of a group, the citizens of a nation, give very little heed to the morality developed by one of their number. Who, apart from the specialists, is interested in Kant's ethics? It is a matter for the philosophers and the philosophers have no influence over morals. Even when there is a deep community of interests between the group and the moralist, the latter is still a stranger and his morality is not applied... A few intellectuals know them, but one can say that by the very fact that it is a matter for intellectuals the dialogue remains at that level, rather than at the level of practical behavior. And no one thinks to govern his life according to the outcome of the quarrels among the specialists in philosophical ethics."

To Will & To Do: An Ethical Research for Christians (1964; ET, 1969), pp. 127-129.

## Lived Moralities

"A lived morality is located at the sociological level, not only because, as we have said, there is no morality except in relationships among individuals, but also because the various elements of the moral phenomenon are directly or indirectly produced by the social group. . .

"The connection between morality and society is certain First of all, no society can exist and develop

without a morality. We have already indicated that morality is necessary for any group whatsoever. Society must supply its members with a criterion of good and evil, a hierarchy of values, a list of imperatives, goals to be attained which are characterized as 'good,' a definition of the just and unjust, and prohibitions setting the limits to freedom of action. Without these, the society could not operate. Were it based exclusively on self-interest, or exclusively on restraint, it would meet with an insurmountable psychological obstacle or would dissolve into ceaseless conflict. . .

"In every society there is an essential motif, a chief center of interest, an undisputed assumption, a goal recognized by all. . . This principal motif is always both ideological

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in Christian character formation.

and material. It is bound up with a certain structure and it expresses itself in an aspiration. It is not a belief alone, nor is it a fact alone. It involves a combination of the two. It is in relation to this principal motif that the group's hierarchy of 'values' is arranged, and that the striving toward the desirable and the imperatives of the obligatory are established. . . But this principal motif is always bound up with the various group structures: economic, technological, religious, political, cultural, and demographic. The morality expresses the structures in terms of obligation and duty, with a view to preserving them, perpetuating them, and regulating man with respect to them.

"When a society no longer acknowledges a central motif, or when its structures are no longer felt to be necessary, no morality can remain valid."

To Will & To Do: An Ethical Research for Christians (1964; ET, 1969), pp. 159-65 passim.

## Technological Morality

"A transformation in the lived morality is taking place under our own eyes. [Ed. Note: Ellul is writing in the early 1960s]. We are entering into a new form of morality which could be called technological morality since it tends to bring human behavior into harmony with the technological world, to set up a new scale of values in terms of technology, and to create new virtues. . .

"Technology supposes the creation of a new morality. It informs the whole of public, professional, and private life. One can no longer act except in relational to technical ensembles. Hence there is need to create new patterns of behavior, new ideas, new virtues. At the same time, new choices are set before man which he is in no way prepared to face. . .

"The probability is that a new morality will be created which will put its blessing upon man's subjection to the technological values and will make him a good servant to this new master, in trustfulness and loyalty, in the spirit of a service freely rendered. . .

"Contemporary man is very generally convinced that technique is the good, that it concurs in man's good and will bring about his happiness. Should man recoil before this prospect, the proof of the technical good is confirmed, reinforced, and assured by the various pressures at the disposal of the technological civilization: the testimony of its successes, the importance of the necessity for its development, the certainty of progress, the marvelous concordance of the techniques. How can all that fail to convince a man inwardly that he should participate with all his heart in the development of such a good? . . .

"In this technological morality there is also set up a scale of values which are truly valid for man and which the individual accepts as such. Wighout doubt, one of the important facts in this sphere is the transformation of technology itself into a value. For the man of today, technology is not only a fact. It is not merely an instrument, a

means. It is the criterion of good and evil. It gives meaning to life. It brings promise. It is a reason for acting and it demands our commitment....

"In this technological society the normal tends to replace the moral. Man is no longer asked to act well but to act normally... the highest virtue demanded of man today is adjustment. . .

"We should bear in mind a third value characteristic of this morality: namely success. In the last analysis, good and evil are synonyms for success and failure. . .

"[T]he 'more' becomes a criterion in itself. The new morality justifies automatically that which is 'more.'

To Will & To Do: An Ethical Research for Christians (1964; ET, 1969), pp. 127-129.

## Christian Ethics

"In reality, the problem that confronts us is that of the Christian ethic, an ethic which has nothing in common with what is generally called 'morality,' and still less with the Christian 'virtues' in the traditional sense. . . It is never a series of rules, or principles, or slogans . . . we can never make a complete and valid description of the ethical demands of God, any more than we can reach its heart. We can only define its outline, and its conditions, and study some of its elements for purposes of illustration.

"The heart of this ethic may be expressed thus: it is based on an 'agonistic' way of life; that is to say, the Christian life is always an 'agony,' that is, a final decisive conflict; thus it means that constant and actual presence in our hearts of the two elements of judgment and grace. But it is this very fact that ensures our liberty. We are free because at every moment in our lives we are both judged and pardoned, and are consequently placed in a new situation, free from fatalism, and from the bondage of sinful habits

"The two dominant characteristics of this ethic are, so it seems to me, (a) that it should be temporary, and (b) that it should be apologetic.

"(a) *Temporary*: because it concerns a given and variable situation. We are not concerned with formulating principles but with knowing how to judge an action in given circumstances. Thus we are not bound to hold closely to moral ideas which must be invariable, but the Scripture teaches us that its ethic varies in form, and in concrete application to situations and places. . . There are consequences of the faith which can be objectively indicated. . . The construction of a Christian ethic is necessary, first of all, because it is a guide, an indication given to faith, a real assistance to the brethren; and then, because it allows us to give a real content to the judgment which God pronounces upon us; and finally, because it is necessary for the life of the Church. But this elaboration must not be substituted for the fight of faith which every Christian must wage; that is why it is indicative, not imperative. We must not imagine that this ethic will give us the permanent solution of all problems. That is why, essentially, it ought to be temporary; it needs to be continually revised, re-examined, and re-shaped by the combined effort of the Church as a whole.

”(b) Further, the Christian ethic is necessarily *apologetic* in character That is to say, that the

’works’ done in virtue of, and in consequence of, the Christian ethic, ought to appear in the light of Jesus Christ as veritable good works . . . of such a quality that they lead men to praise God. When they do this, they do constitute an apologetic.”

*Presence of the Kingdom* (1948; ET 1951), pp. 20-23.

## **The Ethics of Holiness in an Age of Globalization: The Significance of Jacques Ellul’s Work for Comparative Religious Ethics**

by Darrell J. Fasching

Darrell J. Fasching is Professor of Religious Studies at the University of South Florida, Tampa. His book *The Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Edwin Mellen Press, 1981) was the first English language monograph published on Ellul. Darrell is also author of *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima* (SUNY, 1993) and co-author (with Dell deChant) of *Comparative Religious Ethics: A Narrative Approach* (Blackwell, 2001) reviewed elsewhere in this issue. He was the founding editor of *The Ellul Forum* in 1988.

For more than a quarter of a century now I have been engaged in a theological approach to comparative religious ethics. See especially *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima* (1993) and *Comparative Religious Ethics: A Narrative Approach* (with Dell deChant, 2001).<sup>32</sup> This approach has been built around Ellul’s distinction between the sacred and the holy. Ellul first made this distinction in his second book, *The Presence of the Kingdom* (1948, English translation 1967) and gave his most detailed analysis of it in *The New Demons* (1973, English translation 1975.) These two terms, “sacred” and “holy,” are typically used as synonyms, but Ellul uses them as antonyms - opposites. The sacred, he argues, is a reverse image of the holy. It is like looking in a mirror –what seems to be the same is really totally reversed.

Following Durkheim, the sacred is for Ellul the sociological dimension of all societies that provides a sense of order necessary for human social life but which tends to become absolute, totalitarian and demonic. Ellul argues that the word of God manifests the power of the holy to call into question and desacralize all sacred orders. This is what the Christian Gospel did for classical western culture by demythologizing and desacralizing

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<sup>32</sup> See especially *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima* (SUNY, 1993) and also *Comparative Religious Ethics: A Narrative Approach*, (with Dell deChant, Blackwell, 2001) and my chapter on new and new age religions and ethics in *World Religions Today* (with John Esposito and Todd Lewis, Oxford, 2006). See also, my chapter “Religious Studies and the Alienation of Theology” in *Religious Studies, Theology and the University*, edited by Linell Cady and Delwin Brown (SUNY, 2002).

its myths and rituals –its “sacred way of life” required by the gods of nature. In the modern world, he argued, Christianity is called to do the same for technological society, by desacralizing the sacred technological order that superceded and replaced the sacred natural order.

For Emile Durkheim, religion is to be understood as a human response to the overwhelming (and therefore sacred) power of society upon which we depend for our existence. Without being fully conscious of the reason for their actions, he would say, tribal peoples revere their sacred ancestors or *totems* (both human and non-human) as symbols of the sacred order of their society. For Durkheim the singular purpose of religious myth is to sacralize society so that its customs can be considered sacred and bring social stability to human life.

Yet another of the great founders of sociology, Max Weber, argued that this is not the only social function of religion. Weber argued that while religion functions much of the time to sanction the “routine order” of society (i.e., the sacred customs) as Durkheim claimed, still sometimes religion manifests the dramatic power to desacralize and disenchant society, and in so doing bring about dramatic social change. It does this by calling into question the supposed sacredness of the old order. Indeed the same religious tradition can at different times do both. Sometimes religion sacralizes society and sometimes it secularizes it. Thus Weber argued that Roman Catholic Christianity functioned to sacralize the social order of the Middle Ages while Protestant Christianity functioned to secularize that social order, contributing to the emergence of the modern secular society. (Of course for Weber secularization is irreversible while for Ellul, once a new “secular” order is established there is nothing to prevent that order from becoming a new sacred order, requiring further acts of desacralization.)

Ellul’s understanding of the sacred and the holy, it always seemed to me, has a lot in common with Weber’s views, but in my conversations with Ellul he always denied the influence of Weber and persisted in giving Marx all the credit. Nevertheless, I still find it useful to understand Ellul through the prism of Weber’s perspective, in which he argued that charismatic religion inserts itself into the sacred routine of social order, calls it into question and initiates a desacralizing transformation of society.

For Ellul, that transformation is a moment in which the holy manifests itself as the insertion of a wholly other dimension of transcendence into sacred order. This is made possible by the gift of apocalyptic hope in God as the Wholly Other. The goal is not to destroy a sacred way of life but to call it into question, transform and “rehabilitate” it, by opening it to transcendence –making human freedom and dignity possible in rebellion against all sacred necessities. With these distinctions Ellul opens up an approach to comparative religious ethics as identifying “sacred ways of life” in need of rehabilitation by experiences of the holy. Ellul helps us get things into correct perspective when he argues that “the sacred is not one of the categories of religion.

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Most of this essay is drawn from arguments previously made in these publications.

Religion, rather, is one possible rendition of the sacred” alongside of politics, economics, and other cultural enterprises.<sup>33</sup>

Ellul, standing in the French sociological tradition that goes back to Durkheim, is simply stating what is obvious to this tradition; namely, that every society is legitimated by some sense of the sacred. This sense of the sacred pervades every aspect of culture, not just “religion” in its explicit institutional forms. Indeed, in most times and places in history, religion and culture have been indistinguishable.

In making his distinction between sacred and holy, Ellul was not thinking so much about comparative religious ethics as the Christian ethical encounter with society in history. But his work suggested to me a theological path into comparative religious ethics, one useful in defining theology as an academic (rather than confessional) discipline essential to the tasks of religious studies in secular universities. This would not be a Christian theology but what Paul Tillich called a theology of the history of religions. Drawing on Ellul’s work, and that of Gabriel Vahanian who also makes this distinction between the sacred and the holy, I have argued that religious studies is about more than “religions” (that is, as Ellul insists, it is about the sacred in all its manifestations) even as theology is about more than “God.”<sup>34</sup> From this perspective, comparative religious ethics is about comparing sacred ways of life that are normative for societies and their critique under the influence of diverse experiences of the holy. “Theos” or “God” is only one name for such experiences. Buddhism, for example, offers significant alternatives.

Theological ethics is the task of critical normative reflection on the dimension of the sacred that pervades and shapes all cultural activities. And all critique of the sacred, I would argue, is rooted in some experience of the *holy as wholly other*. I will give you three examples: the Biblical critique of society in the name of a God who cannot be named or imaged and in whose image we are created; the Socratic critique in the name of the Unseen Measure as the measure of every human being; the Buddhist critique in the name of the emptiness of all selves. In all three cases the self reflects the image of the holy as wholly other (transcendence) that cannot be defined and confined to any sacred order and which every sacred order must respect and accommodate if it is to be just and compassionate.

In ancient Israel, prophets like Jeremiah (in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE) insisted that God demanded a life of holiness which called into question the sacred order of society in the name of justice for the widow, the orphan and the stranger (those neglected and repressed by the sacred order of society). In a parallel fashion the Buddha (who lived in India about the same time as Jeremiah), called into question the sacred order of the caste system and welcomed lower castes and outcaste into his holy community (the sangha) as equal with persons from all higher castes. The heart of prejudice and injustice is the claim reinforced by sacred social orders that some are more human than

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<sup>33</sup> *The New Demons*, (Seabury Press, 1975), p. 48.

<sup>34</sup> See “Religious Studies and the Alienation of Theology” as listed in note 1.



others and therefore deserve a more privileged status. But in the biblical tradition all are created in the image of a God who is without image even as for Buddhism all selves are empty, so that for either –no caste or class can claim special privileges.

Some three centuries later, in Ancient Greece, Socrates repeated this pattern in his “invention” of ethics as a category in Western philosophy. The Greek roots of our term “ethics” (*ethos, ethike*) like its Latin parallel (*mos, mores*) “morality” once meant the “customs” of the people - the sacred customs. However, after Socrates, ethics came to mean “the questioning of the sacred customs” by asking: *Is what people call “good” really the good?* This is a dangerous question. Socrates was put on trial and executed for “impiety towards the gods” and “corrupting the youth” because he dared to question the sacred way of life of Athenian society. Yet Socrates’ goal was not to demean the Athenian way of life but to rehabilitate it and raise it to a higher level.

The life and death of Socrates (like that of Jeremiah and the Buddha) illustrates the tension between the sacred and the holy. As Ellul insists, every society needs the stability provided by a sense of sacred order. But sometimes order is achieved in society at the expense of virtues such as justice and compassion. As Socrates put it, every society must be more than just the “cosmos writ small” (sacred order), it must also be “the human writ large” (the holy), provided we understand the measure of the human to be the “Unseen Measure.” No society can be a good society which sacrifices justice and compassion for human beings in the name of sacred order. Morality need not simply be a mirror of sacred order. It can be transformed to meet the demands of the holy. The goal of the Socratic ethic of the holy is to rehabilitate the sacred order of Athenian society so that its sacred customs or morality, reflect *both* a sense of order *and* of justice.

Socrates crime was asking people whether what they called the good really was the good. It was a crime of corrupting the youth because he taught them to question the sacredness of the Athenian way of life and so led them astray. It was a crime of impiety toward the gods because what people called the good was a way of life legitimated by an appeal to sacred/divine origins. His enemies accused Socrates of being an atheist. But Socrates himself argued that, on the contrary, he was compelled to question the Athenian way of life by some mysterious God (apparently a stranger to the Athenian pantheon) who had sent him as a “gad-fly”\_ to the city of Athens. Thus Socrates’ protest against the sacred order of Athenian society was itself rooted in an alternative type of religious experience. An experience he described as an inward movement of “the soul” toward a wholly other “Unseen Measure” which called all other measures of the public good into question so that no society could be called good that was not just toward it members.

Socrates opposed “the way things are” (Is = Ought) with an understanding of the Good that transcends the sacred order of things and calls it into question (Ought vs. Is). His death in protest of unjust laws became a model of civil disobedience for both Eastern and Western modern exemplars of the ethical life, like Gandhi and Martin

Luther King Jr. It was both an act of respect for morality (he does not flee “the laws”) and at the same time an ethical call to transform morality in the name of justice.

To say that a way of life is sacred is virtually, by definition, to say that it is ‘beyond questioning.’ The sacred is typically surrounded by a taboo which forbids all questions. Socratic questioning is inherently subversive and desacralizing, that is, secularizing activity. As with Buddhism, it produces the paradox of a form of religious expression that seems irreligious, even as early Christians seemed atheistic and irreligious for questioning the sacred way of life of the Romans.

As Ellul notes, the Hebrew term for “holy” (*qadosh*) suggests that to be holy is to be “set apart.” Ellul finds this occurring through apocalyptic hope in the Wholly Other, I would argue that the experience of doubt and questioning is an equally valid avenue. When we are seized by doubt and by wonder we are seized by the holy: we are *estranged* or set apart from the sacred order of things. We find ourselves alienated from our sacred way of life and able to see it as if through the eyes of a *stranger*. Seeing from this perspective enables us to put all things in question. From this point of view, the inner demand for rationality (i.e., that our doubts and questions be pursued and answered) is an opening of the self to the infinite. All answers are finite and limited. Every answer generates more questions: we always have more questions than answers. Moreover, we do not initiate such experiences of doubt and wonder, they come upon us. We are seized by them the way Siddhartha was when he felt compelled to leave the security of the palace grounds only to encounter the old man, the sick man, the dead man and even more doubts and questions.

Such experiences demand from us the integrity to follow the questions wherever they lead. In saying this, I have in mind Augustine’s *Confessions*, where he says that a key turning point in his life was reading Cicero’s *Hortensius* which set him on fire with the desire to seek wisdom. This experience, he said, made him resolve never to cling to any partisan answers but rather to follow the questions wherever they led him (Book 3:4). Later in the *Confessions* he suggests that the wisdom he first surrendered to when he first surrendered to his doubts was none other than Christ, the wisdom of God (Book 11:9).

Thus faith begins, for Augustine, with a surrender to doubt— and trusting doubt opens him to the infinite wisdom of God through his quest for insight. Interestingly, it is through reading the pagan author Cicero, not the Bible, that this openness to selftranscendence and divine wisdom first occurs. For Augustine, faith is setting out on a life journey without knowing where he is going, trusting his surrender to doubt, his passion for wisdom, to lead the way. Indeed, in his Trinitarian writings Augustine argued that you cannot seek the God you do not know unless that God is already at work in your doubts and your passion for wisdom, leading you to him.

Without such experiences of the holy we would not experience the gap between ‘what is’ and “what might be,” and between “what is” and “what ought to be.” To be human is to be capable of migrating into new worlds in time, space and imagination. Our openness to the infinite requires of us openness to other worlds (both actual

and possible). In this sense, the claims of the holy as a type of human experience demand from us a hospitality to strangers and their strange worlds. Theological ethics, academically

conceived, requires engagement with the plurality of human experiences of the sacred and the holy.

Even from the perspective of Christian theology, while I would argue that there is no way to God except through Christ, I would quickly add -provided you understand that there is no way to Christ except through hospitality to strangers and their strange worldviews. For when we welcome the stranger we welcome either God (Genesis 18:1-5), God's messiah (Matt 25:35) or God's messengers/angels (Hebrews 13:2). To turn your back on the stranger is to turn your back on God. A world without strangers is a world without God. An affirmation of religious pluralism is compelled by the very logic of a biblical ethic of hospitality.

To be faithful to this logic we need to distinguish sacred moralities from various ethics of holiness that have emerged in history because this distinction clarifies the ambiguity surrounding the influence of religion on human behavior by exposing the demonic manifestations of religion for what they are. How is it that most Christians in Nazi Germany, either actively or passively, supported Hitler's attempted annihilation of the Jews while some felt their faith required them to oppose Hitler and rescue Jews? The first divided the world into sacred and profane realms and relegated the Jews to the profane realm of subhumans. These *Deutsch Christians* remade God in their own image as a true Aryan. Or how is it that, in the Southern United States in the middle of the twentieth century, both the proponents of segregation and the opponents of segregation (in the civil rights movement lead by Martin Luther King Jr.) could each think of themselves as following the Christian way of life. The proponents of segregation interpreted the Christian story in such a way as to divide the world into sacred and profane. Only whites were fully human and so permitted full access to the sacred order of society, blacks were profane and less (than) human and permitted only in certain controlled areas (separate water fountains, separate bathrooms, separate entrances to buildings, etc.) The opponents of segregation interpreted the Christian story in exactly the opposite direction, as one that demanded the desacralization of sacred order in the name of all that is holy so as to bring about equality and justice. The histories of religions and cultures are rife with such examples.

The distinction between the sacred and the holy is meant to express the idea that religious experiences are not all the same - the "sacred" and of the "holy" name two categories of types of experiences (in each category the experiences are not necessarily all the same but can be grouped together because they have similar functional impacts on society) that shape the narrative imagination in opposing directions, so that the very same tradition and the very same scriptural stories can be interpreted very differently, encouraging opposing patterns of behavior. By separating the uses of "sacred" and "holy" (and in a parallel manner, "morality" and "ethics") in this way we are saying that the collection of social behaviors that are generally labeled "religious" are not all religious

in the same way. So we are arguing that it is very helpful to give separate meanings to terms that have been used interchangeably in order help us see and understand these differences.

While the center of a sacred society is within its boundaries and measured by all who share the same identity, in a holy community the center is to be found, paradoxically, outside its boundaries, in the stranger who is wholly other. For strangers and outcasts are those whose identity does not fit within the sacred order of things and consequently cannot be named or measured in its categories. A holy community is typically a subculture which functions as a “counter culture,” an alternative community within a sacred society whose way of life calls that society’s sacred order into question. The experience of the holy desacralizes all sacred societies and sets in motion the development of an ethic of hospitality to the stranger.

Unlike the sacred and the profane, the holy and the secular are not opposites but complementaries. The world is experienced as secular for it is not the holy (the infinite) which is always wholly other (immeasurable and indefinable) than the finite world. The stranger’s “difference” is a reminder of this wholly-otherness (for the stranger’s ways, like God’s, are not my ways and his thoughts are not my thoughts - -Isaiah 55:8-9).

The Appendix (below), a charting of the *Characteristics of the Sacred and the Holy*, outlines some of the key features of these opposing patterns of religious ways of life. In a sacred society all who are alike (for example, sharing a common ethnic identity) form a sacred circle of all who are the same - and therefore “fully human.” All strangers - that is, all who are different - are outside this circle and seen as profane and less (or less than) human. One only has full moral obligations toward those who are human.

The experience of the sacred sacralizes the finite order of the society, seeing a society’s way of life as an expression of the sacred cosmic order of things. And what is sacred is held to be beyond question. The way things are in this sacred order is the way they ought to be (Is = Ought). A very different form of religious experience gives rise to the holy community. For the experience of the holy generates a human response to the sacred which calls it into question by insisting that ultimate truth and reality are radically different than this world and its sacred powers and sacred orders. Consequently, the holy encourages doubt and questioning. The way things are is not the way they ought to be and so the way things are must be called into question by the way things ought to be (Ought vs. Is).

The distinction we are making between the sacred and the holy is typological. That is, it is a model to be used to help us sort out human experiences and behaviors. If taken too literally, however, it may become a stereotype. The difference between the sacred and the holy is not a difference to be found between religions, as if some were pure models of one and some pure models of the other. Rather, the sacred and the holy should be seen as opposing tendencies or ways of experiencing life, to be found in all persons and all communities/cultures (whether they appear to be religious or not). Every actual culture and religion (indeed every person’s identity) is likely to embody tendencies of both models –the sacred and the holy -in a complex and sometimes self-

contradictory way of life. Thus, for instance, to cite the Buddhist sangha as an example of a holy community does not mean that it has not also functioned much of the time as a sacred society. Likewise for Christianity or any other tradition.

The world as we know it is passing away. The great world religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam, or Hinduism and Buddhism, or Taoism and Confucianism go back to the beginnings of civilization and are deeply bound up with the civilizations in which they emerged: the Middle East, India and China. In the past these religions and cultures lived in relative isolation from one another. Today our situation is dramatically different. For today we live at the beginning of an age of globalization created by the advance of techno-economic and communications techniques encircling the globe.

In this environment, the spiritual heritages of the human race have become our common inheritance, forming a rich ecology that can provide us with the wisdom we need to guide us in the new millennium. The more complex an ecology is, the more stable it is. And the more simplified an ecology becomes, the more unstable it becomes until it reaches a point where it is in danger of collapsing, unable to support life. The important thing to remember is that ecological diversity and complexity sustain life. This is as true for world culture as it is for nature.

The time when a new world religion could be founded - the time of a Moses, Jesus, Siddhartha or Mohammed—says contemporary theologian John Dunne, has passed. The spiritual adventure of our postmodern world is different. “The holy man of our time, it seems, is not a figure like Gotama [i.e., the Buddha] or Jesus or Mohammed, a man who could found a world religion, but a figure like Gandhi, a man who passes over by sympathetic understanding from his own religion to other religions and comes back again with new insight to his own. Passing over and coming back, it seems, is the spiritual adventure of our time.”<sup>35</sup> What is required today is not the conquest of the world by any one religion or culture but a meeting and sharing of religious and cultural insight. Our common future depends upon our capacity to welcome the stranger, that is, our capacity for hospitality.

The spiritual adventure of passing over into the life of the stranger and coming back with new insight is a world-transforming process whose results have been keenly felt in the emergence of a global ethic of nonviolent resistance to all assaults against the sanctity of human dignity. It illustrates the way in which comparative religious ethics can advance a normative ethic through cross-cultural dialogue.

Martin Luther King, Jr. openly admitted that his own commitment to non-violent resistance or civil disobedience as a strategy for protecting human dignity had its roots in two sources: Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and Gandhi’s teachings of nonviolence rooted in his interpretation of the Hindu scripture, the Bhagavad Gita. Belonging to the next generation, King never met Gandhi, but did travel to India to study the effects of Gandhi’s teachings of non-violence on Indian society. In this he showed a remarkable openness to the insights of another’s religion and culture. In Gandhi and

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<sup>35</sup> John Dunne, *The Way of All the Earth*, (University of Notre Dame Press, 1972), p ix.

his spiritual heirs King found kindred spirits, and he came back to his own religion and culture enriched by the new insights that came to him in the process of passing over and coming back. Martin Luther King, Jr. never considered becoming a Hindu, but his own Christianity was profoundly transformed by his encounter with Gandhi's Hinduism.

Just as important, however, is the fact that Gandhi himself engaged in the spiritual adventure of passing over. As a young man, Gandhi, at the age of 19, came to England to study law. His journey to England led him not away from his Hinduism but more deeply into it. For it was in England that Gandhi came to discover the *Bhagavad Gita* and to appreciate the spiritual and ethical power of Hinduism. Because he had promised his mother that he would remain vegetarian, he took to eating his meals with British citizens who had developed similar commitments to vegetarianism through their fascination with India and its religions. It is in this context that Gandhi was brought into direct contact with the 19<sup>th</sup> century Theosophists, for in these circles he met Madame Blavatsky and her disciple Annie Besant, both of whom had a profound influence upon him. His associates also included Christian followers of the Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy, who, after his midlife conversion, had embraced an ethic of non-violence based on Jesus' *Sermon on the Mount*.

At the invitation of his theosophist friends Gandhi read the *Bhagavad Gita* for the first time, in an English translation by Sir Edwin Arnold, entitled *The Song Celestial*. It was only much later that he took to a serious study of it in Sanskrit. Thus, seeing through the eyes of Western friends, he was moved to discover the spiritual riches of his own Hinduism. The seeds were planted in England, nourished by more serious study during his years in South Africa, and brought to completion upon his final return to India in 1915.

Gandhi was especially influenced by the Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy and his understanding of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The message of nonviolence –love your enemy, turn the other cheek –took hold of Gandhi. And yet Gandhi did not become a Christian but rather returned to his own religion and culture, finding parallels to Jesus' teachings in his own Hindu tradition. And so he read his own Hindu scriptures with new insight, interpreting the Bhagavad Gita allegorically as a Hindu scripture of non-violent resistance to evil. And just as King used Gandhi to help him fight non-violently for the dignity of Blacks in America so Gandhi used Tolstoy to help him fight for the dignity of Hindus under British rule, and of the lower castes and outcastes within Hindu society in India.

Gandhi never seriously considered becoming a Christian any more than King ever seriously considered becoming a Hindu. Nevertheless, Gandhi's Hindu faith was profoundly transformed by his encounter with the Christianity of Tolstoy just as King's Christian faith was profoundly transformed by his encounter with Gandhi's Hinduism. For Gandhi, seeing the Sermon on the Mount through the prism of the Gita, "gave teeth" to the message of Jesus, showing that turning the other cheek did not require surrendering to evil but rather required non-violent resistance against all evil. In the

lives of Gandhi and M.L.King, Jr. we have examples of “passing over” as a profoundly transforming postmodern spiritual adventure.

Non-violence, King argued, is more than just a remedy for this or that social injustice. It is, he became convinced, essential to the future survival of humanity in an age of nuclear weapons. The choice, he argued, was “no longer between violence and non-violence. It is either nonviolence or nonexistence.” Truth is to be found in all religions, King argued, and “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.” The scandal of our age, said Abraham Joshua Heschel, is that in a world of diplomacy “only religions are not on speaking terms.” But no religion, he argues, is an island and we all need to realize that “holiness is not the monopoly of any particular religion or tradition.” “Buddhism today” says Thich Nhat Hanh, “is made up of non-Buddhist elements, including Jewish and Christian ones.” And likewise with every tradition. “We have to allow what is good, beautiful, and meaningful in the other’s tradition to transform us,” he says. The purpose of such passing over into the other’s tradition is to allow each to return to his or her own tradition transformed. What is astonishing, says Thich Nhat Hanh, is how we will find kindred spirits in other traditions with whom we share more than we do with many in our own tradition.<sup>36</sup>

What may we hope for from the practice of passing over and coming back? Certainly, our goal should not be to make everyone the same. The global ethic I envision emerging from the way of all the earth need not (indeed must not) aspire to make everyone conform. Alfred North Whitehead once noted that approximately 10 % of the European population participated in the Renaissance and yet the Renaissance transformed Europe. Creative minorities can be a powerful fermenting influence, bringing about profound cultural, even global, transformations. Ten percent of the world’s population, engaged in passing over and coming back, working through the presence of diverse holy communities—Buddhist, Jewish, Christian and other kindred religious and secular communities—can be a saving remnant.

The journey of passing over and coming back is itself a kind of spiritual practice—a pilgrimage involving hospitality to the stranger. On this pilgrimage we wrestle with the stranger, ourselves, and the mystery of the holy (the one who refuses to give us his name). Like Jacob (Genesis 32:22-31), we may come away limping but blessed, transformed and given a new name—“Israel.” The meaning of this new name, we are told is, *he who wrestles with God and humans and wins*, even though no one has been defeated. And like Jacob, we may walk away saying we have seen God face to face. Out of such a pilgrimage could emerge a new way of life for a new millennium in which the

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<sup>36</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail” in *I Have a Dream: Writings and Speeches that Changed the World* edited by James M. Washington (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1986 & 1992), p. 85. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity: Essays [of] Abraham Joshua Heschel*, edited by Susannah Heschel (N.Y.: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1996), pp 241 & 247. Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (N.Y.: G.P.

sacred is rehabilitated by an ethic of the holy embodied in the practice of hospitality. In this ethic we pass over into the lives and cultures of stranger only to come back to our own with new insight. As a Christian, that is the only way I can encounter the

Christ who is the wisdom of God. Would Ellul agree? I don't know. However, Ellul, with his commitment to universal salvation, certainly had the spirit of openness necessary for such a view. Moreover, he always encouraged us to "think for ourselves." In my view, this is where the ethics of holiness leads.

Putnam and Sons, Riverhead Books, 1995), pp. 9&11.

## Appendix: Characteristics of the Sacred and the Holy

<p>Sacred Society  Center within itself  Sameness = measure of the human  Hostility to the stranger  Sacred is opposed to Profane  Sacralization of the finite cosmos/society, expressed in a sacred way of life</p> <p>Cosmos writ small  Answers are absolute answers imprison us in the finite</p> <p>God in the image of self</p> <p>This-worldly  Hierarchical  Honor  Morality  Is = Ought  The way things are is they way they ought to be.  The way things ought to be calls into question the way things are.</p>	<p>Holy Community  Center outside of itself in the stranger  Difference = measure of the human  Hospitality to the stranger  Holy and Secular  Desacralization or secularization of the finite in the name of the infinite - only the Holy is holy: the world is not profane but secular  Human writ large  Questioning and Doubt as measure of faith: we always have more questions than answers this keeps us open to the infinite (leap of faith)  Created in the image of a God without image  Other-worldly  Equality and interdependence  Dignity  Ethics</p> <p>Ought vs. Is</p>
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# Re-Viewing Ellul

## To Will & To Do: An Ethical

Jacques Ellul

Research for Christians

Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1969.

English translation by C. Edward Hopkin from

*Le vouloir et le faire: recherches ethiques pour les chretiens.*

Geneve: Labor et Fides, 1964.

Reviewed by Matthew Patillo

*Princeton Theological Seminary*

How can a society or an individual found an ethical system? Is there a transcendental or metaphysical ground from which one can reason ethically, or an absolute standard by which we can decide whether a given action is right or wrong? And, if no such foundation is possible, can we be content, and can society survive relying on casuistry, relativism, and pure pragmatism?

A Christian might be led to conclude that, apart from belief in the one, true God, it is impossible to establish a legitimate foundation for ethics. All other ethical systems must be founded on a false transcendence (Ellul's "theoretical moralities") or would necessarily take some form of moral relativism ("lived moralities"). Christendom has historically presented itself as the only sure guide to human behavior, as possessing the eternally secure basis for ethical decision-making, but it is precisely on this point that Ellul radically challenges Christian thought. It is not the case, he argues, that the Hebrew and Christian scriptures offer the only true ethical system; rather, it is the biblical revelation that condemns all ethical systems, and makes a Christian ethic *impossible*. Instead of saying that apart from God no ethical system is possible, Ellul contends that, apart from God, *only* ethics is possible.

Ellul confesses in his introduction that the biblical revelation supplies the criterion, content, point of departure, method, and purpose for his ethical research. Reasoning from scripture, he argues that when Adam and Eve disobediently appropriated the knowledge of good and evil, what humans assumed is the right to decide for ourselves what is good, and what is evil. Morality—even, or especially Christian morality—is a result of humans' fall into sin. Like death and work, morality is a necessary part of our fallen world, but it is only a necessity. Christ did not suffer, die, and rise again to establish a new ethical system, but to lead humans back to God, whose will alone

determines what is good. Ellul sees in Christ the possibility for humans to obey God's will in a way unmediated by theories, systems, and human choice.

On this last point we might wonder what Ellul has in mind exactly. Although a Christian morality is impossible, society still needs morality; because there can be no Christian morality, it must be a conscious morality, aware of its relativity, humble and under condemnation, in the service of the faithful and not imposed upon them. But how can an individual, much less a society, know the will of God in an immediate way? Here, Ellul relies largely on Karl Barth's dialectic: morality is necessary, but morality is impossible; everything depends on us, but everything depends on God. Each of us is utterly dependent on God, and each of us must reconstitute morality at the moment of every critical act, never allowing our decisions to become calcified in a system that would prescribe future action.

In the nearly 40 years since this book's publication, other writers without Ellul's Christian commitments have come to nearly identical ethical conclusions. One thinks of the impossibility for decision and action in the later writings of Derrida, for example, who complained that all ethical systems make humans no better than "smart missiles" programmed to hit a given target. Considering why and how the ethical theories of a Christian and an atheist agree could be a productive inquiry.

A second investigation that may be necessary is a reconsideration of "Pharisaical" ethics in light of more recent Paul scholarship and the vastly improved scholarship on 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple Judaism that has appeared since Ellul wrote. The opposition between Jewish and Christian ethics (law versus grace, old versus new, etc.) concealed in the Christian (and anti-Jewish) use of the term "Pharisee" can, and should be overcome.

A final potential objection is that the intervention of the Holy Spirit, which is absolutely crucial to responsible, ethical, Christian action in the world, is not or perhaps cannot be defined and explained by Ellul. But this may well be the main thesis and greatest merit of his work.

Jacques Ellul

## The Ethics of Freedom

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976.

Translated and edited by Geoffrey Bromiley from the original *Ethique de la liberte*, (Geneve: Labor et Fides) Tome 1, 1973; Tome 2, 1975; Tome 3 (*Les Combats de la liberte*), 1984

Reviewed by Andrew Goddard  
*Oxford University*

Ellul's *Ethics of Freedom* is the largest of his books in English and yet the English version (517pp) lacks much material that is found in the 3 volume French edition (totalling nearly 900pp). It is, therefore, impossible to do any justice at all to the book(s) in so short a space and so I hope here simply to locate it within Ellul's writing

as a whole, explore the complexities of the inter-relationship between the different volumes and note some of its themes.

Within Ellul's ethical writing project, *Ethics of Freedom* follows the earlier publication of an introduction to his ethic in *To Will and To Do* (1964, ET 1969). It represents, in fact, an early example of the recent recovery of virtue ethics, explicitly rejecting the division between general ethics and special ethics (discussing different issues and areas - sexual, medical etc) in order to explore what it means to live life as a Christian in relationship with Christ.

Ellul's plan was to write an ethic corresponding to each of the three theological virtues - an ethic of freedom relating to hope, an ethic of holiness relating to faith and an ethic of relationship relating to love. Two of these virtues were also explored more fully in other books - *Hope in Time of Abandonment* (1972, ET 1973) and *Living Faith* (1980, ET 1983). Ellul says he resolved to begin this trilogy with the *Ethics of Freedom* back in 1960 (though the seed ideas are evident in articles in the early 1950s on necessity and freedom in Paul, in ET in *Sources and Trajectories*). It remains, to date, the only volume to appear although a manuscript is in existence for *Ethics of Holiness* and may soon be published.

The nature of the relationship between the French and English editions of *Ethics of Freedom* is particularly complex and confused. While the exact inter-relationship will never be totally clear and different and inaccurate accounts have been given (including by Ellul himself and Geoffrey Bromiley, the English editor and translator), it now appears that the situation is roughly as follows. Volumes 1 and 2 of *Ethique de la liberte* appeared in French in 1973 and 1975 with the latter confusingly claiming to have appeared originally in English as *Ethics of Freedom* in 1973.

When *Ethics of Freedom* did finally appear in 1976, Bromiley repeated this account and claimed that Parts I-III in the English edition were Ellul's volume 1 and Part IV was volume 2. In fact, Part IV bears no resemblance to volume 2 in French which is, in fact, unavailable in English. It was only with the appearance of *Les combats de la liberte, Ethique de la liberte Tome 3* in 1984 that the origins of Part IV of the English translation became clearer. In the opening to volume 3 Ellul refers to earlier versions of the material in the book. It was, he says, originally written in 1966, proofreading and modifications occurred in the 1970s and final revision took place in 1980-82.

On comparison it becomes clear that the English Part IV of *Ethics of Freedom* must have been one of the earlier (and shorter) drafts of what appears in this French third volume. Contrary therefore to Ellul's claim to Darrell Fasching that "the English edition is the more complete" the three French volumes - as shown simply by their respective lengths - contain much (the whole of volume 2 and a significant amount in volume 3) that is not found in English translation. We will, therefore, sketch the book's content by reference to the 3-volume French edition.

Volume 1 - parts I-III of the ET - offers a Christologically focussed account of Christian freedom in a world of bondage and necessity. This both illustrates the truth of Ellul's words that the ethics 'has to some extent been inspired by the theology of

Karl Barth' and provides the fullest account of one of the central dialectical features of Ellul's theological ethic - that of being called and liberated to live the life of freedom that flows from communion with God in Christ and to do so in the face of the different forms of necessity that dominate and structure life in the fallen world (and are examined in other of Ellul's works, most famously *la Technique*).

Volume 2 opens with a quotation from another major influence on Ellul's ethics - Dietrich Bonhoeffer - and proceeds to offer descriptions of the characteristics of the life of Christian freedom. Here we have fascinating discussions of the law of freedom discovered through wisdom, the useless, provisional and relative, non-absolute character of lived Christian freedom, the nature of human works, and what it means to be human through non-conformity to the present age. The second chapter focuses on the freedom of the individual and explores such phenomena as living without covetousness, obedience, spontaneity and hypocrisy. We are offered here a portrait of the virtues and character of freedom in the life of the disciple of Christ.

Finally, volume 3 (and its earlier version in part IV of the ET) explores in more depth the implications of Ellul's eschatological ethic and the forms of expression for the life of freedom rooted in hope. It opens with further biblically based explorations of the features of this life - being strangers and pilgrims committed to lives of risk and contradiction - before providing even more concrete discussions of the shape of Christian freedom in various areas of life such as politics and the state (including early discussions of Ellul's anarchist thinking), religious freedom, work, sex (including contraception and homosexuality) and marriage.

*Ethics of Freedom* is not an easy read and far from being a standard ethical text as it resists the usual categorisations and methodologies of much ethical discourse. For those who persevere with it, however, it provides numerous fascinating insights and offers a stimulating, theological and biblically inspired vision of the life of Christian discipleship and of the characteristics to be found in human lives that faithfully seek to live out the good news that it is for freedom Christ has set us free.

# Book Notes & Reviews

## Ecologie et liberte: Bernard Charbonneau precurseur de l'ecologie politique.

(Ecology and freedom: Bernard Charbonneau as a precursor of political ecology.)  
Lyon, France: Parangon, 2006.

Daniel Cerezuelle

Reviewed by Carl Mitcham

*Colorado School of Mines*

"Over the course of his long adult life, from when he turned 20 in 1930 to his death in 1996, Bernard Charbonneau reflected on the dangers that resulted for nature and for freedom from what was called the *Great Break*, that is from the rise in power of technical, scientific, and industrial progress. Some specialists in the history of ideas have considered him a precursor and a founder of French political ecology. For a long time this perspective gave him at least a marginal place in the intellectual world. Yet today his work is very little known by the public and is totally ignored by philosophers, although his radical questioning is incontestably philosophical. However, with the passage of time his work appears more pertinent and contemporary; the ecological and political problems that Charbonneau set forth in the 1930s before a generally uncomprehending audience have only increased."

Thus begins Daniel Cerezuelle's important new book on the work of a life-long friend and intellectual companion of Jacques Ellul, one to whom Ellul himself gave credit for much of the originality of his own thinking. As far as I know this is the only monograph in any language to be devoted to some aspect of the life and thought of Charbonneau. Cerezuelle, himself a friend with one of Charbonneau's sons as well as one of Ellul's, has written an analytic appreciation of Charbonneau's major but largely unrecognized contribution to the development of environmental philosophy — in a book that calls strongly for an English translation.

Following a brief introduction (chapter 1) and biography (chapter 2), Cerezuelle presents the central intuition of a "Great Break" (chapter 3) and summarizes Charbonneau's existential approach to social change (chapter 4). The core of the book considers in more detail some of Charbonneau's key analyses: the difference between totalitarianism and social totalization (chapter 5), the disdain of nature by industrial society (chapter 6), the dialectical relation between system and chaos (chapter 7), the reversal of freedom (chapter 8), and the de-incarnation of the spirit (chapter 9). By way

of conclusion, Cerezuelle considers Charbonneau's perspective on the "faire societe," a term of richer connotation than "social constructionism" (chapter 10), and provides a brief bibliography of works by and about Charbonneau (chapter 11).

Of Charbonneau's 22 books approximately half were issued privately or semi-privately, five after his death. Eight more books remain unpublished. Because of his access to and close knowledge of the full complement of this work, Cerezuelle's book exhibits an authority that is, in addition, a deftly crafted volume. Until the French book is translated into English, readers may wish to consult his "Nature and Freedom: Introducing the Thought of Bernard Charbonneau," published as one of a collection of six lectures by Cerezuelle in the *Colorado School of Mines Quarterly*, vol. 100, no. 2 (2000), as the result of Cerezuelle's residency as the Hennebach Visiting Professor in the Humanities, 1999-2000.

## **Darrel Fasching & Dell DeChant Comparative Religious Ethics: A Narrative Approach**

*(Blackwell, 2001)*

Reviewed by Louise M. Doire

*College of Charleston*

In the fall of 2001 I was assigned to teach the Comparative Religious Ethics course at the College of Charleston in Charleston, South Carolina. I had no textbook and began a search on the Internet. It was there that I was first introduced to *Comparative Religious Ethics: A Narrative Approach*, by Darrell J. Fasching and Dell DeChant. I ordered the book and we began to work with it in the classroom. Not three weeks into the course, September 11th arrived.

Teaching a comparative religious ethics course during that semester was a painful challenge. Fasching and DeChant's book provided us with a profound resource for questioning, analysis and hope.

This is a different kind of textbook. First, one does not typically find hope in a textbook. Secondly, the narrative approach recognizes what the world's best teachers have always known; that stories teach. It provides a wonderfully compelling and unique methodological alternative to a study of religious ethics.

The ethical foundations of each of the world's religions are explored through the ancient "stories" of individuals who have been lifted up by the tradition as models for noble and virtuous lives characterized by the seeking after justice and the alleviation of suffering. Krisna and Arjuna, Abraham and Job, Jesus of Nazareth, Siddhartha Gautama and Muhammad are presented as exemplary of the central ethical affirmations within each tradition.

The narratives of these ancient lives are accompanied by the life story of a contemporary figure; Gandhi, Rabbi Abraham Heschel, Martin Luther King, Jr., Thich

Nhat Hanh, Malcolm X who embodied and reflected the ethical foundations of their religious tradition within the context of their lives.

Thirdly, the authors themselves are quite honest in admitting that their book proposes a thesis and that they seek “to persuade.” They argue that the world’s major religious traditions offer the possibility for locating a common “cross-cultural and inter-religious ethic of human dignity, human rights and human liberation.” The possibility for this common interreligious ethic emerges convincingly through the presentation of pervasive themes contained within the narratives: “(1) wrestling with the stranger and (2) the quest for an answer to the problems of old age, sickness and death.”

These narrative dynamics result in common resolutions of hospitality toward the stranger, compassion and the recognition of the interdependence of all being. My students then, and my students now continue to be most profoundly influenced by an analysis which provides the answer to their confusion as to how adherents within each respective religious tradition can read the same texts, be exposed to the same narratives and yet come to quite different ethical ways of being in the world.

This distinction is expressed in the text through a naming of “the sacred” and “the holy,” described as “two categories of types of experience.” A religious experience of the “sacred” identifies sameness as the ethical yardstick for measuring what is good; what is “right.” An experience of the “holy” measures justice and righteousness by the treatment afforded to the “stranger,” the one who is not alike. This invaluable analysis becomes practical when the experience of the holy is presented by the authors as something that can be cultivated and nurtured. For this, they return to the biographical narratives of those individuals who have “crossed over” to an appreciation of truth and wisdom in religious traditions other than their own and then, have traveled back to their religious roots enriched with renewed insight.

The brilliance of this text is that in the very presentation of the narratives, it offers students the possibility for engaging in that act; the act of crossing over and coming back. The proof of the theses rests not only within the pages of the book, but within the students themselves who express to me over and over again that this book has changed their way of being in the world.

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# Ellul's Technique, Wikinomics, & the Ethical Frontier

by Randy M. Ataide

Personal Reflection

*Point Loma University*

Recently I came upon a video that stated “We are currently preparing kids for jobs that don't exist using technologies that haven't yet been invented in order to solve problems we don't even know are problems yet.” My experience as a business practitioner who recently began a career as an educator of business students at a Christian University, allows me a good perspective from which to attempt determine any validity this caveat has.

On the one hand, Ellul's observations and prophecies of technological development seem truer than ever. On the other hand, could we be entering into an undiscovered country of technological possibilities that Ellul was not able to wholly anticipate?

## Technique & Human Community

Ellul suggested that technique would diminish our interest in both the study of the humanities and the building of authentic human community. My early foray into business education seems to confirm Ellul's contention. A student may complain that some general education course interferes with the ability to take advanced courses on money, investing or entrepreneurship. Humanities it has been said, are concerned with “the complete record of human experience” and many students and those in the business world may seem little concerned with this record when the pursuit of a career awaits them. So too, technology can have an isolating effect.

But ironically, some opposite movement seems to be occurring. Technology is now being used to build communities that never existed before. Our progeny have been able to arrive at uses of technology that we did not recognize let alone develop or apply. While it is too soon to say that what is emerging is some form of *neo-technique*, some interesting trends of the use of technology away from the tendency to dehumanize need to be brought to our attention. The ethical implications of these trends upon the field of business are enormous.

## Technique & Private Property

From our earliest days of adolescent play we are urged by our parents to “share and share alike.” To do so is the essence of activity in the human community as a youth, and at that age we are in some ways a mere conduit freely receiving from our support structure and freely dispensing to our peers.



But in the early teenage years, this community dynamic shifts and the rise of individual possessiveness is dramatic and stays with us our entire lives. This tendency culminates in few arenas as much as our business systems. Indeed, most cultures of any level of organization, regardless of the particular political system, place high value not just on material ownership but on intellectual property, proprietary information, trademark and copyright protection.

Our system of business ethics reinforces follows this primacy of ownership protection for confidential work products. We have seen this play out most clearly in the battles between open-source use of film, music and other entertainment content, a conflict reminiscent of a small Dutch boy holding back a rupturing dam. But few have considered this pending explosion from an ethical perspective.

Open-source technology, in its many well-known forms such as Linux, flickr, MySpace, SocialText and Wikipedia, has fundamentally changed the focus of personal technology from separation and exclusion, two great fears of Ellul, to collaboration and community. The global community is in kindergarten once again, sharing our toys, knowledge and opinions freely and without restriction, except now we are doing it with powerful computers linked throughout the world. SnoCap, Proctor and Gamble's InnoCentive Project, MIT's OpenCourseWare and the FightAids@home initiative are just a few of the many formidable open business efforts. These remarkable low-cost collaborative infrastructures call us to indeed think globally and act locally, but it means something new and equally thrilling and frightening.

However, business ethics continue to focus upon disclosure, reporting and punitive actions and is generally oblivious to what is occurring. What is actually needed is a new Ellulian dialectic on the topic of technology, technique and ethics in business, for few can speak to the emerging reality as insightfully as Ellul. There is a new frontier of ethics and where it begins or ends is unclear. Fresh voices and new insights need to be soon considered.

## News & Notes

—International Colloquium: “Telling the Truth: Revisiting Jacques Ellul in an Age of Spin.” Ottawa, Ont., 28-30 Sept 2007

A conference at Carleton University is being organised in collaboration with the International Jacques Ellul Society and the Association Internationale Jacques Ellul. The prospects are very positive and planning must proceed now but all is subject to SSHRC funding with results to be announced June 30, 2007.

Proposals for papers must be submitted by email *no later than April 15, 2007*, to the conference director, Prof. Randal Marlin, Department of Philosophy, Carleton University: marlin@ncf.ca.

Whether delivering a paper or not, plan on attending this rare occasion to meet other IJES members and Ellul scholars and readers and to discuss Ellul's provocative and helpful ideas.

Further information will be sent to IJES members in early July 2007.

— "Swords into Plowshares: ANARCHISM, CHRISTIANITY, & PRINCIPLES OF PEACE"

Conference August 10-11, 2007, at Loras College, Dubuque, Iowa. More info at [www.jesusradicals.com](http://www.jesusradicals.com)

— NINETEEN ELLUL BOOKS FROM GALLIMARD

Thanks to the indefatigable efforts of Dominique Ellul and Editions Gallimard editor Dennis Tilinac, many of Ellul's French language books have come back into print, often with new introductions.

*Le Defi et le Nouveau* is the latest product: a collection of eight Ellul books in one thousand-page volume (English title by which they are known: *Presence of Kingdom, Jonah, Money, Politics of God, Violence, Prayer, Israel, If You are the Son of God*) for only 40 euros.

Gallimard also has the following individual volumes (English title by which they are known): *Commonplaces, Anarchy, Metamorphose du bourgeois, Subversion, City (Sans feu ni lieu), Hope, Faith, Jesus & Marx (Ideologie marxiste-chretienne)*.

Finally, two recent volumes that are a completely new contribution to Ellul studies are *La Pensee Marxiste* (2003) and *Les Successeurs de Marx* (2007). Each of these volumes is a roughly 250 page account of Ellul's classroom lectures at the Institute for Political Studies, University of Bordeaux, between 1947 and 1979. Former Ellul students Michel Hourcade, Jean-Pierre Jezequel, and Gerard Paul are the team which collected, edited, and annotated these notes.

— TWO RECENT BOOKS OF NOTE

Willem H. Vanderburg, Director of the Centre for Technology and Social Development at the University of Toronto recently published a massive (540-page) addition to his critique of technological society: *Living in the Labyrinth of Technology* (Univ. of Toronto, 2005). Lawrence J. Terlizese's dissertation was also recently published as *Hope in the Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Wipf & Stock, 2005). Both books are scheduled for review in upcoming issues of *The Ellul Forum*.

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The IJES (with its francophone sister-society, L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul) links together scholars and friends of various specializations, vocations, backgrounds, and nations, who share a common interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), long time professor at the University of Bordeaux. Our objectives are (1) to

preserve and disseminate his literary and intellectual heritage, (2) to extend his social critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) to extend his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

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Back issues #31 - #36 of *The Ellul Forum* are available for \$5 each (postage and shipping included).

### **Cahiers Jacques Ellul**

*Pour Une Critique de la Societe Technicienne*

An essential annual journal for students of Ellul is *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*, edited by Patrick Chastenet, published by Editions L'Esprit du Temps, and distributed by Presses Universitaires de France Send orders to Editions L'Esprit du Temps, BP 107, 33491 Le Bouscat Cedex, France. Postage and shipping is 5 euros for the first volume

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Volume 1: “L’Annees personnalistes” (15 euros)

Volume 2: “La Technique” (15 euros)

Volume 3: “L’Economie” (21 euros).

Volume 4 (forthcoming): “La Propagande” (21 euros).

### **Librairie Mollat—new books in French**

Librairie Mollat in the center of old Bordeaux ([www.mollat.com](http://www.mollat.com)) is an excellent resource for French language books, including those by and about Ellul. Mollat accepts credit cards over the web and will mail books anywhere in the world.

### **Alibris—used books in English**

The Alibris web site ([www.alibris.com](http://www.alibris.com)) lists thirty titles of used and out-of-print Jacques Ellul books in English translation available to order at reasonable prices.

### **Used books in French:**

#### **two web resources**

Two web sites that will be of help in finding used books in French by Jacques Ellul (and others) are [www.chapitre.com](http://www.chapitre.com) and [www.livre-rare-book.com](http://www.livre-rare-book.com).

### **Reprints of Nine Ellul Books**

By arrangement with Ingram and Spring Arbor, individual reprint copies of several Ellul books originally published by William B. Eerdmans can now be purchased. The books and prices listed at the Eerdmans web site are as follows: *The Ethics of Freedom* (\$40), *The Humiliation of the Word* (\$26), *The Judgment of Jonah* (\$13), *The Meaning of the City* (\$20), *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man* (\$19), *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes* (\$28), *The Subversion of Christianity* (\$20), and *The Technological Bluff* (\$35). *Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul* translated by Marva Dawn is also available (price unknown).

Have your bookstore (or on-line book dealer) “back order” the titles you want. Do not go as an individual customer to Eerdmans or Ingram/Spring Arbor. For more information visit “Books on Demand” at [www.eerdmans.com](http://www.eerdmans.com).

**Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works** by Joyce Main Hanks. Research in Philosophy and Technology. Supplement 5. Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 2000. xiii., 206 pages. \$87. ISBN: 076230619X.

This is the essential guide for anyone doing research in Jacques Ellul’s writings. An excellent brief biography is followed by a 140-page annotated bibliography of Ellul’s fifty books and thousand-plus articles and a thirty-page subject index. Hank’s work is comprehensive, accurate, and invariably helpful. This may be one of the more expensive books you buy for your library; it will surely be one of the most valuable. Visit [www.elsevier.com](http://www.elsevier.com) for ordering information.

### **Ellul on Video**

French film maker Serge Steyer’s film “Jacques Ellul: L’homme entier” (52 minutes) is available for 25 euros at the web site [www.meromedia.com](http://www.meromedia.com). Ellul is himself interviewed as are several commentators on Ellul’s ideas.

Another hour-length film/video that is focused entirely on Ellul's commentary on technique in our society, "The Treachery of Technology," was produced by Dutch film maker Jan van Boekel for ReRun Produkties (mail to: Postbox 93021, 1090 BA Amsterdam).

If you try to purchase either of these excellent films, be sure to check on compatibility with your video system and on whether English subtitles are provided, if that is desire.

**Issue #40 Spring 2007 — Jacques  
Ellul and Latin America**

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## For the Critique of Technological Civilization

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”Technique, in all the lands it has penetrated, has exploded the local, national cultures. Two cultures, of which technique is one, cannot coexist. . . . We shall continue to have the appearance of different civilizations . . . . But their essence will be identical.”

-Jacques Ellul

*The Technological Society* (1954; ET1964), p. 130

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## From the Editor

Ellul's work has a worldwide impact. His three master works, *The Technological Society*, *Propaganda*, and *The Political Illusion*, translated into English in the 1960s, pushed his scholarship from France and the European context to the international arena. *The Ellul Forum* has documented that geographical spread, most recently including Canada, Mexico, the United States and Korea. This issue is oriented to Latin America.

Joyce Hanks lists for us the Spanish and Portuguese writings on Ellul, selected from her comprehensive book, *The Reception of Jacques Ellul's Critique of Technology* (2007). Mark Baker situates Ellul in Honduras. The immediate occasion for this issue was the Media Ecology Association (MEA) Annual Conference at the Tecnologico de Monterrey university in Mexico City. MEA centers on the work of Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan in Canada; Mumford, Walter Ong and Neil Postman in the United States. It includes Ellul as one of its important theorists. Ellul himself argues with McLuhan in his *Humiliation of the Word*, he and Mumford work in parallel, and Neil Postman depends heavily on him. MEA and IJES have official affiliation, with MEA granting forums and papers on Ellul scholarship.

The MEA conference featured two major sessions on Ellul, and two papers from those meetings are included here in summary form. The Tecnologico de Monterrey-Estado de Mexico specializes in technology and science. One of its professors, Maria de la Luz Casas Perez illustrates how she introduces Ellul to her students with the goal of inspiring them to further study of his work. Professor Stephanie Bennett wrote her doctoral dissertation on Ellul and communications theory. With the prominence of cell phone technology in Mexico, she was asked to present her research considered important on both sides of the border. One of Mexico's distinguished scholars, Fernando Gutierrez, specializes in technology and society, and is a strong advocate for scholarship on Ellul in Latin America. His summary of internet technology in Mexico is an overall argument for Ellul's relevance as communication technologies grow exponentially around the globe.

Should this issue bring to mind additional work on Ellul on the South American continent, send it to the editor for information and possible publication in *The Forum*. For the 2008 issues, David Gill and I solicit your contributions also. The theme of the Spring issue is theological (Islam) and for the Fall issue we return to politics.

Clifford G. Christians, **Editor** [editor@ellul.org](mailto:editor@ellul.org)

# The Internet as a Media Extension: The Case of Mexico

by Fernando Gutierrez

*Fernando Gutierrez is Chair of the Department of Communication at the Tecnológico de Monterrey, Campus Estado de Mexico; Vice-President of the Internet Association in Mexico (AMIPCI), member of the Media Ecology Association (MEA) and coordinator of the World Internet Project in Mexico (WIP). His latest research focuses on the new media ecology in Mexico and the impact of new technologies in society. He studies in the International Law doctoral program at the Salamanca University in Spain. He earned a Master degree in Electronic Commerce and another one in Information Technologies from the Tecnológico de Monterrey. He teaches Communication Technologies and Society, and Design and Digital Production.*

Abstract: In recent years, we have been studying the organization and arrangement of complex media environments and the new media ecology in Mexico. As in other parts of the world, this new media ecology is the product of some important technologies that have been altering the environment and contributing to the formation of new societies with particular characteristics that differ from the general culture. One of these technologies is the Internet. The purpose of this work is to show how environments are changing in Mexico and the manner in which the Internet gives a fresh perspective to traditional activities in this society.

Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin have written in *Remediation* (a term they define as the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms) the following:

”Like other media since the Renaissance -in particular perspective painting, photography, film, and television-new digital media oscillate between immediacy and hypermediacy, between transparency and opacity. This oscillation is the key to understanding how a medium refashions its predecessor and other contemporary media. Although each medium promises to reform its predecessors by offering a more immediate or authentic experience, the promise of reform inevitably lead us to become aware of the new medium as a medium. Thus immediacy leads to hypermediacy. The process of remediation makes us aware that all media are at one level a play of signs, which is a lesson that we take from poststructuralist literary theory.” (Bolter & Grusin, 1999, p. 19) [Note: hypermediacy means that knowledge of the world comes to us through the media. Viewers know they are in the presence of a medium and learn through acts of mediation.]

Any new technology should do work that is clearly and demonstrably better than the one it replaces, but this doesn't always happen. When a new medium is created, it will eventually overtake those media from which it derives its content for innovation. The older medium becomes a ground upon which the new medium stands as

a more noticeable configuration. Marshall McLuhan suggested this idea in his book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*.

But in the history of mass communication, no new medium has yet made an earlier one obsolete, despite the repeated predictions at the time of each new arrival.

- Photography was supposed to mean the end of painting.
- Film was supposed to mean the end of the novel.
- Radio was supposed to mean the end of newspapers.
- Television was supposed to mean the end of film and radio.

What did happen was that the new medium changed its predecessor but did not replace it. The older medium always adapted itself to fit into the new mix of competitors -redefining itself according to its intrinsic strengths. In this regard, Douglas Rushkoff wrote in *Media Virus: Hidden Agendas in Popular Culture*:

"We should understand the media as an extension of a living organism. Just as ecologists now understand the life of this planet to be part of a single biological organism. Media activists see the datasphere as the circulatory system for today's information, ideas, and images." (Rushkoff, 1996, p.7)

New media extend the old media. For instance, after reading an article in the newspaper or magazine, we may become curious and decide to find out more by surfing the Internet. In this sense, the Internet is also a complimentary tool media for newspaper readers. We can observe the same situation with other traditional media. The Internet extends the functions of this conventional media, and the power of users.

McLuhan said that the media are extensions of our human senses, bodies and minds. And it is also interesting to point out that in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), Sigmund Freud had already taken note of the possibility of considering tools as an extension of man:

"With tools, mankind perfects its organs (...) With the camera, it has created an instrument that transfixes fleeting optical impressions, a service that the record player renders to the no less fleeting auditory impression, both constituting its innate faculty to remember, that is, its memory. With the help of the telephone, it hears from distances that even fairy tales would respect as unachievable. Writing, originally, is the language of those who are absent; housing, a substitute for the maternal womb, the first abode whose nostalgia perhaps still persists among us, where we felt secure and well." (Freud, 1930, p. 34)

But also, new media are extensions of traditional media. In the following figure we can see how the Internet extends the power of some traditional media. This is the case of Mexico.

The Internet is an extension for other media industries, not their replacement. Traditional media use the Internet to identify what the public wants, to get interaction,

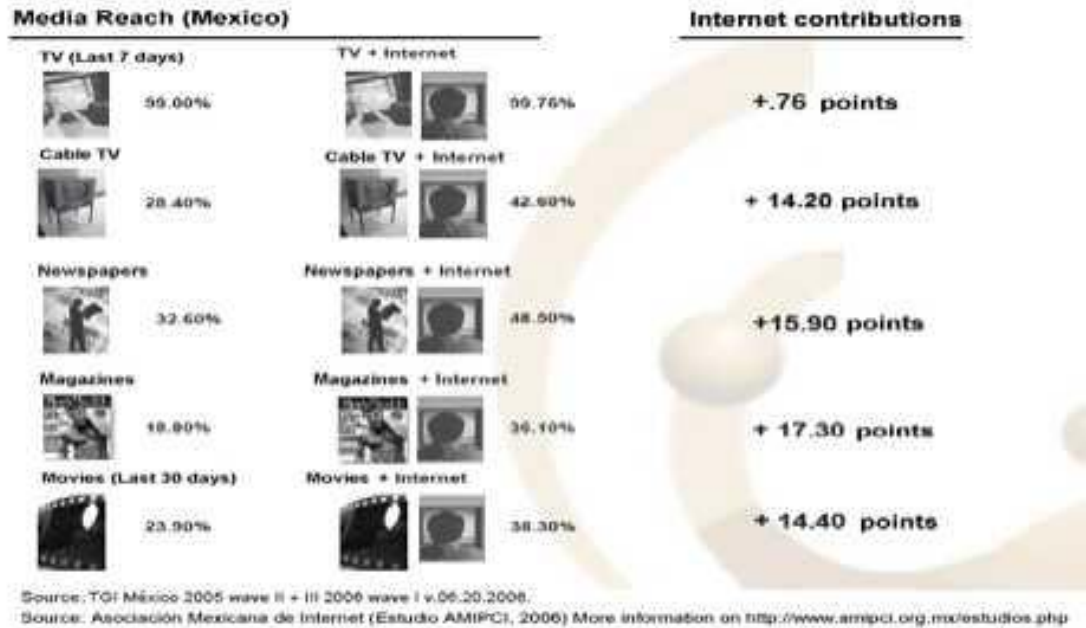


Figure1. Internet Extends Media Reach in Mexico (2006)

to amplify technical capabilities, and as a new platform for advertising. But, as Neil Postman explained, a new medium does not merely add something to the culture; it changes everything.

The Internet has contributed to the formation of new societies with particular characteristics that differ from the general culture of which it is a part. When a new technology like the Internet acquires importance in a culture in a given location, certain elements of the society begin to be redefined. In this sense, then, society results from the new technology. For Postman, the consequences of technological change are always fast, often unpredictable and largely irreversible. Technology is always shaped by the social, political and economic systems in which it is introduced.

In any medium, what passes for critical discourse is not independent of the medium in which it is produced and circulated. Media change, therefore, is far more than just a new piece of equipment; changing the medium affects all of our technologies. The Internet, for example, gives a new coloration to every institution. In the past, newspapers, radio and television changed society. Nowadays, the Internet is doing the same. With the introduction of its technologies everything is changing: political campaigns, homes, schools, churches, and companies. The World Wide Web is not merely a software protocol and text and data files. It is also the sum of the uses to which this protocol is now being put: for marketing and advertising, scholarship, personal expression, and so on.

The invention of the Internet has altered the world we live in. Not since the industrial revolution have we seen such profound change in the way we work, we shop, we get our news, and conduct business. The Internet extends the traditional human abilities to see, to speak, and to manipulate. The revolution is not so much one of content but of distribution. Computers allow the manipulation of old content and old media in unanticipated ways.

The Internet as a different tool favors the processes of communication and information exchange within audiences whose dimensions could be considered medium-sized, allowing the users to develop close contact. In this way, by allowing us to share pastimes or have areas of common interest, the Internet can fill an important space abandoned by the conventional mass media.

The Internet occupies a great portion of young peoples' time. According to a Burst Media survey, published on AdAge.com, in the United States teens between the ages of 13 and 17, nearly four in 10 teens (37.4%) are spending at least three hours daily online daily outside of school settings. Just one in five (19.6%) say they're spending less than an hour online outside of school. For teens, the Internet is a more meaningful source for movie and TV news than word of mouth or local newspapers (O'Malley, 2006). In the following figure, we can see in the case of Mexico how the Internet is occupying important spaces that other media cannot fill.

People in Mexico can use the Internet at their schools, libraries and cybercafes. The Internet and traditional media rarely occupy the same physical space. For instance, the opportunity to watch television outside a home environment is less common. There are more public places for the Internet than for television viewing.

The Internet is used more for informational purposes, while television is used more for entertainment and relaxation. Home computing may be displacing television watching itself as well as reducing leisure time with the family. Television viewing is lower among Internet users than non-users in some countries. The competition between television and the Internet is largely happening at home. It is rather difficult for a person to watch television and go online at the same time, especially given the amount of interactivity and involvement needed for the Internet. The following figures show the impact of the Internet versus other media.

In Mexico, people are watching less television and reading fewer newspapers since they began using the Internet. Radio's niche in the media ecology is in many ways modest. It survives because it reaches arenas other technologies do not reach. People can go online while playing the radio in the background. In this sense, there is a positive relationship between the Internet and radio use. The fact that the internet is changing the media business has prompted many traditional media companies to develop digital strategies.

"New digital media are not external agents that come to disrupt an unsuspecting culture. They emerge from within cultural contexts, and they refashion other media, which are embedded in the same or similar contexts." (Bolter and Grusin 1999: 19)

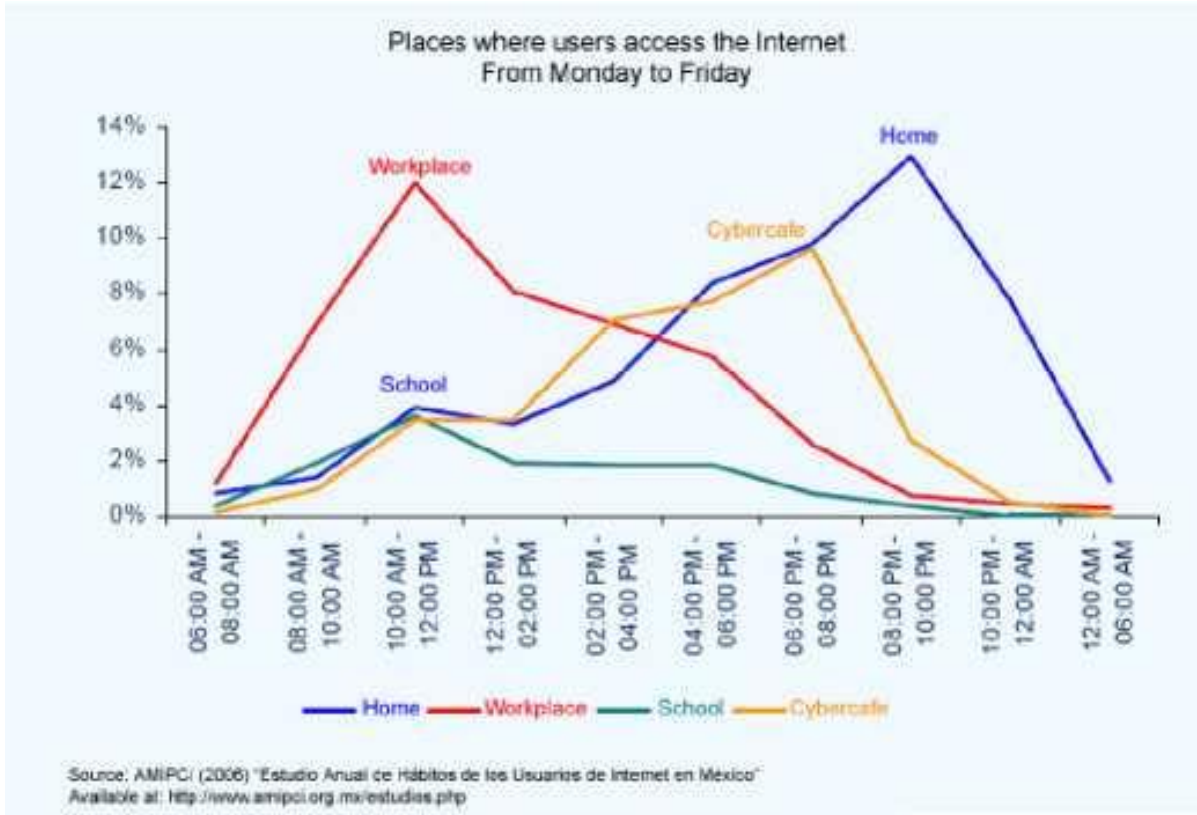


Figure 2. Places Where Users Access the Internet in Mexico. (2005)

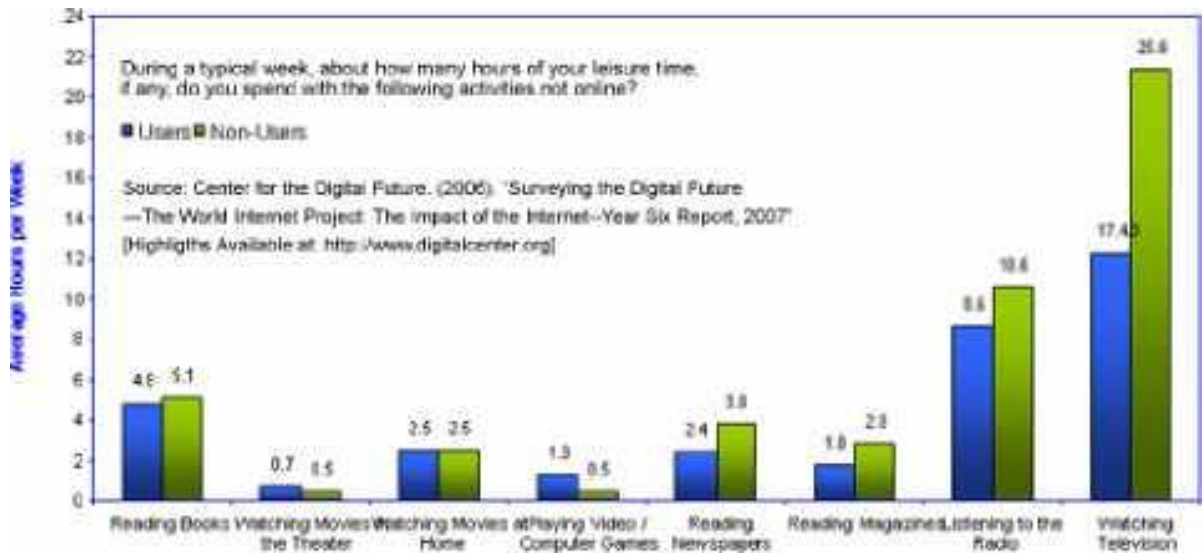


Figure 3. Internet vs. Other Media (United States)

Time spent with various type of media (Internet users)



Figure 4. Internet vs. Other Media (Mexico)

It is only lately that educators have recognized that the tools of instruction may change, but the problems of learning, ingesting and applying information remain the same as they have been since schools began. That’s why Postman said that the “Digital Age” will not pose any problems for us that are more complex than those faced by people in other centuries. Once again, these new digital technologies are giving a new perspective to everything: The same situation occurred with conventional media in other times and it’s important for us to understand it.

In some ways, television has affected learning, school performance, the relationship between voters and politicians, family traditions, and so on. We are now observing that the Internet, and new digital technologies are doing the same. Technology is not an educational panacea. It is only a tool to help solve a broad based problem. We have to use technology rather than be used by it. Mexico has become in Postman’s terms, a “Technopoly”, a system in which technology of every kind is cheerfully granted sovereignty over social institutions and national life and becomes selfjustifying, self-perpetuating and omnipresent. (Postman, 1992)

New technology presents new possibilities and these new possibilities awaken new desires. The intelligent use of the Internet could introduce favorable modifications in our informational models. As a communication medium, the Internet has certain unique characteristics, particularly its total interactivity and its formidable transmission capacity. These characteristics permit any user to access this massive media outlet. It is not far-fetched to assert that through the Internet, the dream of an authentic “global community” could finally come true.

The audience of the traditional mass media faces the problem of a lack of information because of the fewer number of sources which cover news events, and for other processes such as censorship, selfcensorship, and agenda setting. Now the problem is that we have information overloaded, and consequently information is difficult or impossible to assimilate. We think that the more information we have, the better we will be in solving significant problems, and that's not necessarily true. Many people talk about the advantages that a new technology offers in a particular field, but almost none of them talk about the costs of these technologies. And it's important to start to think more about it.

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## Jacques Ellul: Humankind in the Presence of Technology

by Maria de la Casas Perez

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I do not limit myself to describing my feelings with cold objectivity in the manner of a research worker reporting what he sees under a microscope. I am keenly aware that I am myself involved in technological civilization, and that its history is also my own. I may be compared rather with a physician or physicist who is describing a group situation in which he is himself involved. The physician in an epidemic, the physicist



exposed to radioactivity: in such situations the mind may remain cold and lucid, and the method objective, but there is inevitably a profound tension of the whole being.

Jacques Ellul in *The Technological Society*, author's foreword to Revised American Edition

I would like to start this essay with a personal reflection and an acknowledgment of gratitude. When Professor Claudia Benassino asked me to give a talk in memory of Jacques Ellul, she incited me to reread his writings and to question some of the underlying aspects found throughout his complete work.

At first, my major concern focused on the inability to dedicate the necessary amount of *time* that such an act of reflection deserves. I must also admit, on another note, that I was probably threatened by the worries of not being able to measure up to his thought, and therefore, of not being able to share with you today a valuable commentary. Nevertheless, I mustered up the courage to revisit Ellul's work, which led me through unsettling paths little explored by me before and attracted me each time more and more into the spell of technology and the revalorization of humankind in the presence of its eternal charm.

According to his most knowledgeable biographers, Jacques Ellul published more than fifty books and numerous articles. Among all these writings, where we can find outstanding works on theology, philosophy, history, sociology, and other fields, the one that demanded my attention the most was a work published in 1954 and entitled *La Technique ou l'enjeu du Siecle*. It was translated into Spanish merely as *El Siglo XX y la Tecnica*, a translation that from the very beginning deprives the title of its most enriching notion: one that implies precisely a witty critique and reflection resulting from humankind's fascination with technology. What is at stake? What is it that brings science and technology into consideration? To what extent has technology deprived us of one of the most important manifestations of humankind's rationalization and to what extent has it generated new manifestations? What are the implications of all this?

In his insightful work, Ellul writes about -and refers to-the conditions that the twentieth century posed as well as the development and evolution of technology since its oldest origins to the modern era. However, many of the ideas that the writer expressed in 1954 are nowadays more valid than ever. Some of his most outstanding ideas establish that among the inherent characteristics of all technology are rationality, artificiality, automatism, self-augmentation, monism, universality, and autonomy. Ellul considers that all of these characteristics generate an artificial system that subordinates or eliminates the natural. Suffice it to say that Ellul arrives at this categorization after a long examination of different periods in the history of humanity, where the author discovers that the technological phenomenon is a constant feature of human history.

Ellul assumes that, through all those periods in which the human being has been faced with the need to recognize the presence of an invention or a new discovery, mankind's astonishment has been always the same. Nevertheless, he points out that even though current technology offers the same characteristics that all previous tech-

nologies offered, its current development has been extremely fast but not less amazing because of this; a critique and consideration that, as Ellul himself describes, does not make man become spectator but participant, becoming nevertheless, in many instances, a victim.

Nowadays, technology is recognized as science and technique's instrumental arm, as the ultimate articulation of mankind's rationality and intellectuality in benefit of more sublime ends. For Ellul, technique and consequently technology represent the outcome of the articulation of all the rational methods that allow absolute efficiency for a given period of development.

What is interesting about this phenomenon is that while technology, at its origin, was a tool that adjusted to man's needs, nowadays the opposite phenomenon is taking place: that is, man is the one adjusting to technology. Technology is forcing us to redefine ourselves as human beings and as a complete society. It gets inserted, it is measured out for us, it controls us in each of our daily activities, and therefore it becomes a complete civilizing subproduct. Its existing condition is secured. It is not that man has created technology, but current technology is the one creating man, adapting him to its needs.

We have become accustomed to technology working well, to its determining our living cycles, to letting it tell us what to do and when to do it. Computers, electronic alarms, instant messaging systems, they all condition and guide us. Our whole life is duplicated in its records, our *raison d'être* is established under technology's observant and constant gaze, under which efficiency is not constituted as an option, but as a need imposed upon every human activity.

The essential question for Ellul is then: to what extent can we distinguish between what technology offers us and what do we lose under technological progress? To what extent has technology allowed us to live in a better way and to what extent does its presence dehumanize us completely?

If twentieth-century technology (which by the way we largely enjoy or endure - depending on how we perceive it-currently in the twenty-first century) is the result of an undeniable fact: just as technology from previous times consisted in replacing the human muscle, we are now witnessing a second revolution consisting in the replacement of the human brain. And if new technology replaces our brains in order to store, order, and systematize an amount of data never before possible in the history of humanity, is it not also possible that it has deprived us of the ability to think by means of our intellect?

It is maybe because of this that current technology is an eminently motor-driven technology, and hence not related to rationality. In order to use it we simply need to push some buttons with the least effort possible and without the requirement of any basic training. Contemporary technology is then characterized by the fact that it has sublimated the attitude of a complete civilization. Its fundamental device in this intellectual transformation is the notion of comfort. What technology can make

for us and our constant dependency on comfort is what has eventually made us so manageable and subject to technological domination.

Of particular interest is Ellul's notion of comfort as the mark of man's personality vis-a-vis the space he inhabits. In this way, while in medieval times mankind was not concerned in the least with furniture but the proportions and the materials which spaces were made of, nowadays we are more concerned about objects and the extent to which they can provide us with some comfort. It is because of this that we can bear the overcrowding derived from overpopulation, a phenomenon to which we have grown accustomed. Because of this we are able to tolerate a growing decrease in the minimum space required for living; in fact, to such a extent that we are reduced to technological solitude. Let's think, for instance, about the new hotels aimed at executives that have burgeoned in Japan, where guests get hardly enough space to slide into a small bed surrounded by artificial atmospherebuilding elements.

It is not fortuitous, however, that man has given way to the technological race in order to put aside even his very own interests. As Ellul states, the exceptional development of technology that we witness nowadays is derived from a previously unknown conjunction of different elements, such as a long technological maturation or incubation, the demographic increase, the economic situation, an almost perfect flexibility of a malleable society open to the propagation of technology, and a clear technical intention. In sum, it has been the fracturing of human societies, among other things, that has become a fertile land for technological domination.

But Ellul reminds us that evolution follows not the logic of discoveries or a fatal progress of technologies, but *an interaction of technology and the effective choices that mankind makes in its presence*. Therefore, while the nature of the relationship between technology, society, and individual is common to all societies, their relationship is not the same in the modern world. For instance, while in previous times the presence of technology was limited by religious or political conditions, in our contemporary world technology is not limited by anything. On the contrary, it spreads towards all domains and encloses all human activities. Its evolution is so fast that it puzzles not only the man in the street, but also scientists and philosophers, posing harder and harder problems.

Throughout all of his writings, Jacques Ellul did not hesitate to promote ecology as one of the essential conditions of human balance. His approach, innovative as others, mentions what we now know as Media Ecology, that is, the ways by which the media affect not only our perception, understanding, feelings, and values, but also the ways in which we interact with the media, that is, technology, enables or hinders our survival possibilities. If, as Ellul says, technology is the product of rationality and artificiality, then reason has led us to the idea of an artificial progress that mankind has paid through an ever growing subordination to the instrument of his freedom.

Because of this, humankind needs to seek his own ecology, his own balance. Ellul finds it in spirituality, not through an opposition to science and technology but through the expression of a project, that can only be carried out by taking its own ways of

expression. This way, action becomes a subproduct of reflection, having technology as an intermediary. Balance is essentially what is important here; not to lose sight that even though technology works as a mediator between nature and humanity, humankind should not get lost in an artificial world which it knows nothing about. This is precisely the risk, giving in to technological and artificial needs that dictate our lives instead of responding to humankind's inherent need: finding our own place in the world.

## Silence and Mobile Media: An Ellulian Perspective

by Stephanie Bennett

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Cell phones, iPods, and the wireless Internet are no longer exotic digital devices used on occasion for emergency situations or used intermittently to overcome the relational obstacles of distance and time. Increasingly, these technologies are being used in primary ways that substitute face-to-face communication for interaction that is mediated. As the relational ramifications of an increasingly mobile society begin to unfold it is important to ask ourselves how these new media influence the effectiveness and richness of interpersonal communication praxis. This essay takes a broad overview of one aspect of the interpersonal situations these new media engender, that is, the erosion of silence as a necessary component of the communicational landscape.

### *The Disappearance of Silence*

One of the largely overlooked ramifications of the new media environment is the exponential rise in acoustic output and intake, an ancillary effect that intensifies the amount of extraneous noise in and around conversational space. This has much bearing on the effectiveness of the interpersonal interaction, particularly as it affects the degree to which one can adequately listen, process, and reflect upon the message. As a result of both internal and external noise, the increasing lack of conversational room to pause, ponder and thoughtfully consider what is being said is already evident in the public sphere, and, when viewed through the lens of Ellul's concept of *la technique*, presents legitimate concern for the richness and durability of traditionally constructed and maintained human relationships.

### *Unforeseen Consequences*

When viewed through the prism of history the many unforeseen consequences linked to technological advance do not typically become evident until after a major shift in societal norms has already taken place. From the alphabet to Johannes Guttenberg's printing press; to the telegraph, film, the radio and television; to the digital media of

today, “media sketch out our world for us, organize our conversations, determine our decisions, and shape our self-identity, they do so with a technological cadence, massaging in our soul a rhythm toward efficiency.”<sup>1</sup> Over time, these media of communication engender as great - or even greater - influence on the way society is structured than what they make possible by way of convenience, comfort, or other immediate benefits. That is, these changes do much more than add something new to the world; they become part of the ecological framework of society. Today’s media environment is rich with many options for communication, but the technology most prominently rising to the fore is the cell phone, and thus is the focus of the following pages.

*The Social Penetration of the Cell Phone*

“What characterizes technical action within a particular activity is the search for greater efficiency.”<sup>2</sup>

When Jacques Ellul penned the above statement, the computer was still in the early years of commercial use. By the time he died in 1994, personal computers were not as yet available on the average person’s desktop<sup>3</sup>. Now, as the nascent stages of the 21st century unfold, the world has long since embraced the personal computer and is in the midst of experiencing a new love affair, this time with personal mobile media (PMM), the cell phone being the most popular device among them. In fact, in the United States, with 81% of cell phone users reporting that their cell phone is always on, and cell phone sales topping \$207 million, a great deal more noise is being introduced into the public square. This intense proliferation has already begun to nurture an “always on” mentality, one that advances something one might call a “24/7 social environment.” The blinking, buzzing, multi-tasking cacophony that ensues also serves to situate the average mobile media user in a position as to always be ready to receive information (often from multiple sources simultaneously), with one of the least apparent changes to the interpersonal situation being the diminishment of silence.

Similar penetration into the marketplace exists in many other nations; some –such as England and Italy-are growing with even greater proportional use among its citizenry.<sup>4</sup> Africa has recently surpassed Finland and Switzerland, two of the earliest adopters in cell phone growth. In Latin America and Mexico, use of mobile computer technologies has grown exponentially, as well. In Mexico alone, there are 54 million mobile users, as of January 2007.<sup>5</sup> With approximately 2.2 billion cell phone users throughout the world, it may even be said that talking-in-transit has become the magnum opus of

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<sup>1</sup> Christians, C. (2000), *Studies in Christian Ethics*, p. 83.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*. (1964). p. 20

<sup>3</sup> According to the Pew Internet and American Life Research Project, at that time there were fewer than 1 in 7 people online at this time.

<sup>4</sup> Per capita, Western Europe has the highest percentages of cellular users. In 2005, 930 out of every 1,000 people owned a cell phone. [June 28, 2007]<http://www.c-i-a.com/pr0206.htm>. Today, in England, there are more cell phones than people.

<sup>5</sup> *El Universal* newspaper; [retrieved June 28, 2007]<http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/397926.html>

modern media.<sup>6</sup> Because of technological growth around the world, Ellul's analysis is relevant outside France and the U.S.<sup>7</sup>

In the midst of this "digital revolution," increased amounts of auditory and visual stimuli stream into the human central nervous system as new mobile media project ever-increasing mounds of information into physical locations where individuals are attempting to converse. This "more efficient" and convenient mode of conversing not only provides means for people to expand communications outside the limitations of time and space, but it is restructuring and reorganizing the way the world conceives of communication. It is changing the delicate balance between silence and speech - eroding the dialectical nature of speech to bring about a type of interaction that conforms to technical necessity.

*Silence, La Technique and PMM*

*"In this terrible dance of means which has been unleashed no one knows where we are going and the aim of life has been forgotten [. . .] Man has set out at tremendous speed - to go nowhere."*<sup>8</sup>

One of Ellul's primary theses regarding technology is that the goals of life disappear "in the busyness of perfecting methods;" the ends are lost in a selfpropelling force that he terms, *la technique* (1951, 1989; p 64). This force encroaches because the "magnitude of the very means [is, *sic*] at our disposal;" allowing us to "live in a civilization without ends" (Christians, 2006 p. 127). Thus, the issue of concern regarding use of PMM is not the desire for more efficient and convenient access to others, but the uncritical acceptance of these means as appropriate for every situation. When this happens, the dominating, self-propelling necessity threads itself throughout all aspects of everyday life, exchanging greater, teleological goals for the means used to attain them. In other words, instead of using cell phones and other PMM to nurture the intended goal of relationally rich connections, these devices quickly become a personal necessity, collapsing the ends by their compulsory use, trading the process of communication for fascination with the method. Christians posits Ellul's thesis as "inescapable;" contending that to the "degree that the technicized dominates, healthy livelihood disappears (2006; p. 127)." When viewed in relation to personal mobile media then, what may appear to be more freeing to the human soul because of factors such as convenience and mobility may actually be in opposition to freedom.

*Silence in a Technological Society*

While Ellul (1985) did not theorize formally about the role of silence in the communication process, his thoughts on the dialectical nature of speech and silence hold much

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<sup>6</sup> By the end of 2005 there were 1.8 billion cell phone subscribers throughout the globe. Mobile Tracker News. [May 21, 2007]<http://www.mobiletracker.net/archives/2005/05/18/mobile-subscribers-worldwide>. Today, cellular use has catapulted to roughly 2.2 billion subscribers.[1]

<sup>7</sup> The 2006 National Survey of Latinos, [http://www.pewintemet.org/pdfs/Latinos Online 2007\\_topline.pdf](http://www.pewintemet.org/pdfs/Latinos%20Online%202007_topline.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Jacques Ellul (1951, 1989). *The presence of the kingdom*, pp. 63-69.

prescience.<sup>9</sup> According to Ellul, language never belongs to the evident order of things. Rather, he suggests, that language “is a continuous movement between hiding and revealing. It makes of the play in human relationships something even more fine and complex than it would be without language” (1985, p. 16). Max Picard, (1888-1965) a twentiethcentury philosopher who viewed silence as “the necessary bed” or platform, from which conversation must spring” also approached speech and silence as dialectically connected, anthropomorphizing silence as the “friendly sister of the word. (33)” Picard’s conception of this dialectical relationship avers Ellul’s ideas on the importance of dialogue and affirms the role of silence as having much to do with the creative spark of language as well as the choices one makes in using particular words or phrases.

The infusion of this creativity is what Picard called the “fullness” of speech as opposed to what is commonly called empty chatter; for Picard did not view silence as simply the absence of speech or the absence of noise. Instead, he perceived silence as a phenomenon in and of itself, contending that in order to maintain the creativity of the human spirit speech must retain its connection to language, maintaining the embrace and exchange of “the other” so as to prevent language from becoming a mechanical routine (p. 33). Interpersonal exchanges via the cell phone often occur too quickly to manage much creativity and often reduce conversation to de-contextualized sound bites.

One of Ellul’s (1964) contentions involves the nervousness with which modern men and women have to cope because of a constant drive and clatter to find the most efficient means to communicate. This situation is exacerbated with the use of PMM. His position finds some clarity with a query concerning the average citizen’s quandary: “What does he find (when he gets home from work, *sic*) He finds a phantom. If he ever thinks, his reflections terrify him” (1964, p. 376). The questions that are left lingering demand an attention. What is this terror? Does it conflate with an environment saturated in too much exogenous noise? Does the sheer quantity of information, both in the form of external noise and internal message overload leave human beings so busy reacting to stimuli that we have no time for reflection? For Ellul, the constant flow of

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<sup>9</sup> Discussion of the relationship between dialectic and rhetoric has a long history, and highly respected scholars differ greatly in interpretation. Some, like Aristotle, maintain that dialectic is a part of rhetoric; others, such as Plato, uphold dialectic as “higher” or more important than rhetoric, pointing to rhetoric as a means of persuasion through eloquence while dialectic involves argument and a more reasoned and respectable approach to truth. As a dialectician, Ellul’s perspective seems to be the opposite of Kenneth Burke’s in that (as a Rhetorician) Burke positions rhetoric as replacing dialectic as the operative mode. However, in Burke’s dramatistic theory of communication, there are overlaps and intersections between Ellul’s depictions of the tragedy and drama of life and the terministic screens through which people communicate. This train of thought may find application to the contemporary configuration and use of PMM in interpersonal communication, in general. The fullest expression of interpersonal communication makes use of both the rhetorical and dialectical modes. With the present use of these digital devices, it is evident that communication behavior requires an incorporation of both. This may be especially so in the present age when the tools of technology have become increasingly sophisticated and embedded in daily use.

information (data, images, words) is most problematic because it obstructs the ability to enter into meaningful dialogue (1985).

#### *Meaningful Dialogue*

Meaningful dialogue is not only difficult via cell phone and wireless devices, but often serves to reduce the significance of the communication taking place. Thus, when making regular use of PMM as the sole (or primary) mode of communication it may bring much comfort to individuals relating at great distances, but accomplishes this in increasingly in mediated fashion with extra layers of separation and space between interlocutors. Not only do the missing nonverbal communication cues impact conversational coherence, but listening become more difficult, and the act of engaging in meaningful dialogue is sorely diminished.

#### *Further Philosophical Implications*

*“There is always a margin around our conversation. More precisely, conversation is like this printed page, framed on all sides by white margins, without words, but which can be filled in with any word at all. The margins situate a conversation and give it the possibility of rebounding and beginning again. They allow the other person to participate with his marginal comments. [. . .] Here again, we are dealing with the unexpected. And we up against the mystery of silence.”<sup>10</sup>*

Both axiological and ontological, the philosophical implications involved in this discussion are varied and complex, far more extensive than this short essay will allow us to address. One aspect of the problematic that must be mentioned is the interrelationship between PMM, silence, certainty and mystery. The “idea” of mystery in connection with communication is very much embedded in a philosophical approach to language, which is captured in Ellul’s thoughts on the way meaning and mystery intersect:

Meaning is uncertain; therefore I must constantly fine-tune my language and work at reinterpreting the words I hear. I try to understand what the other person says to me. All language is more or less a riddle to be figured out; it is like interpreting a text that has many possible meanings. In my effort at understanding

and interpretation, I establish definitions, and finally, a meaning. The thick haze of discourse produces meaning.<sup>11</sup>

Ellul’s “thick haze of discourse” necessitates time for reflection along with a respect for the non-verbal elements in interpersonal communication. Both of these elements intersect with the use of personal mobile media and are worthy of greater exploration.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, an essential aspect of the communication process involves pre-conversation, or the intrapersonal sense-making that takes place prior to an interaction. Healthy

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<sup>10</sup> *Humiliation*, p. 25

<sup>11</sup> From Jacques Ellul’s chapter “Seeing and Hearing: Prolegomena” in Anderson, Cissna and Arnett (1994) *The Reach of Dialogue*.” p. 121.

<sup>12</sup> Detailed explication of these elements is available in my dissertation, available via ProQuest. “The Disappearance of Silence: A Dialectical Exploration of the Interpersonal Implications of Personal Mobile Media as Viewed through the Lens of Jacques Ellul’s *la technique*.”



intrapersonal communication necessitates a measure of “silent time” or solitude, and although the measure of such may differ widely for each individual, quietude is necessary for all. Whereas present trends and “cell phone behavior” might refute this need as superfluous, “time spent thinking, reflecting, is not wasteful” (Stewart, 1990). For-saking it compromises quality and coherence in numerous ways. Without the strong, functional, structuring apparatus of the intrapersonal, conversational coherence may be seriously compromised.

*True Presence and the Art of Listening*

Among other dynamics of PMM, the mobility factor changes not only daily communication behavior, but the very way people think about being together. Lack of true presence, a substitution of virtual relationships for actual ones, acquiescence to sound bites instead of conversation, and the veneration of multi-tasking to the status of a core virtue are but a few of these. To ignore the symbolic and dialectical significance of speech and silence could be an incontrovertible social ill and horrific consequence to the flourishing of human beings. Ellul (1994) expands on its symbolic significance of language by lauding the way in which it is used to communicate, saying:

We are in the presence of an infinitely and unexpectedly rich tool, so that the tiniest phrase unleashes an entire polyphonic gamut of meaning. The ambiguity of language and even its ambivalence and its contradiction between the moment it is spoken and the moment it is received — produce extremely intense activities. Without such activities we would be ants or bees, and our drama and tragedy would quickly be dried up and empty. (p. 123)

Ellul embraced the ambiguity of language as integral to the human being and as inferred in the above quotation, using the symbolic tool we call language (and using it well) he explains is “the” human feature that separates us from the beasts. To ignore or truncate the process into something mathematical, scientific, or strictly utilitarian is to denigrate the beauty and intrinsic worth - even necessity - of language as a mean to comprehend our humanness. As Ellul explains so eloquently, “Speech does not take its pattern directly from what there is “to say”; it creates in addition a sphere of unexpectedness, a wonderful flowering which adorns, enriches, and ennobles what I have to say, instead of expressing it directly, flatly, and exactly.”<sup>13</sup> Instead, of the expedient transmission of information, conversation is an art, one that requires the commitment to listen relationally.

For Don Idhe (1976) listening relationally involves a process that is different from abstract listening, and it necessitates a certain measure of silence, for, he explains, “silence is the hidden genesis of the word.”(p. 202). To clarify this, Idhe uses the term, “communicative silence,” which inheres a type of listening that must occur in order to invite speech, suggesting that primary listening precedes meaningful conversation. Further, Idhe explains the significance of silence as a human experience, positing its

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<sup>13</sup> (*Humiliation*, p. 17).

inception as much farther back than the socialization process of a child. Listening, as a primary part of learning and communicating, begins in the womb. He contends:

Long before [the child, *sic*] has learned to speak he has heard and entered the conversation which is humankind. He has been immersed in the voices and movements which preceded his speaking even more deeply in the invisible language of touch and even that of sound within the womb. Listening comes before speaking, and wherever it is sought the most primitive word of sounding language has already occurred (p. 202).

This key component in the communication process is impossible in an environment saturated with too much noise.

#### *Toward Solution*

The development of relationships-on-the-run might not be problematic if the dynamics involving salient and rich conversation could be satisfied by computation or simply by the successful exchange of information, but interpersonal communication entails many unquantifiable elements such as the often humorous, emotion-laden, highly nuanced, meaning-rich and other unique qualities that bring a fullness and depth into a human exchange. We must ask ourselves if we are willing to invest in interpersonal relationships that are driven by the principle of utility but lacking in the *poetic*. If not, it will be necessary to take the extra time to foster communication that does more than celebrate quick, efficient, and productive interpersonal interactions. This is by no means the easiest way to proceed. Yet, to inspire the kind of communication that is qualitatively rich and relational one must be increasingly intentional about creating an environment that is conducive to conversation. Uncritical acceptance of a 24/7 mentality fostered by the availability and use of personal mobile media may be one of the quickest routes to dismantling the time honored conversational arts. Without at least a modicum of silence, the hectic pace and acoustic congeries of 21st century life usurps the freedom we cherish. Subjugating silence to the technical necessity of a world of unrelenting information and noise not only increases communication breakdown, but is likely to result in a mental posture devoid of rest, reflection, and quiet repose.

What to do? From a very practical standpoint, this means, among other intentional acts, that we must *really* listen to others. It also means that we avoid the temptation to drive the beautiful mystery of human communication into a technological cul-de-sac. In our busy world of rapid information exchange a healthy respect for the integration of silence can add to the nurturing of a well-balanced, productive, and flourishing life. Without this respect our fascination with all things technological will inadvertently eclipse the beauty and mystery of the gift that most bespeaks our humanness - that ability to use human speech with the dialectical presence of silence as a necessary path to meaningful and vigorous dialogue.

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# A Honduran Mayor's Experience of Ellul's Political Illusion

by Mark Baker

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In the midst of introducing me to his boss, and greeting my family, Jacobo Sanchez pulled me aside just long enough to say, "Ellul was right!" In a way that said it all. I knew what he meant. At the same time Jacobo's statement begged for further explanation and conversation. Questions immediately flooded my mind. This chance meeting in La Ceiba, Honduras, a city neither of us lived in, did not, however, allow for that conversation. I vowed to myself that on a future visit to Honduras I would visit Jacobo and follow-up on that comment.

In the early 1980's, fresh out of college, I taught at an evangelical bi-lingual school in Tegucigalpa. I met Jacobo, at that time a university student studying chemical engineering. He was charismatic, confident and fun to be with. We spent hours in wide ranging conversation. Many of my beliefs and assumptions were shaken by the poverty and injustices in Honduras and the revolutions in neighboring countries. Jacobo enthusiastically encouraged my critical thinking. (He, a Catholic, also challenged and transformed my conceptions of Catholics.) We became soul mates. We actively sought to convince others that working for justice for the poor and oppressed was central to the Christian faith, and we reflected on ways we could do that ourselves in the present and future.

I also first encountered Ellul's writing in that time period. Jacobo and I read and discussed a number of Ellul's books. Ellul added to our growing sense that a commitment to God called for commitment to radical change. Ellul also challenged us to think more critically about the means we might use to bring change-including the use of political power. I interpreted Ellul as warning us against the political option, yet it was easy for me to be negative about an option I did not realistically have. Jacobo, however, read *The Political Illusion* and *The Politics of God*,

*Politics of Man* from a different setting than I did. He knew politicians. For him becoming an elected government leader, or a high level bureaucrat, was not an unrealistic idea. Jacobo took Ellul's warning seriously, but rather than ruling out participation in politics Jacobo entered the fray with the hope that because of what he had learned he could be a different type of politician.

In 1985 Jacobo's uncle, Oscar Mej<sup>^</sup>a Arellano, became a candidate for President and Jacobo worked in his campaign. His uncle lost, and in January 1986 Jacobo shared the following reflections with me. (In June of 1983 I returned to the United States. I went to Honduras each summer, and while there visited Jacobo until he graduated and returned to his home city El Progreso. His words are excerpts from a transcription of a cassette recording he sent me in January 1986).

*I had the chance to travel around the country and see hunger, sickness, and ignorance in my people. I saw a lot of problems that need to be solved. I was happy because I thought I would have some power, some power to solve these problems. That was the beginning of the process. . . As the days were passing by I was changing. I was thinking just about power, the sweet taste of power. . . I started seeing myself in a suit with a silk shirt in this big air conditioned office, with a big desk, in comfortable chair—sitting there having people coming asking me for favors. . . I am not saying I'd be a corrupt person. . . In the back of my mind, of course were big dreams, big concerns about the people, . . . but I lost perspective.*

*I was in the this boat and we were sailing in the water of politics and I had realized that the important thing was to keep yourself within the boat. You could see a lot of people swimming around, trying to get into the boat, and some people within the boat pushing them and drowning them. And I was there thinking, "that's good because then I won't have to fight anyone else for my share of power." I was thinking that, and I am a Christian! I love my neighbors, but I was becoming part of this, becoming selfish. . .*

*You have to be really careful because the gap between the powerful and the oppressed becomes wider all the time. In my speeches I was saying we'd seek justice, health, education and agrarian reform. When I was saying things like that I really meant them because I think it's what is best. But I was on a stage seven or eight feet above the ground and I didn't talk to my people. No, I was with the men on stage, and when we talked among ourselves we did not talk about the needs of the people. . . I remember we were developing a strategy so we could gain more power in the congress and the supreme court. We were just seeking power, power, power. . . And they were saying, "I'm going to buy this house," "this farm," "buy that car," "get this for my family." I never heard, "We have to do this for the people." I never said it. . .*

*I'm telling these things to you because I know you love me and will pray for me so that I can see the light and gain more wisdom. . . I know your ideals and your dreams and how much you love my people. I love my people too, and I am seeking justice for them. I know that this feeling that burns within me was set there by God. I failed.*

Jacobo's first foray in politics confirmed many things he had read in Ellul. He continued to read Ellul, and still had a burning passion to rectify situations of injustice and to lessen the suffering of the poor. His experience in politics had left him feeling great disappointment and disillusionment. He had, however, learned that he could give speeches that moved people. He loved to see how people had reacted to his words, and the thought played in his mind: "why give speeches for others? Why not speak for myself?" Four years later he did. In 1989 he ran for mayor of El Progreso, the third largest city in Honduras. He won the election and became mayor in 1990.

In the summer of 1990 my wife and I, once again living in Honduras, ran a two-month program for some university students involved with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship in New York state. On our way to the beach for their final debriefing we passed through El Progreso and I had arranged for us to visit Jacobo.. I had not seen him for a few years. He sat behind a large desk in an air conditioned office. Aides sat as his side.

While talking to our group various people interrupted the meeting to get his signature, ask a question, or to report someone was waiting for him. He dealt with each one quickly and returned to his animated description of the changes he was trying to bring about in the city; how he was using his power to help others. For instance, he explained how he helped the poor and landless to get land. I felt a mix of things-excited by what he was accomplishing, yet wondering if he was remembering the lessons he had learned in 1986.

I was even more confused when, two years later, I read in the Honduran newspapers that Jacobo was in Jail and accused of misusing public funds. He was forced out of office. In the end he was found innocent. The real story was that he had been betrayed by some in his own party who saw him as a threat to politics as usual. I left Honduras that year to begin my doctoral studies, and did not see Jacobo again for over ten years until, as noted above, we ran into each other by chance in another city.

Now two years had passed. I was once again visiting Honduras and Jacobo came to Tegucigalpa to spend the afternoon with me. He immediately began explaining the phrase he had mentioned to me two years earlier. "You know that book you gave me by Jacques Ellul, '*The Political Illusion*,' it's true." Yes, he had read it before he became mayor and acknowledged the reality of Ellul's insights, but he aimed to be different. Re-reading it four years after his time as mayor, however, he had read more realistically and honestly. It served as a helpful tool for reflection. True he had taken positive actions-things he is grateful he had the opportunity to do. He did not just give handouts, but began projects that people worked themselves to obtain the results. He grew in his speaking ability, but also became ever more enamored with the feeling of being able to move a crowd. He learned to say the things they wanted to hear. The longer he was in office the more absorbed he became in seeking power for himself, the more he was changed by the power he obtained, and the more he found himself using laudable goals to justify questionable means.

Looking back he can see how the power changed and corrupted him. He did not see it at the time. He thought he was avoiding what Ellul warned us about. While he was mayor, one aide, Sergio, told him, "you are changing." Jacobo ignored him, and listened to all the others that praised him. Ironically after Jacobo lost his position Sergio was the only one who continued to visit him. All the others disappeared.

We had a great discussion that afternoon. It fascinated me to hear his insights on politics today-global and Honduran. After two hours, however, I leaned forward and asked, "But where are you today? What about all our talk of justice 20 some years ago?" He looked at me and said, "I think about it every day when I wake up, and a plaque of Isaiah 58 hangs behind my desk at work."

*Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free....*



Then he described changes he has made at the factory he runs, changes resisted by the owner, changes that have required him to confront other powers that Ellul has written about. That, however, is material for another article.

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# Book Notes & Reviews

## La pensee marxiste & Les successeurs de Marx Reviewed by Joyce Hanks

La pensee marxiste: Cours professe a l'Institut d'etudes politiques de Bordeaux de 1947 a 1979

Jacques Ellul

**Edited by Michel Hourcade, Jean-Pierre Jezequel and Gerard Paul.**

Paris: La Table Ronde, 2003. 255 pages.

Jacques Ellul

Les successeurs de Marx: Cours professe a l'Institut d'etudes politiques de Bordeaux

**Edited by Michel Hourcade, Jean-Pierre Jezequel and Gerard Paul**

Paris: La Table Ronde, 2007. 218 pages.

Reviewed by Joyce Hanks

University of Scranton

Jacques Ellul's courses taught at the University of Bordeaux (including at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques, which he helped found) often broke new ground, influencing the thought of generations of French students and students from abroad. Until recently, our access to this material has been limited to Ellul's own adaptations of his course materials made available in book form (*The Technological Society; Propaganda*). Now, thanks to the herculean efforts of three dedicated Parisians (two of whom studied under Ellul), we have two additional Ellul courses available: Marxist Thought and Marx's Successors.

Like Ellul's previously published books based on his university lectures, these two new books are models of carefully organized and presented thought. Hourcade's, Jezequel's, and Paul's efforts have involved locating notes taken by several students, as well as tape recordings (made by Bill Vanderburg when he studied with Ellul), and molding them into a smoothly readable whole. The editors have tracked down references, explained allusions, and often cross referenced Ellul's lectures where they intersect with material in his published books and in interviews he gave. Additional footnotes compare Ellul with other writers, or show how he was ahead of his time, signaling trends that would become important much later. We owe a

considerable debt of thanks to all three editors, to the former students who gave permission to use their notes and recordings, and to Denis Tillinac of La Table Ronde for his willingness to publish Ellul's lectures.

The first of these volumes traces how Marx's ideas relate to those of Hegel and Feuerbach, and offers a broad outline of Marx's thought, including a presentation of his publications. Separate sections explain Marx on materialism, history, economics, and politics. Throughout the book, Ellul evaluates other scholars' understandings of Marx. Readers familiar with Ellul will expect to find references to Technique, but the editors have helpfully set these and other comments by Ellul apart from the rest of the text, using a symbol (^) and bold type to indicate that they involve Ellul's opinions, predictions, and updating of Marx's thought (this same system identifies Ellul's personal views in *Les successeurs de Marx*). Readers who already know Marx well may want to concentrate on these readily identifiable paragraphs to get a view of "Ellul on Marx." Others may want to begin with the final chapter, devoted to Marx on political and social issues: ideology, the State, democracy, religion, alienation, the proletariat, and class struggle. Ellul shines especially in this section, where the influence of Marx's thought on him makes him quite persuasive and exceptionally clear.

The section that closes the book explains the importance of Marx in Ellul's thinking and the reason he has chosen to teach a course on Marxist thought. For those who have felt perplexed by Ellul's frequent references to Marx, this book may answer a host of questions.

The second book, on Marx's followers, includes notes on two different courses in that category. The first follows the fate of Marx's thought in France (Jean Jaures, Georges Sorel), in Germany, especially as Marxists reacted to Lenin (Eduard Bernstein, Karl Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg), and in Russia (Lenin and Plekhanov). The second course traces the development of Marxism in Czechoslovakia.

Ellul delineates the effects of certain contradictions, paradoxes, and predictions in Marx's thought as his early successors attempted to apply his principles to their country's situation. As Ellul sees it, conflicts among Marxists developed because of the incomplete state of Marx's published thought, its dialectical nature, and historical developments not foreseen by Marx. Marxist intellectuals battled communist parties, and followers attempted to define a "Marxist" so as to exclude those they considered heretics. Ellul describes the adaptations of

Marx's ideas to new developments in capitalism, the economic situation, and World War I.

Ellul's course on Marxism in Czechoslovakia concerns a much later period, after World War II, antiStalinism in the 1960's, and the effects of science and Technique on socialism, especially with respect to economics. Many of Radovan Richta's ideas (and to some degree, those of Ota Sik) bear a striking resemblance to Ellul's, especially as expressed in *Changer de revolution* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1982). Indeed, in the introduction to this course, Ellul makes it clear that he saw something new in these Czechoslovakian thinkers: a Marxist way of viewing technological society that made him hopeful for the first time in decades. Ellul also points out where he differs with the Czechs' views, so we get a balanced impression.

The editors have also prepared Ellul's lecture notes on Social Classes. This shorter work, privately published and circulated in 1998, was reviewed by Gabriel Vahanian in *Foi et Vie* (July 1999).

It is certainly to be hoped that these volumes will find their way into English, with added indexes, bibliographies, and probably some additional explanatory footnotes. They constitute concise, clear, and valuable introductions to Marx and his followers, as well as a slant on Ellul's thought we cannot find elsewhere in his published works.

## Living in the Labyrinth of Technology

Willem Vanderburg

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005

Reviewed by Richard Stivers

Illinois State University

Bill Vanderburg brings a unique perspective to the study of technique even as he is greatly indebted to the work of Jacques Ellul. *Living in the Labyrinth of Technology* is the third volume in a trilogy on culture, nature, technique, and the individual (whom many of us in the social sciences have forgotten). A full understanding of this highly important book requires a reading of *The Growth of Minds and Cultures* and *The Labyrinth of Technology*. Yet the author has done an excellent job of incorporating key ideas from the previous volumes into this one; consequently, this volume can stand alone.

Vanderburg's work, this book in particular, is the necessary complement to Ellul's work. Let me explain. Ellul's theory of the technological society is not a universal and philosophical theory of society (such as that of Talcott Parsons) applied to modern societies; rather it is a theory of what society has become in a technological context. Nor did Ellul attempt to create a scientific sociology in which findings in the social sciences and history are integrated into a work of empirical generalizations. Instead he studied a number of important topics, such as propaganda, politics, and visual images, within the context of a technological society.

By contrast Vanderburg, as Ellul notes in the foreword to *The Growth of Minds and Cultures*, has created a work of scientific integration. His work is not merely interdisciplinary, but integrated into a cohesive, consistent whole. *The Growth of Minds and Cultures* contains a theory of culture, one that explains the so-called micro/macro problem. Social scientists have vainly attempted to explain the culture link between the individual and society. My reaction to Vanderburg's first book, as was Ellul's it turns out, was "He's explained the cultural link." In *the Labyrinth of Technology*, Vanderburg develops a concept of preventive engineering based on the best research on the biosphere, society, and technique. In this the third volume, he has brought together the main ideas of the previous works into a comprehensive theory of biosphere, society, and the individual under the dominion of technique.

For me as a social scientist, the issue of technique's impact on culture is central. I have been waiting for him to apply the concept of culture from the first book to a technological society. He has done this. I will spend the remainder of the review on this topic.

Vanderburg's theory of culture which resolved the issue of the individual and society, was based on a set of related concepts. One is the idea that culture is an open system, an organic whole, a social ecology, that is the result of human experience, most of which is at a metaconscious level of awareness. A central cultural dialectic is that of unity and diversity. All successful cultures provide for diversity, e.g., male and female, at the same time symbolically organizing the diversity into a unity. What sets apart Vanderburg's theory is the idea of metaconscious depth of experience. Experience runs from the personal to the societal. The former is about experiences unique to the individual, the latter about the common experiences of everyone in society. In between the micro and the macro are experiences common to those of the same sex, age, ethnicity, race, and class, on the one hand, and those of family and friendship groups, on the other hand. The brilliant insight is that each set of experiences is enfolded (made sense of) into the next higher level of experience. My personal experiences are set within my experiences in friendship groups and family, and these within those of my sex, age, and ethnic group, and those within my experiences as a member of society as a whole. The most profound level of metaconscious experience is that of the most common experience. *The more general the experience the greater the degree of depth.* We are less conscious of these metaconscious experiences and they are linked to the anchor of all cultures—the experience of the sacred. His theory explains both socialization and the inevitable tension between the individual and the group, and the group and society.

How does technique affect culture? First, technique supplants experience. In a technological society we learn less and less from custom and interpersonal experiences, both skills and ways of being, and more in an abstract, external, rationalized way. The culture begins to lose its ability to symbolize and thus integrate the differentiated experiences of the diversity of status groups in society. At best, metaconscious knowledge related to experience exists in a fragmented way, only within one's occupational group or perhaps a special interest group. Consequently, culture loses its essential unity—a symbolic unity in the form of a narrative about the past and future. The diversity of culture overcomes its unity. Technique can only integrate a society at the level of logic, not meaning. Furthermore, technique as the modern sacred is exclusively about power, our own power. Consequently, all our relationships to nature and to each other are transformed into power relationships. Meaning is ephemeral and political.

Using open systems theory in a highly creative way, Bill Vanderburg has provided an indispensable service—placing biosphere, society, and individual into a dialectical context that enables us to perceive at a single glance the tragedy of our actions driven by the technological will to power.

# Religious No More: Building Communities of Grace & Freedom

Mark D. Baker

Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press 1999; Wipf & Stock, 2005. Spanish version: *[Basta de religion!: Como construir comunidades de gracia y libertad* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Kairos, 2005)

Reviewed by Ken Morris  
Boulder, Colorado

Mark Baker's book, *Religious No More: Building Communities of Grace & Freedom*, reluctantly offers a definition of evangelicalism as "a specific movement that sought to reform fundamentalism from within" (167 n.19). A similar characterization could also apply to Baker's book, which arose out of the author's years of missionary experience in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, and his reflections on those experiences during MA and PhD studies at New College Berkeley and Duke University. Like evangelicals who sought to reform fundamentalism while preserving what they viewed as the positive theological and social aspects of the movement, Baker offers a thoughtful and timely critique of evangelicalism from within.

Baker knows about what he writes. As his book explains, Baker grew up solidly inside American evangelicalism, graduated from Wheaton College, and selfidentifies as an evangelical. He currently is associate professor of mission and theology at Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in Fresno, California, and an IJES board member. Drawing on his experiences from an evangelical upbringing in the U.S., his decade of missionary work in evangelical contexts in Latin America, his close reading of Jacques Ellul's critique of religiosity vs. living faith, and his training in theology and biblical studies at New College Berkeley and Duke, Baker has important insights to offer.

Baker's book begins with the premise that North American evangelicals can detect fallacies in their proclamation of the Christian message by examining how it plays out under the challenges of poverty, injustice and entrenched legalism at churches born out of North American mission work in Honduras. In the first part of the book, Baker uses case studies from churches in Tegucigalpa to demonstrate how legalism in Latin American churches offers solidarity among evangelicals and other social benefits, but also acts as a barrier to deeper, more authentic Christian community.

Baker recounts how, when the Honduran congregation he was working with sought to address this concern, its members ended up studying the book of Galatians for a number of weeks, which spawned the central ideas of this book. Baker's critique of legalism among Honduran evangelicals led him to take a new look at parallel legalisms found in North American evangelicalism.

The second part of the book summarizes the key insights Baker gained as a result of that contextual study and his subsequent doctoral work with Richard Hays and Frederick Herzog at Duke University. Baker contrasts the traditional interpretation of



Galatians, which tends to reinforce the individualistic and overly spiritualized character of North American evangelicalism, with the interpretation being advanced by Hays and other New Testament scholars that the apostle Paul downplays concerns of individual guilt and salvation and focuses on the gospel's communal inclusiveness. This section is not a verse by verse exegesis of Galatians—although Baker is currently writing such a commentary in Spanish for the Comentario Biblico Latinoamericano series (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Kairos y La Fraternidad Teologica Latinoamericana). Rather, Baker takes the reader through Galatians section by section, summarizing key hermeneutical issues and the range of interpretations, and offering his own insightful conclusions.

In the book's concluding section, Baker briefly proposes how the insights he has gained from reflecting on his missionary experiences and contextual and scholarly studies could have an impact on North American evangelicals. He is not alone in his concern over the individualistic and legalistic tendencies in the evangelical church. The Emergent Church movement is also addressing these concerns and gaining a growing following among younger generations of evangelicals. See, for example, Brian McClaren, *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey* (Jossey-Bass 2001). Nor is Baker the first to raise concerns about corrosive effect of religiosity on deeper Christian community. M. Scott Peck's work on community building has long noted an astonishing lack of interest in, and even resistance to, efforts to deepen community among Christians across the faith spectrum. See, for example, *A World Waiting to be Born: Civility Rediscovered* (Bantam Books 1993), pp. 351-353.

Interestingly, Dr. Peck's observations about the barriers to true community in church congregations parallel in significant ways Baker's conclusions. But to my knowledge, Baker is among the few evangelical scholars who are combining missions experience with solid biblical exegesis to produce the kind of practical theology that has real potential to contribute to reform within North American evangelicalism. For that, his work could not be more timely.

## **Beyond Paradise: Technology and the Kingdom of God**

Jack Clayton Swearengen

Eugene OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2007. 350 pages.

Reviewed by Jacob VanVleet

Diablo Valley College, Concord CA

Former Scientific Advisor for the Secretary of Defense and Founding Director of Engineering Programs at Washington State University, Jack Clayton Swearengen has produced a monumentally important work on the impacts of technology. By critically and cautiously analyzing the dominating role that technology plays in our everyday lives, Swearengen helps awaken us to our naive acceptance of the ever-new forms of

technology and their negative material and spiritual effects. More importantly, rather than simply criticizing technology, he provides practical responses to our current technological predicaments.

In his opening chapter, Swearengen provides historical examples of how technology has transformed socio-economic sectors as well as the Western psyche, resulting in such changes as automation, assembly lines, and a profound shift in human values. Efficiency, speed, and continuous progress became the goals and deciding factors in new forms of technological development. These motivating principles, of course, failed to consider possible negative outcomes, such as depletion of natural resources, health risks, and most importantly, spiritual consequences.

Swearengen goes on to argue, in chapter 2, that we have allowed technology to hypnotize us and to control our lives and decisions. This can clearly be seen in our utter dependency on the complex network of technology that directs our lives. We no longer question technology, but we uncritically trust it - even to the demise of ourselves and the earth. Swearengen provides several powerful illustrations of our optimistic and unrealistic trust in technology, including the development of missile defense programs, the surge in personal safety and security systems, and the installation of metal detectors in schools across the country. Swearengen maintains that we ought to seek out the root causes rather than look for quick “technological fixes” to the many dangers we are trying to avoid.

In chapters 3-4, Swearengen discusses at length various communication technologies, artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and the latest nanotechnologies. He argues, with Jacques Ellul (whose influence is clear throughout the work), that technology is not morally neutral. Every new form of technology is value laden, and due to this fact, there are severe physical and spiritual impacts. These impacts are outlined in detail in chapters 5-7. Here, Swearengen carefully, and with much insight, details the environmental, aesthetic, social, and finally the spiritual impacts of technology.

In the following chapter, Swearengen surveys various attitudes and responses to technology since the Enlightenment, including utilitarianism, realism, Luddism and postmodernism. His overview provides a framework for the concluding chapters of *Beyond Paradise*, which are the most noteworthy of the work. In chapter 9, the author calls us to recognize our enslavement to personal mobility, and to work toward transportation systems that are truly sustainable. Subsequently, the author begins to develop a theology of technology in chapter 10.

Specifically, we need to respond to technology in a manner that is guided by various principles found in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. For example, Swearengen maintains that Christians should look to the example of Jesus to inform our values rather than to the technologically devoted “spirit of the age.” Swearengen states: “Jesus taught that the highest good is God and His Kingdom” (288). Because of this, we must place our trust and hope in God and His kingdom, rather than in technological gadgets, devices and infrastructures. Swearengen then presents eight guiding principles for technological development guided by Scripture. Technology should: bring praise to

the Creator; stimulate humanity's thirst for God's kingdom; serve and promote justice; serve God, fellow humans and nature; enhance life without dominating it; respect, preserve, care for and utilize nature while meeting human needs; be culturally appropriate and protect cultural traditions that are not unbiblical; and be trustworthy (reliable and repairable) and transparent (full disclosure of impacts) (294). These guiding principles, Swearengen maintains, will help Christians deal effectively with their relationships to technology, whether they are developing new technologies or simply living with them.

In the work's final chapter, titled "What Then Should We Be Doing?", a practical and concrete methodology for "steering technology" is proposed. The concluding suggestions are quite persuasive and encouraging.

In the prologue of *Beyond Paradise: Technology and the Kingdom of God*, Jack Clayton Swearengen states that the book was written for the Church and its leaders. However, this work clearly goes well beyond that audience. It is a clearly written, passionately sustained argument for the limiting and redirecting of technology, using Scripture as a guide. Like Jacques Ellul, Swearengen's work will appeal to anyone who has thought critically and analytically about technology and its impacts.

## News & Notes

—Vernard Eller (1927-2007)

Vernard Ellul died on June 18, 2007, after suffering from Alzheimer's disease in recent years. Vernard was a lifelong member of the Church of the Brethren, an Anabaptist, peace church tradition. He earned his B.A. at LaVerne College, a Brethren school (later "university") where he was professor of philosophy and religion for 34 years until his retirement. He also earned the M.Div at Bethany Seminary (IL), M.A. at Northwestern University, and the Th.D. at Pacific School of Religion.

Eller's dissertation evolved into his book *Kierkegaard and Radical Discipleship: A New Perspective* (Princeton, 1968). From his undergraduate studies onward, SK had a profound influence on Eller's thought (he even named one of his sons "Enten"; *enten/eller* is Danish for *Either/Or*, one of SK's most important works).

Eller was drawn to Jacques Ellul's writings beginning in the late Sixties, not least because of Ellul's own deep appreciation of Kierkegaard. Eller wrote more than twenty articles on, and reviews of, Ellul's work in the *Ellul Forum*, *Christian Century*, *Katalagete*, and other publications. Perhaps his most explicitly Ellulian book (he wrote more than twenty) was *Christian Anarchy: Jesus' Primacy over the Powers* (Eerdmans, 1987) which he dedicated as follows: "In appreciation of Jacques Ellul who has led me not only into Christian Anarchy but into much more of God's truth as well. Merci mon ami!"

As a writer Eller sometimes came across in a more "prophetic" critical mode that "stirred the pot" (not unlike SK and JE) but in person he was always a great friend, classroom teacher, pastor, and community builder. He had a terrific wit and sense of

humor. We will miss him and be grateful for his legacy. Our condolences to Phyllis Eller, his wife of 52 years.

—ELLUL CONFERENCE NEWS

As many of you know, the international conference on Ellul's thought planned for September of this year in Ottawa had to be cancelled. The major funding source did not come through, despite the encouragement we initially received.

On a smaller scale, 18 people gathered in Berkeley on August 20 to hear Daniel Cerezuelle describe (en francais) the growth of the environmental movement in southwestern France, and the roles played by Jacques Ellul and Bernard Charbonneau.

## **Advert: International Jacques Ellul Society**

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The IJES (with its francophone sister-society, L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul) links together scholars and friends of various specializations, vocations, backgrounds, and nations, who share a common interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), long time professor at the University of Bordeaux. Our objectives are (1) to preserve and disseminate his literary and intellectual heritage, (2) to extend his social critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) to extend his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

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*Pour Une Critique de la Societe Technicienne*

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Volume 1: "L'Annees personnalistes" (15 euros)

Volume 2: "La Technique" (15 euros)

Volume 3: "L'Economie" (21 euros).

Volume 4 (forthcoming): "La Propagande" (21 euros).

### **Librairie Mollat—new books in French**

Librairie Mollat in the center of old Bordeaux ([www.mollat.com](http://www.mollat.com)) is an excellent resource for French language books, including those by and about Ellul. Mollat accepts credit cards over the web and will mail books anywhere in the world.

### **Alibris—used books in English**

The Alibris web site ([www.alibris.com](http://www.alibris.com)) lists thirty titles of used and out-of-print Jacques Ellul books in English translation available to order at reasonable prices.

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Two web sites that will be of help in finding used books in French by Jacques Ellul (and others) are [www.chapitre.com](http://www.chapitre.com) and [www.livre-rare-book.com](http://www.livre-rare-book.com).

### **Reprints of Nine Ellul Books**

By arrangement with Ingram and Spring Arbor, individual reprint copies of several Ellul books originally published by William B. Eerdmans can now be purchased. The books and prices listed at the Eerdmans web site are as follows: *The Ethics of Freedom* (\$40), *The Humiliation of the Word* (\$26), *The Judgment of Jonah* (\$13), *The Meaning of the City* (\$20), *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man* (\$19), *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes* (\$28), *The Subversion of Christianity* (\$20), and *The Technological Bluff* (\$35). *Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul* translated by Marva Dawn is also available (price unknown).

Have your bookstore (or on-line book dealer) “back order” the titles you want. Do not go as an individual customer to Eerdmans or Ingram/Spring Arbor. For more information visit “Books on Demand” at [www.eerdmans.com](http://www.eerdmans.com).

**Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works** by Joyce Main Hanks. Research in Philosophy and Technology. Supplement 5. Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 2000. xiii., 206 pages. \$87. ISBN: 076230619X.

This is the essential guide for anyone doing research in Jacques Ellul’s writings. An excellent brief biography is followed by a 140-page annotated bibliography of Ellul’s fifty books and thousand-plus articles and a thirty-page subject index. Hank’s work is comprehensive, accurate, and invariably helpful. This may be one of the more expensive books you buy for your library; it will surely be one of the most valuable. Visit [www.elsevier.com](http://www.elsevier.com) for ordering information.

### **Ellul on Video**

French film maker Serge Steyer’s film “Jacques Ellul: L’homme entier” (52 minutes) is available for 25 euros at the web site [www.meromedia.com](http://www.meromedia.com). Ellul is himself interviewed as are several commentators on Ellul’s ideas.

Another hour-length film/video that is focused entirely on Ellul’s commentary on technique in our society, “The Treachery of Technology,” was produced by Dutch film maker Jan van Boekel for ReRun Produkties (mail to: Postbox 93021, 1090 BA Amsterdam).

If you try to purchase either of these excellent films, be sure to check on compatibility with your video system and on whether English subtitles are provided, if that is desired

**Issue #41 Spring 2008 — Islam  
and Religion**

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### **For the Critique of Technological Civilization**

International Jacques Ellul Society

Berkeley, California, USA

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"Let me make it clear that I have not been trying to excuse what the Europeans did. I have not been trying to shift the "blame," to say that the Muslims, not the Christians, were the guilty party. "

-Jacques Ellul

The Subversion of Christianity

(1984; *ET*1986), p. 112.

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The Ellul Forum is published twice per year, in the Spring and Fall. Its purpose is to analyze and apply Jacques Ellul's thought to our technological civilization and carry forward both his sociological and theological analyses in new directions.

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## **From the Editor**

We are interested in this issue in presenting Ellul’s perspectives on Islam. But our overall theme is broad: “Globalization: Religious and Technological Conflict.” *The Ellul*

*Forum* is not limited to Ellul's thought in itself, but as the subtitle indicates, we are engaged in "The Critique of Technological Civilization." See *The Forum*'s mission statement in the journal column on the left, and this wider scope is obvious.

Thus we feature Darrell Fasching's article in this issue and take note of his double reference to Ellul in terms of the sacred and new demons. We follow it with sections from two of Ellul's major statements on Islam. For both, religious conflict as it turns to technological conflict through weapons and war, is a central theme.

Ellul's "Preface" to the Bat Ye'or volume and chapter 5 in his *Subversion of Christianity* are in books no longer in print. Though Ellul's thinking on Islam is hugely controversial and set in the 1980s, *The Forum* seeks to serve our readers by making it accessible in this form to help invigorate our discussion in the age of religious fundamentalism and the so-called war on terrorism.

Andrew Goddard has reminded us that Ellul's strong proIsrael view needs to be considered to help put his views on Islam in context, though Ellul's major books on the topic have never been translated: *Un chretien pour Israel* and *Ce dieu injuste*. And David Gill's comments on this topic are also very helpful: "Ellul visited Israel, had lots of Jewish and rabbi friends, and worked hard to save Jewish lives during the Resistance. But he also argued for France to get out of Algeria after WWII; they didn't and a horrible war followed. He was not absolutely against Muslims or Arabs. For example, his *New Demons* rips all religion, including the Christian version and the technological one."

For a more complete understanding of Ellul's thinking on religious conflict in general and Islam in particular, Joyce Hanks includes a comprehensive list of the original and secondary literature on "Islam" in her recent bibliography *The Reception of Jacques Ellul's Critique of Technology* (p. 495), reviewed in this issue.

Associate Editor David Gill invites all our IJES members to submit 100-500 word personal statements on "How Ellul has Affected My Approach to Politics" for the special Fall 2008 issue on "Ellul and Practical Politics." Deadline September 20. Email to IJES@ellul.org. Let your voice be heard.

*Clifford G. Christians, Editor*  
**Editor@ellul.org**

## **Religious Postmodernism In An Age of Global Conflict by Darrell J. Fasching**

Darrell J. Fasching is Professor of Religious Studies at the University of South Florida, Tampa. He was the founding editor of *The Ellul Forum* (1988-1998) and a founding member of the International Jacques Ellul Society. His book, *The Thought of Jacques Ellul* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1981), was the first English-language monograph to focus on the work of Ellul.

## Foreword from the author:

Is it plagiarism to quote oneself without quotation marks? I have never come to a satisfactory answer to that question. So here is my "confession:" The ideas expressed here are found in a variety of other things I have written (including an unpublished manuscript on Gandhi and bin Laden) but are taken here, almost verbatim, from the concluding chapter I wrote for *Religion and Globalization*, co-authored with John Esposito and Todd Lewis (Oxford University Press, 2008). That chapter is also used as the concluding chapter of *World Religions Today* (Oxford University Press, 2006) with the same co-authors. And the material I used in those concluding chapters began to be formulated in my book *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima* (SUNY Press, 1993), the epilogue of my book *The Coming of the Millennium* (Trinity International Press, 1996) and further formulated in "Stories of War and Peace: Sacred, Secular and Holy" in *War and Words* (Lexington Books, 2004, edited by Sara Munson Deats, Lagretta Tallent Lenker, and Merry G. Perry).

## Introduction

Technology globalizes human existence through mass communication, international travel and global reach of international corporations. In doing so it everywhere disrupts sacred ways of life that were once largely immune to outside incursion, precipitating a new era of violence. These sacred ways of life gave each culture its sacred center. Globalization, especially through the mass media, decenters and relativizes all such centers and therefore threatens every sacred way of life. Postmodernity is a product of globalization, for the postmodern world is an eclectic world that has no center. In the same way "new age religion" is a postmodern product of globalization, for it is eclectic religiosity that has no center of its own but borrows from everywhere. Globalization creates the pluralism and relativism that only a secular society will tolerate.

A sacred society, by definition, cannot tolerate this seemingly normless diversity. The sacred is that which matters most, and what matters most to people is their way of life. It is what people are willing to die for and, more ominously, what they are willing to kill for. For all traditional sacred societies, the modern West, seems like a disease that is trying to infect the whole world with its "secularism"—a secularism that creates a "pluralistic relativism" and brings with it "moral decadence."

Fundamentalism and terrorism are protective responses to this global invasion, responses that see the cure as a return to a sacred order now imagined as a global order. But how can humanity go from a diversity of sacred orders to one sacred order? Whose sacred order would this be? In a world of sacral conflicts, where compromise equals apostasy, violence seems like the only way to settle this issue.

In this essay I argue that this issue cannot have a secular solution, since secularism (itself, as Ellul would say, the new face of the sacred) evokes the violent response it seeks to undermine by preaching a totalistic form of pluralism and relativism in response

to every form of sacred absolutism and totalism. The only constructive alternative to religious fundamentalism's call to return to a sacred order, I argue, must itself be religious - a religious postmodernism. This religious postmodernism would give human beings a religious reason to abandon the totalitarian impulse to create a global sacred order by embracing what I would call Gandhi's "religious postmodernism," for Gandhi insists that all religion is political and must shape the public global order but do so by discovering religious reasons to embrace religious diversity.

## **Violence and the Sacred: Defending the Center**

After the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, on the very day the U.S. bombing of Afghanistan began, a tape of Osama bin Laden was broadcast to the world in which he declared, "These events have split the whole world into two camps. The camp of belief and the camp of disbelief. There is only one God, and I declare that there is no prophet but Muhammad." September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 was the most recent and dramatic battle in a war between two worlds. This "jihad" or "holy war" was declared by bin Laden in 1998 from Afghanistan, announcing: "We, with Allah's help, call on every Muslim . . . to comply with Allah's order to kill the Americans... We also call on Muslim ulema, leaders, youths and soldiers to launch the raid on Satan's U.S. troops and the devil's supporters.."<sup>1</sup>

For bin Laden, the world is divided into two realms, that of sacred order (*dar al Islam*) and that of chaos and war (*dar al harb*). According to bin Laden, the West, with its secularism and unbelief, threatens and profanes the sacred realm of Islam. Muslims are authorized and urged to kill Americans and all unbelievers, even innocent women and children. According to news reports of a discovered terrorist manual, the *al Qaida* are clear about the goal - "overthrow of the godless regimes and their replacement with an Islamic regime." For bin Laden, the very presence of American soldiers in Saudi Arabia during the Gulf War profaned the land that harbors the most sacred places of Islam (i.e., the sacred places that mark Muhammad's life and teachings in Mecca and Medina). "Holy war" is not the unique province of radical Muslims. Most wars qualify, especially the Christian "Crusades."

Bin Laden is intent upon protecting a sacred way of life against the invasion of the secular West. A people demonstrate what they truly hold sacred by what they are willing to die for, or more ominously, to kill for. Again and again, humans have demonstrated that it is their way of life, above all, that fills that category. What matters most to human beings everywhere is their living and dying. What is common to all human religiosity is not belief in God or the gods but the sacredness of a "way of life" that conquers the fear of death, holds chaos at bay, and makes life possible. Durkheim,

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<sup>1</sup> February 1998 declaration of Jihad by Osama bin Laden, reprinted in *Responding to Terrorism: Challenges for Democracy* published by The Watson Institute for International Studies, Box 1948, Brown University, Providence, RI 02912. The other quotations are from widely disseminated newspaper reports following the events of 9-11.

(and Ellul following this French sociological tradition) was right: every society on the face of the earth has been held together by some sense of the sacred.

Moreover, if what is held sacred is ultimately *a way of life*, we need to realize that religion and politics are two sides of the same coin. Politics, no matter how secular it may appear, always has a religious function - to protect a sacred way of life from the incursion of the profane forces of chaos and death. Sacred mythologies create their own cosmologies of space. They divide the world into two camps - the sacred realm of order that sustains life and the profane realm of chaos that threatens life. War becomes “holy war” whenever it is conducted to preserve sacred order against the cosmic forces of chaos.

The resort to violence and war is the sacred obligation of all who participate in a sacred way of life, whenever that way of life is thought to be threatened. In an age of globalization, religious terrorism itself becomes global because in such an age the threat of secularism and the “moral degeneracy” it is believed to bring, becomes a global threat that imperils every sacred way of life. It is postmodern global relativism that drives global terrorism.

The postmodern world is synonymous with globalization. Globalization is the product of the growing interdependence of cultures through emerging global techno-economic and socio-cultural networks. These networks transcend national boundaries and in the process tend to challenge previous forms of authority and identity. In a world of instant global communication and jet travel, time and space shrink and force a new awareness of diversity and interdependence upon all the inhabitants of the earth. The world of great independent civilizations normatively centered in the grand stories of their religious visions (Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, Islamic, etc.) and great sacred cities like Benares, Lhasa, Rome, Jerusalem and Mecca, is giving way to a global village where those who were once strangers from the other side of the globe are now our neighbors.

Today our cities reflect our global diversity and have no single sacred center but rather many centers. The center, we could say, is found everywhere, reflecting the many religious stories and practices that diversity brings to urban life. Perhaps there is no more apt description of the postmodern world produced by globalization than “a circle whose circumference is nowhere and whose center is everywhere.” This definition is borrowed from the Renaissance geometrician and mystic, Nicholas of Cusa (c. 1400-1450 CE), who used it to describe God. It is equally apt as a way of describing the diverse paths to God/the Holy that co-mingle in the postmodern global village.

This postmodern world without a normative center is in many ways a frightening and disorienting world, one aptly described by the Irish storyteller and poet, William Butler Yeats, in his poem “The Second Coming”:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and  
everywhere

The ceremony of innocence is drowned;

The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.<sup>2</sup>

Postmodernism, Jean Francois Lyotard has asserted, is marked by the collapse of all metanarratives—those grand narratives that give each civilization (whether, Christian or Muslim or Buddhist, or Secular Modernist, etc.) its center. These stories do not disappear. Instead of being the grand stories that center civilizations they survive as the “small” decentered stories of storytellers who are forced to share public space with the stories of others in the same global village.

More than anyone else, Augustine, by authoring *The City of God*, is responsible for the grand story or metanarrative that centered the Christian civilization of the West. Lyotard sees the decentering effect of postmodernism as a cure for the totalisms (or totalitarianisms) of a civilization bent on “compelling” strangers “to come in” (whether Christian, or Marxist-Stalinist or the imperialism of modern Scientism) even as Augustine wanted to so compel the Donatists. Lyotard’s admonition is to “activate the differences” and so decenter or relativize all totalisms.<sup>3</sup>

It is just such a championing of secular relativism that makes radical religious fundamentalists express the desire to take up arms if necessary to preserve the sacredness of human identity in a rightly ordered society against what they perceive as the chaos of today’s decadent, normless secular relativism. To restore the sacred normative order, therefore, they tend to affirm the desirability of achieving the premodern ideal of one society, one religion. They remain uncomfortable with the religious diversity that thrives in a secular society.

Religious modernism, by contrast, as it emerged in the West rejected the fundamentalist ideal, adopted from premodern societies, of identity between religion and society. Instead of dangerous absolutism, modernists looked for an accommodation between religion and modern secular society. They argued that it is possible to desacralize one’s way of life and identity in a way that creates a new identity that preserves the essential values or norms of the past religious tradition, but in harmony with a new modern way of life. Modernists secularize society and privatize their religious practices, hoping by their encouragement of denominational forms of religion to ensure an environment that supports religious diversity.

What I would call religious postmodernism, like religious modernism, accepts secularization and religious pluralism. But religious postmodernism, like fundamentalism, rejects the modernist solution of privatization and seeks a public role for religion. It differs from fundamentalism, however, in that it rejects the domination of society by a single religion. Religious postmodernists insist that there is a way for religious commu-

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<sup>2</sup> “The Second Coming” in *The Selected Poems and Two Plays of William Butler Yeats*, ed. M.L. Rosenthal (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 91.

<sup>3</sup> Jean Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), 82.

nities in all their diversity to shape the public order and so rescue society from secular relativism. The chief example of this option is the model established by Mohandas K. Gandhi. Because his disciples rejected the privatization of religion while affirming religious diversity, I would define Gandhi's movement as a postmodern "new age" religious movement rather than a modern one.

## **"Passing Over": A Postmodern Spiritual Adventure for a New Age of Globalization**

All the great world religions date back a millennium or more, and each provided a grand metanarrative for the premodern civilization in which it emerged—in the Middle East, in India, and in China. In the past these world religions were relatively isolated from one another. There were many histories in the world, each shaped by a great metanarrative, but no global history.

The perspective of religious postmodernism arises from a dramatically different situation. We are at the beginning of a new millennium, which is marked by the development of a global civilization. The diverse spiritual heritages of the human race have become the common inheritance of all. Modern changes have ended the isolation of the past, and people following one great tradition are now very likely to live in proximity to adherents of other faiths. New age religion has tapped this condition of globalism, but in two different ways. In its modernist forms it has privatized the religious quest as a quest for the perfection of the self. In its postmodern forms, without rejecting selftransformation, it has turned that goal outward in forms of social organization committed to bettering society, with a balance between personal and social transformation.

The time when a new world religion could be founded has passed, argues John Dunne in his book, *The Way of All the Earth*. What is required today is not the conquest of the world by any one religion or culture but a meeting and sharing of religious and cultural insight. The postmodern spiritual adventure occurs when we engage in what Dunne calls "passing over" into another's religion and culture and come to see the world through another's eyes. When we do this, we "come back" to our own religion and culture enriched with new insight not only into the other's but also our own religion and culture—insight that builds bridges of understanding, a unity in diversity between people of diverse religions and cultures. The model for this spiritual adventure is found in the lives of Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910), Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869-1948), and Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968).

Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. are the great champions of the fight for the dignity and rights of all human beings, from all religions and cultures. Moreover, they are models for a different kind of new age religious practice, one that absorbs the global wisdom of diverse religions, but does so without indiscriminately mixing elements to create a new religion, as is typical of the eclectic syncretism of

most new age religions. Yet clearly these religious leaders initiated a new way of being religious that could occur only in an age of globalization.

Martin Luther King Jr. often noted that his commitment to nonviolent civil disobedience as a strategy for protecting human dignity had its roots in two sources: Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and Gandhi's teachings of nonviolence derived from his interpretation of the *Bhagavad Gita* of Hinduism. Gandhi died when King was a teenager, but Dr. King did travel to India to study the effects of Gandhi's teachings of nonviolence on Indian society. In this he showed a remarkable openness to the insights of another religion and culture. In Gandhi and his spiritual heirs, King found kindred spirits, and he came back to his own religion and culture enriched by the new insights that came to him in the process of passing over and coming back. Martin Luther King Jr. never considered becoming a Hindu, but his Christianity was profoundly transformed by his encounter with Gandhi's Hinduism.

Just as important, however, is the spiritual passing over of Gandhi himself. As a young man, Gandhi went to England to study law. His journey led him not away from Hinduism but more deeply into it. For it was in England that Gandhi discovered the *Bhagavad Gita* and began to appreciate the spiritual and ethical power of Hinduism.

Having promised his mother that he would remain vegetarian, Gandhi took to eating his meals with British citizens who had developed similar commitments to vegetarianism through their fascination with India and its religions. It is in this context that Gandhi was brought into direct contact with the nineteenth-century theosophical roots of new age globalization. In these circles he met Madam Blavatsky and her disciple Annie Besant, both of whom had a profound influence upon him. His associates also included Christian followers of the Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy, who, after his midlife conversion, had embraced an ethic of nonviolence based on the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7).

At the invitation of his theosophist friends, Gandhi read the *Bhagavad Gita* for the first time in an English translation by Sir Edwin Arnold, entitled *The Song Celestial*. It was only much later that he took to a serious study of the Hindu text in Sanskrit. He was also deeply impressed by Arnold's *The Light of Asia*, recounting the life of the Buddha. Thus, through the eyes of Western friends, he was first moved to discover the spiritual riches of his own Hindu heritage. The seeds were planted in England, nourished by more serious study during his years in South Africa, and brought to fruition upon his return to India in 1915.

From his theosophist friends, Gandhi not only learned to appreciate his own religious tradition but came to see Christianity in a new way. For unlike the evangelical missionaries he had met in his childhood, the theosophists had a deeply allegorical way of reading the Christian scriptures. This approach to Bible study allowed people to find in the teachings of Jesus a universal path toward spiritual truth that was in harmony with the wisdom of Asia. The power of allegory lay in opening the literal stories of the scripture to reveal a deeper symbolic meaning based on what the theosophists believed was profound universal religious experience and wisdom. From the theosophists,



Gandhi took an interpretive principle that has its roots in the New Testament writings of St. Paul: “the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life” (2 Corinthians 3:6). This insight would enable him to read the *Bhagavad Gita* in the light of his own deep religious experience and find in it the justification for nonviolent civil disobedience.

Gandhi was likewise profoundly influenced by Tolstoy’s understanding of the Sermon on the Mount. The message of nonviolence—love your enemy, turn the other cheek—took hold of Gandhi. And yet Gandhi did not become a Christian. Rather, he returned to his parents’ religion and culture, finding parallels to Jesus’ teachings in the Hindu tradition. And so he read Hindu scriptures with new insight, interpreting the *Bhagavad Gita* allegorically, as a call to resist evil by nonviolent means. And just as King would later use the ideas of Gandhi in the nonviolent struggle for the dignity of blacks in America, so Gandhi was inspired by Tolstoy as he led the fight for the dignity of the lower castes and outcasts within Hindu society, and for the liberation of India from British colonial rule.

Gandhi never seriously considered becoming a Christian any more than King ever seriously considered becoming a Hindu. Nevertheless, Gandhi’s Hindu faith was profoundly transformed by his encounter with the Christianity of Tolstoy, just as King’s Christian faith was profoundly transformed by his encounter with Gandhi’s Hinduism. In the lives of these twentieth-century religious activists we have examples of “passing over” as a transformative postmodern spiritual adventure.

Whereas in the secular forms of postmodernism all knowledge is relative, and therefore the choice between interpretations of any claim to truth is undecidable, Gandhi and King opened up an alternate path. While agreeing that in matters of religion, truth is undecidable, they showed that acceptance of diversity does not have to lead to the kind of ethical relativism that so deeply troubles fundamentalists. For in the cases of Gandhi and King, passing over led to a sharing of wisdom among traditions that gave birth to an ethical coalition in defense of human dignity across religions and cultures—a global ethic for a new age.

By their lives, Gandhi and King demonstrated that, contrary to the fears raised by fundamentalism, the sharing of a common ethic and of spiritual wisdom across traditions does not require any practitioners to abandon their religious identity. Instead, Gandhi and King offered a model of unity in diversity. Finally, both Gandhi and King rejected the privatization of religion, insisting that religion in all its diversity plays a decisive role in shaping the public order. And both were convinced that only a firm commitment to nonviolence on the part of religious communities would allow society to avoid a return to the kind of religious wars that accompanied the Protestant Reformation and the emergence of modernity.

The spiritual adventure initiated by Gandhi and King involves passing over (through imagination, through travel and cultural exchange, through a common commitment to social action to promote social justice, etc.) into the life and stories and traditions of others, sharing in them and, in the process, coming to see one’s own tradition through them. Such encounters enlarge our sense of human identity to include the other. The

religious metanarratives of the world's civilizations may have become "smaller narratives" in an age of global diversity, but they have not lost their power. Indeed, in this Gandhian model, it is the sharing of the wisdom from another tradition's metanarratives that gives the stories of a seeker's own tradition their power. Each seeker remains on familiar religious and cultural ground, yet each is profoundly influenced by the other.

## **Tolstoy, Jesus, and "Saint Buddha": An Ancient Tale with a Thousand Faces**

Although at first glance, the religious worlds of humankind seem to have grown up largely independent of one another, a closer look will reveal that hidden threads from different religions and cultures have for centuries been woven together to form a new tapestry, one that contributes to the sharing of religious insight in an age of globalization. In *Toward a World Theology*, Wilfred Cantwell Smith traces the threads of this new tapestry, and the story he tells is quite surprising.<sup>4</sup> Smith notes, for example, that to fully appreciate the influence on Gandhi of Tolstoy's understanding of the Sermon on the Mount, it is important to know that Tolstoy's own conversion to Christianity, which occurred in a period of midlife crisis, was deeply influenced not only by the Sermon on the Mount but also by the life of the Buddha.

Tolstoy was a member of the Russian nobility, rich and famous because of his novels, which included *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. Yet in his fifties, Tolstoy went through a period of great depression that resolved itself in a powerful religious conversion experience. Although, nominally a member of the (Russian) Orthodox Church, Tolstoy had not taken his faith seriously until he came to the point of making the Sermon on the Mount a blueprint for his life. After his conversion, Tolstoy freed his serfs, gave away all his wealth, and spent the rest of his life serving the poor.

As Wilfred Cantwell Smith tells it, a key factor in Tolstoy's conversion was his reading of a story from the lives of the saints. The story was that of Barlaam and Josaphat. It is the story of a wealthy young Indian prince by the name of Josaphat who gave up all his wealth and power, and abandoned his family, to embark on an urgent quest for an answer to the problems of old age, sickness, and death. During his search, the prince comes across a Christian monk by the name of Barlaam, who told him a story. It seems that once there was a man who fell into a very deep well and was hanging onto two vines for dear life. As he was trapped in this precarious situation, two mice, one white and one black, came along and began to chew on the vines. The man knew that in short order the vines would be severed and he would plunge to his death.

The story was a parable of the prince's spiritual situation. Barlaam points out that the two mice represent the cycle of day and night, the passing of time that brings us

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<sup>4</sup> Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Toward a World Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981),

ever closer to death. The paradox is that like the man in the well, Josaphat cannot save his life by clinging to it. He must let go of the vines, so to speak. He can save his life only by losing it. That is, if he lets go of his life now, no longer clinging to it but surrendering himself completely to the divine will, this spiritual death will lead to a new life that transcends death. This story and its parable touched the deeply depressed writer and led him to a spiritual surrender that brought about his rebirth. Out of this rebirth came a new Tolstoy, the author of *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, which advocates a life of nonviolent resistance to evil based on the Sermon on the Mount.

The story of the Indian prince who abandons a life of wealth and power and responds to a parable of a man about to fall into an abyss is of course a thinly disguised version of the life story of the Buddha. Versions of the story and the parable can be found in almost all the world's great religions, recorded in a variety of languages (Greek, Latin, Czech, Polish, Italian, Spanish, French, German, Swedish, Norwegian, Arabic, Hebrew, Yiddish, Persian, Sanskrit, Chinese, Japanese, etc.). The Greek version came into Christianity from an Islamic Arabic version, which was passed on to Judaism as well. The Muslims apparently got it from members of a Gnostic cult in Persia, who got it from Buddhists in India. The Latin name *Josaphat* is a translation of the Greek *Loasaf*, which is translated from the Arabic *Yudasaf*, which comes from the Persian *Bodisaf*, which is a translation of *Bodhisattva*, a Sanskrit title for the Buddha.

The parable of the man clinging to the vine may be even older than the story of the prince (Buddha) who renounces his wealth. It may well go back to early Indic sources at the beginnings of civilization. It is one of the oldest and most universal stories in the history of religions and civilizations. Tolstoy's conversion was brought about in large part by the story of a Christian saint, Josaphat, who was, so to speak, really the Buddha in disguise.

This history of the story of a great sage's first steps toward enlightenment suggests that the process leading to globalization goes back to the very beginnings of civilization. We can see that the practice of passing over and coming back, of being open to the stories of others, and of coming to understand one's own tradition through these stories is in fact very ancient. Therefore, when Martin Luther King Jr. embraced the teachings of Gandhi, he embraced not only Gandhi but also Tolstoy, and through Tolstoy two of the greatest religious teachers of nonviolence: Jesus of Nazareth, whose committed follower King already was, and Siddhartha the Buddha. Thus from the teachings of Gandhi, King actually assimilated important teachings from at least four religious traditions—Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Christianity. This rich spiritual debt to other religions and cultures never in any way diminished Martin Luther King Jr.'s faith. On the contrary, the Baptist pastor's Christian beliefs were deeply enriched, in turn enriching the world in which we live. The same could be said about Gandhi and Hinduism.

Gandhi's transformation of the *Bhagavad Gita*—a Hindu story that literally advocates the duty of going to war and killing one's enemies—into a story of nonviolence

is instructive of the transforming power of the allegorical method that he learned from his theosophist friends. The *Bhagavad Gita* is a story about a warrior named Arjuna, who argues with his chariot driver, Krishna, over whether it is right to go to war if it means having to kill one's own relatives. Krishna's answer is Yes—Arjuna must do his duty as a warrior in the cause of justice, but he is morally obliged to do it selflessly, with no thought of personal loss or gain. Gandhi, however, transformed the story of Arjuna and Krishna from a story of war as physical violence into a story of war as active but nonviolent resistance to injustice through civil disobedience.

If the message of spiritual realization in the *Gita* is that all beings share the same self (as Brahman or Purusha), how could the *Gita* be literally advocating violence? For to do violence against another would be to do violence against oneself. The self-contradiction of a literal interpretation, in Gandhi's way of thinking, forces the mind into an allegorical mode, where it can grasp the *Gita*'s true spiritual meaning. Reading the *Gita* allegorically, Gandhi insisted that the impending battle described in the Hindu classic is really about the battle between good and evil going on within every self.

Krishna's command to Arjuna to stand up and fight is thus a "spiritual" command. But for Gandhi this does not mean, as it usually does in "modern" terms, that the struggle is purely inner (private) and personal. On the contrary, the spiritual person will see the need to practice nonviolent civil disobedience: that is, to replace "body force" (i.e., violence) with "soul force." As the *Gita* suggests, there really is injustice in the world, and therefore there really is an obligation to fight, even to go to war, to reestablish justice. One must be prepared to exert Gandhian soul force, to put one's body on the line, but in a nonviolent way. In so doing, one leaves open the opportunity to gain the respect, understanding, and perhaps transformation of one's enemy.

The lesson Gandhi derived from the *Gita* is that the encounter with the other need not lead to conquest. It can lead, instead, to mutual understanding and mutual respect. King's relationship to Gandhi and Gandhi's relationship to Tolstoy are models of a postmodern spirituality and ethics that transform postmodern relativism and eclecticism into the opportunity to follow a new spiritual and ethical path—"the way of all the earth"—the sharing of spiritual insight and ethical wisdom across religions and cultures in an age of globalization.

On this path, people of diverse religions and cultures find themselves sharing an ethical commitment to protect human dignity beyond the postmodern interest in personal transformation fostered by the modernist ideal of privatization. Gandhi and King were not engaged in a private quest to perfect the self (although neither neglected the need for personal transformation). Rather, each man embarked on a public quest to transform human communities socially and politically by invoking a global ethical commitment to protect the dignity of all persons. The religious movements associated with both men fit the pattern of what Jacques Ellul defines as "the holy" - for only the holy truly secularizes by opening the door to hospitality and the path to religious pluralism.

Gandhi and King recovered the premodern ideal of religion shaping the public order but now in a postmodern mode, committed to religious pluralism.

## **The Children of Gandhi: An Experiment in Postmodern Global Ethics**

In April 1968, Martin Luther King Jr., sometimes referred to as “the American Gandhi,” went to Memphis to support black municipal workers in the midst of a strike. The Baptist minister was looking forward to spending the approaching Passover with Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. Heschel, who had marched with King during the voter registration drive in Selma, Alabama, three years earlier, had become a close friend and supporter. Unfortunately, King was not able to keep that engagement. On April 4, 1968, like Gandhi before him, Martin Luther King Jr., a man of nonviolence, was shot to death by an assassin.

The Buddhist monk and anti-Vietnam War activist Thich Nhat Hanh, whom King had nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize, received the news of his friend’s death while at an interreligious conference in New York City. Only the previous spring, King had expressed his opposition to the Vietnam War, largely at the urging of Thich Nhat Hanh and Rabbi Heschel. King spoke out at an event sponsored by Clergy and Laymen Concerned about Vietnam, a group founded by Heschel, Protestant cleric John Bennett, and Richard Neuhaus, then a Lutheran minister. Now another champion in the struggle against hatred, violence, and war was dead. But the spiritual and ethical vision he shared with his friends, across religions and cultures, has continued to inspire followers throughout the world.

These religious activists—a Baptist minister who for his leadership in the American civil rights movement won the Noble Peace Prize, a Hasidic rabbi and scholar who narrowly escaped the death camps of the Holocaust, and a Buddhist monk who had been targeted for death in Vietnam but survived to lead the Buddhist peace delegation to the Paris peace negotiations in 1973—are the spiritual children of Gandhi. By working together to protest racial injustice and the violence of war, they demonstrated that religious and cultural pluralism do not have to end in ethical relativism and, given a commitment to nonviolence, can play a role in shaping public life in an age of globalization. The goal, Martin Luther King Jr. insisted, is not to humiliate and defeat your enemy but to win him or her over, bringing about not only justice but also reconciliation. The goal, he said, was to attack the evil in systems, not to attack persons. The goal was to love one’s enemy, not in the sense of sentimental affection, nor in the reciprocal sense of friendship, but in the constructive sense of seeking the opponent’s well-being.

Nonviolence, King argued, is more than just a remedy for this or that social injustice. It is, he was convinced, essential to the survival of humanity in an age of nuclear

weapons. The choice, he said, was “no longer between violence and nonviolence. It is either nonviolence or nonexistence.”

Truth is to be found in all religions, King said many times, and “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.”<sup>5</sup> The scandal of our age, said Abraham Joshua Heschel, is that in a world of diplomacy “only religions are not on speaking terms.” But, he also said, no religion is an island, and all must realize that “holiness is not the monopoly of any particular religion or tradition.”<sup>6</sup>

“Buddhism today,” writes Thich Nhat Hanh, “is made up of non-Buddhist elements, including Jewish and Christian ones.” And likewise with every tradition. “We have to allow what is good, beautiful, and meaningful in the other’s tradition to transform us,” the Vietnamese monk continues. The purpose of such passing over into the other’s tradition is to allow each to return to his or her own place transformed. What is astonishing, says Thich Nhat Hanh, is that we will find kindred spirits in other traditions with whom we share more than we do with many in our own tradition.<sup>7</sup>

## **The Story of Babel: A Postmodern Tale for an Age of Global Conflict**

Will the global future of religion and civilization be shaped by this Gandhian model of a new age spiritual practice? It clearly offers an alternative to both traditional denominational religions that seek to privatize religion and keep it out of the secular public square and the more privatistic forms of new age religion that focus on perfecting the self. The Gandhian model offers a postmodern religious alternative to modern secularism. It is this secularism that radical fundamentalists and their terrorist extremes fear is leading the world into the moral decadence of ethical relativism. The terrorist extremes want to resacralize the world around their particular premodern grand narrative (each movement has its own conception of what that is). The only path they see to religion shaping public life is one of totalism and totalitarianism. The postmodern religious path of Gandhi and King, also calls for religion to shape public life but does so while embracing religious pluralism rather than a sacral totalism. It too rejects a shallow and decadent secularism in favor of a fervent religious commitment, but one defined by non-violence and religious pluralism in defense of the sanctity of the human. The emergence of religious postmodernism means that in the future, the

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<sup>5</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” in King, *I Have a Dream: Writings and Speeches That Changed the World*, James M. Washington, ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), p. 85.

<sup>6</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity: Essays [of] Abraham Joshua Heschel*, Susannah Herschel, ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1996), pp 241, 247.

<sup>7</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, Riverhead Books, 1995), pp. 9, 11.

struggle among religions will most likely be not between fundamentalism and modernism, as a conflict between the sacred and the secular (public and private religion), but between the sacred and the holy—religious exclusivism and religious pluralism as alternative forms of public religion.

In a curious fashion all the spiritual children of Gandhi should be able to affirm the lesson of the biblical story of Babel that Jews, Christians and Muslims already have an affinity for. For the lesson of Babel is a global lesson with a curiously postmodern twist, suggesting where we can find God in a world that has no center, or rather in a world whose center is everywhere.

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, ‘Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.’ And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.’

The LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. And the LORD said, ‘Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another’s speech.’ So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore it was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth. (Genesis 11:1-9)

The citizens of Babel, we might imagine, reveled in totalism—in a way of life where everyone shared the same language, identity and world-view. One can think of examples like the Inquisition of medieval Christendom or the Nazi pursuit of the purity of the Aryan race.

The usual exegesis of the Babel story suggests that God punished the citizens of Babel for their hubris by confusing their tongues so that no one spoke the same language and therefore they could not cooperate in finishing their building project. However, the story of Babel cannot be understood in isolation from its larger narrative context. Given the overwhelming emphasis on hospitality to the stranger in the Torah (a commandment that occurs more often than any other), we must understand this story differently. Human efforts to reach God were misguided and so God reoriented these efforts by creating a world of strangers where God is to be encountered in the midst of diversity. According to the biblical tradition to welcome the stranger is to welcome God, or God’s Messiah or else an angel (messenger) of God.

The good news proclaimed by the story of Babel is that God is to be found neither in uniformity (totalism) on earth nor by scaling the heavens (through special privileged religious experiences or revelations) but rather in our encounter with the stranger. The good news is that God’s holiness shatters sacral uniformity. God prefers the pluralism

of a world of strangers to the uniformity of a sacred society. God loves difference. God prefers to be discovered through difference rather than similarity. God enters our lives through the presence of the stranger.

If the devil's strategy is to divide the world and assert the totalism of sameness against all who are different, God's strategy is to invite diversity and welcome the stranger. God's strategy at Babel is "postmodern." It is, as Lyotard describes it, "to activate the differences." But it is not Lyotard secularism and relativism that follows from this but an ethic of holiness.

We are created in the image of a God (The Holy) without image. One of us is not more like God than another. To activate the differences is to decenter a civilizational story whose sacred authority resides in its claim that only those who are the same (in religion, in ethnicity, etc.) are human. To activate the differences in this context does not lead to secular relativism but the affirmation of the sanctity of every human being around the globe—for all stand within a circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere.

The ethical strategy suggested by Babel is an ethical strategy of alienation, of becoming a stranger to one's own tradition and seeing it through the eyes of those violated by it. This strategy opens the path to holiness and hospitality, embracing the God whose ways are not our ethno-religio-centric ways whenever we embrace the stranger. For God, Isaiah suggests, is the ultimate stranger "whose ways are not our ways and thoughts are not our thoughts." The long term cure for an age of global terrorism is a global religious ethic of hospitality that takes the wind out of secularism. For it is a sacral (totalistic) secularism that feeds religious terrorism. The more secular the world becomes the more urgent it seems to terrorists to defend their sacred way of life. An ethic of holiness and hospitality takes the wind out of the totalism and relativism of the secular by returning religion to the public square to affirm differences and so to realize the utopian promise of Babel.

#### Jacques Ellul: Islam & Non-Muslims

This essay, written in 1983, was Ellul's preface to *The Dhimmi: Jews and Christians Under Islam* by Bat Ye'or (Rutherford, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson Press, revised and enlarged edition, 1985; translated from the French by David Maisel and David Littman; reprinted here by permission). Bat Ye'or describes her own objective this way: "This study does not seek to investigate the legal status of the dhimmi peoples—that is, the non-Arab and non-Muslim nations and communities that were subjected to Muslim domination after the conquest of their territories by the Arabs. That has already been done Its aim is more modest.

It has grown out of an independent reflection on the relationship between conqueror and conquered, established as a result of a special code of warfare, the jihad, for in the drama acted out by humanity on the stage of history, it is clear that the dhimmi peoples bore the role of victim, vanquished by force" (p. 35).



This is a very important book, for it deals with one of the most sensitive problems of our time, sensitive owing to the difficulty of the subject—the reality of Islamic doctrine and practice with regard to non-Muslims, and sensitive owing to the topicality of the subject and the susceptibilities it now arouses throughout the world. Half a century ago the question of the condition of non-Muslims in the Islamic countries would not have excited anyone. It might have been the subject of a historical dissertation of interest to specialists, the subject of a juridical analysis (I am thinking of the work of M. Gaudefroy-Demombynes and of my old colleague G.-H. Bousquet, who wrote extensively on different aspects of Muslim law and history without their research giving rise to the smallest controversy), or the subject of a philosophical and theological discussion, but without passion. That which was related to Islam and the Muslim world was believed to belong to a past that, if not dead, was certainly no more alive than medieval Christianity. The Muslim peoples had no power; they were extraordinarily divided and many of them were subjected to European colonization. Those Europeans who were hostile to colonization showed some sympathy for the "Arabs," but that was as far as it went!

And then, suddenly, since 1950, everything changed completely.

I think that one can discern four stages in this development. The first was the attempt of the Islamic peoples to rid themselves of their conquerors. In this, the Muslims were by no means "original": the Algerian war and all that followed was only a consequence of the first war against the French in Vietnam. It was part of a general process of decolonization. This process, in turn, led the Islamic people to search for their own identity, to seek to be not only free of the Europeans but different, qualitatively different from them. This led to the second step: that which was specific to these peoples was not an ethnic or organizational peculiarity, but a religion. Accordingly, even in leftwing socialist or communist movements in the Muslim world there was a return to religion, so that the idea of a secular state such as Ataturk, for instance, had envisaged was completely rejected.

The explosion of Islamic religiosity is frequently considered specific to the Ayatollah Khomeini, but that is not correct. One ought not to forget that the terrible war of 1947 in India between the Muslims and Hindus was fought on a purely religious basis. More than one million people died, and since massacres had not taken place when the Muslims had lived within the Hindu-Buddhist orbit, one may presume that the war was caused by the attempt to set up an independent Islamic republic. Pakistan officially proclaimed itself an Islamic Republic in 1953, precisely at the time when other Muslim peoples were making their great effort to regain their identity.

Hardly a year has since passed without its marking some new stage in the religious revival of Islam (e.g., the resumption of the conversion of Black Africa to Islam, the return of alienated populations to religious practice, the obligation for Arab socialist regimes to proclaim that their states were "Muslim" republics, etc.), so that at the present day Islam can be said to be the most active religion in the world. The extremism of the Ayatollah Khomeini can be understood only in the light of this general tendency.

It is not something exceptional and extraordinary, but its logical continuation. But, together with this religious renewal, there arose an awareness of a certain unity of the Islamic world over and above its political and cultural diversity. This was the third stage in the Islamic revival.

Of course, one ought not to overlook all the conflicts between Muslim states, their divergences of interests and even wars, *but* these differences should not blind us to a more fundamental reality: their religious unity in opposition to the non-Muslim world. And here we have an interesting phenomenon: I am tempted to say that it is the "others," the "communist" and "Christian" countries, that reinforce the unity of the Muslim world, playing, as it were, the role of a "compressor" to bring about its unification. Finally, and this is obviously the last stage, there was the discovery of Islam's oil resources and economic power, which hardly needs elaboration.

Taken as a whole, this process follows a logical sequence: political independence, religious revival, and economic power. It has transformed the face of the world in less than half a century. And we are now witnessing a vast program to propagate Islam, involving the building of mosques everywhere, even in the USSR, the diffusion of Arab literature and culture, and the recovery of a history. Islam now boasts of having been the cradle of all civilizations at a time when Europe was sunk in barbarism and the Far East was torn asunder by divisions. Islam as the origin of all the sciences and arts is a theme that is constantly developed. This idea has perhaps been promoted more in France than in the English-speaking world (although one should not forget the Black Muslims in the United States). If I take the French situation as my yardstick, it is because I feel that it can serve as an example.

The moment one broaches a problem related to Islam, one touches upon a subject where strong feelings are easily aroused. In France it is no longer acceptable to criticize Islam or the Arab countries. There are several reasons for this: the French have a guilty conscience on account of their invasion and colonization of North Africa, doubly so after the Algerian War (which, by a backlash, has brought about a climate of sympathy for the adversary), and then there has also been the discovery of the fact, true enough, that for centuries Western culture has underestimated the value of the Muslim contribution to civilization (and, as a result, now goes to the other extreme). The flow of immigrant workers of Arab origin into France has established an important group that is generally wretched and despised (with racial overtones). This has led many intellectuals, Christians and others, to be favorably and uncritically disposed toward them.

A general rehabilitation of Islam has therefore taken place that has been expressed in two ways. On the intellectual level there is first of all an increasing number of works of an apparently scholarly nature whose declared purpose is to eradicate prejudices and false preconceptions about Islam, with regard to both its doctrines and its customs. Thus these works "demonstrate" that it is untrue that the Arabs were cruel conquerors and that they disseminated terror and massacred those peoples who would not submit to their rule. It is false that Islam is intolerant; on the contrary, it is held to be toler-

ance itself. It is false that women had an inferior status and that they were excluded from public life. It is false that the *jihad* (Holy War) was a war fought for material gain, and so on. In other words, everything that has been regarded as historically unquestionable about Islam is considered as propaganda, and a false picture of Islam has been implanted in the West, which, it is claimed, must be corrected by the truth. Reference is made to a very spiritual interpretation of the Koran, and the excellence of the manners and customs in Islamic countries is emphasized.

But this is not all. In some Western European countries, Islam exerts a special spiritual fascination. Inasmuch as Christianity no longer possesses the religious influence it once had and is strongly criticized, and communism has lost its prestige and is no longer regarded as being the bearer of a message of hope, the religious needs of Europeans require another form in which to find expression, and Islam has been rediscovered. It is no longer a matter of an exchange of ideas between intellectuals, but rather of an authentic religious adherence.

Several well-known French intellectuals have made a spectacular conversion to Islam. Islam is presented as a very great advance over Christianity, and reference is made to Muslim mystics. It is recalled that the three religions of the Book (Jewish, Christian, and Muslim) are all related. All of them claim Abraham as their ancestor, and the last one, the most recent, must obviously be the most advanced of the three. I am not exaggerating. Among Jews in France there are even serious intellectuals who hope, if not for a fusion, at least for a coming together of the three religions. If I have described what may be observed in Europe, it is because—whether one likes it or not—Islam regards itself as having a universal vocation and proclaims itself to be the only true religion to which everyone must adhere. We should have no illusions about the matter: no part of the world will be excluded. Now that Islam has national, military, and economic power, it will attempt to extend its religion everywhere, including the British Commonwealth and the United States.

In the face of this expansion (for the third time), one should not react by racism, nor by an orthodox dogmatism, nor by persecution or war. The reaction should be of a spiritual and psychological nature (one must avoid being carried away by a guilty conscience), and on a scholarly level. What really happened? What was the reality: the cruelties of the Muslim conquest, or the magnanimity and the beneficence of the Koran? What is correct as regards doctrine and its application to daily life in the Muslim world? And the search that is done must be intellectually serious, *relating to specific points*. It is impossible to judge the Islamic world in a general way: a hundred different cultures have been absorbed by Islam. It is impossible to study all the doctrines, all the traditions, and all their applications together. Such a study can only be undertaken if one limits oneself to the study of specific questions, disentangling what is true from what is false.

It is within this context that Bat Ye'or's book *The Dhimmi* should be placed: and it is an exemplary contribution to this crucial discussion that concerns us all. Here I shall neither give an account of the book nor praise its merits, but shall simply indicate

its importance. The *dhimmi* is someone who lives in a Muslim society without being a Muslim (Jews, Christians, and occasionally "animists"). He has a particular social, political, and economic status, and it is essential for us to know how this "refractory" person has been treated. But first of all, one ought to realize the dimensions of this subject: it is much more than the study of one "social condition" among others.

The reader will see that in many ways the *dhimmi* was comparable to the European serf of the Middle Ages. The condition of serfdom, however, was the result of certain historical changes such as the transformation of slavery, the end of the State, the emergence of the feudal system, and the like, and thus, when these historical conditions altered, the situation of the serf also evolved until his status finally disappeared. The same, however, does not apply to the *dhimmi*: his status was not the product of historical accident but was that which *ought* to be from the religious point of view and according to the Muslim conception of the world. In other words, it was the expression of the absolute, unchanging, theologically grounded Muslim conception of the relationship between Islam and non-Islam. It is not a historical accident of retrospective interest, but a necessary condition of existence.

Consequently, it is both a subject for historical research (involving an examination of the historical sources and a study of their application in the past) and a contemporary subject, most topical in relation to the present-day expansion of Islam. Bat Ye'or's book ought to be read as a work of current interest. One must know as exactly as possible what the Muslims did with these unconverted conquered peoples, because that is what they will do in the future (and are doing right now). It is possible that my opinion on this question will not entirely convince the reader.

After all, ideas and concepts are known to change. The Christian concept of God or of Jesus Christ is no longer the same for the Christians today as it was in the Middle Ages, and one can multiply examples. But precisely what seems to me interesting and striking about Islam, one of its peculiarities, is the fixity of its concepts. It is clear enough that things change to a far greater extent when they are not set in a fixed ideological mold. The Roman imperial regime was far more susceptible to change than the Stalinist regime because there was no ideological framework to give it a continuity, a rigidity.

Wherever the social organization is based upon a system, it tends to reproduce itself far more exactly. Islam, even more than Christianity, is a religion that claims to give a definite form to the social order, to human relations, and claims to embrace each moment in the life of every person. Thus, it tends toward an inflexibility that most other forms of society have not had. Moreover, it is known that the whole of Islamic doctrine (including its religious thought) took on a juridical form. All the authoritative texts were subjected to a juridical type of interpretation and every application (even on spiritual matters) had a juridical imprint.

One should not forget that this legalism has a very definite orientation: to fix—to fix relationships, halt time, fix meanings (to give a word one single and indisputable significance), to fix interpretations. Everything of a juridical nature evolves only very

slowly and is not subject to any changes. Of course, there can be an evolution (in practical matters, in jurisprudence, etc.), but when there is a *text*, which is regarded in some way as an "authoritative" source, one has only to go back to that text and the recent innovations will collapse. And this is exactly what has happened in Islam. Legalism has everywhere produced a rigidity (not an absolute rigidity, which is impossible, but a maximal one) that makes historical investigation essential.

One should be aware that when one is dealing with some Islamic term or institution of the past, as long as the basic text—in this case, the Koran—remains unchanged, one can always return to the original principles and ideas whatever apparent transformations or developments have taken place, especially because Islam has achieved something that has always been very unusual: an integration of the religious, the political, the moral, the social, the juridical, and the intellectual, thus constituting a rigorous whole of which each element forms an integral part.

However, the *dhimmi* himself is a controversial subject. This word actually means "protege" or "protected person." This is one of the arguments of the modern defenders of Islam: the *dhimmi* has never been persecuted or maltreated (except accidentally); on the contrary, he was a protected person. What better example could illustrate Islam's liberalism. Here are people who do not accept Islam and, instead of being expelled, they are protected. I have read a great deal of literature attempting to prove that no society or religion has been so tolerant as Islam or has protected its minorities so well.

Naturally, this argument has been used to condemn medieval Christianity (which I have no intention of defending), on the ground that Islam never knew an Inquisition or "witch hunts." Even if this dubious argument is accepted, let us confine ourselves to an examination of the meaning of the term *protected person*. One must ask: "protected against whom?" When this "stranger" lives in Islamic countries, the answer can only be: against the Muslims themselves. The point that must be clearly understood is that the very term *protege* implies a latent hostility.

A similar institution existed in early Rome, where the *cliens*, the stranger, was always the enemy. He had to be treated as an enemy even if there was no situation of war. But if this stranger obtained the favor of the head of some great family, he became his *protege* (*cliens*) and was then able to reside in Rome: he was "protected" by his "patron" from the acts of aggression that any Roman citizen could commit against him. This also meant that in reality the protected person had *no genuine rights*. The reader of this book will see that the *dhimmi's* condition was defined by a treaty (*dhimma*) between him (or his group) and a Muslim group.

This treaty had a juridical aspect, but was what we would call an unequal contract: the *dhimma* was a "concessionary charter" (cf. C. Chehata on Muslim law), something that implies two consequences. The first is that the person who concedes the charter can equally well rescind it. It is not, in fact, a contract representing a "consensus" arrived at between the two sides. On the contrary, it is quite arbitrary. The person who grants the treaty is the only one who decides what he is prepared to concede (hence the great variety of conditions).

The second is that the resulting situation is the opposite of the one envisaged in the theory of the "rights of man" whereby, by the mere fact of being a human being, *one is endowed* automatically with certain rights and *those* who fail to respect them are at fault. In the case of the "concessionary charter," on the contrary, one enjoys rights only to the extent that they are recognized in the charter and only for as long as it remains valid. As a person, by the mere fact of one's "existence," one has no claim to any rights. And this, indeed, is the *dhimmi's* condition. As I have explained above, this condition is unvarying throughout the course of history; it is not the result of social chance, but a rooted concept.

For the conquering Islam of today, those who do not claim to be Muslims do not have any human rights recognized as such. In an Islamic society, the non-Muslims would return to their former *dhimmi* status, which is why the idea of solving the Middle East conflicts by the creation of a federation including Israel within a group of Muslim peoples or states, or in a "Judeo-Islamic" state, is a fantasy and an illusion. From the Muslim point of view, such a thing would be unthinkable.

Thus the term *protected* can have two completely opposite meanings according to whether one takes it in its moral sense or in its juridical sense, and that is entirely characteristic of the controversies now taking place concerning the character of Islam. Unfortunately, this term has to be taken in its juridical sense. I am well aware that it will be objected that the *dhimmi* had his rights. Yes, indeed; but they were *conceded* rights. That is precisely the point.

In the Versailles Treaty of 1918, for example, Germany was granted a number of "rights" by the victors, and that was called a *Diktat*. This shows how hard it is to evaluate a problem of this kind, for one's conclusions will vary according to whether one is favorably or unfavorably predisposed toward Islam, and a truly scholarly, "objective" study becomes extremely difficult (though personally, I do not believe in objectivity in the humanities; at best, the scholar can be honest and take his own prejudices into account). And yet, precisely because, as has been said, passion is involved, studies of this kind are nevertheless indispensable in all questions concerning Islam.

So now it must be asked: is this book a serious, scholarly study? I reviewed *Le Dhimmi*, when it first appeared, in a major French newspaper\* (the French edition was far less complete and rich than this one, especially with regard to the documents, notes, and appendixes, which are essential). In response to that review I received a very strong letter from a colleague, a well-known orientalist, informing me that the book was purely polemical and could not be regarded seriously. His criticisms, however, betrayed the fact that he had not read the book, and the interesting thing about his arguments (based on what I had written) was that they demonstrated, on the contrary, the serious nature of this work. First of all, he began with an appeal to authority, referring me to certain works whose scholarship he regarded as unquestionable (those of Professors S. D. Goitein, B. Lewis, and N. Stillman), that in his opinion adopt a positive attitude toward Islam and its tolerance toward non-Muslims.

I conveyed his opinion to Bat Ye'or, who assured me that she was personally acquainted with all three authors and had read their publications dealing with the subject. Given the scope of the author's researches, I would have been surprised if this was not the case. She maintained that an attentive reading of their writings would not justify such a restrictive interpretation.

One may now ask: what were the principal arguments that our critic advanced against Bat Ye'or's analysis? He claimed, first, that one cannot generalize about the *dhimmi's* condition, which varied considerably. But this is precisely the point that Bat Ye'or makes in her very skillfully constructed book: using common data, from an identical basis, the author has provided documents that permit us to gain an exact idea of these differences, in accordance with whether the *dhimmi* lived in the Maghreb, or in Persia, Arabia, and so on. And, although we perceive a very great diversity in the reality of the *dhimmi's* existence, this in no way changed the identical and profound reality of his condition.

The second argument put forward by our critic was that the "persecutions" to which the *dhimmi* was subjected had been greatly exaggerated. He spoke of "a few outbursts of popular anger," but, on the one hand, that is not something that the book is particularly concerned with, and, on the other hand, it was here, precisely, that our critic's bias clearly revealed itself. The "few" outbursts, in fact, were historically very numerous, and massacres of *dhimmis* were frequent.

Nowadays we ought not to overlook the considerable evidence (which was formerly overstressed) of the slaughter of Jews and Christians in all the countries occupied by the Arabs and Turks, which recurred often, without the intervention of the forces of order. The *dhimmi* did, perhaps, have recognized rights, but when popular hatred was aroused, sometimes for incomprehensible reasons, he found himself defenseless and without protection. This was the equivalent of pogroms. On this point it was my correspondent who was not "scholarly." Third, he claimed that the *dhimmis* had personal and communal rights, but, not being a jurist, he failed to see the difference between personal rights and conceded rights. This aspect has been stressed above and the argument is unfounded, as Bat Ye'or demonstrates by a careful and convincing examination of the rights in question.

Another point raised was that the Jews attained their highest level of culture in Muslim countries, and that they regarded the states in which they resided as *their own*. With regard to the first point, I would say that there was an enormous diversity. It is quite true that in certain Muslim countries at some periods, Jews—and Christians—did attain a high level of culture and affluence, but Bat Ye'or does not deny that. And, in any case, that was not anything extraordinary: in Rome, for instance, in the first century A.D., the slaves (who remained *slaves*) enjoyed a very remarkable position, being active in nearly all the intellectual professions (as teachers, doctors, engineers, etc.), directed enterprises, and could even be slave-owners themselves. Nonetheless, they were slaves!

The situation of the *dhimmi*s was something comparable to this. They had an important economic role (as is clearly shown in this book) and could be "happy," but they were nevertheless inferiors whose very variable status rendered them narrowly dependent and bereft of "rights." As for the assertion that they considered as their own the states which ruled them, that was never true of the Christians. And, with regard to the Jews, they had been dispersed throughout the world for so long that they had no alternative. Yet we know that a real current of "assimilationism" came into existence only in the modern Western democracies.

Finally, Bat Ye'or's critic states that "a degradation of the condition of the Jews has taken place in recent times in Islamic countries," but that the *dhimmi*'s condition ought not to be evaluated by what happened to them in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I can only ask whether the author of these criticisms, like so many other historians, has not given way to the temptation to glamorize the past. It is enough to notice the remarkable concordance between the historical sources referring to events, and the basic, authoritative texts to realize that such an evolution was not so considerable.

If I have dealt with the criticisms at some length, it is because I feel that it is important in order to establish the "scholarly" nature of this book. For my part, I consider this study to be very honest, hardly polemical at all, and as objective as possible (always bearing in mind the fact that I belong to the school of historians for whom pure objectivity, in the absolute sense, cannot exist).

*The Dhimmi* contains a rich selection of source material, makes a correct use of documents, and displays a concern to place each situation in its proper historical context. Consequently, it satisfies a certain number of scholarly requirements for a work of this kind. And for that reason I regard it as exemplary and very significant. But also, within the "living context" of contemporary history, which I described earlier, this is a book that carries a clear warning. The Muslim world has not evolved in its manner of considering the non-Muslim, which is a reminder of the fate in store for those who may one day be submerged within it. It is a source of enlightenment for our time.

## Jacques Ellul: The Influence of Islam On Christianity

Excerpted from Jacques Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity*, chapter 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986. Translated by trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley from the French edition, *La Subversion du Christianisme*, Editions du Seuil, 1984).

Editor's Introduction: In this chapter of *The Subversion of Christianity*, Ellul draws on his vast historical learning (remember that he was the author of a multi-volume *Histoire des Institutions* that was for decades a standard textbook in France) to show



that, contrary to the politically-correct thinking of the 80s in France, the influence of Islam on Christendom was not all positive. Ellul acknowledges the positive contributions in philosophy, science, mathematics, architecture, agriculture, astronomy and other fields—though perhaps with less enthusiasm than these deserve. And he is very clear in this chapter and still more in the rest of *Subversion* and in his many other writings that Christians themselves—and Westerners in general—are primarily to blame for their own deformation and betrayal of their faith, truth, and values. But Ellul insists that there are some fundamental conflicts between Islam and Christianity. He discusses various topics such as mysticism, the nature of the soul, views of God, Jesus, women, revelation, and piety. What follows are his discussions of law, political authority, war, slavery, and colonization. He sees radical differences and goes against the tide with his commentary. However, Ellul is also unmistakably clear that what is called for is not more conflict, violence, and denunciation but more resolute adherence to the truth and freedom we should have been representing all along.

Stress has seldom been laid upon the influence of Islam on Christianity, that is, on the deformation and subversion to which God's revelation in Jesus Christ is subjected. Yet this influence was considerable between the ninth and eleventh centuries. We have been brought up on the image of a strong and stable Christianity that was attacked and besieged in some sense by Islam. Engaged in unlimited conquest, with a universal vocation similar to that claimed by Christianity, Islam was expanding its empire in three directions: to the south, especially along the coasts into black Africa, and reaching as far as Zanzibar by the twelfth century; to the northwest, with the conquest of Spain and the invasion of France up to Lyons on the one side and Poitiers on the other; and to the northeast into Asia Minor and as far as Constantinople. With the Turks Islam would then continue incessantly to threaten the Balkans, Austria, Hungary, etc. The picture is a Manichean and warlike one; as it is hard to conceive of profound contacts between warring enemies, how can Islam have influenced Christianity in this permanent state of war?

The fine book by H. Pirenne, *Mahomet et Charlemagne*, has admirably shown what were the economic and political consequences of this permanent military threat. But it has often been emphasized that we lack any study of relationships. This is the more surprising in that elsewhere, in the domain of philosophy, we know perfectly well that Aristotle's thought came into Europe thanks to the translations and commentaries of the Arab philosopher Averroes (twelfth century), and we can also point to the influence of Avicenna from the eleventh century. It is also recognized that Arab influence was great in scientific fields such as mathematics, medicine, agronomy, astronomy, and physics. All this is conceded and generally known.

A little later Arab influence may be seen incontestably in the black arts, in magic, the various "mancies," alchemy, the search for the philosopher's stone, and also music (twelfth century). It is also well understood that the Arabs had considerable military influence (e.g., upon cavalry, etc.) and that some technical fields (irrigation) and architecture felt their impact. Finally, it is constantly stressed that through the Crusades

and the contacts of the Crusaders with the Arabs many changes came about in various areas, such as the bringing of certain fruit trees (cherries and apricots) into France. All this is very banal. But it does at least tell us beyond a doubt that even between enemies who are depicted as irreconcilable there were cultural and intellectual relations. Exchanges took place and knowledge circulated. In truth, knowledge seems to have circulated in only one direction, coming from Islam and the Arab world to the West, which was much more backward and "barbarian."

It is readily perceived that Christianity and Islam had certain obvious points in common or points of meeting. Both were monotheistic and both were based on a book. We should also note the importance that Islam accords to the poor. Certainly Christians reject Allah because of the denial that Jesus Christ is God's Son, and they do not allow that the Koran is divinely inspired. On the other hand, Muslims reject the Trinity in the name of the unity, and they make the whole Bible a mere preface or introduction to the Koran. At root, Muslims do with the whole Bible what Christians do with the Hebrew Bible. But on this common foundation there are necessarily encounters and debates and discussions, and hence a certain openness. Even where there is rejection and objection, there can be no evading the question that is put.

It seems that the Muslim intellectuals and theologians were much stronger than their Christian counterparts. It seems that Islam had an influence, but not Christianity. Our interest here is not in the philosophical problem or in theological formulations, which were necessarily restricted to a small intellectual circle, but in the way in which Islamic influences change practices, rites, beliefs, attitudes toward life, all that belongs to the domain of moral or social belief or conduct, all that constitutes Christendom. Here again, everyone knows that the Frankish kingdom of Jerusalem, the French knights installed in Palestine, rapidly adopted many manners and customs that originated in Islam. But the exceptional case is not important. What counts is what is imported into Europe. It is the fact of unwitting imitation. It is the fact of being situated on the chosen territory and being delimited by those whom one wants to combat.

## **Religion, Revelation, & Law**

I believe that in every respect the spirit of Islam is contrary to that of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. It is so in the basic fact that the God of Islam cannot be incarnate. This God can be only the sovereign judge who ordains all things as he wills. Another point of antithesis lies in the absolute integration of religious and political law. The expression of God's will inevitably translates itself into law. No law is not religious, inspired by God. Reciprocally, all God's will must translate itself into legal terms. Islam pushed to an extreme a tendency that is virtual in the Hebrew Bible, but there it is symbolic of the spiritual and is then transcended by Jesus Christ; with Islam we come back to legal formulation as such.

I have shown elsewhere that the twofold formulation of "having a law" and of "objective law" is contrary to revelation. This can naturally be contested only by champions

of natural law and classical theology. My conviction is that this revelation of love, seeking to set up a relationship of love (alone) among us, and thus basing everything on grace and giving us a model of exclusively gracious relationships, is in fact the exact opposite of law, in which everything is measured by debits and credits (the opposite of grace) and duties (the opposite of love).

To the extent that we are not in the kingdom of God, we certainly cannot achieve this pure relation of love and grace, this completely transparent relation. Hence law has a necessary existence. Yet we have to view it merely as a matter of expediency (because we cannot do better) and a necessary evil (which is always an evil). This understanding has nothing in common with that which contrariwise greatly exalts law, making it the expression of God's will and the legal formulation of the "religious" world. On this view law is a preeminent value. In taking this approach Christians were greatly influenced by their Roman background. They could not exclude or minimize the value of Roman law, as we have seen. There then comes a great rebound with the Arabs. We now have an intimate union between law and the will of God.

The jurist is the theologian. Theology becomes no less legal than philosophical. Life is set in law no less and even more than in ethics. Everything religious becomes legal. Judges handle religious matters, and jurisprudence becomes theology. This gives an enormous boost to the juridicizing of Christendom. Canon law expands after the pattern found in Islam. If everything is not included in it, it is because the feudal lords and monarchs are very hostile to the growing power of the church and because (lay) customs put up firm opposition to this sanctification. But the legal spirit penetrates deeply into the church, and I maintain that this is both under the influence of Islam and in *response* to the religious law of Islam. The church had to follow suit.

## **Ecclesiastical and Political Authority**

Furthermore, law set up ecclesiastical courts and gave them means of ruling. They would have liked to have seen everything referred to canon law and their courts, as in the Muslim world. The church would have liked sole power. But in Islam there was an indissoluble correlation between religious law and political power. In this field, too, what was introduced with Constantianism, as we have seen, received a new impulse from Islam. Every political head in Islam is also the ruler of believers. There is no separation between the church and political power. The political head is the religious head. He is a representative of Allah. His political and military acts, etc., are inspired.

Now this is all familiar in Europe. The king or emperor does not merely claim to be the secular arm of the church but, the one who has spiritual power. He wants it to be recognized that he personally is chosen by God, elected by the Almighty. He needs a prophetic word and the power to work miracles. His word and person have to be sacred.

Naturally some of this was already present prior to Islam. It was not for nothing, however, that this theology, liturgy, and imperial understanding developed first at

Byzantium on the first contact with Islam, and only later spread to the West. Royal power becomes religious not merely in an alliance with the church but under the influence of Islam, which was much more of a theocracy than the West ever was: a theocracy in which God is indeed the sole king, but the true representative of God on earth is the political head, so that we have what has rightly been called "lay theocracy" with no religious organization, no clergy, no ecclesiastical institution—a situation in which to rejoice, for it implies that only the political power is religious. Islam does not know the duality of church and state with its conflicts and also with the limitation that it entails for the political power.

We can thus understand perfectly the wish or desire or temptation of Western kings and emperors to be themselves the sole representatives of God on earth and thus to go much further than Constantine. The formula according to which the emperor is "the bishop on the outside" did not suffice for them. I am certain that the Islamic model acted in favor of the emancipation of kings and their attempt from the fourteenth century to create a church that would be wholly dependent on the political power. Certainly in the big debate they were not able to advance this argument. What an admission it would be to say that they were taking those terrible unbelievers as a model!

## **Holy War**

In tandem with this great importance of the political power there is, of course, the importance and glorification of war as a means of spreading the faith. Such war is a duty for all Muslims. Islam has to become universal. The true faith, not the power, has to be taken to every people by every means, including by military force. This makes the political power important, for it is warlike by nature. The two things are closely related. The political head wages war on behalf of the faith. He is thus the religious head, and as the sole representative of God he must fight to extend Islam. This enormous importance of war has been totally obliterated today in intellectual circles that admire Islam and want to take it afresh as a model.

War is inherent in Islam. It is inscribed in its teaching. It is a fact of its civilization and also a religious fact; the two cannot be separated. It is coherent with its conception of the Dhar al ahrb, that the whole world is destined to become Muslim by Arab conquests. The proof of all this is not just theological; it is historical: hardly has the Islamic faith been preached when an immediate military conquest begins. From 632 to 651, in the twenty years after the death of the prophet, we have a lightning war of conquest with the invasion of Egypt and Cyrenaica to the west, Arabia in the center, Armenia, Syria, and Persia to the east. In the following century all North Africa and Spain are taken over, along with India and Turkey to the east. The conquests are not achieved by sanctity, but by war.

For three centuries Christianity spread by preaching, kindness, example, morality, and encouragement of the poor. When the empire became Christian, war was hardly

tolerated by the Christians. Even when waged by a Christian emperor it was a dubious business and was assessed unfavorably. It was often condemned. Christians were accused of undermining the political force and military might of the empire from within. In practice Christians would remain critical of war until the flamboyant image of the holy war came on the scene. In other words, no matter what atrocities have been committed in wars waged by so-called Christian nations, war has always been in essential contradiction to the gospel. Christians have always been more or less aware of this. They have judged war and questioned it.

In Islam, on the contrary, war was always just and constituted a sacred duty. The war that was meant to convert infidels was just and legitimate, for, as Muslim thinking repeats, Islam is the only religion that conforms perfectly to nature. In a natural state we would all be Muslims: If we are not, it is because we have been led astray and diverted from the true faith. In making war to force people to become Muslims the faithful are bringing them back to their true nature. Q.E.D. Furthermore, a war of this kind is a *jihad*, a holy war. Let us make no mistake, the word *jihad* has two complementary senses. It may denote a spiritual war that is moral and inward. Muslims have to wage this war within themselves in the fight against demons and evil forces, in the effort to achieve better obedience to God's will, in the struggle for perfect submission. But at the same time and in a wholly consistent way the *jihad* is also the war against external demons. To spread the faith, it is necessary to destroy false religions. This war, then, is *always* a religious war, a *holy* war.

The famous story of Charlemagne forcing the Saxons to be converted on pain of death simply presents us with an imitation of what Islam had been doing for two centuries. But if war now has conversions to Christianity as its goal, we can see that very quickly it takes on the aspect of a holy war. It is a war waged against unbelievers and heretics (we know how pitiless was the war that Islam waged against heretics in its midst). But the idea of a holy war is a direct product of the Muslim *jihad*. If the latter is a holy war, then obviously the fight against Muslims to defend or save Christianity has *also* to be a holy war. The idea of a holy war is not of Christian origin. Emperors never advanced the idea prior to the appearance of Islam.

For half a century historians have been studying the Crusades to find explanations other than the silly theory that was previously held . . . that claims their intention was to secure the holy places. It has been shown that the Crusades had economic objectives, or that they were stirred up by the popes for various political motives such as that of securing papal preeminence by exhausting the kingdoms, or reorganizing the weakening unity of the church, or again that they were a means whereby the kings ruined the barons who were challenging their power, or again that the bankers of Genoa, Florence, and Barcelona instigated them so as to be able to lend money to the Crusaders and make fabulous profits, etc. One fact, however, is a radical one, namely, that the Crusade is an imitation of the *jihad*. Thus the Crusade includes a guarantee of salvation. The one who dies in a holy war goes straight to Paradise, and the same

applies to the one who takes part in a Crusade. This is no coincidence; it is an exact equivalent.

The Crusades, which were once admired as an expression of absolute faith, and which are now the subject of accusations against the church and Christianity, are of Muslim, not Christian, origin. We find here a terrible consequence and confirmation of a vice that was eating into Christianity already, namely, that of violence and the desire for power and domination. To fight against a wicked foe with the same means and arms is unavoidably to be identified with this foe. Evil means inevitably corrupt a just cause. The nonviolence of Jesus Christ changes into a war in conflict with that waged by the foe. Like that war, this is now a holy war. Here we have one of the chief perversions of faith in Jesus Christ and of the Christian life.

But we must take this a step further. Once the king is the representative of God on earth and a war is holy, another question necessarily arises. If a war is not holy, what is it? It seems that the Christian emperors of Rome did not ask this question. They had to defend the empire. That was all. Naturally it did not arise in the period of the invasions and the Germanic kingdoms either. War was then a fact, a permanent state. No one tried to justify it. But with the Muslim idea of a holy war the idea is born that a war may be good even if it is not motivated by religious intentions so long as it is waged by a legitimate king. Gradually the view is accepted that political power has to engage in war, and if this power is Christian, then a ruler has to obey certain precepts, orientations, and criteria if he is to act as a Christian ruler and to wage a just war. We thus embark on an endless debate as to the conditions of a just war, from Gratian's decree to St. Thomas. All this derives from the first impulse toward a holy war, and it was the Muslim example that finally inspired this dreadful denial of which all Christendom becomes guilty.

\* \* \*

## Slavery

I have to admit that Christian history took an incredibly sad turn in two other areas. The first concerns slavery. Not all at once but progressively under Christian influence (and not because of technical improvements, as is often stated today), slavery disappeared in the Roman empire. It persisted, however, in remote corners of the Carolingian empire. We may note, meanwhile, two currents: the one from the North (the Slavs), the other from the Mediterranean. Yet the incidence of this is negligible and episodic. The general thesis that there was no more slavery in Christendom is true. Thus the proclamation that "everyone in the kingdom of France is free" was correct, and it was even allowed (although perhaps theoretically) that the moment slaves arrived in France, the mere fact of setting foot on French soil made them free. This was wholly in keeping with Christian thinking.

Nevertheless, from the fifteenth century, with the development of a knowledge of Africa, and then especially in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, we have the

familiar and dreadful history of the enslaving of Africans, who were torn from their own country and transported to America.

What accusations have been made against "Christianity" and Western civilization! And rightly so! How lightly the revelation in Christ was taken, which would have totally and radically and unreservedly forbidden slavery. In the Middle Ages the traffic in slaves would undoubtedly have led to excommunication. It is a curious fact, however, that apart from some conscientious historians no one has put the elementary question how it was that a few Western navigators could round up thousands of slaves from among peoples who were by no means sheeplike. Could a hundred French sailors, even though armed with muskets, attack a tribe of several hundred hardy warriors and seize a cargo of slaves? Such an idea is pure fiction. For centuries the Muslims had regularly cropped the black continent for slaves. Seizing Africans as slaves was a Muslim practice from at least the tenth century. The African tribes were in this case attacked by considerable armies, in veritable invasions, of which we shall have to speak later.

The Muslims carried off to the East far more black slaves than the Westerners ever did. In the eleventh century fifteen great slave markets were set up by the Arabs in black Africa. In the east they extended as far as across from Madagascar [present-day Mozambique], and in the west as far as the Niger [present-day Guinea River]. Slaves were the main item in Muslim trade from the tenth century to the fifteenth. Furthermore, the Muslims began to use political methods by which the Western merchants profited. They played off the African chiefs against one another in such a way that a chief would take prisoners from neighboring tribes and then sell them to the Arab merchants. It was by following this practice, which had been established for many centuries, that the Western sailors obtained slaves so easily. Naturally, the reality itself is terrible and anti-Christian, but we see here the direct influence of Islam on the practice of Westerners who were Christian only in name. One should also remember, as the United Nations has pointed out, that trading in black slaves by Arab merchants still goes on in countries around the gulf of Oman.

## **Colonization**

Finally, a last point: colonizing. Here again, for the last thirty years some have attacked Christianity for instigating colonialism. Christians are accused of invading the whole world and justifying the capitalist system. It has become a traditional belief that missionaries pioneered the way for merchants. Undoubtedly there is some truth in all this. Undoubtedly serious and conscientious Christians should never have acquiesced in the invasion of "Third World" peoples, in the seizing of their lands, in their reduction to semislavery (or their extermination), in the destruction of their cultures. The judgment against us is a crushing one. Las Casas is entirely right. But who invented colonizing? Islam. Incontestably so!

I will not discuss again the question of war or the establishment in Africa of kingdoms dominated by the Arabs. My theme is colonizing, the penetration by other than

military means, the reduction of subject peoples by a sort of treaty that makes them do exactly as the rulers want. In Islam we find two methods of penetration, commercial and religious. Things are exactly the same as they will be among the Westerners five centuries later. Muslim missionaries convert the Africans to Islam by every possible means. Nor can one deny that their intervention has just the same effects as that of Christian missionaries: the destruction of the independent religions and cultures of the African tribes and kingdoms. Nor must we back the stupid argument that it was an internal affair of the African world. The Muslims came into the north by conquest, and the Arabs are white. Muslim missionaries went as far as Zanzibar, and in Angola they brought within the Muslim orbit African peoples that had not been conquered or subjugated.

The other method is that of commerce. The Arab merchants go much further afield than the soldiers. They do much the same as the Westerners will do five centuries later. They set up trading posts and barter with the local tribes. It is not without interest that one of the commodities they were seeking in the tenth and eleventh centuries was gold. Trading in gold by the Arabs took place in Ghana, to the south of the Niger, and on the east coast down toward Zanzibar. When it is said that the desire for gold prompted the Westerners in the fifteenth century, they were simply following in the footsteps of Islam. Thus the Arab mechanism of colonizing serves as a model for the Europeans.

In conclusion, let me make it clear that I have not been trying to excuse what the Europeans did. I have not been trying to shift the "blame," to say that the Muslims, not the Christians, were the guilty party. My purpose is to try to explain certain perversions in Christian conduct. I have found a model for them in Islam. Christians did not invent the holy war or the slave trade. Their great fault was to imitate Islam. Sometimes this was direct imitation by following the example of Islam. Sometimes it was inverse imitation by doing the same thing in order to combat Islam, as in the Crusades. Either way, the tragedy was that the church completely forgot the truth of the gospel. It turned Christian ethics upside down in favor of what seemed to be very obviously a much more effective mode of action, for in the twelfth century and later the Muslim world offered a dazzling example of civilization. The church forgot the authenticity of the revelation in Christ in order to launch out in pursuit of the same mirage.



# Book Notes & Reviews

## Le Destin d'Israel: Correspondances avec Jules Isaac, Jacques Ellul, Jacques Maritain et Marc Chagall

*Entretiens avec Paul Claudel* [Israel's Destiny: Correspondence with Jules Isaac, Jacques Ellul, Jacques Maritain and Marc Chagall; Interviews with Paul Claudel]. Ed. Bruno Charmet and Yves Chevalier. [Paris:] Parole et Silence, 2007. Pp. 265. ISBN 9782845733343.

### Andre Chouraqui

Reviewed by Joyce Hanks

University of Scranton

Andre Chouraqui (1917-2007) seems to have written almost as many books as Jacques Ellul. The helpful bibliography at the end of this volume lists almost fifty books by him spanning the period 1948-2003, in addition to many articles and other publications. The editors also provide extensive notes to establish the historical context and explain events surrounding the letters they publish here.

Chouraqui met Ellul in 1940, and this volume reproduces some of their correspondence, beginning in 1942, when Ellul was still living in hiding in Martres (near Bordeaux), and continuing until 1992, barely two years before Ellul's death. Chouraqui, an Algerian-born Jew, had to flee the German occupation during World War II, and Ellul took him in, and then helped him and his wife escape. Some of the details surrounding these events can be found in Chouraqui's autobiography, *L'amour fort comme la mort* (Paris: Laffont, 1990). In addition to the twenty-eight letters preserved here, many exchanges between the two thinkers appear to have been lost, but perhaps not irretrievably.

The correspondence between Chouraqui and Ellul preserved in this volume deals with many facets of their relationship, including Ellul's advice as Chouraqui wrote his thesis, the political situation of Israel before and after the 1967 war, and family concerns. Ellul enthusiastically uses Chouraqui's translation of the Hebrew Bible in Bible study sessions, but disagrees flatly with Chouraqui over the possibility of dialogue with Islam, a possibility Ellul rejected. We observe Ellul's growing frustration with what he saw as the French government's failure to support Israel and with the French Protestant tendency to support the Palestinian cause rather than Israel's. Ellul's unflagging

support for Israel stemmed from his “faithfulness as a Christian towards the chosen people” (p. 104; see p. 120).

Most of Chouraqui’s interviews with Paul Claudel were published in *Le Monde* in 1952, in summary form. Claudel (1868-1955), one of the prominent figures in French diplomacy and Catholic literature of the twentieth century, expresses fascination with the establishment of the state of Israel, and deep concern for Jewish people everywhere, as do Chouraqui’s other correspondents in this volume.

Editors Bruno Charmet and Yves Chevalier offer us only one letter from Chouraqui to painter Marc Chagall (and none from Chagall). In this letter Chouraqui offers his advice to Chagall (1887-1985) following their conversation concerning the ethical question posed by the Jewish painter’s decision whether to create biblical paintings for an unused Catholic chapel (in Vence, southern France; the paintings are now located in Nice).

Chouraqui and Jacques Maritain (1882-1973), famous French philosopher and Thomist theologian, corresponded mainly about their publications, but also concerning more personal family concerns, and about the Catholic Church’s stance during World War II. Maritain was one of the early Catholic writers to make public statements about anti-Semitism.

After his wife and daughter were deported to Auschwitz, historian Jules Isaac (1877-1963) began to investigate the roots of anti-Semitism. He became convinced of the historical significance of mistaken Christian thinking regarding the Jews, and wrote extensively on the subject. He was received by Pope John XXIII, who agreed to put the relationship of the Church and the Jewish people on the agenda for the Second Vatican Council. Chouraqui played an important role in this effort, and in the relationship between the state of Israel and the Vatican generally, including the period when he served as deputy mayor of Jerusalem. He made a lifelong effort to promote dialogue between Jews and Christians, and often spoke of this matter in his letters to Ellul, who shared his concern and worked toward the same ends.

Although most of Chouraqui’s other correspondents are better known than Ellul, the exchanges between these two give evidence of a special closeness, probably springing from their shared danger during World War II. Chouraqui addresses each of the other men as “vous,” the formal “you” pronoun in French, reserving the familiar “tu” form for Ellul alone.

## **The Reception of Jacques Ellul’s Critique of Technology: An Annotated Bibliography**

**Joyce Hanks**

Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007.

**Reviewed by Darrell J. Fasching**

University of South Florida, Tampa

Even if you do not know who Jacques Ellul is, you would know from the title of this bibliography and the sheer number of pages it contains (546) that he was an extraordinary thinker to have prompted such a diligent and comprehensive a bibliography of the scholarly responses to his work. Joyce Hanks's work as Jacques Ellul's bibliographer (e.g., *Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works* (206 pages), in *Research in Philosophy and Technology*, Supplement 5 (JAI Press, 2000) and now this work as the bibliographer of the scholarship on Ellul speaks eloquently of her love and respect for the work of Ellul. In turn she deserves the respect and admiration of the entire international community of Ellul scholars for making this thorough and astonishing contribution.

How does one write a review of a bibliography as comprehensive as this. There is no one who has a better command of this literature than Joyce Hanks. Certainly I do not. I can only say that I am astonished at its comprehensiveness. I can't imagine that anything of significance is missing here, unless it was written in the last few months. The bibliography is divided into three chapters. The first covers books, articles and interviews, the second dissertations and the third reviews of Ellul's work. These chapters are followed by an author index and a selected subject index. The book covers the scholarly response to Ellul over his entire career from its earliest stages in the 1930s until his death in 1994 and beyond (to 2007) as his influence continues to reverberate throughout the postmodern world. This astonishing 546 page volume is a treasure trove for Ellul scholars. All Ellul scholars need a copy of this volume on their desk and every university library should have a copy. I would urge every Ellul scholar to make sure both are true.

## Hope in the Thought of Jacques Ellul

**Lawrence Terlizzese**

Eugene OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005.

**Reviewed by Andy Alexis-Baker**

Asociated Mennonite Seminaries, Elkhart IN

In this book, Lawrence Terlizzese argues that hope is a crucial concept in Ellul's thought. Hope provides the counterpoint to the world's despair and challenges a static world to change. Terlizzese convincingly offers new insights into Ellul's thought that other scholars have either missed or dismissed as utopian. Hope, according to Terlizzese, informs Ellul's view on eschatology, technique, politics and his vision for alternatives.

Terlizzese demonstrates that eschatology is central to understanding hope in Ellul's thought. Ellul agreed with classical apocalypticism in its "pessimistic view of politics, world-denial, hope for the next world and discontinuity between the kingdom of God and human history" (28). Yet Christians realize eschatology in the present through obedience. With secular apocalypticism he agreed that humans do not need God to

destroy the world—we can do that just fine on our own. God’s most terrible judgment is allowing us to follow our own desires and to enslave ourselves to technique. With deconstructionism he agreed that there is no intrinsic meaning to history except in relation to Christ. Despite history’s meaninglessness, history’s devolution and classical eschatology’s spiritualizing and pacifying of Christianity, which have allowed for technique to imprison the world, Ellul saw cracks in the prison walls. On the basis of the future, Christians can critique technique. Once they begin to say no on the basis of this eschatology, they can realize it in their lives and witness to a different future.

Technique encloses the world and offers abundant material comforts but denies meaning for life. Thus although technique’s tomorrow will be better, it will not mean anything. This is false hope or optimism, which Terlizzese identifies as *espoir* in Ellul’s works. Yet this false hope leads to people feeling trapped, unable to change things even as they see technology creating massive problems. However, Terlizzese shows that Ellul saw hope in this recognition. It is the beginning of consciousness which leads to action.

The most problematic parts of the book are when Terlizzese attempts to tame Ellul. For example, Terlizzese believes that Ellul did not ground his anarchism in a more philosophical basis, nor in any view the Bible had about “states.” He also claims that Ellul wanted to dismantle the ideology behind the state without destroying the state. Yes and no. Prior to the modern state, anarchism did not exist. Thus anarchism is a response to the modern state and the rise of technique. So on one level all anarchism is a modern response to a specific political situation. However, Ellul reads the prophets and Jesus over against those who rule others. This suggests his anarchism is more than a timebound response to the nation-state and technique. Ellul suggests that all institutions, at all times and places, must be questioned because they represent a threat to human practices and our freedom to follow Christ. After all, Ellul argued against utopianism and for “permanent revolution” (Ellul, *Presence of the Kingdom*, 43, 48). Why do they always represent a threat? Because they represent power of all kinds: “money, personal authority, social status, economic structure, military force, politics, artifice, sentimental or material extortion, seduction, spiritual influence.” These powers are in fact a type of good, a good that is external to the day-to-day activities that humans engage in to better our communities and lives. These external goods have set themselves up as the primary motivators to engage in any activity: political or otherwise. Since they have become ends in themselves, rather than the goods of freedom, we have no reason to attain them by becoming good human beings. Thus they are a permanent threat, and I would argue that Ellul sees them in this way. That does not make him anti-institution, but he recognizes the need to balance the institutions’ power with other power, in all times. His anarchism is more than superficial, Terlizzese does not seem to recognize that.

Finally, should Terlizzese ever revise his book, I would suggest deleting the long, distracting footnotes that sometimes run for pages, dropping the male biased language from his prose (that is. “humanity” for “man”), and adding an index. The book contains several spelling and other typographical errors, e.g. page 90 “crowed” should be

“crowded” and page 101 “Brave New Word” should be “Brave New World”; on page 91 epidemic is partially italicized. Finally, Terlizzese’s extended Ellul quotation on page 45 left out punctuation and left a sentence dangling; on page 69 Terlizzese left out “its” from “cannot curb growth”; on page 87 he added a list of atrocities to the Ellul quotation; and on page 91 Terlizzese added “must” to the quotation. I didn’t check all the quotations, but these spot checks suggest that he and the editors needed to be more careful at times. Nevertheless, these flaws do not override the overall value of this book in correcting previous views of Ellul. Ellul may not let us sleep soundly, but not because he was hopeless; quite the contrary.

## ***Shades of Loneliness: Pathologies of a Technological Society***

**Richard Stivers**

Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004. 148 pages.

**Reviewed by Jacob VanVleet**

Diablo Valley College, Concord CA.

In *Shades of Loneliness*, social scientist Richard Stivers gives us a broad and insightful perspective on the phenomenon of loneliness as a symptom of technological civilization. Stivers persuasively argues that mental disorders - manifestations or “shades” of intense loneliness - have their origin in the structure of societies, specifically those that are dominated by technology.

Stivers begins by describing what he calls “the technological personality”: the modern self that is conflicted, cold, and impersonal. The technological personality is emotionally conditioned by the mass media, lacking genuine individuality while compensating for and covering up the increasing fear and loneliness within.

Stivers points out that technology has created various types of stress: the tempo of society, forms of communication, overcrowding, noise, and the workplace. Living within these pressures, the technological personality is forced to become a “stimulus shield:” a combination of psychological traits - from emotional indifference to internalization of certain machines - which protects the individual from the harsh and chaotic realities of the technological society. However, Stivers maintains, the stimulus shield cannot protect one from his or her deep, inner loneliness.

In his chapter, “Psychological and Cultural Conflict,” Stivers then draws from the work of J.H. van den Berg, Karen Horney, and Jacques Ellul. Here, Stivers argues that technological civilization fuels loneliness by creating intense contradiction and ambiguity in modern life. In this chapter, Stivers also begins to outline what he sees as four major contradictions produced by the technological society, each with its own subsequent chapter.

The first major contradiction is a result of the intermixed, confused values of the technological civilization, which emphasizes success, control, and winning on the one hand, yet also values affection on the other. Thus, modern neuroses often involve a compulsive need for both power and love simultaneously (75). Using Horney's terminology, Stivers argues that one's attempt to "move against others" is illustrated in one's need for power and control, while "moving towards others" is demonstrated in one's need for affection and love. Shrouded in the ambiguity and confusion of technological culture, love and power are often nearly indistinguishable as they co-exist in unhealthy tension.

The second contradiction of the technological society is between the rational and the irrational. This is illustrated in obsessive-compulsive symptoms on the one hand, and in impulsive symptoms on the other. Stivers states: "Like all forms of neurosis, the obsessive-compulsive style is an exaggeration and intensification of the sociological context: the obsessive-compulsive style reflects technological and bureaucratic rationality" (97). Mirroring technological rationality, this form of neurosis was identified by Karl Marx and Max Weber, who referred to "the bureaucratic mind," in which one's reality has become "a purely material reality of objects and power relations" (97). In contrast, impulsive ways of relating to the modern world are instinctual and not subject to reason. This neurosis, like the obsessive-compulsive, is a result of the technological society's manipulation of one's emotions and instincts. While the obsessive-compulsive obeys technical rules, the impulsive individual relies on reflex rather than reason, blindly led by the media and advertising.

The third contradiction is between power and meaning. According to Stivers, "Technological power has led to the erosion of common moral meaning and created a false meaning in its place" (72). The result of this contradiction can be seen in two psychological responses: narcissism and depression. The narcissist experiences powerlessness, and responds by wholeheartedly putting his or her faith in various techniques - often at the expense of others - in order to gain a sense of power and meaning. Conversely, the depressed person experiences meaninglessness and is overtaken by a sense of hopelessness and helplessness. According to Stivers, our society is one marked by a "dialectic of narcissism and depression" (121).

The final contradiction that arises from the technological civilization is between unity and fragmentation. This is demonstrated in two common symptoms: paranoia and schizophrenia. As a unity that controls, manipulates, and strips people of their freedom, the technological system creates paranoid individuals: those who recognize technology's omnipresence and feel a profound loss of autonomy (131). The technological system also leads to severe psychological fragmentation; namely, schizophrenia. The individual faces inner loneliness, anxiety, and depression, while wearing masks of pseudocheerfulness for employers, colleagues, and neighbors. Thus, "schizophrenia takes the technological personality to its logical conclusion" (143).

Stivers has provided us with a profoundly persuasive analysis of technological civilization. He has conclusively demonstrated that technology is the factor most respon-

sible for loneliness and forms of mental illness in our society today. It is my sincere hope that *Shades of Loneliness* will find its way into the hands of many readers.

## News & Notes

—Charbonneau Collection

Daniel Cerezuelle has completed his own preliminary organization of some 35 boxes of papers and manuscripts of Bernard Charbonneau, Jacques Ellul's long time close friend, conversation partner, and collaborator on many projects over the years.

The Institute of Political Studies at the University of Bordeaux has agreed to catalog and house the Charbonneau collection alongside the Jacques Ellul collection and make it available to researchers. Cerezuelle continues to search for some rare Charbonneau documents and hopes to add these as well as a series of photos of Ellul and Charbonneau to the collection. .

— ELLUL oN-LINE DISCUSSIoN GRoUP

Rick Herder, IJES member at Georgia State University, tells us that a group of forty or so people have joined the Facebook group "People who Read Jacques Ellul and Still use Computers." The group is open to anyone wishing to discuss Ellul and his ideas concerning technology, theology, etc.

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The IJES (with its francophone sister-society, L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul) links together scholars and friends of various specializations, vocations, backgrounds, and nations, who share a common interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), long time professor at the University of Bordeaux. Our objectives are (1) to preserve and disseminate his literary and intellectual heritage, (2) to extend his social critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) to extend his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

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**For the Critique of Technological Civilization**



”All life today is in fact oriented to politics. . . politics has gradually invaded everything...

"It is a wrong question, then, to ask whether the Christian should take part in politics. He is fully doing so already. . . The only question is to know how to participate in such a way as to bring a certain freedom into this order of necessity... "

-Jacques Ellul

The Ethics of Freedom (1976), pp. 374-75.

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### **For the Critique of Technological Civilization**

#### **Founded 1988**

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## From the Editor

This has to be one of the most interesting issues in the twenty year history of the *Ellul Forum*. We invited our readers to submit brief reflective essays on “How Ellul Has Affected My Practical Politics.” Twelve of our IJES members responded and we present them here in alphabetical order. Three of our contributions come from France, the Netherlands, and New Zealand. The other nine are from various parts of the USA. Some come at the topic from a Christian perspective, others not.

This fall the USA will hold its presidential election once again. Canada is also the scene of a national political campaign. Certainly there is great sound and fury, strong emotion, and bitter debate about the various candidates and political platforms. Is it all a grand “political illusion”—all of little importance or true consequence? Beneath the surface froth of personalities, current events, and today’s “breaking news” is it really the bureaucracy of the state inexorably following Technique that decides and then implements its understanding of the “one best way” in every field it touches? (Would a President Gore have pursued the same foreign relations and domestic antiregulatory actions as a President Bush?). Are candidate differences (e.g., Obama vs. McCain) inconsequential ephemera? Is our best move to reject the nation-state and its political structures and activities? If voting amounts to an illusory “participation” in an illusory “politics,” if it is utterly ineffective, does that suggest that we should boycott the electoral process? But then should “effectiveness” be the criterion by which we decide to vote (or do anything else)? Isn’t that yielding to the spirit of Technique?

Ellul’s insights on the political illusion, the state, propaganda and technique are as brilliantly insightful and challenging as ever. So are his emphases on presence in our neighborhoods, on introducing contradiction, on strategic anarchism, on representing the humanity of the opposition to our own party or movement, on resisting and questioning all powers, on looking at maincurrents beneath the surface instead of sound bites and isolated bits of information, on bringing hope to those around us.

As our readers demonstrate in this issue, there is no Ellulian orthodoxy in politics any more than theology. Remember his famous words: “I want only to provide my readers with the means to think out for themselves, the meaning of their existence.”

**David W. Gill**  
Associate Editor

# Wild & Untamed

by Andy Alexis-Baker

*Andy Alexis-Baker earned an M.A. in theology and ethics at the Associated Mennonite Seminary (Indiana). He has been a prime mover in the Jesus Radicals anarchist movement inspired by Jacques Ellul and other leaders.*

As a life-long anarchist who converted to Christianity while bound to a prison cell, I came to a radical, orthodox Christianity in part by the writings of Jacques Ellul. Although I am indebted to Ellul's book *Anarchism and Christianity* for helping me connect my politics to my faith, it is his critique of the technological society that has recently had the biggest impact on my life and politics. In particular, his reading of Genesis 1-9, that has moved me away from an anarcho-syndicalist position towards a green anarchist standpoint.

According to Ellul, Genesis depicts a pre-civilized setting in which society as we know it did not yet exist. In this garden, Adam and Eve lived in communion with their Creator, with one another and with the natural world as they foraged for the plants God provided for food and lived among the creatures for whom they were called to care. However, they were tempted to use green things for more than they had been instructed and sought to change their social environment by transforming themselves and their relationship to God and the untamed world of which they were a part. In *What I Believe* (WB) Ellul expands and applies this Biblical exegesis in his view of human history. Rejecting Thomas Hobbes' view of pre-civilized society as one of poor, solitary individuals living short-lived and violent lives, Ellul emphasizes that before the dawn of agriculture and modern civilization people lived in relative harmony with each other and their environment and were quite well off.

Drawing on Marshall Sahlin's analysis of the "Original Affluent Society" (WB, 107), Ellul argues that it is the dawn of agriculture that created divisions of labor, hierarchy, patriarchy, wars and poverty (WB, 105-106, 118). He then outlines a history in which people who domesticate animals and plant life, eventually domesticate each other (WB, 120, 219) and create cities that extract resources from the surrounding countryside to survive. As their populations grew and strained the resources of the domesticated environment, they had to find new resources to continue, so they waged war on other cities (WB, 220). They also created laws in order to civilize each other and the natural world (WB, 121) because the natural world began to seem so threatening. They were completely alienated from their former life of affluence and leisure once they became civilized.

As I have become convinced of Ellul's assertion that that civilization and violence are interconnected, I have also come to favor deep ecology, radical environmentalism and anarcho-primitivism. This shift to a new form of anarchism has forced me to see that I had more hope and faith in the technological system than I realized and has moved me towards an even more Ellulian view of the technological society. Even a quick read of *The Technological Society* and *Propaganda* readily reveals that Ellul had no

hope in technique. Instead, he found hope in Jesus and in faithfulness to his way. This is why his critique of and solutions to the technological society were largely theological and eschatological at their core.

Reading and understanding Ellul during our present ecological crisis has made it possible to see both his work and the civilization in which we live with new eyes. The coming oil peak and the futility of the “green” alternatives to meet the gaping needs oil will leave behind is another sign that technology cannot save us. If anything, it reveals that our entire civilized way of life may well collapse (the politicians never tell us this truth). My initial reaction to this news was despair and hopelessness: surely it is the end of the world and Jesus would return before allowing such a catastrophe. But then I remember, our technological civilization is not “the world” nor is it “hopeful.” The collapse of Western civilization would not mean the end of the world, that Jesus is coming back, or the end of hope. It would only mean the collapse of one way of living—a way of living that much of the world has survived without or has been betrayed by. The fact that I had placed my hope in technology and Western civilization without really knowing it challenged and perhaps even weakened my Christian faith.

One of Ellul’s practices in response to the technological society and to Western civilization was to teach urban youth survival skills. From 1930 onwards he and his friend Charbonneau would take a group far from the city and into the wilderness and teach them basic survival skills in an effort to give them a taste of what liberty was really like (*Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology and Christianity*, 84). What might seem like an eccentric experiment on his part has increasingly become a meaningful act for me to imitate. To that end my wife and I grow most of our own food and I am learning to forage for the plant food that God had given us to eat. This is no attempt to get back to Eden or to attain a level of purity or perfection that cannot be achieved this side of the eschaton. It is however a way to take seriously the Biblical vision for human relationship to the Creator, to the natural world around us and to its inhabitants. It is a way to resist the onslaught of technology and the pressures of a civilized world that has brought itself to the brink through overconsumption. It is a way to put Ellul’s thought into practice in my own small corner of the world. It is a “politics” that reveals the true violent nature of the “polis.”

## Prophets in Politics

by Cliff Christians

*Clifford Christians is Editor of the Ellul Forum. He recently retired from a long career as professor of communication studies at the University of Illinois-Urbana.*

Ellul’s *Propaganda* and *The Technological Society* have always been more determinative for me than his *Political Illusion*, *Politics of God*, *Politics of Man*, and *Autopsy of Revolution*. I know that his work fits together as an organic whole, but it’s not his

anarchism that inspires my politics as a citizen or during the relentless presidential campaign this fall in the United States.

The counterpoint to *Propaganda* in Ellul is *The Judgment of Jonah*, covert propaganda the problem in media-rich societies and prophecy the solution. Instead of weaving humans into the technological whole, the prophetic word announces freedom and transformation. Prophets speak the truth—they get it from knowing history or from a keen intelligence and righteous living or by revelation from the Divine being. Jonah demanded that Babylon repent of its evil ways, but as with all prophets it's with a constructive intent—they plead with people to come home, not send them to perdition.

In these terms, Ellul doesn't teach me anarchism, first of all, but to look for prophets in politics and resist propaganda tooth and nail.

For Ellul, the prophet sees beneath the surface to the fundamental issues underneath. Prophets cut through the idolatrous attitudes and desires that drive technology forward. Prophecy demythologizes—in Ellul's case, the Myth of Technique. It severs at its root any blind faith that technological prowess can lead from one achievement to another. Thus, the enemy in the prophet's mind is not technology per se but our sacralizing them. Prophetic resistance is not aimed at various technologies themselves, but intends to restructure the worldview undergirding them.

Over my lifetime, Ellul has been teaching me what being a prophet means. Ellul brought a prophetic critique up from the footnote and out of the epilogue to make it characteristic of one's thinking overall. In the prefaces to several of his books, he is called "prophetic." Dale Brown in a typical statement applauds his "Amos-like ministry to the technological society." True to the prophet's vision, Ellul raised fundamental issues about the technological society already in 1954 when new technology was largely considered the key to society's progress.

And so I emulate the prophetic Ellul, warts and all. While Rupert Hall's caustic criticism is not representative, it points to a weakness: "Ellul lives on black bread and spring water...The prophet whose cry is only, 'Woe, ye are dammed' walks unheeded." As Abraham Heschel makes clear, prophets bring the wayward home. Ellul overall does so too, but not always with the quality of the Hebrew tradition.

Even with some ambiguities about its meaning and execution, Ellul's prophecy lights my pathway into politics. And when I see it as the counterpoint to propaganda, prophecy becomes crystal clear. As propaganda, media information floods in from all areas of the globe and evaporates quickly. Underneath the rushing surface are deep currents, but spectacle captures our attention. Correctly gauging center and periphery becomes impossible. The citizen is not informed but inebriated, not enabled but drowned. Ellul's description of people obsessed with current events directly contradicts democracy's image of a public attentive and vitally involved. Citizens riveted to news avoid "the truly fundamental problems" and "lacking landmarks" draw no accurate relationship between events and truth. The information explosion produces not informed, but crystallized humans. Ellul compares that with a frog incessantly stimulated—its



muscles turn rigid. Decisions based on sociological propaganda are neither imaginative nor discerning.

Political campaigns are the epitome of propaganda. Schooled by Ellul, I have no interest in the endless news coverage of details and slogans and gaffes. Political advertising—30/60 second spots—I ignore totally. But “Meet the Press” is sometimes satisfactory with its dialogic format. The European model of short campaigns with longer speeches in concentrated blocks of time, provided as a public service and not for commercial gain, has possibilities. The New England town meeting in its various configurations is the opposite of electronic campaigns and an arena in which the prophetic word has a chance.

Ellul also makes it clear to me that politicians advocating the technological fix do not speak with prophetic insight. Exaggerated emphasis on magnitude, control, and uniformity—what Pacey calls the virtuosity values—I avoid like a plague. Technics augmenting itself, Ellul would call it. Moral purpose is sacrificed to technical excellence. Thus the answer to the energy crisis is more efficient engines or more available coal or biofuels. Restructuring bureaucracy will lead to savings that we can use elsewhere. The answer to a military threat is superior weapons.

Prophets focus on the problem, rather than shortterm, half-way answers. They are more concerned about getting the issues straight than surrendering to a utilitarian penchant for immediate results. Of course, an unending list of short-term crises demand our attention in a limited sense. But the prophet worries long term about our attenuated philosophy of life, the instrumentalist worldview invading our spirit, the mystique of technique that eats into our being.

Accordingly, in following Ellul, I look for action in the intermediate. For him, the revolutionary axis can only be at the interstices—at the cracks in the instrumentalism where some wiggle room is possible. The prophet’s battle with philosophies of life must be nurtured in backyards, close to the ground, among voluntary associations, NGOs, families, churches and neighborhoods. Ellul urges us to promote pluralism. He seeks all kinds of subcultures “which diversify a society’s fundamental tendencies” and present themselves “not as negations of the state, but as something else not under its tutelage.” Together these subcultures can provide a new infrastructure, a fresh web of interlocking relationships. Depth, responsibility, vision within the intermediate domain—these describe for me how to live prophetically.

In politics, where are the prophets? Martin Luther King, Jr is an obvious example of speaking the truth to set us free. Václav Havel is another, president of the Czech Republic for a decade and playwright for his lifetime. Adlai Stevenson II, U.S. presidential candidate, spoke with the intelligence that electrified the public toward citizenship. South Africa’s Nelson Mandela was a huge source of strength as the country was established in 1994. And the numerous politicians who live and speak prophetically on the local level are the primary saviors of democratic life. In ancient Greece, when Pericles spoke they admired his great oration; Socrates inspired them to greater achievement. Socrates is Ellul’s prophet in ancient terms.

# The Political Path & the Road to God

by Daniel Clendenin

*Daniel Clendenin wrote and later published his Drew University Ph.D. dissertation on "Theological Method in Jacques Ellul." He has served as a university professor in Russia and elsewhere and is now producing a highly regarded weekly e-zine on culture called Journey With Jesus, read by some 7000 subscribers on all the continents.*

With America's presidential election just around the corner, my mind has turned toward one brave pastor, along with a distant memory of a conversation with Jacques Ellul as we stood at the end of his driveway in Bordeaux.

In April of 2004, pastor and scholar Greg Boyd preached a controversial series of six sermons called "The Cross and the Sword" at his 5,000 member Woodland Hills Church in Saint Paul, Minnesota. As he explained in his book that grew out of those sermons (*The Myth of a Christian Nation; How the Quest for Political Power is Destroying the Church*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), in those months preceding the national elections, Boyd wanted to warn his congregation about "nationalistic and political ideology," of identifying the Christian Gospel with any political point of view, of cherished but badly mistaken convictions like the belief that America is a Christian nation, or that believers should "take back the nation for God."

No, Boyd preached, "the path through politics is not the road to God." No, he would not endorse conservative candidates or announce anti-gay rallies from the pulpit. No, he would not distribute antiabortion literature, pass out voter guides, or fly a flag in the sanctuary. Many parishioners thanked Boyd for his wisdom and boldness, but others were not so enamored. About a thousand people left the congregation.

Boyd makes a sharp distinction between the kingdom(s) of this world that are characterized by what he calls "power over," and the kingdom of God that Jesus announced which is characterized by "power under" (cf. especially Luke 22:25-27 and Philippians 2:1-11). The former is the realm of domination, exploitation, violence, coercion, and self-interest, the latter one of love and self-sacrifice. Jesus calls his followers to do something the state must never do, which is to place the interests of others ahead of your own.

The kingdom that Jesus announced is a radical and counter-cultural alternative to every sort of worldly power, and not merely an attempt to upgrade government to a better level. Jesus, of course, insisted that his kingdom was "not of this world" (John 18:36). Most Christians until the baptism of Constantine lived this distinction, but in Boyd's view the developments after Constantine's conversion have constituted an unmitigated disaster: "The church of resident aliens became a horde of savage warlords. . . We have become intoxicated with the Constantinian, nationalistic, violent mind set of imperialistic Christendom."

With our national elections just a few weeks away, it seems to me that American Christians have not learned the lesson that Boyd has urged. For thirty years it was

easy to criticize conservative Christians like Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and James Dobson for pandering to the Republican Right.

Some of their kind saw the light and deconstructed what was really happening. In his book *Tempting Faith; An Inside Story of Political Seduction* (New York: Free Press, 2006), David Kuo, a former Bush staffer, tells how he resigned when he realized that—surprise!—the Bush administration had done “less than nothing” to fulfill its promises to evangelicals. It was all “a farce, a brazen deception, smear tactics, a mirage.” The grant application for the faith-based initiative process was a sham and probably illegal and unconstitutional. Worst of all, Kuo saw how instead of using politics to further the Gospel, his Bush colleagues played right wing evangelicals like a cheap violin to further their political ends, and in private derided them as dupes, nuts, and crazies. Evangelicals, Kuo discovered, were used and abused as an incredibly gullible gold mine of voters (over 80% of them voted for Bush), nothing more and nothing less. And like in a very bad marriage, the victim still carries favor from its abuser.

Jim Wallis wrote a fine book called *God's Politics*, then hosted a presidential debate for candidates Obama, Edwards, and Clinton. He posed with the three candidates for the camera, smiling from ear to ear. He even pretended to be a neutral arbiter of a civic conversation. It reminded me of a comment by Will Willimon who once told Jerry Falwell, “Jerry, you conservatives are acting just like we liberals did, only the content of the propaganda is different.”

Pastor Rick Warren, apparently as clueless as he was earnest and well-intended, then hosted *both* the Democrat Obama and the Republican McCain in his church (and charged \$500 to \$2000 a ticket to attend), as if it wasn't enough for Christians to be used and abused by one party at a time. And now we've come full circle with evangelicals thrilled with John McCain's selection of Sarah Palin, a gun-toting beauty queen who speaks in tongues and believes that America's war in Iraq is “God's task” for us.

Just once I'd love to see some sort of contemporary replay of the encounter between emperor Theodosius (347-395) and bishop Ambrose of Milan (340-397).

After Theodosius slaughtered 7,000 people in Thessalonika “most unjustly and tyrannically,” Ambrose physically prevented him from entering his church. The Syrian bishop Theodoret (c.393-466) recorded the drama in his *Ecclesiastical History* (V.17-18): “You must not be dazzled by the splendor of the purple that you wear,” thundered Ambrose to Theodosius. “How could you lift in prayer hands which are stained with the blood of such an unjust massacre? Go away, and do not add to your guilt by committing a second crime.” Emperor Theodosius “submitted to the rebuke, and with many tears and groans returned to his palace.” Ambrose later restored him after thirty days of public penance.

In 1987 I interviewed Jacques Ellul at his home, and when we finished we walked outside to the end of his driveway. There he recounted how in 1943 he thought that after the war genuine revolution was possible by starting from scratch with a clean slate. All they needed was the right people, he thought. “It was the biggest mistake of

my life. After that, I never thought that anything could be changed by politics. I often think of that conversation when I hear Christians of both the left and the right argue for the right person, as if changing the actors will alter the script. Twenty-five years ago Ellul pointed me in the direction that Boyd articulates: “The path of politics is not the road to God.”

## **Beneath the Froth: Witnessing to the Powers by Chuck Fager**

*Chuck Fager has been Director of Quaker House [www.quakerhouse.org](http://www.quakerhouse.org) in Fayetteville NC since late 2001.*

Few if any thinkers have affected my “practical politics” as much as Jacques Ellul. Among the many of his books that could be listed in this connection, let me mention *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, *False Presence of the Kingdom*, *The New Demons*, and *The Meaning of the City*. As these indicate, the influence has come more from his religious works than his sociological writings. From these I’ve drawn two guiding propositions:

First, the most genuine and important “political” impact the church can have in society is to be the church. By “church” I mean the various bodies that have been somehow called into being by the divine spirit; among these, bringing up the rear, I would include my own Society of Friends, or Quakers. Each of these groups manifests a part of the larger Body, and its primary duty and usefulness is in doing that as authentically as it can.

Secondly, Ellul’s identification of large social forces as “the new demons” helped me understand that much - -maybe most - -of the frothy daily political scene is just that: froth, with little impact on the deeper currents beneath. I should add here that I may differ from Ellul to some extent in regarding these “powers” as having more autonomy and even personality than he did, at least in later works.

To be more specific, my discernment is that the U.S. is firmly in the grip of several intertwined powers: first that of war, then lies, then greed, and not least a kind of blindness about these facts. These powers have brought us well over the edge of being a police state and a rapacious empire. In this situation, the tasks of serious people are above all those of survival and resistance. Survival is defined here primarily as the mandate to become and stay aware of this condition; resistance can take a myriad of forms, with non-violence being my own commitment.

This discernment was made possible to a large extent by what I learned from Ellul, as is my own response. I’m fortunate in that my day-to-day work largely reflects these two principles: I’m the Director of a Quaker peace project located next door to Ft. Bragg, North Carolina. This is not only one of the largest US military bases; it is also

the crossroads for several crucial pieces of the present American war efforts, including that monster I call the “Torture Industrial Complex.”

My work here has made only too plain that American militarism is a great “power and principality,” moving with great autonomy. It shapes America’s more formal politics much more than our politics shapes militarism.

In the face of such power, which is spiritual as much as physical, our response has been to stay as focused on holding up what Quakers call our Peace Testimony. We do this in numerous, mostly mundane ways. It’s evident that we’ve not stopped any wars; yet this feels to me like genuine spiritual combat. Moreover, the work here has been upheld for nearly forty years, and we are set to continue for another forty. Ellul’s work helps me have hope that this witness is of value in the divine schema.

My political “strategy” then, is an extension of this experience, and the two principles: I’d like to see more such projects developed, not necessarily all Quaker, but doing parallel work, networked and mutually supportive. By so doing, our little church would be more itself, more a part of the larger Body, and would do its bit to name and unmask the powers. I’ve written in more detail about this in a piece called “A Quaker Declaration of war,” which interested readers can find at our website.

As far as the conventions of “practical politics,” I do vote, and have preferences among the available options. But I don’t take an active part in partisan political work, and have limited expectations for the outcome; beneath the froth, the deep currents continue to run. Apropos of which, I would note that in the current presidential campaign, both leading candidates are promising Americans more war and a bigger military, though each says it in a distinctive voice.

These are promises that, alas, I expect the winner to keep. And thus with divine assistance, we will continue to be busy here for the foreseeable future.

## What Divides Us & What Unites Us

by Joyce Hanks

*Joyce Hanks is the author of several outstanding bibliographies of Jacques Ellul. She recently retired from the faculty of the University of Scranton (PA) and will soon be serving with the Peace Corps in Southeast Asia.*

Grateful as I feel for a whole series of Jacques Ellul’s theological insights, his political ideas may have penetrated my thinking even more deeply. They have significantly affected my choices and my everyday life. It all goes against the grain! We have thought of political stances as absolute, but Ellul shows again and again how, in the end, the right and the left have more in common than we ever suspected, so much so that they often become indistinguishable as ideologies. This observation seems especially relevant during a hard-fought election campaign, when I note how selectively we tend to judge what we hear, depending on whether it comes from “our side” or the “other

side.” You would think that only one party or the other had any understanding of present circumstances, any contribution to make, or any intention of serving the public interest rather than selfish goals. Ellul has sharpened my listening and my judgment, but I have never felt inclined to abstain from voting, as he claimed to have done. On the contrary. I have learned through Ellul’s recounting of his own experience how little power government officials can usually exercise, since technicians must make most of the decisions. But I still want to participate in choosing who exercises that limited power.

Ellul’s relativism went very far indeed. He believed strongly that when we take up the cause of the oppressed, we need to understand that whenever the oppressed triumph (in a revolutionary situation, a war, etc.), they become the oppressors of those who previously oppressed them. If we really side with the oppressed because of their oppression, says Ellul, we will then change sides! Ellul saw this pattern play out when France emerged “on top” after World War II. Occupiers who had failed to escape quickly became scapegoats, regardless of what role they had played during the war. Ellul went to bat for simple German soldiers who stood to bear excessive punishment at a time when understandably strong feelings tended to overwhelm sound judgment, immediately after an oppressed people regained freedom and power. On a vastly different plane, I believe this principle can apply to winners and losers in politics, including university politics.

I have struggled most with Ellul’s view of politics and the church. He believed that a proper understanding of the bonds that unite us as believers enables us to put our political differences into perspective, rather than to view each other as enemies when we espouse differing political and social views. In this community, the eternal beliefs and the life we have in common must take precedence over lesser beliefs, no matter how strongly held, Ellul maintained. In our present-day polarized society, I have found it nearly impossible to react calmly when believers I associate with use scathing words to put down my point of view and all people who espouse it, on the assumption that no true believer could possibly hold to such a stance. I have usually managed to hold my tongue, but not always! Then, in a few cases, I have found the strength to seek out the person whose words seemed so offensive, in order to try to talk about our differences. Usually this has turned into something extraordinarily difficult, but also, finally, unspeakably rewarding.

I don’t know if I would have tried to follow Ellul in this matter if I had not become convinced that he had grasped a biblical teaching I had previously preferred to ignore. In any case, building a relationship on the basis of what we have in common rather than turning our backs on one another because of different points of view on lesser matters has far-reaching possibilities. Ellul pointed to the church as a place where we should find we can discuss important political and social differences without stigmatizing each other, since we can appreciate the relative character of such differences. This type of discussion can help us appreciate each others’ points of view, and even occasionally encounter something in the other fellow’s stance that strikes us as superior to our own.

Once this happens to us, we become almost useless as party stalwarts, according to Ellul. We will tend to temper strident statements, to take issue with extreme positions, and to point out the value in opposing viewpoints. None of this gets approval in political circles, Ellul says, but, if we speak carefully, we may serve to lower the level of anger and to blunt the spiral of misunderstandings. And politically monolithic folks may prefer to avoid our company!

In his commentary on the book of Exodus in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, vol. 1<sup>1</sup>, p. 898), Walter Brueggemann comes to the same conclusion as Ellul about the importance of what unites us: "Worship can be an invitation and practice of an 'otherness' *beyond fearful utilitarianism*. Worship can be a place of overriding *belonging at home*, even in the face of our powerful and insistent homelessness. Worship can be a *post-rational embrace of oneness* in a world where we are so deeply and angrily divided."

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## Desacralize & Act, Modestly

by Virginia Landgraf

*Virginia Landgraf works for the American Theological Library Association in Chicago. She wrote her Ph.D. dissertation on Ellul at Princeton.*

I confess a certain temperamental distaste for practical politics. I am more comfortable trying to live my life in a way that will benefit the community than trying to persuade others to choose leaders to enact the right policies. Yet as a teenager, I actively participated in a sacral universe of politics mediated by my family and structured by the Cold War. My family's party and the philosophies and ethos associated with it were "good guys"; the opposition, "bad guys." I covered up my introversion with exaggerated enthusiasm for my family's party and knee-jerk versions of certain philosophies.

After a crisis in my early twenties, for a while I could deal with politics only at a theoretical level. I took comfort in how serious Christian thinkers desacralized politics, neither absolutizing its claims nor denying its function. Political philosophies, when

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<sup>1</sup> Ellul, *Propaganda*, 169.

relativized by basic tenets of Christian theology (such as the universality of human beings' creation in the image of God, fallenness, possible redemption, etc.) may be not absolute but complementary, depending on the needs of the political body. Should one put more emphasis on individual or community? Tradition or innovation? Harmony with nature as God created it or repair of fallen creation?

Yet I could not rest content with hypothetical neutrality as a complete expression of what Christians should want in the political realm. I had spent time in developing countries and with people who are marginally employable in a world which values speed and material success. Regardless of my conclusions about the effectiveness of particular political programs at helping the poor, I could see that the God of the Bible is concerned with liberating the oppressed, became incarnate as an ordinary laborer, and was crucified alongside common criminals.

Jacques Ellul's work entered into my deliberations as both support and challenge. He engaged opposing schools of thought as few thinkers dared. He provided more reasons to desacralize politics: the difficulty of finding accurate information about existing conditions or outcomes of policies; the difficulty politicians have in carrying through their programs, given the autonomy of technique; and the call of Christian freedom to go beyond the limited set of choices put forth by society. Although as an anarchist he refused to vote beyond local elections where he could personally know the candidates, in his environmental activities he engaged public policy in ways that went beyond an individualism or neutrality that throws up its hands at things supposedly beyond its control.

I have come to question Ellul's absolute disjunction between power/manipulation and love/freedom, both because of lacunae within Ellul's own work and the belief that the Bible has a more supple view of the nature of divine and human action. I find a refusal to vote in politics above a certain size overly rigid, because it rules out in advance the possibility that there may be significant differences between candidates. Thus I continue to vote and engage from time to time in other low-commitment activities commonly considered political, such as writing letters to representatives, signing petitions against torture, or attending antiwar rallies, more from the conviction that "someone ought to say something" than any belief in the purity or efficacy of either representative or direct democracy.

Perhaps the most high-commitment political thing I do - although some might not call it political - is avoiding car ownership, which I have done for over twenty years as an adult. (I would revise my decision if I were responsible for the care of an invalid or felt called to work in a sparsely populated area.) Although not without self-interest - it saves money and helps ensure that I will get exercise - the basic impetus behind this choice is the conviction that a transportation system based on "one adult, one car" is unwise, feeding a vicious circle of increasing traffic, consumerist desire, and environmental degradation. Public policy is one factor in this cycle. In that sense, limiting my car use is political. It helps me know whereof I speak when I write my representatives or talk to people about transportation alternatives. It provides a glimpse of what those



who can't afford a car face in their daily lives. It is not the only choice a Christian might make (especially given different family and vocational circumstances), nor is it some island of purity (we are all dependent on the transportation of supplies), but I do not regret having lived this portion of my life this way.

## Teaching, Thinking, & Friendship

by David Lovekin

*David Lovekin has been professor of philosophy at Hastings College in Nebraska for two decades—as well as an exhibited photographer, jazz bassist, and motorcycle guy. His Texas Ph.D. dissertation was revised and published as Technique, Discourse, & Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul (1991).*

I read Ellul's *The Technological Society* in 1968 and have been occupied by this book ever since, by Ellul's vision and grace and by the disturbing accuracy of his prophecy, which is social criticism, true to the biblical tradition. However, his insights extended much further, concerned as I was (and still am) with a left wing interpretation of Hegel and with his great coconspirator Ernst Cassirer, the founder of a philosophy of culture. Cassirer believed that Hegel's dialectic did not go far enough, did not begin with knowledge grounded in myth and the imagination, and that knowledge seemed to stop with a domineering Absolute. Cassirer interpreted culture as a production of symbolic spirit (*Geist*) coming to know itself in what it made and always attempting a further reach, the philosophy of culture itself. Mind (*Geist*) could not leap over its own shadows, Cassirer concluded, but needed those shadows, nonetheless; Cassirer understood mind as a balance of opposition, necessary to the work of mind itself in its shadow dance.

Wilkinson, the translator of *L'enjeu du siecle*, allowed that the work reminded him of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind (Geist)* and thought that it was indeed a phenomenology of technical mind. Wilkinson also compared it to Plato's *Republic*, at which point I was thoroughly on board. I read Ellul as a philosopher of culture and saw technical consciousness in dialectical drift, pushed and pulled by the various objects it claimed for the real, objects that it had made, concepts made objective. Technology was another shadow show on the cave wall of human experience in its current evolution. Hegel reminded readers of the *Phenomenology* that society was a kind of spiritual zoo in need of transcendental spelunking and Ellul provided the shape of cage that was technique.

I was, in the early seventies, continuing my studies and teaching, playing jazz bass, and learning photography, learning the art of the machine and the lessons of improvisation. I was much against the Vietnam war but was never forced to put my political beliefs on the line. Instead, I came to care for teaching as the activity of leading students out from somewhere, a radical move understanding "radical" as a turn toward

origins, to the “radix” of matters. I shunned the doctrinaire, agreeing with Ellul’s belief in elementary freedom, in the necessity of keeping necessity at bay. Technique had become the new necessity that needed to be recognized as such, recognized as provisional and as *made*. Few accounts are better than Ellul’s in tracing the origins of technique as a radically new phenomenon.

I am still teaching, now at Hastings College, a Liberal Arts college committed to the base of Western tradition, to leading students through whatever we can still make of the *Trivium* and the *Quadrivium*. I argue that the liberal arts are the arts that make us free and interesting; I’m against turning knowledge into a machinelike rational pursuit of a means transformed into a method that scrapes for absolute efficiency in all things. The best things are often the things that are not done well but are done badly; a failed drawing or poem may lead to a greater success. Certainly, any Cartesian attempt at the clear and distinct—the base for technical consciousness in its turn toward the technical phenomenon—must be made out of the doubtful and ambiguous. This is Descartes’ own path which he often conveniently ignores or denies in the detail of his *Discourse on Method*. Where would that method have gone without the over heated room in Germany that contributed to that fateful night of dreams, which took him to his goal of attempting to unite philosophy, religion, and science? When the question of ultimate objective meaning arises at the end of the “Second Meditation,” Descartes goes to church and turns scholastic argument into a machine to prove the necessary working of God in his creation and in our understanding of it. He needs to be convinced that reason abides and that the Evil Genius has been defeated, or rather, has become an ally in furthering doubt to justify reason. In the *Discourse on Method*, he remarks of the need for using the *niveau de la raison*, well translated as the plumb line of reason. Descartes uses architectural metaphors throughout the *Discourse II*, although in this instance the metaphor attempts a concept. Technique has gone beyond the plumb line although it has roots there.

Ellul’s critique of technical mind I read as a critique of rationality having become a bad infinity. He saw much biblical criticism as the transformation of the Bible into a machine. He reminded that the Bible was couched in an irony that dislodged human pride, hubris, certainly the deadliest of sins. He invoked the power of metaphor in his writing and reading of the past; he noted, for example, that in the technological society morality goes the way of the sunshade on McCormick’s first reaper and that often attempts at freedom are but entries in technique’s filing cabinet.

In my *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul* I contend that Ellul’s distinction between the image and the word has great epistemic force that reminds of the importance of tension between concepts and metaphors in a free understanding. The dialectic, the push and pull of consciousness, stops when communication and understanding are reduced to mere images, to a rigid logical necessity. I devote the last chapter on the cliché, the machine in its new suit, in attempt to further Ellul’s critique. I noted, for example, that Thomas Kuhn’s “paradigm shift” had become a cliché for academicians; the idea comes from *The Struc-*

*ture of Scientific Revolution* , published in 1962 but not much read until 1969 and after, likely because of the power of the word “revolution” at this cultural moment on American college campuses. In an appendix to the 1970 edition Kuhn allowed that he had used the term in twenty-two different ways that many of his readers missed in their attempts to clarify and conceptualize and hence trivialize the notion.

I teach *The Technological Society* nearly every year in my Contemporary Moral Issues class and marvel that it is still in print and that students can be engaged to read it. There may be signs that they are currently more engaged, but I hold my breath. Reality tv only makes sense when television becomes reality; many of my students claim they do not watch television although they admit that in their rooms it is usually on. Television has become just an other person, but a person with no insides.

More important, perhaps, is an increasing “vidiocy” as the “screen” proliferates—cell phone screens, game screens, etc. Also, more important may be the desire for increased visual stimulation with the decreasing signs of lack of judgment and the lack of analytic skills acquired by reading books and writing them or about them. Mark Bauerlein argues convincingly in *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future* that research data proves this decline and hastens the concerns that had been Ellul’s from the late 1930’s. He concludes that students under 30 lack the knowledge of history and cultural wisdom that make a true civility possible, and, moreover, lack the skills for attaining them. Worse, many do not realize that they are living in the dustbin of history.

One of my students found a copy of Harry G. Frankfurt’s *On Bullshit* and found it most interesting. Frankfurt claims that much political discourse had become bullshit, an attitude grounded in utter unconcern for truth. Political claims are often made, he argues, simply to be believed. Thus, bullshit is not a lie; it is worse. It is utter disregard for truth or falsity. Its purpose is to unify belief and action. Ellul, of course, saw this years before in his understanding that *le politique* (ultimate values and concerns) had become *la politique* (technique, means and methods) and that the first illusion was in believing that politics was the supreme activity and then that all had become political. At that point the technical means become the ends and discourse disappears in the blather of sound bytes.

I mostly agree with Plato of the Republic who claimed that there were no just forms of government and that those who did not wish to govern should be the only ones so allowed. I have always avoided politics directly although each year I vote and make my voice heard on local and national issues. I was the president of our faculty senate for one term, and I believe contributed to some important decisions, but I have never felt the desire to further serve. As a teacher and thinker, both forms of committed action, I find fulfillment.

I agree also with Aristotle of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, who claimed that where there was friendship there was no need of justice but where there was justice there was need of friendship as well. Ellul too distrusted politics although he was engaged on many levels, but throughout his philosophical and political life he valued the friendship of Bernard

Charbonneau. Charbonneau, a teacher of geography, introduced him to the importance of technology as the decisive factor. The commitment to friends and loved ones is the force that flies in the face of the political; without that empathy the political is a shallow field. Friendship is the power that politics needs but cannot create or destroy. Ellul often remarked: "Think globally but act locally." This I regard as another affirmation of friendship. My entire academic life was never merely intellectual but dependent on many friends—Donald Phillip Verene, Steven L. Goldman, Max Buller, Carl Mitcham, Dudley Bailey, John O'Banion, W.R. Johnson—to name a few. My students past and present are a crucial part of the mix, and, my wife Terry, is my ground for good and common sense necessary for any intellect.

Plato sometimes referred to the members of his group as the "friends of the Forms", the philosophers. Cicero remarked in the *Tusculan Disputations* that Pythagoras coined the term "philosopher." Pythagoras explained that those who attended the Great Games at Olympia did so for three reasons. Some came for fame, some for money, and some to spectate. The spectators were philosophers. Cicero, further, in the *Disputations* urged that wisdom, the goal of philosophy, was the attempt to see into the divine and human and to discover the causes of each. The notions of the divine and human, the transcendent and the imminent, are two crucial dialectical poles that distinguish speculating and seeing from merely looking. There can be no search for answers if questions do not arise from spectators speculating. And actions issuing from ignorance are to be greatly feared, as Americans of 2008 should clearly understand.

I hope that Americans will take back their country from technical corporate interests, realize that corporations are not persons, and lean toward a true eloquence—the speech of the whole (*le pollitique*) and that politicians in their detest and inability with language come to be seen for what they are: clichés themselves, machines in not very new suits. I intend to support Obama and hope there is more there than "Yes, we can." Hopefully, to echo Gertrude Stein, there is much there there.

As the great Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico noted, providence enters history upside down giving moments their shape, their story, and the focus for speculation that is more than passive viewing. Philosophy, as Hegel's owl of Minerva, contributes to the business of the day by witnessing it and by reminding us all of the importance of both the dayside and the night side. All is not merely a stage but is also a topos for those making the stage, writing the discourse, selling and taking tickets. Ellul's vision of technique as a mentality and mode of being has been the proscenium arch from which I have framed my vision and understanding, which, in turn, supports my life in all directions, both in terms of what it is and what it is not. God does not speak to me but that is no reason not to listen and to know that God is not technique, although it is often so taken. Politicians still couch their visions of the good life in terms of technical development—alternative energy, green technology, and support of an infrastructure, and that is good as it goes. But none of these developments mean much without the friendship and love that move us beyond our Cartesian solipsism

buttressed by the adherence to method and to concepts made into objects which then become concepts.

Love and friendship involve the embrace of the other that is the nemesis of technique and the Cartesian clear and distinct. I attempt to live on the notion that philosophy is the love of the wisdom we desire but do not have and so struggle not to confuse love or friendship with desire or its objects. Ellul has been and is a guide in this struggle, a fulfilling labor with the negative that requires speculation and self development, the true goal of leisure, which is not simply the absence of work. My work stemming from that leisure is hunting and trapping in the spiritual zoo and attempting to clean the spiritual cage of technique, our current incarnation of the Augean stables. Unlike Hercules I expect no reward and know in the end that no king would give it. Speculation is its own reward, a seeing of the self seeing and witnessing the community of seers and doers in further witness.

## Politics as Power over Others

by Didier Nordon

*Didier Nordon (www.didiernordon.org) served as professor of mathematics at the University of Bordeaux. A rich exchange of twelve letters between Nordon and Ellul during 1990-91 was published as L'homme a lui-meme (Paris:Editions du Felin, 1992)*

I came to Bordeaux in 1970. A mathematician, I intended to specialize in Number Theory and Bordeaux was a good place for that. By that time, I had never heard about Ellul. As soon as I settled in Bordeaux, I did hear about him. But I saw no reason why I should read his books. He was a Christian, I am not. He was a sociologist and a philosopher, I am not.

However, my activity as a mathematician went bad. I did not succeed in proving any interesting theorem. Moreover, I started wondering about the meaning and the value of such an attempt. Frantic specialization led my fellow mathematicians towards achievements. But each of them only mastered a tiny field. Specialization appeared to me as a poor way of thinking. I saw no meaning in writing papers which only a handful of specialists scattered all over the world would understand.

That was a time of dejection. And I started reading books which could enable me to consider the role scientists play in the shaping of our society. One of these books happened to be Jacques Ellul's *Le Systeme technicien*. The book does not deal with mathematics but it induced me to see scientific research as part of the more general technician system. And that was fantastic! I stopped feeling dominated by successful mathematicians. I started seeing them as mere cogs within the technician system. I was and still am very grateful to that book. It helped me to overcome my inferiority complex (not make it disappear, though!). My mathematical failure was no longer my own personal failure. It involved a political meaning. I could view it as a refusal to take

part in the technician system. Using Ellul's book, I then published papers to scrutinize the role of scientific research and to criticize it.

As Ellul's sociological work is based upon his religious faith, I was led to another question. How is it that I agree with most of Ellul's views on sociology though I don't share his faith? I started exchanging letters with Ellul dealing with that matter. Our letters eventually resulted in a book which was published in 1992 under the title *L'Homme a lui-meme*.

Ellul helped me to choose the way I acted as a researcher. I stopped thinking about mathematical tricks and started thinking about social issues. Ellul thus shaped my professional behavior. In that respect, he has had a political influence on me.

He has had another one. His writings point out that one has to be very cautious when one reads a paper or listens to the radio, because propaganda lies everywhere, even in democratic countries. Ellul made me aware of that fact.

As for the question "To vote or not to vote", I feel uneasy. Like Ellul, I view elections as deceptions. Still, I do vote quite often - 2 times out of 3, say. When a candidate seems too dangerous, I vote for the other one! But voting is an abdication. Whoever the elected candidate is, he/she will fail to keep his/her promises. I know that. I should not find myself constrained to express myself within the distorted frame of elections. I should be involved in some political or social action. But I am not! In my opinion, political action always amounts to an attempt to take some sort of power over other individuals. And I condemn any kind of power. As a result, I remain passive most of the time. That is why I vote, which I am not proud of.

Let me add a last remark. Not to vote is a necessary condition to be an anarchist, but it is not a sufficient one. All anarchists regard state as their worst enemy. So no one can be simultaneously an anarchist and a state servant. Ellul was a state servant (as I am). Thus he could not be a "real anarchist". Neither can I!

## Affecting Culture, or Not

by T. Daniel Schotanus

*Tjalling Daniel Schotanus is former senior university lecturer in water and geo-information management, now high school mathematics teacher and amateur theologian in Ede, the Netherlands*

Recently, I thought I would be able to thwart a midlife crisis through the study of evangelical theology at the *Vrije Universiteit*, Amsterdam. It originally seemed less dangerous to me than taking up motorcycle riding, less tiring than spending my evenings at the local fitness center, less cumbersome than exchanging my wife for a younger (and possibly blonder) version, and more pragmatic than starting out on a potentially more fulfilling career.

Little did I suspect that ploughing through neatly organized rows of theological conventions, dogmas and other subtleties could be as exhilarating as riding a dirt bike through the bush. Thorny issues in abundance, treacherous heresies lurking as pot-holes beneath still waters, torrents of diverging opinions as a dry riverbed suddenly inundated by a theological storm. And clearly white elephants are nowhere near the brink of extinction. My evenings with the family were soon to be exchanged for long evenings with the books, occasionally boring, often tiring, but also surprisingly engaging. Evenings turned into nights with the wife being exchanged for Abraham Kuyper, Jacques Ellul and their subsequent stand-ins. Not very blond (mostly rather bald in fact), but otherwise quite colorful people who, as I might have expected, turned out to be not just unlikely, but rather contrary bedfellows. And yes, as a result in the end my career did suffer a significant change as well.

In the resulting thesis, I set out to demonstrate that as evangelical Christians we are unashamedly opportunistic about culture. Hardly anyone is able to distinguish our life and work from our non-Christian contemporaries. Our exuberant faith is often patently otherworldly. Our political involvement naive and self-serving under a cloak of sacrificial public service. For example, currently in the Netherlands we see that evangelicals, when they are politically active, tend to support a small party called the Christian Union (CU), a recent union of two earlier orthodox reformed/evangelical parties. (Recently, far removed from the daily political bustle, I was in fact invited to become a member of one of its advisory bodies on environmental sustainability). It has a somewhat green, left of center orientation, but also a demonstrably neo-calvinist agenda. Given the intricacies of Dutch coalition politics, it is since 2006 member of the Dutch government, together with the larger (and more nominal) Christian Democrat Alliance (CDA) and the secular Labor party (PvdA). As an interesting sideline, the realization that all three coalition leaders studied at the *Vrije Universiteit* inspired somewhat of a media-hype concerning a possible return of neo-calvinist (Kuyperian) politics.

Unfortunately Dutch evangelicals are rather naive about the neo-calvinist concept of culture. The so-called ‘cultural mandate’ can be traced back to the former Dutch statesman and theologian Abraham Kuyper. A century and a half ago he appreciated the modern pursuit and promise of progress by his liberal and secular contemporaries and bemoaned their rejection of the relevance of traditional biblical truths for contemporary culture. At the same time he struggled to overcome the unwillingness of the majority of orthodox Christians to participate in the political process.

Kuyper, Bavinck, Schilder, as reformed theologians, and Dooyeweerd, Vollenhoven and Schuurman, as reformed philosophers, consider cultural development through the sciences, technology and politics a clear mandate based on the Genesis record. Comparably in the USA, the reformed Al Wolters (*Creation Regained*) insists that the cultural mandate is no less than the divinely instituted human complement to creation, while the evangelical Chuck Colson speaks of the cultural commission as the inseparable twin of the great commission.

In a few lesser known publications, Jacques Ellul attacks this interpretation (which he considers theologically liberal rather than orthodox) head on. See for example, “The Relationship Between Man and Creation in the Bible” (*Foi et Vie* 73, 1974, nos. 5-6) and “Technique and the Opening Chapters of Genesis” (*Foi et Vie* 59, 1960, no. 2), both reprinted in Mitcham, Carl and Jim Grote, eds., *Theology and Technology: Essays in Christian Analysis and Exegesis* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1984). See also Ellul’s *La Genese Aujourd’hui* (Toulouse: AREFPPI, 1987).

Ellul specifically argues, based on the Genesis record, and very much in line with his more commonly known publications, against the possibility of such a positive interpretation of culture. Culture is, of necessity, a consequence of the fall, which Ellul does not like to call *le chute* (the fall), but *la rupture*, the break with God. Culture is a mandate yes, for survival as a consequence of the rupture, but not to be confused with the divine purpose for liberation and reunion. (See also Andrew Goddard’s book/PhD thesis on Ellul *Living the Word, Resisting the World*). As we know, Ellul posits his alternative with a typically dialectical approach to the unfortunate necessity of being immersed in culture, complementing it with liberation by prophetic and paradoxical engagement with and disengagement from culture.

So where does this leave me?

The three *Vrije Universiteit* theologians who assessed my thesis considered Ellul’s Genesis exegesis far too speculative for reformed comfort and proceeded to bash me on my evangelical reading of Kuyper and consorts. This was probably to be expected (it was Kuyper who founded the *Vrije Universiteit*, while Bavinck, Vollenhoven, Dooyeweerd and Schuurman were all professors there; Wolters did his PhD there), but what struck me dumb was that they willfully ignored my proposed naive-radical-theological-political-pacifist-non-withdrawing-evangelical alternative to the cultural mandate based on Yoder, Hauerwas, and a bit of Milbank. Consequently, I am now struggling with the question whether it is too much of a cultural compromise to accept the Master of Theology degree they want to award me with (but then again, Ellul did accept an honorary doctorate from the *Vrije Universiteit*).

At least I am back in bed with my wife at night.

## Libertarian with Soul & Conscience

by Lawrence Terlizzese

*Lawrence Terlizzese’s recent book Hope in the Thought of Jacques Ellul (2005) was reviewed in the Spring 2008 issue of the Ellul Forum.*

Ellul has revolutionized my approach to politics. Prior to studying Ellul I voted Republican like most of my conservative and Christian friends. I thought this party best embodied a Christian view of politics on the basis of its cultural conservatism such



as prolife, lower taxes and individual responsibility as opposed to the welfare state of the Democratic Party.

But since my encounter with Ellul I have come to realize that Republicans largely only differ in rhetoric from Democrats. When they talk about freedom it is only economic freedom they mean and this means freedom only for the rich and freedom for the corporations, not personal freedoms for the individual. Therefore it is an elitist freedom. There is absolutely nothing Christian about their beliefs or political agendas. It is the love of money that drives the so-called “conservatives.”

This is no glib interpretation from a disillusioned theologian. One needs only talk with conservatives, listen to their radio talk shows, spend time with them and watch them in church, especially in church, to realize that conservatives are about pursuing the American Dream rooted in avarice and greed. This hypocrisy seriously disaffected me from the political process since I could not possibly vote for a Democrat.

But Ellul has helped me to understand that Christians can have a profound influence on the world through by passing the political process altogether. In fact, this may be the only way we can impact the world. Even to get involved in the mechanism of the state necessarily causes us to compromise our convictions. I still hold to all my conservative beliefs but try to realize them differently through caring for the individual, valuing his or her individuality, avoiding political solutions, steering students to prayer and opposition to state control and involvement regardless of what party is in power. I stress the importance of rights and freedoms.

Ellul has made me more a Libertarian than a Republican. But not an American Libertarian such as is found in the Libertarian Party or in Ayn Rand’s Objectivism since this type of libertarian has no soul, no social conscience. It cares only for itself. In stead I am a Christian Libertarian or Anarchist. Christian Anarchism that Ellul advocated embraced the Libertarian value for the individual but did not neglect social conscientiousness. It is individualism, but not selfishness, care for the greater whole, for others and the ecology are just as important as individual freedom. I attribute my newfound political philosophy directly to Jacques Ellul.

## Moderation amidst Polarization

by Daryl Wennemann

*Daryl Wennemann is professor of philosophy at Fontbonne University in St. Louis. He has written extensively on business and professional ethics.*

As I reflect on the political culture in America at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, what I find to be its most striking feature is the astounding irrationality that pervades the entire process. We have seen appeals to racism, xenophobia, homophobia, jingoism, and simple character assassination. A striking example of this is the way the Bush team attacked John McCain in the 2000 election by pointing to the fact that he has a non-

white daughter. Of course, he and his wife adopted a little girl from Bangladesh. But republican operatives used a very ugly attack in South Carolina playing the race card against George Bush's republican rival by suggesting that *McCain* had fathered a black child out of wedlock. Practical politics seems to me to be a very dirty business indeed.

Of course, the power of these tactics is magnified by the use of mass media. One thing we have seen clearly during the administration of George W. Bush is how the public can be manipulated, especially in a time of crisis. There is so much disinformation in the electronic environment that it is difficult to know what the reality is. But the electronic medium is itself a highly rationalized method of communication. So, there is a contradiction between the media that are highly rationalized and the content of the messages conveyed through the media which tend to be highly irrational.

It is also true, in my view, that irrational factors are not always problematic simply as irrational. Charisma is still an important element of our political culture and is not necessarily a bad thing. Although, I am a little disturbed that the charisma of Barack Obama has been translated into a sort of rock star fame.

With all of this, and much more, that suggests Jacques Ellul certainly gave an accurate account of modern politics as being thoroughly illusory, I find it difficult to ignore political developments. With me it almost rises to the point of being an obsession. Perhaps that is part of the political illusion.

Still, it seems to me it does make a concrete difference in peoples' lives as to who governs. Molly Ivins pointed out that some people would die during a Bush administration that otherwise would not. At a minimum, it seems to me that despite the grave reservations I have about mass movements and mass media, without touching on the general cultural problem of technique, I have the sense that there is a demand that we try to carry out a sort of rear guard action in our political efforts to prevent the extremes on the political spectrum taking power. To borrow a phrase, *Je maintiendrai*, I will maintain. The point of my meager political involvement in voting and some small efforts at supporting various candidates is to try to maintain a certain balance in the political culture. I would like to know where the moderates are in our political culture. It seems that the media tend to polarize the electorate, emphasizing the differences between the extremes and moving people with hot button issues when what is needed is moderation in the application of state power.

While I do not share Ellul's penchant for anarchism, which seems to have been a strategic alliance, my own communitarian outlook is quite compatible with the concern Ellul had to develop a counterweight to the modern state in what Robert Nisbet thought of as intermediate social groups that could stand as a buffer between the individual and the state (See Robert Nisbet, *The Quest for Community*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1977). That is why I am trying to promote an old idea in my business ethics course that Peter Drucker developed many years ago, the plant community. I think that it is now possible to bring about a democratization of the workplace along the lines of the plant community, whereas Drucker could not, because now we have an information economy which requires such a community setting to

promote the innovation possible in an information economy (I have developed this idea in *Free-Market Capitalism with a Soul: Capitalism and Community in the Information Age*, St. Louis, Parma House, 2006).

The American democratic political process has become technicized. The money of special interests has inordinate influence. Ideologues have recently thrown the country off course. And yet, the country tends to right itself slowly over time. The Supreme Court opposed Lincoln's suspension of habeas corpus. The Japanese Americans that were detained during the Second World War received an apology and some compensation from the government. The Bush administration's policies regarding the right to legal representation of illegal combatants was rebuffed in the courts. Matters that would be buried in many other countries often come to light in time, like the truth about friendly fire killings in Iraq (See 'Friendly Fire' Cover-up, by Marjorie Cohn, Altnet. Posted June 22, 2006, at

<http://www.altnet.org/waroniraq/37989/>).

And there are times when we see political courage as when Hubert Humphrey convinced the Democratic Party to promote civil rights in the 1948 platform. Now we have the first black presidential candidate of a major party and a woman running in the vice president's slot of the opposing party. I see slow uneven progress in the country. I suppose that is why I cannot just give up on the political process.

## Live, Talk, Work, Play

by Bryan Winters

*Bryan Winters is one of a dozen or so IJES members "down under" in Australia and New Zealand*

This is an interesting exercise for me. I look forward to the *Ellul Forum* when it appears, at the same time knowing I am the sole subscriber in these far flung islands of New Zealand, in the balmy Pacific Ocean, far away from anything of political importance. I live in a sport mad country, littered with beautiful beaches, a minority displaced native people who are being given their land back, and where the major TV channel runs stories on pets for lack of other news.

Do I live in an unusual country? Out of the 238 available, I guess at least 180 are similar. Small populations, small businesses, a handful of universities at most (don't be tempted to add "small minds"). So perhaps the bigger news creating nations are actually the oddity. How can the works of a Professor grappling with emerging social trends affect my practical politics? Especially one that wrote *The Political Illusion*. To put it into a perspective that would gel with my countrymen, that's something to ponder on as I paddle out to my surf break.

But it is my country. Despite its appearing to be a gigantic movie set to the rest of the world, (oh yes, it was the Lord of the Rings films that doubled our tourist trade),

I am familiar with it. I know its roads, its lakes, its humour and its lack of history. My friends, in the main, are not writers, or academics. They are business people, sporting enthusiasts and church or non church going Christians. I talk about how the writings of this obscure French writer have influenced my thinking - but not my practical politics.

I started reading Ellul when I was 22. Mixed with our propensity to travel, and a love of surfing, at an early age I wanted to experience the world, the world as it was available to me. I loved Ellul's opportunity to be involved in the resistance movement, and his start at rebuilding Bordeaux, but those weren't my chances. Mine were getting beyond our idyllic shores, and mixing with mankind elsewhere, in what we, from our seemingly benign islands, term the real world. So my life became quite existential, seeking the experience, not the wealth, or the career, or the power.

In my thirties, I read *Reason for Being*, quickly followed by Milan Kundera's *The unbearable lightness of being*, that Ellul refers to. This crystallized, intellectually, for me, the reality of the lived life, rather than the purpose driven one. After living through various overseas and local conditions of poverty e.g. missionary West Africa, then wealth e.g. expatriate Singapore, we returned to New Zealand. My life thereafter was taken apart, and most of the power, wealth and influence removed. This crystallized, internally this time for me, the reality of the lived life, of having and losing, of starting to look at Kiplings success and failure, and treating those two imposters just the same.

So on the one hand, I could say there has been little affect on my politics, living in a basically two party state that celebrates in small differences. The same billboard humour, affectation with native and green causes, promises to look after the increasing aged, and attendance at football games, is practiced by both.

But that is not the question. The question was practical politics, and this is where Ellul gels with me. I realize I love being both a participant, yet an observer of life. To catch a glimmer of what is coming, to see around the corner without embracing cynicism. To accept that life is uncertain, and strong men will rule over us with the agenda they must have, while living now, today, experiencing the trials of family, work, and finance.

My practical politics in this country, in the life I have been given, is the freedom to engage in what we term D & Ms (deep and meaningful conversations) in church, non church, and coffee shop settings. It is the choice to live outside the three boxes of life, to give up careers and show my children Europe even though we couldn't really afford it. Practical politics for me is how I will live, and talk, and work, and play in the environment I have been placed in. A young friend talks about success, and I tell him for me it will still be riding a short board when I turn 60. Yet strangely, or perhaps not so strangely, despite being the least wealthy of my peer group, and I admit this realizing it could be misunderstood, people reflect that I lead an interesting enviable life.

My practical politics has little to do with debate in the political arena. Indeed I am sure I will vote in this election year, but I don't yet know who for. Instead my practical

politics has been my welcoming of who I am, a relationship that in my opinion must parallel any claim to knowing the Almighty.

I like to think this hard to read Frenchman would appreciate that an ordinary westerner can live, seemingly carelessly, observing, but not heeding the illusory calls to power, wealth and influence that surround us all.

After all, he did live near some of the best surfing beaches in the world.

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# Book Notes & Reviews

## Secularization & Cultural Criticism: Religion, Nation, & Modernity

University of Chicago Press, 2006. 208 pp.

**Vincent Pecora**

**Reviewed by Don Surrency**

University of South Florida, Tampa

Vincent Pecora's *Secularization and Cultural Criticism* is the latest work published in the University of Chicago Press' *Religion and Postmodernism* series. It provides readers with an insightful analysis of how the "paradoxes and ambivalences" of secularization should be treated as an "intractable problem for culture and cultural criticism." It is not imperative for readers to be well-versed in the available literature because Pecora offers a satisfactory review of literature on secularization and postmodern theory—although it leans towards philosophical literature and away from sociological work. However, the text is certainly intended for scholars because it is permeated with jargon that would leave the average reader mystified.

Pecora clearly states that his objective is to trace out the dialectic character of secularization, its "overcoming but also [its] distortion and reemergence of received religious concepts and patterns of thought," in the introduction. Pecora argues that there is a deeper, more substantial link between Western intellectuals who value the "semantic resonances" of religious thought, such as Jurgen Habermas, and the oppositional perspectives of various other intellectuals, such as Talal Asad. To support this argument, Pecora reviews many thinkers including, but not limited to: Michel Foucault, Edward Said, Martin Heidegger, Walter Benjamin, Alasdair MacIntyre, Matthew Arnold, Siegfried Kracauer, and Emile Durkheim to demonstrate that, despite the vast differences in theories, all of these theorists have a "semantic resonance" of religion in their writings, despite their commitment to secular ideals.

It should come as no surprise, being that Pecora is a Professor of British Literature and Culture, that he chose the illustrious Virginia Woolf as the prime example of this *verwindung*, the term Pecora borrowed from Heidegger to describe the dialectic character of secularization. Pecora illustrates that while Woolf's literature was often hostile and satirical in its presentation of religion, many ideals reminiscent of those found in the Evangelical Christianity in Woolf's family heritage were present, albeit in secular versions, throughout her work. Pecora finds it compelling that despite Woolf's

well-known membership in the Bloomsbury Set, an overtly secular group of intellectual humanists, she still could not shake the religious resonance that shaped both her family history and Britain on the whole. He writes that Woolf's novels are an example of how "religious thought and practice are inextricably embedded in the secular social and literary forms that would transcend them."

While Pecora's line of reasoning is certainly provocative, one could argue that this *verwindung* that is indicative of secularization could be interpreted in another way. In fact, it appears Jacques Ellul may have postulated this himself. Rather than there being a mere "semantic resonance" of religion, as Pecora asserts, perhaps, as Ellul writes in *New Demons*, the sacred "is proliferating around us." Because of this understanding, Ellul does not view society as secular, as Pecora does; rather, he finds it to be profoundly sacred. Furthermore, by providing specific forms and functions of the sacred, Ellul establishes an important groundwork for analyzing seemingly secular phenomena using religious categories.

If one understands the postmodern culture as being cosmological, and not transcendental, as it was since the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE when Christianity became the dominant religion of the Roman Empire, one could deduce that rather than the secular containing religious resonance, what is being labeled secular, actually is religious. Just as there was no institutional differentiation of religion from the rest of society in cosmological cultures, if postmodern society is viewed as cosmological, what Pecora terms "religious resonance" actually may not be resonance at all; it may be indeed be religious. Thus, rather than redefining secularization to accommodate for the apparent resonance of religion in postmodernity, one could conclude that the secularization thesis may not accurately apply to postmodern culture as it did to modernity.

Despite Pecora's failure to address interpretations of the secularization thesis that employ understandings of 'implicit' religion, this work is still a tremendous addition to the field of religious studies and cultural criticism. It provides a remarkable review of literature, and offers an astute argument. Pecora's observations of the relationship between secularization, religion, culture, and cultural criticism are clever and beneficial for anyone interested in socio-cultural analysis, especially those interested in Ellul's scholarship. Ellul's understanding of the sacred provides the necessary groundwork for studying cultural phenomena as functional equivalents to religion; however, his work on secularization may not be quite as helpful as Pecora's. While Ellul is another example of a dismissive critic of secularization, Pecora provides a middle ground between the proponents and critics.

**Ted Lewis, editor**

# Electing Not to Vote: Christian Reflections on Reasons for Not Voting

Eugene OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008.

Reviewed by David W. Gill

St. Mary's College, Moraga CA

Ted Lewis is acquisitions editor for Wipf & Stock Publishers in Eugene, Oregon (and incidentally, the main driver of our IJES dream project to bring Ellul's books back into print). He is also an attorney and the leader of a conciliation service. Lewis argues that Christians (and for that matter, all citizens) ought to reflect on the nature, meaning, and impact of participating in voting and electoral politics (the focus is on the USA).

Lewis acknowledges that there are no simple or easy answers to the questions about voting. And he acknowledges that many have fought, suffered, and even died for the right to vote —so it is not something to be rejected or neglected out of laziness, irresponsibility, or for light reasons.

Lewis and his other eight contributors all urge a faithful political presence —it's just that voting may not be the best way of such presence, for a Christian at any rate. Of course the authors must want to convince their readers. But editor Lewis is surely right in saying that these perspectives ought at least to be seriously discussed by a much broader audience.

Goshen College history professor, John Roth, offers five possible reasons for Menonite Christians not to vote: (1) as pacifists, how can they support any military commander in chief, (2) political party platforms and leaders conflict with core Christian values—party differences are illusory, (3) Christians are called to a prophetic and servant stance, not to reinforce the apparatus of the state (cf. the Constantinian fall of the church), (4) the individualism of voting violates the communal orientation of the faith, and (5) not voting can have a symbolic value - especially when accompanied by vigorous action to help the poor, suffering, et al.

Like Roth, Andy Alexis-Baker is most certainly not calling for passivity. He and his Ellul-inspired "Jesus Radicals" anarchists put most others to shame with their sacrificial efforts to help the hurting, illuminate the darkness, etc.. But Alexis-Baker asks "what is there to vote for?" Drawing on the work of John Howard Yoder, Alexis-Baker argues that voting is often enough a ritual confession of the state-as-savior that substitutes for real authentic protest and activism. Getting people involved in campaigns and voting deflects people from more effective activism and simply chooses which elite will rule over the people.

Nekeisha Alexis-Baker acknowledges that as a black, immigrant, woman her choice not to vote may puzzle or offend other blacks, immigrants, and women to whom the franchise was long denied. But she argues that ballots confine the expression of conviction, values, and choices. She provides a great argument that the civil rights movement



outside of electoral politics had a much greater impact on American life than what was achieved through voting and elections.

G. Scott Becker's chapter on Karl Barth explores some rather esoteric theological terrain for those interested. Michael Degan reflects on how the electoral process brought out the worst in him, violates basic biblical teaching about citizenship in the kingdom of God, and is corrupted by money and power. His discussion of how political districting serves those in power is insightful.

Notre Dame theology and ethics professor Todd David Whitmore argues that "the lesser evil is not good enough" as he carefully evaluates George Bush and John Kerry on matters of the Iraq war, tax policy, and abortion. Pentecostal professor and pastor Paul Alexander urges his community to reject the nationalism and militarism of typical politics and behave as a transnational, alternative people of God. House church pastor Tato Sumantri makes a similar case for Christian investment in kingdom of God identity and recalls his disappointment with Jimmy Carter. Ted Lewis closes with a thoughtful argument for the "presidentialdom" of God, discussing his own migration from voter to non-voter, imagining how Jesus might have responded to the opportunity to vote way back then, and challenging Christians to replace voting with active, faithful, sacrificial responses to the social and political challenges so imperfectly and ineffectively addressed by electoral politics.

These are excellent, thought-provoking essays, especially for thoughtful Christians eager to "do something" and prone to electoral hype. Personally, I am sympathetic but not convinced. While I totally agree with the kingdom of God political identity themes (1) I hear our king calling us to "salt" the earth, not remake it or wait for it to be perfect; I see my voting as one aspect of modestly salting my world the best I can, but I have no illusions that this is as important as the alternative community activism I do in my urban neighborhood, etc.; (2) Christians are "ambassadors" from that other kingdom to their earthly nation of residence; if our earthly nation offers us the electoral franchise and invites us to vote—as it has—I think I'll go ahead and try to do some salting; (3) while many of the electoral choices we have are pretty pathetic, and there is no "salvation" from any candidate, and my pathetic little vote may not count for much, I simply don't believe that it was inconsequential for Bush to take the election from Gore in 2000; nor is the choice between McCain/Palin and Obama/Biden inconsequential for the world and the church.

## Ellul on Politics

The idea that the citizen should control the state rests on the assumption that, within the state, parliament effectively directs the political body, the administrative organs, and the technicians. But this is pure illusion. . . A modern state is *not* primarily a centralized organ of decision, a set of political organs. It is primarily an enormous

machinery of bureaus. It is composed of two contradictory elements—on the one hand, political personnel, assemblies, and councils, and, on the other, administrative personnel in the bureaus—whose distinction, incidentally, is becoming less and less clear.

*The Political Illusion* (1965; ET 1967), pp. 138-41.

I have long affirmed the anarchist position as the only acceptable stance in the modern world. This in no way means that I believe in the possibility of the realization and existence of an anarchist society. All my position means is that the present center of conflict is the state, so that we must adopt a radical position with respect to this unfeeling monster.

*Jesus and Marx* (1979; ET 1988), p. 156n.

Christians allow themselves to be taken in by the prevailing vogue. They see everybody expressing their own ideas, so why shouldn't they do the same? That's all right, as far as I am concerned, only let them be less pretentious about it, less authoritative, less inclined to expect everyone to follow in their wake. And let them not claim to be representing Jesus Christ! . . .

[I]ncompetence, evident in writings and proclamations, is even more apparent in encounters with the Christian who is actively involved in a party or union. His beginner's training is usually very deficient, both from the point of view of biblical theology and from the point of view of politics and economics. But once he is involved the situation becomes worse, for participation in politics is very fascinating and absorbing.

*False Presence of the Kingdom* (1963; ET 1972), pp. 155-7.

Naturally it is better to run a city well than badly. If a Christian has a hand in this and is a good administrator, that is all to the good. But any person can be a good administrator. Being a Christian is no absolute guarantee that one will be a better politician or administrator. Seeking the good of a city is not a specifically Christian thing

Christians are needed in all parties and movements. All opinions should have Christian representatives. . . If . . . Christians take up different positions knowing that these are only human, and having it as their primary goal to bear witness to Jesus Christ wherever they are, their splitting up into various movements, far from manifesting the incompetence of Christian thought or the inconsistency of faith, will be a striking expression of Christian freedom.

*Ethics of Freedom* (1973; ET 1976), p. 379.

## News & Notes

### —Walt Reiner (1923 - 2006)

On December 6, 2006, one of the greatest Jacques Ellul students and promoters in North America died, just three weeks before what would have been his 83<sup>rd</sup> birthday. Walt Reiner may be best known for his accomplishments as a courageous member of the US Navy in the Normandy invasion—or as football coach at Valparaiso University

in Indiana —or as a beloved community activist fighting for health care, housing, education, and building community in Chicago as well as Valparaiso —or as a faithful, prophetic presence in the Lutheran Church.

Many of us in the IJES, however, knew him as the passionate, enthusiastic guy at our meetings who *loved* the writings and ideas of Jacques Ellul. It was always a joy and inspiration to be around Walt and we mourn his passing as we send our condolences to his wife Lois and the whole Reiner family.

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The IJES (with its francophone sister-society, L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul) links together scholars and friends of various specializations, vocations, backgrounds, and nations, who share a common interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), long time professor at the University of Bordeaux. Our objectives are (1) to preserve and disseminate his literary and intellectual heritage, (2) to extend his social critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) to extend his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

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Another hour-length film/video that is focused entirely on Ellul's commentary on technique in our society, "The Treachery of Technology," was produced by Dutch film maker Jan van Boekel for ReRun Produkties (mail to: Postbox 93021, 1090 BA Amsterdam).

If you try to purchase either of these excellent films, be sure to check on compatibility with your video system and on whether English subtitles are provided, if that is desired.

**Issue #43 Spring 2009 — Ellul in  
Scandinavia**

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-Jacques Ellul

“Between Chaos and Paralysis,”

Christian Century 85 (3 June 1968), p. 749

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## **Editorial**

Our front cover quotation reminds us of how important the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard was to Jacques Ellul. This issue introduces recent work on Ellul in Scandinavia. Two active Ellul scholars are featured—Erik Persson of Lund University (Sweden) and Monica Papazu of the Loegum Kloster Theological Institute (Denmark). They give an account of Ellul's books translated into Swedish and Danish. Christian Braw is a well-known Swedish author with an interest in Ellul and one of his essays is included. Ellul is an active presence in Scandinavia as the Nordic countries deal with technological innovation, globalization and political change. As additional scholarship on Ellul in Scandinavia becomes available, the *Forum* will introduce that information to our readers.

Previous issues of the *Forum* have been geography-specific. Ellul scholarship in Latin America was featured in Issue #40. Ivan Illich called Ellul “a master who decisively affected my pilgrimage” and we went with Illich from Mexico to Germany in Issue #31. Issue #30 featured Myung Su Yang's book-length work on Ellul published in Korean.

Ellul's influence in England, the United States and Canada is well-documented. The *Forum* has included articles from the Netherlands and New Zealand. Joyce Hanks' *Reception of Jacques Ellul's Critique of Technology* shows the global reach of Ellul studies. But *Forum* issues such as this one featuring Scandinavia, enable those of us interested in Ellul to learn from each other, both in theory and application.

Virginia Landgraf, Board of Directors, International Jacques Ellul Society, is editing an issue of the *Forum* on economics/economic ideologies. She welcomes your ideas and contributions [[kaencat@sbcglobal.net](mailto:kaencat@sbcglobal.net)]. Manuscripts you wish to have considered

on any Ellul-related topics are invited by the editor. Material for “News and Notes,” “Ellul Resources” and queries about book reviews should be sent to David Gill.

*The Ellul Forum* and the International Jacques Ellul Society are all-volunteer activities, funded entirely by membership dues and small donations. We appreciate your solidarity and support.

*Clifford G. Christians, Editor editor@ellul.org*

## Cybergnosticism Triumphant?

Towards an Ellulian Analysis of Cyberspace and Cybergaming

by Erik Persson

*Professor Erik Persson is a faculty member in the Department of Informatics, Lund University, Sweden. His Ph.D. is in Computer Science.*

*Abstract. In order to penetrate behind the commonplace views of the current attempts to bring to fruition the vision of cyberspace, i.e. a shared, computer-generated, internet-based 3-D “virtual world,” and to arrive at a proper understanding of the driving forces behind the ongoing cyberspace revolution, its historical, ideohistorical, and mythistorical roots as well as the motive backgrounds of the key personages involved in bringing it about must be explored. In particular, the question as to how “worldviews” and various extra-scientific motivations and pursuits, such as gnostic-utopian ideas and schemes - possibly disseminated through, for example, science fiction literature and films - impinge on and direct research and development in and about these topics and how they relate to the neglected ethical issues of the field needs to be attended to. In order to put the ongoing cyberspace revolution into some kind of macrohistorical context, we may take our cue from, inter alia, Marshall McLuhan’s media theory, Jacques Ellul’s notions of “la Technique” and “le bluff technologique,” Paul Virilio’s observations on “extreme science,” Eric Voegelin’s insights about the gnostic character of modernism, and various theories and approaches formed within the field of the philosophy of technology as well as from an ideohistorical scrutiny of the seminal notions and thought structures involved.*

## The Brave New World of Virtual Entertainment

Recently, there has been a great uproar around the phenomenon of computer gaming in the daily press and other media. Brash headlines call attention to a quickly growing addiction problem amongst the young, and reports proliferate about youngsters who have lost their youth to the machine, sacrificing friends, family, their education, and most ingredients of a normal youth to a life-style of persistent gaming.

Interviewed parents bitterly regret the day they provided their child with a computer, telling distressing stories about children who stay up all night playing games, neglecting or even dropping out of school because of their all-consuming interest in videogame playing, and react violently to any attempt to mitigate or stop their addic-

tive gaming habits. For instance, one Swedish teenager deprived of his computer by his parents is reported to have smashed the furnishings of his and the parents' home and a 16-year-old Maryland videogame enthusiast tried to hire a hit-man to have his mother and stepfather killed, when his mother confiscated his PlayStation.

Just like alcoholics and drug addicts, game-addicted children are now regularly treated by psychologists and psychiatrists in order to get rid of their addictive behaviour, and there are even specialized clinics and treatment programmes available for the more serious cases. A steady stream of new books, such as [GD99], [Winn02], [Stey03], and [Brun05], offers advice to the troubled parents of the victims of the new videogame obsession, while "videogame addiction" and "Internet addiction disorder" are currently being considered for inclusion amongst the officially recognized medical diagnoses of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). A poll made in 2004 in Sweden by Fair Play, an organisation formed by concerned parents and researchers, indicated that as many as 40.000 (about 6%) of all Swedish children between 11 and 16 years of age exhibit addictive gaming behaviour, spending more than 35 hours per week on video gaming (see [Fair04]; cf. also [Fair05]), and the results of these and similar polls from all over the world have been the subject of much debate and altercation. In at least three highly-publicized cases, inveterate gamers have died from exhaustion due to excessively extended spells of computer gaming. The lure of virtual reality (VR) environments has been discussed in terms of "electronic LSD" and "virtual delirium" since the early 90s, and some researchers have taken advantage of concepts from research on altered states of consciousness, such as notably Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow, in order to describe the mesmerizing effects of computer gaming and their shrewdly thought-out reward systems (see [Csik90]; cf. also [Bart07]).

The phenomenon of massive multiplayer online games (MMOGs or MMOs), the iconic examples of which will be the immensely popular World of Warcraft and Second Life, has added an economic dimension to the problem picture, since on-line gamers usually pay for access to the game worlds as well as for various related services and virtual paraphernalia, such as virtual weapons or territory, sometimes spending huge amounts on virtual "investments" (cf. [Cast05]). MMOGs have grown big business, becoming extremely popular during the last few years with millions, or in some cases even tens of millions, of players all over the world; in South Korea there are even two television channels devoted to broadcasting events in the MMOG "worlds". A growing number of people spend most of their waking hours in these gaming worlds, occasionally even trying to make a living out of on-line gaming, and skilled third-world gamers offer the service of increasing the valuable properties of rich Westerners' avatars by persistent gaming.

That the younger generations' fascination with the thrill-laden world of electronic media - TV, video, computer games - in lieu of the staid world of books, studies, and erudition is a major culprit in the decline in educational skills widely observed amongst university students, seems to be the common opinion in academe. Amongst the effects of video game playing vindicated by researchers into the field are, besides addiction ten-

dencies and reduced cognitive brain function and educational performance, an increase in aggressive and violent thoughts, emotions, and behaviour, a corresponding decrease in social behaviours, and various health problems, such as obesity and depression (see [Gent03], [Ande03], [GA05] and [Spit06]). In particular, there has been a heated discussion going on as to the relationship between various forms of violent criminality, such as the school shootings in Columbine, Heath High School, Dawson College and elsewhere, and violent computer games and other forms of media violence. Sadistic or hyperviolent games, such as Doom, Mortal Kombat, Manhunt, Postal<sup>2</sup>, Duke Nukem 3D, or Grand Theft Auto, have been part of the picture in several brutal murder cases and school shootings, although their precise significance in these cases is the subject of dispute. According to [GD99] and others, many videogames take advantage of techniques similar to those used by the military to harden people emotionally against their natural repugnance against killing or violently attacking other people, in effect being nothing but “murder simulators”. In fact, in military training such “first-person shooter” videogames are used to teach soldiers how to shoot and kill. Notably, the user interfaces of modern remote-controlled weapon systems tend to be indistinguishable from typical videogame or virtual reality user interfaces, subtly blurring the border between killing in fantasy and in real life.

Some researchers (notably [Gunt98], [Free02], [EH03], and [LB05]) have criticised the trend to paint computer gaming in black only, questioning the above results on methodological and other grounds and citing positive effects in, for example, spatial capabilities and reaction time. However, their rather off-handed dismissal of a very large body of research certainly is not beyond criticism (see, for example, [Ande03a-b], [HT03], [Spit06], and [AGB07]), and the positive effects cited seem vague and of questionable significance when compared to the negative ones claimed by their opponents and confirmed by common sense. In addition, it has been noted that the entertainment and media industry is apt to guard its vested interests by funding and promoting such critical researchers, bringing to the fore the sore issue of these researchers’ impartiality (see, for example, [Ande03a-b] and [Spit06] p. 255). In any case, researchers and others developing and making a business of the new technology generally take little interest in the dangers inherent in it, but rather tend to entertain a discourse of fantastic expectations and grandiose predictions, typical of what I have called “cybernetic joachimism” (see [Pers02] p. 484 et seqq.). Arguably, their and their scholarly defenders’ neglect of or facile rebuff of the, to common sense at least, rather obvious negative consequences and conspicuous dangers of these technologies. This seems to confirm Jacques Ellul’s famous thesis of the fundamental deceitfulness of technological discourse, “le bluff technologique” (see [Ellu90]), whereby all negative aspects of technological “progress” are swept under the rug or made light of in the interest of the “wager” (“l’enjeu du siecle”) that we shall be able to control technology to our own advantage, the unspoken premise of which being “after us the deluge”.

For, indeed, these developments will raise many disturbing questions: Will a gradual “exodus” of mankind into cyberspace, as [Cast07] proclaims, take place by our giving

up our allegedly dull natural lifeworld for a more “fun” virtual dream world, where various cunningly calculated thrills and kicks, the refined scientific technologies of an ever-growing “experience industry”, will make us captive to a permanent state of virtual coma or psychosis? What will the development towards increasingly realistic 3-D graphics environments entail, in particular when enhanced by the widespread use of immersive virtual reality equipment such as head-mounted displays, data gloves, or 3-D audio and force feedback devices? If today’s fairly primitive electronic media are capable of spellbinding people and propagating, undermining, and homogenising beliefs, morals, and attitudes in ways that many will find disquieting or unpalatable, their immersive VR counterparts have the potential of becoming immensely more impressive, powerful, and addictive; hence also the talk about virtual reality as “electronic LSD” (see [Rhei91] p. 353 et seqq. and [Zett96] p. 91 et seqq.). If people start spending large portions of their spare time (and perhaps working time as well) in “synthetic worlds” (so [Cast05]), thereby taking part in, as it were, an exodus from reality as well as the much less intrusive alternative realities provided by literature, theatre, art, and the like, this will indubitably have consequences for mankind and society that give at least some of us pause.

Certainly, tomorrow’s VR entertainment will offer all the brutality, decadence, obscenity, and vulgarity of today’s video games, telecasts, docusoaps, and video films, but writ large, potentially at least, being capable of producing so much more of obtrusiveness and realism than ever will be possible on today’s coarse CRT and TFT displays. By offering a highly lifelike, but imaginary “room of one’s own”, where no normal moral responsibilities and restrictions any longer obtain and where “telepathological” influences from all the world will be directly accessible at everyone’s fingertips, will not cyberspace present insuperable evil temptations to many people, not a few of whom will be children or adolescents, nay the intrusion of the deepest recesses of Hell into everyone’s sitting room and nurseries? If it is true that today’s electronic media, such as television and video games in particular, are highly addictive, what are we to expect from a virtual reality already dubbed “electronic LSD”? If today’s electronic media have been highly conducive to the escalation of violence in society and the dissolution of family and community life, as hardly can be denied, what can we expect from those growing up with a daily dose of hyperrealistic virtual carnage and carnality? What will the person be like who will appear from long-time immersion in all kinds of “ultraviolent” (see [Ande03]), more or less corrupt and perverted, virtual realities and repeatedly exposed to the ego-dissolving allures of “identity tourism” (so [Naka00])? Can we hope that man will be able to cope with such an assault on his own essence in any reasonable way? These and many similar questions are closely connected to the wider question as to how media in general and electronic media in particular affect man and society.

## From the Global Village to Discarnate Man

Marshall McLuhan is best known as the founding father of modern media theory and the cheerful prophet of the Internet era, but he was in fact a stunningly erudite scholar and a metahistorian of some standing as well. In McLuhan's construal of the past, the main caesurae of history are marked by the shifts in media, as epitomised by the famous quip "the medium is the message" (see [McLu64] p. 7 et seqq.; cf. also [Chan94]). By this catch phrase, so typical of McLuhan, were spotlighted "the structuring powers of media to impose their assumptions subliminally" ([McLu62] p. 216), amputating and extending man's being and senses in subtle ways and, thus, changing "the ratio of the senses". McLuhan also made a distinction between two types of media, "cold" and "hot", which can be illustrated by the difference between a photograph and a cartoon (see [McLu64] p. 22 et seqq.). Cold media, such as the cartoon, speech, the telephone, and television are "low definition", insofar as they, containing little data and detail, provide but an outline that makes it necessary for the recipient to fill in and "participate" in order to understand, whereas hot media, such as a photograph, a page of print, a lecture, movie pictures, or the radio, being rich in data and detail, extend a single sense in "high definition" and demand little mental participation.

According to McLuhan, the introduction of phonetic literacy made for a major shift of emphasis between the human senses, "the ratio of the senses", from the original predominance of "acoustic space" in preliterate, tribal life to that of the "visual space" of literate society, as reflected in the change from primitive, non-representative art to the representative plasticity of, for instance, classical Greek art. Thus, the art of writing changed man's very *modus essendi* in various subtle ways, from tribal man's impulsive, emotional, weakly defined ego to the controlled, goal-oriented, rationalistic individuality of literate man (see [McLu62] p. 51 et seqq.). Likewise, the Reformation, the centralised national state, the formation of "the public", the modern self-conscious, alienated individuals and groups of individuals, ideologies, mass man, the desacralisation of the cosmos, and modern science together with its worldview, specialism, incessant technological change, industrialism, mass production, and market economy would hardly be conceivable without the printing press, which, thus, strongly amplifies the rationalist bias inherent already in manuscript literacy.

More recently introduced electric-electronic media, such as the telegraph, the telephone, radio, film, television, and, of course, the networked computer, have changed or are about to change man's being once again. But what will the outcome of this shift be? According to McLuhan, electronic media inaugurate the third age of "the global village", an epoch of a "post-literate" second orality, which will give us back the participatory collectivity, a kind of holistic, integral, right brain-hemisphere awareness, and the "buzzing" and chattering audile-tactile space that used to surround the tribal village, but amplified to a global scale, supplanting the predominance of the visual space characteristic of the age of phonetic literacy with its proclivity for linearity, logic, causal reasoning, sequentiality, fragmentation, homogenisation, and left hemisphere mental-

ity. Sometimes he referred to this resurgent mode of being as “robot-ism”, in contrast to the “angelism” of Western literary man, enslaved by the domination of the left hemisphere of his brain (see [MP89]). To bring mankind together into “the global village” united by electronics will thus be the most significant implication of the computerised information networks. In the end, McLuhan thus arrives at a tripartite interpretation of history, where the “cool” preliterate, participatory culture of primitive happiness is followed by the “hot”, rationalist literate culture - the temperature being considerably raised by the introduction of the printing press -, which he prophetically pronounces to be about to be ensued by the “cool”, once again participatory “post-literate” age of electric and electronic media, when man will finally be restored to his primordial acoustic happiness.

McLuhan, however, also recognised that every new technology not only provides benefits to man, but also implies a loss, as the balance between the human senses is implicitly changed by the new technology. In a letter to the Thomist philosopher Jacques Maritain from May 6, 1969, he famously wrote ([McLu87] p. 370, [McLu99] p. 72; cf. also [Angl05] p. 15 for some similar reflections):

Electric information environments being utterly ethereal fosters the illusion of the world as a spiritual substance. It is now a reasonable facsimile of the mystical body, a blatant manifestation of the AntiChrist. After all, the Prince of this World is a very great electrical engineer.

During the 70s, McLuhan in fact changed his mind fundamentally on the electronic media revolution, forming a much more gloomy view of its consequences (see [McLu78]; cf. also [Marc98] p. 248 et seqq., [Tayl96], and [McDo97]). Step by step, he developed the idea of “discarnate man”, who, liberated from the physical limitations of corporeality through various kinds of electronic equipment, no longer identifies his self with his body, but with a shadowy, gnostic pattern of information and, swamped by the deluge of incoming information and images, tends to live in a hypnotic state between fantasy and reality, where he will suffer a breakdown between the conscious and unconscious parts of his psyche and, having lost identity, civility, literacy, discipline, purpose in life, and the sense of natural law, will become a brute prone to acts of violence and crude amorality. The relevance of this conception of “discarnate man” when trying to make sense of the effects of the developments in cyberspace and cybergaming technologies as described above will be obvious.

## **Discarnate Man, La Technique, and Extreme Science—Technocalypse Now!**

McLuhan’s insights about “discarnate man” can be compared and combined with Jacques Ellul’s conclusions in his great trilogy on modern technology, the three volumes of which were published 1954-1987 as *La Technique*, *Le système technique*, and *Le bluff technologique* (see [Ellu64], [Ellu80], and [Ellu90]). According to Ellul, “the

technical phenomenon" (la Technique), being the most decisive power of our time, can by no means be controlled or supervised (the famous "autonomy thesis") and is continually and relentlessly expanding into every nook and cranny of our life-world. At the same time, it eliminates everything else, gradually replacing nature and society with a more and more technical-artificial environment. Apparently, cyberspace will be the ultimate upshot of this unstoppable self-augmentation of la Technique, substituting an electronically generated virtual world for physical space and our entire natural life-world (cf. [Eber07]).

As the driving force of la Technique is, according to Ellul, the crave for absolute efficiency in all human endeavours, we are led towards an interpretation of cyberspace as primarily a mediator of efficiency, whereby, for one thing, the inefficient obstacles of geographical distance are overcome, and of cybergaming as a hyperefficient form of amusement, where Pavlovian physiology, modern psychology, and cybernetics are cross-bred and brought to bear on man's mind with an efficiency that makes the anxieties about "electronic LSD", VR-based brainwashing, and "amusing ourselves to death" seem almost like understatements or platitudes (cf. [Post86]). That virtual reality and cyberspace would become the ideal medium for brainwashing and propaganda has been foreseen at least since the publication of Huxley's *Brave New World*, confirming C.S. Lewis' observation that man's much-praised dominion over nature is a kind of magician's bargain, which repeatedly has turned out to end up in the dominion of a few over the many through nature, thus in effect bringing about the paradoxical "abolition of man" rather than the desired "empowerment of man" (see [Lew96]). To take advantage of Ellul's brilliant analysis of propaganda [Ellu65] as a prime, defining force of the modern world parallel to la Technique also in the study of the brave new cyberworld, however, remains a task to be carried out.

Nor should cyberspace and virtual reality be treated in isolation from other recent technological and scientific developments. On the contrary they will be part of the much wider postmodern phenomenon of "extreme science" described by another Christian French thinker, Paul Virilio, in [Viri00]. According to Virilio, science is currently going through a process of violent escalation, through which a new kind, or phase, of science, "extreme science", has appeared. Firstly, science currently tends to become more and more cybernetic, which is to say that science and technology now are quickly amalgamating into "techno-science" (so [Lato93]), the overriding obsession of which is control and management of all aspects of reality. Secondly, there is a strong tendency in today's science towards the transcendence of all limits and the rejection of all ethical restraints, making science into a most dangerous game for mankind, where what is now at stake is nothing less than the very principle of life. Nay, behind this "post-scientific extremism" Virilio discerns a kind of almost demonic "Lust am Untergang". This Faustian extremism comes to the fore in all kinds of "limit performances" through which the scientists vie for fame just like artists who try to gain publicity by overtrumping each other in the breaking of taboos or athletes who set out to transcend the physical limits of man's body by preparing themselves with steroids that they know will ruin



their health and mental stability. This is of course the very opposite of Ellul's proposal of an "ethics of non-power", according to which we should not do everything we can do ("the technological imperative") and limits must be set for technological development.

At the same time, much of what is going on and is claimed in contemporary science seems to be unrealistic, unverifiable, strange or simply untrue, thus creating a kind of "science of the implausible" (cf. also [Horg96] where similar observations are made about the coming of "ironic science"). The pathologies of "extreme science" and "the science of the implausible" show up almost everywhere in today's scientific world, most spectacularly, perhaps, in fields such as genetic engineering, embryonic stem cell research, cloning, nanotechnology, artificial intelligence (AI), and robotics with their outlandish discourses on such topics as the transformation of all living matter into "gray goo" through an out-of-control self-replicating nanoprocess ("the accident to end all accidents"), the selective killing of enemy populations through genetically engineered "nanoviruses", the cure of all illnesses through nanomedicaments or stem cell broths made on aborted fetuses, the cloning of human beings and the "uploading" of their minds into a computer's memory, or the future overshadowing and replacement of man by artificially hyperintelligent robots, just to mention a few popular themes of this kind. Evidently, also virtual reality and cyberspace must be included amongst the manifestations of "extreme science", exuding the typical odour of unrestrained technology and pneumapathology. In the end, the technological assault on reality leads, according to Virilio, into a kind of "generalized

virtualization", through which the real is overshadowed by the virtual and everything becomes artificial, the brave new world of "globalitarian" technutopianism. Virilio concludes apocalyptically ([Viri00] p. 139):

Ultimately, this so-called postmodern period is not so much the age in which industrial modernity has been surpassed, as the era of the sudden industrialization of the end, the all-out globalization of the havoc wreaked by progress.

## **Cyberspace—A Gnostic Project?**

McLuhan's shrewd observations about the quasispiritual character of the electronic media environment and the new kind of gnostic personality, "discarnate man", who will appear from long-time exposure to this environment, lead us to the thought of Eric Voegelin, the great investigator and critic of the 'gnostic' character of modernism. It was Eric Voegelin's intriguing and much-debated thesis, that there is a deep-seated disorder in our civilisation rooted in a 'gnostic' sentiment of alienation and discontent with reality perceived as evil, in the consequential 'gnostic' turn away from this reality and its Ground (the "Demiurge"), and in the crowning and pre-eminently 'gnostic' claim to self-salvation and liberation from the prison of reality through absolute knowledge (gnosis), coming clearly into sight for the first time in the gnostic heresies, which emerged as a gloomy shadow of Christianity during its earliest years, and which from that time have reasserted themselves ever and anon during the course of history (see

[Voeg87]). Having gone through a process of what Voegelin calls ‘immanentization’, by which the original hopes for a transcendental escape from this world, were, as it were, brought down to earth and turned into utopian projects, the gnostic thought structures gave birth to the virulent impulse of a flight not from, but to this world, or rather to a reconstructed, transfigured, utopian version of it - in short the “revolt against reality” so typical of modern Western culture. Cyberspace can be construed as the ultimate consequence of this “revolt against reality” and the concomitant desire for man’s dominion over being, providing an electronic, quasi-spiritual otherworld totally under man’s control as the replacement, in the gnostic’s view, of the imperfect, unjust, and evil order of the present world (see

[Davi98] and [Pers02] p. 492 et seq.; cf. also [Wert99] p 276 et seq., although her description of the nature of gnosticism is somewhat misleading). The last century’s research into the history of science and ideas has provided an entirely new picture of the emergence of modern science. One of the more intriguing aspects of this picture is the crucial role of theology, mysticism, and esotericism for early science, which seems to be connected not primarily with a rationalistic-scientific tradition with its roots in Greek rationalism as is often more or less implicitly taken for granted, but rather with a gnostic-esoteric cultural undertow that had its roots in the religious-philosophical reactions against Christianity during late antiquity (see, for example, [Eamo94], [Funk86], and [Thor23]).

Unfortunately, the bearings of mystical-esoteric and, more generally, religious-philosophical ideas on contemporary science and the interest in such issues taken by many latter-day scientists have as yet only been spottily and unsatisfactorily explored, being in conspicuous need of more systematic study (see, however, [Nobl99] and [Duse99] for promising bird’s-eye views). Nevertheless, as far as cyberspace and virtual reality are concerned a few more or less relevant studies exist, such as [Heim93], [Heim98], [Davi98], [Wert99], and [Cohe66]. Arguably, we cannot get at the real motives and ideas behind the computer phenomenon in general, and the cyberspace and virtual reality sub-phenomena in particular, nor arrive at a proper understanding of their roots and future direction of growth, unless we take into account these mighty metaphysical driving forces and motivations, as I also attempted to show in [Pers02], notably by charting and analysing:

(1) the role of various esoteric-mystic themes in computing, including i) the Golem myth and similar stories about artificially created life, such as the alchemists’ homunculus, ii) the quest for the primordial, perfect language as in the tradition of Lullism, Leibnizian-Fregian logicism, and logical positivism, iii) traces of number mysticism, as in Leibniz’ binary calculus, which originally was devised in a (mistaken) attempt to comprehend the Chinese divinatory system I Ching, iv) the notion of the World Soul seemingly reflected in the connectionist mystique rampant in the discourse about the Internet, ubiquitous computing, “the noosphere”, and similar topics, v) astral worlds and travel as prototypical for virtual reality, cyberspace, etc.

(2) different varieties of “cybernetic Joachimism”, i.e. the widespread idea that electronic media, the computer, cyberspace, or some future breakthrough, development, or ‘singularity’ in computing will in due time inaugurate a new era of cybernetic delights

(3) the role of computing in more pessimistic or apocalyptic scenarios of science and technology and the future that they supposedly will bring about, such as Virilio’s “extreme science”, McLuhan’s “discarnate man”, Heidegger’s “Ge-stell”, Gibson’s dystopian “cyberspace”, Ellul’s “la Technique” and “le bluff technologique”, etc.

(4) the debate about the metaphysical implications and lessons learnt by the computing experience, which, I contended, in many ways call into question the naturalist presuppositions of the computer pioneers and most present-day AI and VR researchers, cognitive scientists, and philosophers of computing and the mind

(5) the different attitudes toward the ethics of computing and, in particular, of such potentially momentous developments in computing as “virtual reality” and “cyberspace”, which I ventured to discuss in the more general context of the ethical assessment of technological-scientific innovation at large, the historical development of the attitudes to new technology, some major types of worldviews and ethical theories, and the debates pursued in the field of “the philosophy of technology”

Extensive references to the literature on the discussed topics can be found in my thesis [Pers02].

Although the personae of the leading figures behind the cyberspace and cybergaming revolutions have been interestingly portrayed in such works as [Rhei91] and [CR05], the portraits given tend to be somewhat shallow, focusing rather heavily on careers, technical and scientific ideas, and suchlike, rather than on the drivers and motives behind these careers and ideas. It is my thesis that the roots of cyberspace and cybergaming must be investigated in a much wider context than is done in these and other similar works so as to clarify and make comprehensible the motive background and worldviews of the key personages of the field. For the kind of investigations I have in mind the scrutiny of the written, published and unpublished, output of the leading figures and interviews with them, their relatives and collaborators may indeed be necessary preparations. But during this undertaking much more attention to their philosophical, metaphysical-ethical, ideological-political, religious-theological (or antireligious-secular), and mystical-esoteric leanings and interests and their bearings on their scientific-technical accomplishments and ideas should be paid as well as to the possible sources and the actual development of these ideas and attitudes. Needless to say, such an analysis will have to be much concerned with the backdrop provided by ideohistorical derivation and contextualization and by a study of any pertinent thought currents, issues, and debates in the discourse of the field of study as well as in society and modern culture at large. For example, it can be gathered from such en passant observations as those made by [Bran87] p. 224 et seqq. or [Davi98] p. 279 et seqq. that one major source of inspiration for these pursuits as well as a mediator of gnostic attitudes and thought structures will be science fiction literature and film -

indeed, the very concept of “cyberspace” derives from the writings of William Gibson, the father of the pre-eminently neo-gnostic literature of the cyberpunk.

The true significance of such an attempt lies in its goal of a deepened appreciation of the phenomena of cyberspace and cybergaming and their relations to and background in various extrascientific agendas and pursuits. Considering the highly problematic spiritual, social, ethical, educational, and other consequences of the current fascination with cyberspace and cybergaming as outlined above and implied by such concepts as “electronic LSD” and “discarnate man”, the need for a comprehensive understanding of these phenomena and their historical roots should be obvious.

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# The Survival of Culture: “The Kindred Points of Heaven and Home”

by Monica Papazu

*Dr. Monica Papazu is a Professor in the Loegum Kloster Theological Institute in Denmark. This paper was presented to the Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade, conference on “Language, Literature, Culture, Identity,” September 11-12, 2008, and is used by permission of the author. In her book, Det hvileløse hjerte: Essays (Restless Heart: Essays), Professor Papazu includes a major section on Ellul [“Jacques Ellul: The Word of Freedom in the History of Unfreedom”/“Jacques Ellul: Frihedens Ord I ufrihedens historie”, pp. 245-291]. It was published in 2004 in Skanderborg (Denmark): Re-formatio’s Forlag.*

*In her correspondence with the editor, she notes these items of interest to Forum readers: “Ellul means very much to me. Ever since I left Romania (in 1980) and got the possibility to read him, Ellul has been a permanent source of inspiration, a fountain of wisdom to me.” “One of my best friends in France is Xavier Martin. He is a professor of history and of law history. Ellul was one of his teachers, and each time I visit him he tells me how wonderful it was to attend Ellul’s lectures and to study under his guidance.” “The only book of Ellul which has been translated into Danish is La subversion du christianisme/Kristendommens Forvanskning. The translation was made by one of my friends who was very impressed by a conference I gave on Ellul and began reading his works, and I wrote the Preface, “Forord” (pp. 5-9). Translated by Chr. Truelsen, Skaerbaek (Denmark): Tidehvervs Forlag, 2005. This was a posthumous publication. Chr. Truelsen used the last years of his life to translate Ellul (he was in his nineties, yet he continued to work). Ellul was a spiritual nourishment to him. He has also translated L ’esperance oubliée into Danish. I gave it to him as a Christmas gift and he loved it enormously. His widow has the manuscript and we hope that it will be published one day.”*

## Abstract

In his Nobel speech, Solzhenitsyn rejected the idea of “the disappearance of peoples in the melting-pot of modern civilisation,” and expressed his belief that “Nations are the wealth of mankind.. the smallest of them.. embodies a particular facet of God’s design.” Solzhenitsyn’s words suggest the connection between time and eternity (or, to quote G. K. Chesterton, “heaven and home”), and point to the cultural role that national communities play. What we call “world civilization” does not consist in a unique culture, but on the contrary in a multitude of very different cultures (Levi-Strauss, Kilakowski). The only way in which something becomes universal is by being at first local, limited, an expression of a nation’s historical experience and particular *Weltanschauung*. (The inspiration that *The Lay of Kosovo* brought to Western culture

in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries proves this reality.) At the present moment nations face two challenges. One is ideological, and stems from the abstract and utopian ideas of the Enlightenment, which assimilated “boundaries,” and national differences with “prejudice.” The other is connected with “the technical system.” The technical system, whose *raison d’être* is its own uninterrupted development, runs counter to spiritual culture, which is based on individual reflection, the slow passage of time which is necessary for thought and cultural creation, and continuity with the past (Ellul). The present forms of conditioning raise urgent questions about the survival of spiritual culture, which constitutes the essence of man.

In his Nobel Speech of 1970 Solzhenitsyn wrote: “Nations are the wealth of mankind, they are its generalised personalities: the smallest of them has its own particular colours, and embodies a particular facet of God’s design” (15-16).

As he addressed the Western world that honoured him for his works, Solzhenitsyn viewed himself as the representative of millions of people who shared the experience of Gulag (he felt himself “accompanied ... by the shadows of the fallen”), and as the representative of his national culture: he was the voice of “[a] whole national literature [that] has been left there, buried without a coffin,” and an heir to the great tradition of Russian literature (8). He embodied indeed what for him stood as “the quintessence of the writer’s position: . to give expression to the national language, which is the main clamp that binds a nation; to give expression to the very land occupied by his people . [and] to the national soul,” and to create works that are the nation’s “living memory” (25, 15).

Confronted with the terrible assault on memory, tradition, and the national soul, which Communism stood for, Solzhenitsyn rose in defence of the reality of life, in defence of his own people’s life and spirit. At the same time, his words were meant as a protest against the Western idea, akin to the communist ideology, of “the levelling of nations and of the disappearance of peoples in the melting-pot of modern civilisation” (15).

Solzhenitsyn’s protest was the protest of a Christian conscience. In the eyes of the Christian faith, nations are referred to as God’s creation. Nations are “not made by human hands” (“*acheiropoetos*” in Greek); they are not “reducible” to the will and actions of man, says Solzhenitsyn (“*Du repentir*” 114-5). Their existence is a mystery as unfathomable as the existence of the human person, and their destination lies beyond the temporal horizon.

That is why Solzhenitsyn applies the moral and spiritual imperatives that hold for the individual to nations in general, and to his own nation in particular. A community that is “mystically bound together by sin,” as all communities are, is called to “repent,” to ask God’s and the other nations’ forgiveness (“*Du repentir*” 118). Repentance is the miracle through which a people can begin a new life within the community itself as well as a new life together with other nations, for nations are bound together by historical fate.

## Heaven and Home

A nation is by definition a limited community - limited by geography, by a particular *Weltanschauung*, and usually by language. How can this limited reality with its characteristic borders then be related to the eternal “unity from above,” to the “ultimate end,” when “God will be all in all” (1 Co 15:28) (Schmemmann 151)?

The English writer G.K. Chesterton, who (I only mention it in passing) wrote about Serbia, close to the First World War, and drew inspiration in his poetry from *The Lay of Kosovo*, and who was one of the first to address the question of “cosmopolitan civilisation,” answered this question in his novel *Manalive* (1912): “. God has given us the love of special places, of a hearth and of a native land, for a good reason. . Because otherwise . we might worship . [e]ternity . the largest of the idols - the mightiest of the rivals of God. . God bade me love one spot and serve it, and do all things however wild in praise of it, so that this one spot might be a witness against all the infinities and the sophistries, that Paradise is somewhere and not anywhere, is something and not anything” (190-1).

Chesterton explains here that the love for what is entirely local, unique, and unrepeatable is a prerequisite for understanding God’s eternal kingdom. Community is woven in the very texture of existence. The earthly community is a metaphor of the heavenly community. Loving and sharing, one is brought to understand the reality of the personal, triune God’s all-encompassing love, and the intensity of life in the Kingdom of God, true community as opposed to the abstract idea of eternity. Human life is thus, in Chesterton’s words, a bridge between two “kindred points” which mirror each other: “the kindred points of heaven and home” (*New Jerusalem* 21).

## The Fact of Natality

Solzhenitsyn and Chesterton’s vision reflects their faith. Their perception is nonetheless rooted in an existential awareness that amounts to a universal truth. The German philosopher Hannah Arendt called this truth “the fact of natality” (61, 174, 196). It means that in order to think clearly about man one has to begin with “that which is given,” with the objective, unalterable facts of human existence. What is objective and therefore determines all the rest is the fact that man does not owe his existence to himself, nor is he born into a void but into “the world”: “a pre-existing world, constructed by the living and the dead” (174, 177). This world has an objective existence: a land; parents, ancestors; the vast expanse of history and historical experience; a common language; common assumptions and values. Growing up means making this world one’s own, because it is one’s own, not through choice but as “something given.” The “denial of everything given,” characteristic of modernity, is, in the words of Hannah Arendt, a token of “radical nihilism” (34). To be born is a bond. And this bond is what culture and the transmission of culture is about.



Culture is, by definition, the legacy of the past. Knowledge is simply knowledge of the past, for the world into which human beings are born and which they have to learn about is an “old” world, a world that is “always older than they themselves,” writes Hannah Arendt (195).

Learning about the world in which the previous generations have lived, men gain “depth,” which, says Hannah Arendt, is “the same” as “memory”, and a bond with both mankind and the world (94). For what makes the world human is the *meaning* one learns to discover in it - in other words, *tradition* is what makes the world human: “without tradition - which selects and names, which hands down and preserves, which indicates where the treasures are and what their worth is - there seems to be no willed continuity in time and hence ... neither past nor future, only sempiternal change of the world and the biological cycle of living creatures in it” (Arendt 5). Man’s world is fundamentally a cultural world that “comprehends, and gives testimony to, the entire recorded past of countries, nations, and ultimately mankind” (Arendt 202).

## Particular cultures - world culture

”[C]ountries, nations, and ultimately mankind”: Hannah Arendt’s words suggest a connection between the particular cultures of the world and a universal heritage. There is indeed a common human nature, a common human condition, and a common quest for meaning and beauty. Taking a bird’s eye view, there appears to be a “world culture.” The question is what “world culture” really means.

Speaking of the great literature nourished by a particular people’s tradition and historical destiny, and permeated with truth, beauty, and goodness, Solzhenitsyn expressed his belief that art can convey “life experience from one whole nation to another,” reveal “the timeless essence of human nature,” and contribute to the “spiritual unity of mankind” (“One Word” 15, 19, 24). Solzhenitsyn does embrace a belief in universality, but his words indicate that it is what is most particular, unique, that acquires a universal dimension.

There is no way in which *limited* man - for man is not “universal” but limited, he belongs “to a place,” he is marked by “a past,” a specific tradition, and the weight of a particular historical experience (Ellul, *Bluff* 275) - can reach a certain degree of universality other than by being authentically what he is. This paradox is the condition of culture and the condition of mankind: what is universal can only hope to reveal itself through what is most particular.

Culture does express, as the French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss puts it, “the generality of human aspirations,” universal questions and experiences, but it does that in “peculiar,” not universal, forms (*Race and History* 44). The richness of meaning stems from what is most particular in a certain culture: “there is not, and can never be,” writes Levi-Strauss, “a world civilization in the absolute sense in which that term is often used, since civilization implies, and indeed consists in, the coexistence of cultures exhibiting the maximum possible diversities” (*Race and History* 45).

In order to protect culture, underlines Levi-Strauss, one has to understand the condition of culture, that is to say the existence of communities with their specific cultures, cultures that can only preserve their identity through a partial lack of “sensitivity” towards each other’s “values” (*Regard* 15). Identity can only be maintained by refusing to be someone else: “one cannot at the same time merge into the spirit of another, identify with another and still maintain one’s own identity” (*Regard* 47).

It is a fatal mistake to think of humanity in the abstract, to embrace the idea of “world culture” as “a harmonious whole,” and to promote this illusion in the form of a political project that can only result in the atrophy of creativity and culture (*Regard* 47, *Race and History* 48-9). Because this ideological project is at work, the technical system contributing largely to it, Levi-Strauss stresses the urgency of a clear understanding of the condition of culture, based on the reality of facts: “if mankind is not to resign itself to becoming a sterile consumer of the values it created in the past and of those values alone ... it will have to relearn the fact that all true creation implies a certain deafness to outside values, even to the extent of rejecting or, in given cases, denying them” (*Regard* 47).

## The Lures of Nowhere

The idea of a totally unified world, unified in values, norms, manners, that Levi-Strauss opposed, belongs, as the Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski insists, to the realm of utopia, which is a *denial of reality*. Utopias can be implemented, as the totalitarian experiences of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have shown. If the present trend continues, writes Kolakowski, “the world’s cultural variety” will be annihilated “in the name of a so-called world civilisation,” and “this will probably entail such a break in traditions that not only each and every particular civilisation but the human civilisation in its entirety will be put in mortal danger” (113).

Such a world will not be a unified world, but a world that is no longer human, indeed a relapse into “barbarism.” The project itself signals, in Kolakowski’s eyes, the growing barbarism of the West, that is to say the indifference towards one’s own culture. What characterizes the West today is a “suicidal mentality in which the indifference towards our own particular tradition ... or even the selfdestructive frenzy disguise themselves as generous universalism” (Kolakowski 102).

The “multicultural” utopia is only a new expression of the chimera of a society “without evil, without sin, and without conflicts: such ideals,” writes Kolakowski, “are the aberrations of a spirit that believes in its own omnipotence, they are the fruits of pride” (121-2).

Today’s “universalism” is without doubt an heir to the utopian thinking of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. The Enlightenment thought in general terms (concepts are, by nature, abstract and universal) and envisaged creating a new mankind and a new man (even in the biological sense). In the utopia of the reign of reason there was no room for the real human beings such as they are, anchored in the traditions

and the values of their particular community. Suffice it to mention here the abolition of Christianity and the extermination of the population in the province of Vendee in 1793-1794.

In order to bring forth “the new man,” man had to be liberated from the shackles of “prejudice,” that is to say *the existing culture*. The principle that held for the individuals constituting one community also held for humankind as a whole. Prejudices were considered “mental barriers separating human beings,” while state-borders were viewed as the “embodiment” of prejudices. The project of the Enlightenment was, as the French philosopher Pierre-Andre Taguieff writes, two-sided: it consisted in both “the abolition of prejudices” and of the concrete “borders” between states, which should result in “the inception of the reign of reason” and the advent of a “universal brotherhood society” (190-191).

Seen in this utopian light, differences seem outrageous, because they contradict the abstractness of the concepts. Pure reason discards the so-called prejudices (“the prejudice against prejudice,” as Hans-Georg Gadamer calls it) and thus the entire tradition, without realizing its significance - even the exercise of reason, logic and intellectual rules are “prejudices,” since they represent a legacy, the result of the intellectual work of previous generations in a given civilisation (Gadamer 255).

To discard prejudices in this fashion is to estrange oneself from mankind and to cut oneself off from indispensable knowledge. As Hannah Arendt puts it: “[t]he disappearance of prejudices simply means that we have lost the answers on which we ordinarily rely without even realising they were originally answers to questions” (174).

The modern concept of “multiculturalism” is a postscript to the Enlightenment, which ignored history, and failed to understand the meaning of culture. Its near roots are to be found, however, in the vestiges of Marxist and Communist ideology in the West, in the utopia of a new mankind where classes as well as fatherlands will have disappeared. The present civilisational universalism appears as “the substitution of one utopia for another” (Yonnet 11127).

The West’s diminishing understanding of its own culture (and therefore of the sense of culture altogether), the breakdown of tradition and “the crisis in education” represent undoubtedly a serious spiritual crisis (Arendt 173-96). This does not mean that European civilisation is doomed - the proximity of other cultures in Western Europe due to immigration seems even to contribute to a rediscovery of the foundations of European culture and thus to reversing the process. Up until now history has shown, as in the case of the Communist experiment, that utopian projects finally break against the rock of reality. What makes the present crisis particularly threatening, though, is the fact that it is associated with the impact of the technical system.

## **The Technological Society**

When we look at “technology” from the limited point of view of subjective experience, its negative aspects can be hard to grasp. As scholars we use the possibilities created

by the Internet. Many of the classical writers' works are online, and research papers, magazines, and newspapers can be reached in the blink of an eye. An immense library is at our disposal. The essence and the discipline of our work appears to be unaltered by the advent of technology.

To grasp the critique of technique, as formulated for example in the pioneering work of the French thinker Jacques Ellul (1912-1994), technique must be put in a much broader, objective frame of reference. The core of the problem is the relationship between technique and culture.

Throughout most of the history of mankind, highlights Ellul, "*technique belonged to a civilization* and was merely a single element among a host of nontechnical activities." Technical development was slow, and it was absorbed into the general texture of life. Culture remained the axis around which human activities rotated, in other words it remained the determinant factor (*Technological Society* 128, author's italics).

The unprecedented technical development, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century especially, has broken this pattern. Not only did machines develop which have changed the natural perception of time and space, technique has evolved into an integrated system, totally emancipated from culture. Technique has become the decisive factor by "*tak[ing] over*," as Ellul puts it, "*the whole of civilization*": "*Technical civilization* means that our civilization is constructed *by* technique (makes a part of civilization only what belongs to technique), *for* technique (in that everything in this civilization must serve a technical end), and *is* exclusively technique (in that it excludes whatever is not technique or reduces it to a technical form)" (*Technological Society* 128, author's italics).

Technique cannot stop, as Hannah Arendt also remarked, at the border where human life begins: after the conquest of nature, man is being conquered, and technique invades the "world of human relations and human affairs" (Arendt 89, 59). This does not mean that machines run the world, but that *technical thinking* does, reducing man in all his aspects to a technical problem, in other words assimilating him "to the machine" (Ellul, *Technological Society* 12). The technical system has spilled over into all human activities, giving in the first place rise to "the technical state" which by "the accumulation of techniques" in all fields (from economy to propaganda), and not by intention or doctrine, has, as Ellul defines it, a "totalitarian" propensity. Technique has a tendency to evacuate political life and make the "differences from state to state ... fade progressively away." The contemporary technical state rests upon universal techniques of administration, and does not depend on political thinking or on the nation as "a human, geographic, and historical entity" (*Technological Society* 268, 265, 284).

Technique, as opposed to culture, cannot be national. It can only be universal, due to its abstract nature. As an object of technique, man has no more reality than the quantities combined in an algebraic equation. There is no bridge between technical thinking, in which technique is "an end-in-itself," and culture, for culture is, by its own nature, "humanistic." That is to say, culture is "centered on man," on the question of "the meaning of life" and of good and evil, in a word, on man's moral and spiritual values (Ellul, *Bluff* 2812). From the point of view of technique, guided solely by the

principle of efficiency, what constitutes human life (man as a cultural being) appears as a hindrance or “grit in the machine.”

There is thus an obvious connection between the utopian ideas of the Enlightenment and technical thinking, which as a rule is not aware of its philosophical presuppositions. Technical thinking is an heir to utopian thinking in that it neither respects nor reflects upon “that which is given” but wills a new, ideal mankind. The connection between technique and the discourse of cultural universalism is just as obvious: multiculturalism can be considered as an ideology that serves the implementation of the technical system, since it endeavours to remove the hindrances represented by the vestiges of nation, community, and culture.

By taking over “the whole of civilisation,” technique creates a new environment. It gives rise to a new pattern of ideas that are an obedient adaptation to the technical system, and it imposes its own time. Technique (from machines to administrative techniques) pushes forward at high speed, while it effaces its own traces - today makes yesterday obsolete, as tomorrow’s models will cancel today’s. The past has no value any more.

For culture, the reverse is true. Cultural time is slow. It is characterized, as Ellul rightly underlines, by “reflection” and not by efficiency. It takes time to reflect; human experience is slow in bearing the fruits of understanding; the generations succeed one another, as they hand down the meaning they have extracted from their experiences. Meaning arises from the past and through the continuity with the past (Ellul, *Bluff* 276-7).

To remember is what characterizes the human spirit. Without remembrance we are strangers to the world and to our life. Without remembrance we have no means to evaluate the present - we are prisoners of the present. That is why anti-totalitarian literature puts so much weight on memory, as we can see in Solzhenitsyn’s works (his Nobel Speech, for example), in Orwell’s *1984* (27, 29-33, 192-209), or in Kundera’s axiom: “the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting” (14). Spiritual culture is, in its essence, memory. By considering Mnemosyne (Memory) as the mother of the muses, the Greeks showed that memory is the foundation as well as the meaning of culture (Hesiod 915-7).

The opposition between cultural time and technical time is the struggle between Mnemosyne and Chronos, the “devouring time” (Ovid xv.234-6). For man, time only exists because he has the “remembrance of things past,” but memory is also man’s victory over time. Without memory, the sense of time disappears, but the power of time (and ultimately of death) becomes absolute. Human life is reduced to a biological process, not different from the mermaids’ life in Hans Christian Andersen’s fairytale, where a hedonistic existence is brought to a painless end, as the mermaids, whose memory is never preserved (there are no graves on the bottom of the sea), become “foam on the ocean” (“The Little Mermaid” 66).

Globalisation is then not the spreading of culture, but the spreading of technique, which produces the collapse of traditional structures, modes of living and cultures, and,

in the final analysis, threatens to destroy the conditions necessary for the existence of culture. What the technical civilisation gives rise to is a global mass-society, consisting of atomised individuals, caught in the alternate rhythm of work and entertainment, and deprived of memory, tradition, and bonds.

Contrary to the assumption that globalisation brings people and peoples together, creating a “world community,” the universal technical system tends to bring about, as both Arendt and Ellul write, “a radical world-alienation” (Arendt 89; Ellul, *Ethique* 256-7), for technique eradicates both nature and culture, the two milieus that hitherto have constituted man’s universe and mankind’s common world. What is left behind is “a society of men ... without a common world which would at once relate and separate them

. For a mass-society is,” as Hannah Arendt expresses it, “nothing more than that kind of organized living which automatically establishes itself among human beings who . have lost the world once common to all of them” (89-90).

(The misinformation carried out in the West with regards to the dismemberment of Yugoslavia can be partially understood as a consequence of the technical civilisation: the loss of the sense of community and tradition, and even of the mere interest in knowing history, associated with the propaganda apparatus and the power of the media.)

Alienation, as Arendt and Ellul understand it, means that man becomes a stranger to the reality of his life and to his very nature. A world reduced to the fleeting present moment, a world that can no longer be put into words and thus shared with others, and where one neither receives the legacy of the past nor hands down a story to be told (Hamlet’s last words in Shakespeare’s play are: “tell my story” [V.iii.354]), a world to which one is no longer bound by the bonds of birth, loyalty, and love; and *logos* is not a home for man anymore.

## The Rebirth of Community

And yet, it is possible that man will rebel once more against utopia, as he did against the totalitarian projects in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and that there will be a rebirth of community and culture. That was the belief of Chesterton, who in his novel *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* of 1904 prophetically described the technical civilisation and the return to what he calls “normality” and “sanity” (100).

All the characteristics of the technical civilisation evidenced above are, artistically expressed, present in his novel: it was a “well-ordered” universe, a “terribly quiet” world, where one felt “the hell of blank existence” (78-9, 97). Political life had disappeared: “Democracy was dead; for no one minded the governing class governing” (12). The ideology in power was “cosmopolitanism”: “We moderns believe in a great cosmopolitan civilisation,” “we are rid of superstitions,” especially “the superstition of small nationalities,” and, as a consequence, all national symbols and customs have been “relegated ... to the Museums” (23, 24, 17). Freedom in all its forms was gone from the world:

“Freedom of speech means practically in our modern civilisation that we must only talk of unimportant things” (79). World peace had finally become a reality through the monopolisation of power: “The big Powers of the world, having swallowed up all the small ones, came to . [an] agreement, and there was no more war” (84). What was left was “this strange indifference . this strange loneliness of millions in a crowd” (79).

All this lasts until the day when a child, symbolically called Adam, that is to say *man*, rediscovers the meaning of “that which is given”: the near universe consisting of nine streets in Notting Hill, where “men have built houses to live, in which they are born, fall in love, pray, marry, and die,” streets where they bring out their “dead.” In the centre of this small universe lies Pump Street, that is to say the human “heart” (62-3, 73). And the old truth that the earth is a home for man, and that “[f]or every tiny town and place / God made the stars especially” spreads throughout the world and eventually sets everybody free (3).

Chesterton gives no explanation here. This is exactly the point, for no explanation is needed for a statement of facts: the fact of the human nature, as we do know it from mankind’s history and culture. He states a fact and gives, at the same time, expression to his faith in both “heaven and home.”

Our duty today is to transmit the culture handed down to us, to transmit the enduring works that, as Solzhenitsyn puts it, bring a “word of truth” and clothe it in beauty, to maintain the continuity between generations and the bridge between peoples, for the great culture of the world with its very particularities reaches beyond borders, communicates itself from one people and to another, and makes the world a home for man.

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*Archivists Note*: The text body footnotes are missing from the PDF, so I'll just include them here until this can be error corrected.<sup>12345678</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> G.K. Chesterton, "The Thing Called a Nation: The Spiritual Issue of the War" (*The Daily News*, June 18, 1916; *The Law of Kosovo: Serbia's Past and Present (1389-1917)*, London: The British Kosovo Day Committee, 1917, 32-5. In Chesterton's masterpiece *The Ballad of the White Horse* (1911) the Kosovo-motive of the letter of the Mother of God plays a crucial role.

<sup>2</sup> This theme is to be found in the great Danish writers Hans Christian Andersen's and N.F.S. Grundtvig's poetry as well as in the last pages of C.S. Lewis' *The Last Battle*.

<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise mentioned, the translation of the French and the German quotations belongs to me.

<sup>4</sup> Xavier Martin, *Regenerer l'espece humaine: Utopie medicale et Lumieres (1750-1850)* (France: DMM, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Reynald Secher, *Le genocide franco-frangais: Le Vendee-Venge* (Paris: PUF, 1986).

<sup>6</sup> As "technology" etymologically means "discourse on technique," the term "technical" is more accurate than "technological."

<sup>7</sup> See also Lewis' critique of technique: C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1943), and *That Hideous Strength* (London: The Bodley Head, 1945).

<sup>8</sup> Vladimir Volkoff, *Petite histoire de la disinformation: Du cheval de Troie 'a Internet* (Paris: Ed.



# The Islamization of the West

by Christian Braw

*Christian Braw is a prolific Swedish author on culture, literature, theology, and the history of ideas. Published in Swedish as "Vaterlandets islamisering" Used by permission. Translated by Frederick Schwink.*

In today's world the West is acutely dependent on the Muslim world for its energy supply. A large number of Muslim immigrants confronts Europe with complicated questions. Capital investments from the Muslim world dominate significant sectors of the western economy. Muslim fundamentalists hold the West in terror.

Given this situation, it is easy to forget that the West's rationalism has a Muslim background. In simple terms, this rationalism contains within itself the belief that mankind has reason, a *ratio*, with whose help one can comprehend, control, and exploit existence. The central instrument is the *concept*, through which one encaptures the essence of being. A Westerner becomes a "Begriffenfeldt"—to use Ibsen's apt label [Transl: this is a German character in Ibsen's Peer Gynt play, the name means "conceptual field"]—with this there also went lost a considerable portion of symbolic thinking, i.e. the ability to translate existence into powerful signs which bring about what they express. Man steps out of the universe to observe it from the outside, as Tage Lindblom used to say.

Where does this manner of comprehending existence come from? It is a manner of thinking, as it was first developed in ancient Greek, above all by Plato and his disciple Aristotle. It survived the cultural catastrophe of the migration period only in fragments. That's what the situation was in the West. In the Orient the development was different. There the Greek philosophers were translated and annotated by Syrian speaking scholars. The Orient never experienced a migration period. The Arab storm was for the most part a taking over of power by an elite military force in country after country. In the track of military units followed administrative and intellectual elites that quickly took over for themselves the higher culture of the conquered lands. There thus arose a synthesis between Islam and the Greek-Syrian philosophical tradition. In the West by way of contrast there was to be found only a fragment left of the spread of Greek philosophy.

The Arab storm brought Islam to Spain and southern Italy, and once the Arab military, administrative, and intellectual elite had established itself there, cultural contact with the West was introduced. In this manner western researchers uncovered an extremely rich world of Greek thought, integrated into a Muslim religiosity. Its intellectual rigor and breadth caused most of what was thought and written about this in the West seem primitive. From the Arabic translations of Greek philosophers Latin translations were now made. In some cases thus the Greek ideas had undergone three metamorphoses in the process of becoming accessible to western thinkers: from Greek

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du Rocher, 1999), especially the pages 217-43.

to Syrian, from Syrian to Arabic, from Arabic to Latin. What happened to the Greek idea during this long detour is an interesting and partially unresearched history.

The West that took on this intellectual invasion was consciously and expressly Christian. How did people react? Some were enthusiastic, for example, Siger of Brabant (1240-1284) and his Nordic disciple Boethius de Dacia. Others were strongly critical, among them the Archbishop Estienne Tempier, who in a writing of 1271 condemned 219 of the new thinking's theses. Others, on the other hand, tried to come to terms and mediate between traditional Christian ideas and the newly received Greek philosophy, filtered through Islam. The foremost among the last group was Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). It was to be Thomas—and thus synthesis—that would win out.

Which were the Muslim philosophers who aroused such a varied reaction? There are three names that stand out especially. The first came to be called Averroes in the West. His Arabic name is Ibn Rushd (1126-1198). His commentary of Aristotle's writings was pathbreaking in western debates. He emphasized—like Aristotle—that the individual soul dies with the body. Only mankind's collective soul, i.e. Idea, survives. Avicenna Ibn Sina (980-1037) developed the conceptualization of being's essence and existence. Being is what something is, existence is what exists. With God being and existence converge. This is His essence to exist. Everything else can in contrast both exist and not exist.

Therefore it is not necessary for something to exist. Mankind, for example, is a thinking being. That is its essence. But it is not necessary for it to exist. It can also not exist. This idea about that which exists necessarily or unnecessarily comes to acquire a major significance for Thomas and his followers. The third Muslim philosopher who came to influence the West is Algazel—Abu Hamid Mohammed Ghazali (1038-1111), a strong critic of Avicenna.

What is it that happened in the West when the dominant intellectual streams became a synthesis between Biblical faith and Greek thinking, transmitted by Muslims? One person who considered this is Jacques Ellul (1912-1994), French sociologist, legal historian, and theologian. Monica Papazu discusses him in her book *Det hvileløse hjerte* [*The Restless Heart*] (2004). One of his most important works, *La subversion du christianisme* (1984) has been available since 2005 in a Danish translation with the title *Kristendommens forvanskning* (Tidehvervs Publishing House). Jacques Ellul's initial thesis is that there is a fundamental difference between Islam and Christianity: "I believe that the spirit of Islam in all respects is in conflict with the spirit of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. This juxtaposition suffices to explain: God cannot be incarnate, God cannot be anything but a sovereign judge, who determines everything according to his will. From this follows the complete integration of religion, politics, and law. God's will assumes inescapably the form of law." This is the conflict between the person Jesus Christ and the religiously motivated collection of laws. What happens then when one creates a synthesis between these conflicts? Ellul answers, "all things religious become legality...legality becomes theology."

There is found in Islam a close connection between religion, politics, and power, and Ellul believes that the Constantine state church of the 1200s received a new impetus from Islam. It is a fact that the greatest ideological battle of the Middle Ages, that between the church and the state, is about this very thing—the state or the political power that wants to protect the church, and against which the church defends itself with the battle-cry *Libertas ecclesiae! Freedom of the Church!* A further point where Ellul sees how conflicting tendencies receive a new impetus from Islam concerning the reason for war. The Germanic people's warrior ideal gradually receded from prominence in the West under the influence of Christianity. In Byzantium the soldier was a necessary evil more than an ideal. By contrast, in Islam military force is a part of the religious ideal. This was the Arab military elite, which spread Islam over the Orient and North Africa. Ellul writes concerning Muslim war that it is always justified and a holy duty. This implies the conclusion that war isn't only necessary in some situations. War is good. When George W. Bush described the American military deployment to the Middle East as a "crusade", this was taken very negatively in Muslim circles. In Ellul's interpretation this stands out, in contrast, as an example of Christendom's Islamization.

The most important point in the meantime has to do with the heart of theology, the appearance of God. Ellul writes, "...God's omnipotence is allowed to rule over love, his transcendence over the incarnation..." With this comes also history's pattern of appearing as predestined and irrevocable. God is destroyed—or Providence, as the rationalists of the 1700s would say. In their belief in *ratio*, Greek rationality as transmitted by Muslim philosophers come to full expression.

In his treatise, *Shadows of Cavernous Shades* (2002) Erik Persson deals with, among many other things, the question of the Islamization of the West. This is one of the most unusual treatises to see the light of day for a long time in Scandinavia. The topic is data science and for 285 pages the author investigates *realistic computing*. Suddenly, it's as if he is befallen by an afterthought, and then he fills 240 pages with a reckoning with the Western rationality that is the basis of the development of computers. In other words, it is fundamentally a presentation on the history of ideas. For the most part, it is an analysis of the roots of Modernism in Arabic philosophy. Erik Persson expands our perspective. It is not just a question of an Islamicized Aristotle. In the intellectual baggage that was transported to the West were also mysticism, hermeneutics, astrology, and magic. In the case of hermeneutics one may exclude the esotericism that appeals to Hermes Trismegistos. It can be interpreted as if these influences pull in different directions, but there is to be found a common basic essential. This is the ambition to dominate being with knowledge. This knowledge can then become rational, esoteric, or magical. Goethe created the Faust figure as a symbolic figure. Erik Persson likewise pinpoints the Muslim impact. He points out namely that Averroes as well as Avicenna had associations with Ismaelite groups within Islam, a direction that combined the Platonic-Aristotelian idea with esotericism, i.e. a secret knowledge, reserved for a select few and transmitted in strict secrecy.

In the “Festschrift for Staffan Fogelmark,” Erik Persson offers a creative investigation of the possible roots in Islam of western utopianism. That both the Bible’s prophets and Jesus Christ looked forward to a perfect kingdom of God is obvious. What happens in utopianism is that this perfect condition is placed into time and space. Eschatology—the study of the final judgment—becomes immanent, becomes present in the world. The important figure here is Joachim of Fiore, born 1130. His greatest significance lies in his philosophy of history. From him come the concepts “the third Reich” and “the leader” [transl. presumably Führer]. The Third Reich is a secularized state; the leader is the *novus dux de Babylone*—Babylon’s new leader. Erik Persson can show in point after point that Joachim’s philosophy of history has parallels in contemporary Islam, especially in Ismaelism, and he was active in southern Italy, one of the Middle Ages’ meeting points between Christian belief and Islam.

The parallels do not of necessity imply that there was an influence. Similarity is not the same as relatedness. Erik Persson’s contribution can be seen as an attempt, a proposal for later researchers to prove. It is a pressing task to prove, since utopianism is such a mighty force in the West: the idea of the perfect society. In this concept can also be found the dream of being able to “create” a new society, which is something completely different from advancing an existing society’s renewal and growth. If one is successful with this, one can also proceed forwards, with both continuity and change. Western utopianism has had catastrophic results, above all in the 1900s: Gulag, Katyn, Auschwitz, Pol Pot, The Great Leap Forward. How could such things happen? Following Erik Persson’s idea, the West’s Islamization is an important contributing factor.

Jacques Ellul and Erik Persson present bold interpretive models. How far the implications reach can only be determined by someone who has very fundamentally detailed knowledge and a comprehensive overview. One thing is incontrovertible, it can be shown that Islam is not only a challenge today. It has been one already since the 1100s. Its intellectual rigor and breadth, its visionary imagination and strict logic make it in no way easy to confront or respond to. At that time the West’s greatest talents joined Thomas Aquinas in taking up the challenge. Jacques Ellul questions this intellectual achievement—in order to converse with Rolf Lindborg. But even if Ellul has judged the matter rightly, there remains a second and more heated question: What will the West’s greatest talents adopt today?

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# Book Notes & Reviews

## Green Politics Is Utopian by Paul Gilk

Eugene OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008 Reviewed by Jacob VanVleet Diablo Valley College, Concord CA

In *Green Politics is Eutopian*, independent scholar Paul Gilk presents twenty-eight insightful essays exploring various facets of Green politics and culture. Among a wide array of topics, Gilk discusses modern industrial-technological society, the distinction between utopia and eutopia, and the necessity of smallscale agriculture.

A central theme throughout Gilk's writings is the recognition that mainstream Green politics/culture is utopian. According to Gilk, utopian thought strives for permanence, however, permanence is precisely the erroneous assumption of the industrial-technological system (i.e., "civilization"). Drawing from the work of Lewis Mumford and others, Gilk persuasively argues that "civilization in its essence is a utopian undertaking." The industrial-technological realm, as well as utopian thought, both imagine that there is some sort of permanent solution to various political and ecological problems. However, as Gilk points out, a permanent answer contradicts the dynamic nature of reality. The earth, humans, and political systems are always in a state of flux; there can be no single, overarching solution.

In contrast to mainstream utopian thought, Gilk advocates an alternative Green political vision: one that is eutopian. Eutopian thinkers seek a solution of stability and wholeness, embracing *impermanence* in its many complex forms. Eutopian thought also aims to sustain an authentic dialogue with the changing processes of the organic world, recognizing the need for a variety of solutions to the array of ecological problems we face.

In addition, Gilk maintains that in order to restore the earth we need to embrace two "tools" or guiding principles. First, we should look to the "ethical core of all true spiritual traditions: compassion, forgiveness, sharing, moderation, simplicity, modesty, selflessness, and love." By practicing these culture-transcending virtues, we will not only limit our ecological footprint, but we can also begin to dialogue with other traditions which acknowledge the merit of these virtues. Second, we need to adopt the "slow, somewhat stumbling, but steady congealing of the Green political vision." Here, Gilk acknowledges the shortcomings of Green politics while recognizing the absolute necessity of keeping the well-being of the earth at the heart of politics. (This need has been made frighteningly clear by global warming/climate change, depletion of fossil

fuels, and massive waste disposal at sea, to name a few.) Clearly, Gilk's two guiding principles –the ethical core of true spiritual traditions and the Green political vision –can lead us toward healing, wholeness, and stability.

Among its many good qualities, two primary strengths of *Green Politics is Eutopian* stand out. First, Gilk does not dogmatically assert quick fixes to complex problems. With sincerity, Gilk acknowledges that he does not have all of the answers, and he makes it clear that, "These essays, written in the excitement of discovery and the anxiety of distress, are a small nudge in the direction of eutopia." This humility adds to the persuasiveness already found throughout Gilk's work. The second strength is Gilk's recognition of the need for spiritual transformation. It is not enough to simply embrace the Green political vision; we also need to commit ourselves to an authentic and continual spiritual renewal. Indeed, only by committing ourselves politically *and* spiritually will we make any concrete changes in the world.

Overall, Gilk's book insightfully calls us to question our notions of "civilization"; it reminds us that the healing of the earth is our obligation in *many* ways; and it offers a refreshing corrective to today's mainstream, narrow, utopian solutions. Timely and thoughtful, *Green Politics is Eutopian* is a passionate, convicting, and much needed work.

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## **News & Notes**

### **— Russell Heddendorf (1930 - 2008)**

On December 24, 2008, Russell Heddendorf died suddenly at age 78 in Philadelphia. Heddendorf had a long and distinguished career as professor of sociology, with appointments at Dickinson College, Geneva College, and Covenant College. He was a long time student of Elul's sociology and of the interface between Christianity and sociology. He was the author of eight articles and reviews of Ellul.

Heddendorf's latest book, *From Faith to Fun: The Secularization of Humor* (Wipf & Stock, 2008) "takes its lead from Ellul's *Subversion of Christianity*" he wrote in personal correspondence last year. *The Ellul Forum* will review this book in the Fall 2009 issue. A great man and a friend to the Ellul fraternity, Russell Heddendorf will be missed.

— **WIPF & sTOCK: PROGREss ON ELLUL BOOKs** Despite some special challenges to surmount, editor Ted Lewis and Wipf & Stock Publishers are making progress on securing rights to reprint Ellul's out-of-print works in English. *Money & Power* will reappear very soon, *Living Faith* and *Hope in Time of Abandonment* will come next. Others to follow.

— **JOYCE HANKs TO PEACE CORP**

Our IJES co-founder and certainly the leading bibliographer of Jacques Ellul in the world, Joyce Hanks, has retired from her faculty post at the University of Scranton and also taken leave from the IJES to serve in the peace corp in a rather remote southeast Asia location. We wish our amazing colleague well and will eagerly welcome her back.

— **ANDY ALEXIs-BAKER AND DAVID LOVEKIN** Join IJES Board

At its annual meeting, the IJES Board welcomed two new members. Andy Alexis-Baker recently graduated from the Mennonite Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana. He is a long time leader of the Jesus Radicals, an anarchist group largely inspired by Ellul. Andy has been an indefatigable, generous, and courageous promoter of Jacques Ellul's ideas and writings. David Lovekin is professor of philosophy at Hastings College in Nebraska. David was author of one of the first published monographs on Ellul's thought: *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul* (Lehigh Univ, 1991).

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The IJES (with its francophone sister-society, L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul) links together scholars and friends of various specializations, vocations, backgrounds, and nations, who share a common interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), long time professor at the University of Bordeaux. Our objectives are (1) to preserve and disseminate his literary and intellectual heritage, (2) to extend his social critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) to extend his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

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**Issue #44 Fall 2009 — Ellul,  
Capitalism, and the Workplace**

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## For the Critique of Technological Civilization



”One of the results of capitalism... is the subservience of being to having. This result makes allegiance to capitalism virtually impossible for a Christian. For it is not a by-product... To the contrary, it is the inevitable consequence of capitalism, for there is no other possibility when making money becomes the purpose of life.”

-Jacques Ellul

Money and Power

(1954; ET 1984), p. 20

From the Guest Editor

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## **From the Guest Editor**

Over the past fourteen months, capitalism has been in the news. Failures and restructurings of banks, significant drops in stock indexes, and the reshaping of the U.S. automobile industry have put workers and investors on edge. Some readers may have lost jobs in the past year, and most of us know people who have become unemployed or fear that they will be soon. Many people’s retirement funds have diminished considerably.

Institutions that we have counted on as being part of the fabric of our lives may have been forced to reduce services or even close. Despite recent declarations of recovery, it has not seemed like “business as usual” for those whose lives are intertwined with global capitalism.

Yet, from the point of view of certain schools of social thought, capitalism promotes this kind of convulsion. Different types of Marxism offer variants on the doctrine that the productive capacity of capitalism is based on the impoverishment of workers, sooner or later causing supply to outstrip demand and precipitating a business crisis. Even those who think that Marx got many things wrong may wonder what sort of guidance is in place to cause lenders to extend credit to projects which are trustworthy in a deeper sense - not just able to repay their loans, but promoting the long-term well-being of people and the planet.

This issue of *The Ellul Forum* looks at capitalism and life in the business world from various points of view, recognizing that it is a continuing and sometimes controversial part of our technological civilization. First, I examine Jacques Ellul's views of capitalism from the angle of the theological doctrines and social analysis behind them, showing some places where I think he leaves questions open. Next, Nekeisha Alexis-Baker's essay, edited from a presentation she has given to church groups, seeks to raise consciousness of the religious dimensions of the rhetoric and realities around investing, work, and consumerism. Finally, Bryan Winters speaks from the point of view of one who has worked in software marketing and is becoming distressed at the difficulty of rational communication in an environment where image-based spectacles are expected. Together, they show the continuing relevance of Ellul's thought on many issues - from money itself to secular religions to the properties of word and image - for economic life.

Virginia W. Landgraf

American Theological Library Association, Chicago, Illinois

## Capitalism in the Thought of Jacques Ellul: Eight Theses

by Virginia W. Landgraf

*Virginia W. Landgraf is a lay theologian in the Reformed tradition who works as an indexer-analyst at the American Theological Library Association in Chicago. Her theological education was at the Graduate Theological Union (M.A., systematic theology, 1995) and Princeton Theological Seminary (Ph.D., Christian ethics, 2003). Her dissertation focused on the role of institutions in Jacques Ellul's theology and sociology.*

The purpose of the following theses is to outline how capitalism fits into the overall schema of Jacques Ellul's thought. They are intended to serve as a springboard to further work in theology and social analysis.<sup>1</sup> The first three are about Ellul's thought in general and serve as background for those more specific to economic life.<sup>2</sup> They are included because our judgments about whether he is right or wrong there affect how we evaluate his views of capitalism.

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<sup>1</sup> In another project, I was struck by the contrast, over many different areas, between what apologists for and opponents of capitalism believed about what is fixed and what is changeable about human life (Virginia W. Landgraf, "Competing Narratives of Property Rights and Justice for the Poor: Toward a Nonannihilationalist Approach to Scarcity and Efficiency," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 27 (1) Spr/Sum 2007: 57-75). I find both sides to be too triumphalist in what they affirm and too demonizing in what they oppose. Ellul's thought is an interesting starting point because he wants to avoid triumphalism and because he is willing to acknowledge both good intentions and bad results on both sides.

<sup>2</sup> The first three theses are condensed from portions of Virginia W. Landgraf, *Abstract Power and the God of Love: A Critical Assessment of the Place of Institutions in Jacques Ellul's Anthropology of Dialectical Relationships* (Ph.D. diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2003).

*Thesis 1: The problematic that runs through all of Ellul's theological and sociological work can be expressed as follows: "How can truth break into a world in which the realm of reality is becoming more and more closed in upon itself?"*

Ellul defines the order of truth as having to do with "the final or ultimate destination of the human being," as well as debates over meanings, purposes, values, and decisions with ultimate significance. The order of reality has to do with "that which is seen, counted, quantified, and situated in space." It also includes abstractions from particulars that can be depicted visually or manipulated quantitatively. Ellul believes that each of these orders has its characteristic mode and sense by which our mind receives it. Questions or judgments about truth are primarily communicated by the spoken word and received by hearing; realities are transmitted by visible objects or images, perceived by seeing. Each order also has its own characteristic logic. Arriving at truth requires time and includes a dimension of mystery, and words allow multiple interpretations. Reality requires space, definability, and unequivocity. Claims within the realm of truth are backed by the personal word of a committed witness; within the realm of reality, they are backed by impersonal evidence. The position of the self with respect to the world is different within the two orders: waiting for the other and giving the other freedom when it is a question of truth, but grasping at the world outside oneself and manipulating the other when it is a question of reality. The former is a stance of love, the latter of power.<sup>3</sup>

Given this distinction, Ellul's sociological works depict the realm of reality closing in upon itself and increasingly drawing human beings into its machinations: the contemporary technical phenomenon as a matter of the absolutization of quantitative knowledge and effects;<sup>4</sup> propaganda as a phenomenon whereby words are detached from a committed subject and used to manipulate behavior (reality);<sup>5</sup> politics as impervious to values because it is driven behind the scenes by the technical phenomenon;<sup>6</sup> the growth in the power of the bureaucratic state, abstracted from any personal ruler, to manipulate a similarly abstract citizenry;<sup>7</sup> etc. His theological works express hope that Truth, the Word of God, may break into such closed systems<sup>8</sup> and disappoint-

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<sup>3</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 5-42.

<sup>4</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), 7985.

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, trans. Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 25-32.

<sup>6</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Political Illusion*, trans. Konrad Kellen (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), 6895.

<sup>7</sup> One of the subsections of Ellul's *Histoire des institutions* is entitled, "Mainmise de l'etat sur la nation" (Takeover of the nation by the state). Jacques Ellul, *Histoire des institutions*, vol. 4, XVI-XVIII siecle, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Paris: PUF, 1969), 79. For how revolutions against centralized power ended up reinforcing it, see Jacques Ellul, *Autopsy of Revolution*, trans. Patricia Wolf (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), 160-163.

<sup>8</sup> For instance, from various angles, Jacques Ellul, *Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation*, trans.

ment that Christians have grasped at visible structures within the realm of reality (moral and legal codes, institutions, political accomplishments)<sup>9</sup> instead of being open to where God might be calling us next. Occasionally Ellul's sociological works include hypotheses about how vicious circles may be reversed or descriptions of characteristics societies should have to meet the challenges that they encounter. Examples include his call for contemplation in *Autopsy of Revolution*<sup>10</sup> and the argument from information theory in *The Political Illusion* that resilient societies must include a diversity of components and room for dialogue among them.<sup>11</sup> Both of these examples presume the idea that the realm of reality needs transcendent input to avoid becoming a vicious cycle that consumes human beings.

*Thesis 2: Ellul's statements about the absoluteness of quantitative judgments gain their force not from the inner logic of mathematics but from Ellul's belief that a desire to grasp at reality is intrinsic to fallen human beings.*

Ellul states that because the difference in size of two numbers cannot be changed by anyone, methods which are based on quantitative results are similarly indisputable.<sup>12</sup> This inference ignores the fact that many mathematical equations have more than one solution. Another factor of decision must be introduced to narrow down the results to a single number or point. These decisions may be forced not by the calculations of technicians but by the mass psychology of the technical phenomenon: "the larger one" (or, as the trend became later, "the smaller one") or "the faster one."

Ellul believes that the inner structure of our minds as we encounter the realm of reality drives such decisions. All human beings, he thinks, have in our minds an image of us as possessing and manipulating reality. This image intervenes with our immediate experience of the visual, quantitative, abstracted realm to make our relationship with our environment into one in which we are the subjects and the environment is the object. Eventually, we construct a world surrounding ourselves in which everything is made by people. Yet, as we realize our dependence upon this environment, we are struck with horror.<sup>13</sup> Further attempts to master this environment perpetuate this vicious circle.

Because multiple solutions exist for many quantitative problems, the belief that people have this image in our minds seems to function as a proxy for original sin in Ellul's sociological work. It intervenes between temptation to manipulation (seeing

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George C. Schreiner (New York: Seabury, 1977), 144-170;

Jacques Ellul, *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 198-199; Jacques Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 60-66.

<sup>9</sup> This is the theme of Jacques Ellul, *False Presence of the Kingdom*, trans. C. Edward Hopkin (New York: Seabury, 1972), and Jacques Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986).

<sup>10</sup> Ellul, *Autopsy of Revolution*, 285-286.

<sup>11</sup> Ellul, *The Political Illusion*, 206-223, 236-238.

<sup>12</sup> Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 80.

<sup>13</sup> Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 11-12.



reality) and the manipulation itself (grasping at it). Its presence helps explain why Ellul sees societal trends based on the manipulation of quantitative or abstract data as so impervious to claims from the realm of truth.

*Thesis 3: Ellul's absolute disjunction between love and power and his doctrine that God characteristically works through love rather than power make it hard to conceive divine action as working directly through mechanical sociological or economic processes to create positive goods.*

Ellul believes that the Truth who can ultimately break into closed systems of reality is the God who created the world, chose Israel, became incarnate in Jesus Christ who died for humanity's sins on the cross, and will ultimately purge the world of evil in the last judgment. The ultimate purpose of human life is to be in relationship with this God and obey this God's commandments.<sup>14</sup> Among these commandments are "Thou shalt not kill"<sup>15</sup> and commandments to love one's neighbor and enemy. One caught in a cycle of grasping after reality risks drowning out the word of God with concerns over finite things and crushing other members of creation by the desire to possess them.

Ellul thinks that both divine action and the interaction with creation that God wants from human beings are expressible in terms of love, not power. In Ellul's doctrine of divine action, God does not pre-ordain the future but takes human decisions into account when intervening in history and when building the new Jerusalem.<sup>16</sup> God knows what is best for human beings and intervenes in blocked historical situations, using natural and historical forces and human decisions to upset the existing imbalance.<sup>17</sup> When Ellul links blind historical forces to God's activity, he is usually talking about God's judgment, not God's continuous maintenance of the world as in a more conventional doctrine of providence. God may turn aside and be silent,<sup>18</sup> and then the workings out of mechanical processes (e.g., violence begetting more violence) are a way that God's judgment falls on those who choose means which are unfitting for creatures created in the image of a God of love.<sup>19</sup> God suffers when creatures experience these punishments,<sup>20</sup> but God does not indefinitely wallow in the fallen creature's condition. In Jesus Christ God has taken on the condemnation that creatures deserved, showing that God's will is for pardon beyond the temporary chastisements and for the ultimate redemption of creation. This process of bringing human beings to account, which might

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<sup>14</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 295-299.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Ellul's statement that what differentiates human beings from animals is the commandment "Thou shalt not kill." Jacques Ellul, *Violence: Reflections from a Christian Perspective*, trans. Cecelia Gaul Kings (New York: Seabury, 1969), 146.

<sup>16</sup> Jacques Ellul, *What I Believe* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; London: Marshall Morgan and Scott, 1989), 218-223.

<sup>17</sup> Ellul, *What I Believe*, 158-161.

<sup>18</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, trans. C. Edward Hopkin (New York: Seabury, 1973), 114-117.

<sup>19</sup> Ellul, *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 111-118.

<sup>20</sup> Ellul, *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 110.

be termed “benevolent coercion” (although Ellul never uses this term), is consummated in the last judgment, in which every human being is stripped of works which are opposed to God’s will. Ellul believes that God has the power to damn creatures but has renounced it.<sup>21</sup> He thinks that instances that look like manipulative or crushing power in the Bible - such as the Flood or the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah - are recorded precisely because they are abnormal.<sup>22</sup> Ellul sees the character of God’s love revealed and accomplished not by such acts but by a stance of “non-power,” e.g., Jesus’ decision not to use power to defend himself (Matt. 26:52-54).<sup>23</sup>

This disjunction between power and love - with benevolent coercion hovering implicitly in the background but not thematized by Ellul - raises a fundamental question relevant to economic life. Does God ever work through mechanical sociological processes *non-paradoxically* (i.e., not as the “judgment” term in the sequence bad direction - judgment - redirection) to create positive goods? Doctrines of providence that include such a component have been common among Christian apologists for or opponents of capitalism, whether they point to Adam Smith’s doctrine of the “invisible hand” or believe that God is working through class struggle described along Marxist lines. Yet Ellul does not take that route. He refuses to call his doctrine of divine action “providence” because he thinks such a term implies mechanical or totalitarian determinism.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, as the following theses will show, what many of his predecessors and contemporaries call “progress” Ellul sees as trends wherein God seems increasingly silent.

*Thesis 4: Ellul thinks that neither work nor progress are worth the trust that modern ideologies (capitalist or socialist) have placed in them, either on the basis of biblical revelation or concrete results.*

Ellul does not accept the myth that work brings abundant life. From a material point of view he finds its track record poor. He accepts the findings of Georges Hubert de Radkowski and others that poverty was not widespread in primitive societies, but when work for hire available in a society increased, poverty increased also.<sup>25</sup> He thinks that the modern exaltation of work dates only to the eighteenth century and is associated with a certain ideology of happiness (*bonheur*) associated with material comfort.<sup>26</sup> Ellul sees this increased standard of living as more of a temptation or a curse than a boon. Even were this level of material wellbeing available to all, the same problems of grasping for it and being horrified at it apply as with any other element in the realm of

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<sup>21</sup> Ellul, *What I Believe*, 190-192, 210-213, 196.

<sup>22</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 33.

<sup>23</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Si tu es le Fils de Dieu: Souffrances et tentations de Jesus* (Zurich: R. Brockhaus Verlag; Paris: Centurion, 1991), 99-100.

<sup>24</sup> Ellul, *What I Believe*, 156.

<sup>25</sup> Jacques Ellul, “From the Bible to a History of Non-Work,” *Cross Currents* 35 (1) Spring 1985: 45.

<sup>26</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Metamorphose du bourgeois* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1967), 67-88; Jacques Ellul, *A Critique of the New Commonplaces*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), 151.

reality. (Here they are expressed as a preoccupation with achieving or maintaining one's material security.) Moreover, Ellul sees the industrial production methods that have brought increased levels of material comfort as leading inevitably to the proletarianization of some (see thesis #5).

Ellul thinks that the Bible justifies no ideology of work as virtue or freedom, contrary to modern ideologies promoted by capitalistic bourgeois, socialist or fascist governments, or even the church. Before the fall, human beings' interactions with creation resembled play more than work. Our relation with creation became toilsome as a result of the fall, and we aggravate our burden by trying to save ourselves through our work. Work is simply one of the necessities of life and should not be sacralized. The occasional warnings in the Bible that spendthrifts or idlers will lack material sustenance are recognitions of how the fallen world works, not exaltations of work as heroism.<sup>27</sup>

Similarly, Ellul finds no justification in either concrete results or the Bible for a belief in progress: that the course of history is such that conditions of life will continually improve. Looking at history over the last several centuries, he sees a growth in technical power and a growth in the power of the abstract, bureaucratic state, to the point where alternative ways of being are increasingly being squeezed out of social currency. The state and technique do not counterbalance each other but act synergistically; technique increases the power of the state over its citizens, and the state gives a sanction to the demand for technical "progress."<sup>28</sup> Such a growth in technical power is at best morally ambiguous, because of the increased danger to life from maleficent uses, accidents, and systemic unpredictability,<sup>29</sup> and the fact that beneficent uses entail a whole series of prior technical inventions, some of which may have maleficent uses tempting to fallen human beings.<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, Ellul thinks that Christians who read history as progressing incrementally towards the kingdom of God, especially through our works, are misinterpreting the Bible. The new creation is a gift of God and comes only after judgment. Although God takes some of our works into the new Jerusalem, we cannot know which of them they will be.<sup>31</sup>

*Thesis 5: Ellul takes over Karl Marx's thesis that capitalization entails the proletarianization of those without capital and widens it to include labor camps perpetrated by statist Marxist regimes and the replacement of traditional human contacts with technical work and entertainment among workers in societies dominated by technique.*

In his account of original capitalization and proletarianization Ellul hews closely to Marx. The process depends on a labor theory of value and the existence of some kind of "primitive capitalization," where some have capital (and hence the ability to hire others

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<sup>27</sup> Ellul, "From the Bible to a History of NonWork," 43-45.

<sup>28</sup> Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 228.

<sup>29</sup> Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 77-99.

<sup>30</sup> Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 98-99.

<sup>31</sup> Ellul, *What I Believe*, 217-218.

and benefit from their services), and others have nothing to sell but their labor. Because labor is the measure of value, if capitalists do not pay workers the entire difference between the price of the finished product and the cost of the raw materials, they are in effect stealing from the workers (the “alienation” of labor). The workers’ labors under capitalism increase the capitalists’ power at the expense of their own power. The cycle thus continues, with capitalists becoming more powerful and workers not able to command wages beyond what is necessary for their reproduction as a laboring class. Workers in such a situation constitute a proletariat, bearing within themselves the alienating side of all the characteristics of capitalism: the need to conform themselves to means of industrial production; the lack of roots in a particular place and the difficulty of sustaining culture in general (because of the need to move where the work is and the lack of time to spend in a place apart from work); and the lack of family life apart from mere biological reproduction (and the early co-optation of any children into the industrial system).<sup>32</sup>

Ellul believes that such a process of proletarianization occurs during *any* process of industrialization, whether undertaken by private actors or governments. Besides the proletarianization during the Industrial Revolution described by Marx, he sees the process as having happened under Communist regimes in the USSR, China, Vietnam, and Cambodia. In each case, the government mandated some kind of industrialization; in each case, people sent to forced labor camps constituted a new proletariat: people deprived of all but the most basic material sustenance and cut off from roots and family. Marxist regimes extolled the value of work and developed bureaucratic structures to keep those who questioned this ideology in line. The ostensible purpose of the labor camps was to “re-educate” recalcitrants into believing in work. Ellul does not see the massive deurbanization undertaken by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia as a romantic return to the countryside or to pure Khmer culture but as an attempt to build irrigation works industrially.<sup>33</sup>

A third type of proletariat Ellul sees might be termed the “technical proletariat.” These are people who, though not materially miserable, are alienated from roots, family, and culture because they are too caught up in technical work methods and entertainments to want anything else. Their leisure activities do not cause them to question demands for technical progress but serve to better integrate them into these demands.<sup>34</sup>

*Thesis 6: Ellul thinks that money is a power that has its own force and direction, setting itself up in opposition to God, and that component practices of economic systems based on monetary transactions involve manipulative power and/or trust in money rather than the God of grace.*

Ellul believes that Jesus’ designation of money by a personal term (“Mammon”) expresses a spiritual reality: that money has power over us that cannot be explained

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<sup>32</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Changer de revolution: L’inéluctableproletariat* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1982), 7-14.

<sup>33</sup> Ellul, *Changer de revolution*, 48-147, 184-196.

<sup>34</sup> Ellul, *Changer de revolution*, 197-220.

by its rational function in society as a means of exchange. This power is shown by the fact that money is one of contemporary human beings' sacred things: impolite to discuss among the bourgeois and presumed to solve all problems by the working class. It sets itself up as being our personal master and savior, and Jesus demands that we choose between it and God. Ellul's warnings about money go beyond its purely quantitative nature and role in facilitating abstractions. Monetization implies not only preoccupation with the realm of reality but also serving a power that inhabits realities and claims ultimacy (a false "answer" in the realm of truth).<sup>35</sup>

Ellul thus thinks that it is very difficult to use money rather than being used by it. He sees savings or insurance as expressions of trust in money rather than God, although he does not condemn savings for nearterm, concrete purposes such as buying a house or gift, to tide oneself over during slow periods in lines of work with irregular income, or to meet the costs of continuing one's business (e.g., retaining seed corn or replacing worn-out equipment). He considers any act of selling an attempt to gain power over another, not a service to another. His logic is based on the nature of God. The God who becomes incarnate in Jesus Christ and dies for humanity's sins is a God of grace; monetary transactions, by their very nature, involve not giving something away but rather asking a price for it, and hence they are not grace. Jesus Christ already paid the price for our sins, so we should not pay that price to a false god.<sup>36</sup>

*Thesis 7: Ellul believes that choosing God rather than Mammon means siding with human life against money, which puts some basic practices of capitalism in question, but also implies liberation from worry and from the enslaving power of money.*

Ellul believes that loving God rather than Mammon is not merely a matter of internal direction but should be expressed in concrete ways, which can be characterized as personalization and desacralization. Personalization means siding with human life against money: recognizing those with whom one has financial relationships as whole people rather than reducing them to their economic function. Relationships where there can be grace and freedom should take precedence over the desire for personal advantage or the need to follow the letter of contracts. Ellul believes that the biblical legislation against lending at interest to neighbors or members of one's community (Ex. 22:25, Lev. 25:35-38), against taking pledges overnight or taking anything necessary for livelihood as a pledge (Ex. 22:26, Deut. 24:6-13), and against holding back wages (Jas. 5:4) are primarily a matter of choosing human life over Mammon and only secondarily a matter of justice for one group of people over another. Choosing Mammon brings accursedness and enslavement on all sides, both of the less powerful who are immediately crushed and of the more powerful (who nevertheless bear responsibility for their deeds) who are worried about maintaining their position. Choosing life against money also implies

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<sup>35</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Money and Power*, trans. LaVonne Neff (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), 75-85.

<sup>36</sup> Ellul, *Money and Power*, 104-106, 77-79, 8688.

refusing to treat money as sacred, giving money away and eschewing indeterminate savings.<sup>37</sup>

Ellul's beliefs about how Christians should personalize economic relationships and desacralize money put basic practices of capitalism in question. Although he acknowledges that the Old Testament allowed lending at interest to distant Gentiles, he does not seem to believe that Christians should treat anyone as less than a neighbor. He does not say that Christians are forbidden from charging interest, but he implies that a Christian entering into a non-neighborly financial relationship should personalize it (presumably no longer caring about receiving interest). Ellul explicitly states that profit is ruled out by the call not to hold back wages;<sup>38</sup> as in thesis #5, he holds to a labor theory of value inherited from Marx. Ellul's call for Christians to refrain from saving except for near-term purposes implies the curtailment of lending from fractional reserves. Lending at interest, profit, and lending from fractional reserves are three pillars of the expansion of economic activity brought on by capitalism. Ellul seems to imply that all of these occur because people are trusting in Mammon rather than God. When combined with his belief that industrialization brings proletarianization (thesis #5) and that work has a poor track record in providing what human beings really need (thesis #4), one is led to the conclusion that Ellul thinks that capitalistic economic expansion is a huge mistake.

Ellul's calls for Christians to live contrary to capitalistic expectations should not be seen as legalistic restrictions but as ways to live out liberation. He wants to free people from enslavement to money. He believes that living according to God's grace means freedom from financial worry.<sup>39</sup> If we trust that God knows that we need the means of material sustenance, we will be free to adopt the counter-cultural practices he recommends.

*Thesis 8: Ellul's call for Christians to incarnate God's love where they are rather than withdraw from the world presents ambiguities for Christians in capitalistic societies, because any economic act can have multiple meanings and consequences.*

Ellul does not counsel escape from monetary entanglements as a strategy for Christians to avoid being enslaved by money but believes that Christians should personalize economic relationships and desacralize money where they are.<sup>40</sup> Christians are thus placed in situations of ambiguity. One ambiguity comes from the fact that the normal condition of human beings at the end of life is inability to provide for one's basic needs. Saving for old age could then be seen as rational planning for a particular purpose or as balancing out the irregular income that all of us have if our life is seen as a whole. Ellul would probably find this interpretation a rationalization on the slippery slope to trust in Mammon. (Our expenses during retirement are an unknown quantity and unnecessary if we die suddenly while still working.) But the possibility of framing

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<sup>37</sup> Ellul, *Money and Power*, 99-103, 109-116.

<sup>38</sup> Ellul, *Money and Power*, 102-103.

<sup>39</sup> Ellul, *Money and Power*, 106-109.

<sup>40</sup> Ellul, *Money and Power*, 96-97.

retirement savings this way exemplifies Ellul's refusal to provide hard-and-fast rules about where one must desacralize money and where one may follow procedures which those who trust in Mammon would find prudent.

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Taken as a whole, these theses show why Ellul does not recommend capitalistic activity as a strategy to help transcendent input break into vicious circles of reality. The methods of capitalism are based on preoccupation with the realm of reality and/or a power which inhabits reality and sets itself up as a false god, and they lead to consequences deleterious to human life. The fact that Ellul says all these things about statist Marxist regimes as well does not erase his negative judgment of capitalism. At the height of the Cold War, he was saying, "A pox on both your houses!"

At various points people concerned with Ellul's problematic might draw different conclusions. Is his account of vicious cycles of reality, based on the belief that fallen human beings grasp at reality, watertight? Does his doctrine of divine action adequately account for how God relates with nonhuman realities? Is his account of the impoverishment attendant upon work for hire an accurate reading of economic history? Is Marx's labor theory of value correct, or can just wages coexist with just profits? Are all buying-selling relationships expressions of the desire of one party to have power over another, or can monetary transactions exist where both parties benefit?

One might answer several of these questions differently by questioning Ellul's absolute disjunction between love and power. Are the categories of love-as-dialogue and power-as-manipulation adequate to describe the raising of children, care for the mentally disabled, or the tending of plants or animals? It seems that a third category, analogous to artistic creation respectful of one's materials, would help fill the gaps. There are biblical precedents for seeing some of God's activity in this way (e.g., God as the potter in Jer. 18:6-10). Such a category could help make the concept of benevolent coercion explicit, depict non-manipulative relations with realities, and form part of a doctrine of providence that could imagine God's positive action through mechanical sociological processes. Specifying how to formulate such a doctrine so as to avoid the triumphalism of previous descriptions of economic or political providence (whether of left or right) goes beyond the scope of this essay.

## Mea Culpa

Because of editorial mistakes, a number of errors were introduced in Erik Persson's *Cybergnosticism Triumphant?* in Ellul Forum issue #43 (Spring 2009).

- Erik Persson's credentials were not correctly stated in the article. Whereas he worked as an assistant professor at the Department of Informatics at Lund University during 2003-2006, he is currently at LDC (Lund Computer Centre) at Lund University, working with software development.

- p. 4, second column, near the end of the page: “Arguably ... technology. This seems ...” does not make sense. The text should read: “Arguably, their and their scholarly defenders’ neglect or facile rebuff of the, to the common sense at least, rather obvious negative consequences and conspicuous dangers of these technologies seems to confirm Jacques Ellul’s famous thesis of the fundamental deceitfulness of technological discourse, “le bluff technologique” (see [Ellul90]), whereby all negative aspects of technological “progress” are swept under the rug or made light of in the interest of the “wager” (“l’enjeu du siècle”) lain that we shall be able to control technology to our own advantage, the unspoken premise of which being “after us the deluge”.”
- p. 8, first column, last sentence: Instead of “as the replacement, in the gnostic’s view, of the imperfect unjust, and evil order of the present world” the text should read, “as the replacement of the in the gnostic’s view imperfect, unjust, and evil order of the present world.”

The Ellul Forum Editors apologize to both the author and the readers for these oversights and errors.

## **Market Capitalism: The Religion of the Market & its Challenge to the Church**

by Nekeisha Alexis-Baker

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My assertion in this essay is that Christians concerned with economic justice should not understand market capitalism as merely an economic system nor see our participation within it as being “responsible consumers.” Rather market capitalism is a religion with the market as its god. Therefore, resisting the effects of market capitalism is to resist participation in idolatry. Many people have discussed market capitalism as a religion. I will present their arguments and bring in some of my own reflections. After examining several definitions of religion, I came up with a working definition that includes the following elements: a narrative of a transcendent being or beings that relates to history (myth); truth statements on the way the world works and the role of the created order (doctrine); and a set of practices (social institutions, rituals, experiences) and values (ethics) that form persons to participate in that world. As I will show below, the market has a myth, doctrines, and practices that form a religious system. I hope to enable readers to reflect on the ways Christianity is weakened in the face of market capitalism and how the church might regain its potency.



## The myth of the market and doctrines of its transcendence

In investing journalism and websites the market tends to be discussed as three different but interconnected beings: the bull market, in which prices of securities are expected to rise; the bear market, in which such prices are expected to fall; and the market as a whole. The bull and bear markets may be named for the attack postures of the respective animals: the upward thrusting motion of the horns of an attacking bull and the downward motion of a bear paw when it strikes. The warring animals of the market have particular characteristics: growth and optimism in a bull market, and decline and recession in a bear market. Yet bull markets can limp and even die, giving birth to the bear market. The bear market is responsible for the bull's demise until the market is able to roar, surge, and resurrect itself once again<sup>41</sup>.

The seriousness with which people take the inner battle of the market is one indicator of its transcendence. In a bull market all is well with the world. Profits are high, wealth overflows, investors and shareholders are confident, the economic system is in good shape, and consumers can shop without restriction. In a bear market, the very foundation of our society is threatened. Bear markets are blamed on declines in the economy and in the corporate arena, poor government policies, and bank failures that can "paralyze the financial system, causing a persistent slump."<sup>42</sup> Investopedia's first piece of advice to investors in a bear market is, "Don't despair." The article goes on to say, "[T]he best thing to do during a bear market is to play dead - just like you should if you met a real grizzly in the woods By staying calm and not making any sudden

moves, you'll save yourself from becoming a bear's lunch."<sup>43</sup> The market's performance then is figuratively a matter of life, death and resurrection. It can affect everything from employment to the value of our homes to the way we act as consumers and investors.

A key indicator of the market's transcendence is that its proponents refuse to intervene with it. Economists tend to believe that the market is a natural phenomenon that has been in existence at least as long as human beings. A striking example of this belief can be found in a 1999 *Wall Street Journal* article called, "A New Model for the Nature of Business: It's Alive!" Author Thomas Petzinger Jr. quotes from and reflects on the words of anthropologist and economist William C. Frederick:

"All living things...harbor an impulse to economize, to accomplish more with less. This is life's bulwark against the universal propensity toward the loss of energy and form, the unstoppable force called entropy. 'This economizing process is the only way to survive, grow, develop, and flourish,' says Dr. Frederick. 'Overall, life on earth has

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<sup>41</sup> Floyd Norris, "As Bull Market Nears a Birthday, Few Seem Ready to Celebrate," *The New York Times*, 24 Sep 2004; Investopedia, Terms, Bull Market, <<http://www.investopedia.com/terms/b/bullmarket.asp>>; Investopedia, Terms, Bear Market,

<<http://www.investopedia.com/terms/b/bearmarket.asp>>.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Sivy and Erica Garcia, "Forecast 2003," *Money* Jan 2003, p 58-64.

<sup>43</sup> Investopedia, "Digging Deeper into Bull and Bear Markets," 3 Oct 2003:

<<http://www.investopedia.com/articles/basics/03/100303.a.sp>>

been a roaring economizing success story' ... The genes that create us humans have programmed us for business, 'the main economizing vehicle on which organized human life depends,' Dr. Frederick says. Trade, technology and the division of labor, the three foundations of business, all predate agriculture, government, religion, law, symbolic communication and probably every other organizing social force, except the nurturing of progeny."<sup>44</sup>

In other words, business and economics are natural and life-giving, explain the way all life is organized, and are a permanent part of our history. David Loy explores this rationale: "In this calculus...intervention in the ongoing economic system is a threat to the natural order of things, and hence to future human welfare."<sup>45</sup> This view conveys that we who are controlled by a fundamental "impulse" to do business cannot control the movements of the market. We who do not have arms like God cannot contend with the Almighty (cf. Job 40: 2, 9).

Since the market is natural it follows that it is also objective, if not just. If economics is related to genetics, then economic inequality is simply a matter of natural selection. As a lion can't be blamed for eating a gazelle, the market can't be blamed if some become poor and others rich. Loy explains: "If market capitalism does operate according to economic laws as natural as those of physics or chemistry...its consequences seem unavoidable, despite the fact that they have led to extreme social inequality and are leading to environmental catastrophe."<sup>46</sup> The advice of the market to the poor is simply to have faith in its workings. Often, none of the models of development offered to poor countries provide an alternative to capitalism. Advocates of globalization have even suggested that poverty-stricken nations should "let the free market do the work of deciding a) What goods and services to produce...b) How to produce them...and c) How to distribute them."<sup>47</sup> These theories propose that if the market is allowed to exist without intervention then development will naturally occur.

Another truth statement in market capitalism is that the market is all-knowing. Harvey Cox writes, "The market, we are taught, is able to determine what human needs are, what copper and capital should cost, how much barbers and CEOs should be paid, and how much jet planes, running shoes and hysterectomies should sell for." Cox notes that this wisdom may not last long. When the article was written in 1999, there was already the language of a "total market" and the emergence of an economic trend to "apply market calculations to areas that once seemed exempt such as dating, family life, marital relations and child rearing."<sup>48</sup> The market cannot be omniscient

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<sup>44</sup> Thomas Petzinger, Jr., "A New Model for the Nature of Business: It's Alive!" *The Wall Street Journal*, 26 Feb 1999.

<sup>45</sup> David Loy, "The Religion of the Market," New Theology Working Group, 1997.  
<<http://www.religiousconsultation.org/loy.htm>>

<sup>46</sup> Loy, "The Religion of the Market," 2.

<sup>47</sup> Richard A. Yoder, Calvin W. Redekop, and Vernon E. Jantzi, *Development to a Different Drummer: Anabaptist/Mennonite Experiences and Perspectives* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2004), 30.

<sup>48</sup> Harvey Cox, "The Market as God," *Atlantic Monthly* Mar 1999, 6.

without assistance from trend-spotters, motivational researchers, marketing specialists, and psychologists. These intermediaries work to understand and exploit people's wants, needs, fears, and insecurities in order to offer them solutions for the right price, increasing people's dependence on the market and ensuring that it continues to expand.

Note how in the above truth claims several properties that Christian theology traditionally attributes to God are applied to the market: killing and making alive, omnipotence, righteousness, and omniscience.

## **Doctrines of the market: cosmology, anthropology, and salvation**

Market capitalism not only has truth claims about the market but also statements about the role of nature in the world, human beings as workers and consumers, and salvation through accumulation of possessions.

In the cosmology of the market, land, animals, and creation as a whole are worth only as much as the price they will sell for and the products they can be used to create. Everything is for sale. This approach to creation is vastly different from traditional religious understandings of nature. Christians are increasingly beginning to understand creation as signs of God's blessing, glory, and care, and are viewing humanity's role as partner with and caretaker of the earth. Historically other belief systems have worshipped parts of creation as gods: the sun, earth, trees, and other natural elements. The market has no room for such sentimentalities. Cox refers to market capitalism's doctrine on creation as a process of reversed transubstantiation. Instead of the belief that bread and wine become the sacred body and blood of Christ in communion, "in the mass of the Market... things that have been held sacred transmute into interchangeable items for sale."<sup>49</sup> Land provides a good example of this process. All the complex meanings land has held for people over millennia dissolve into the single criterion of what is advantageous for its function as real estate. If an acre of trees must be removed to build one suburban home,<sup>50</sup> real estate takes precedence over trees. If drilling in Alaska is needed to unearth oil, then let the oil rigs roll. In market capitalism, everything has a price tag, and creation as a whole is an exploitable natural resource.

In market capitalism people are workers and consumers and can function as either at any given time. This doctrine is based on the belief that we are primarily individuals interested in self-preservation and self-fulfillment. We work to earn enough money to fulfill our ever increasing and expanding needs. As John Mizzoni puts it: "*Homo economicus* is an economic being who toils in order to satisfy material needs and desires. In this capitalist economic approach, work is conceived as an activity one

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<<http://www.econ.ubc.ca/evans/cox99.pdf>>

<sup>49</sup> Cox, "The Market as God," 3.

<sup>50</sup> John De Graaf, David Wann and Thomas H. Naylor, *Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2001), 85.

engages in order to maximize utility... all that counts is the consequences an action will have for his [or her] interests and desires on each particular occasion.” He further discusses how “a social environment thoroughly infused with capitalism encourages people to see their lives in purely economic terms,” citing studies that involved face-to-face interviews with workers in various kinds of jobs. In the first study, most workers described themselves as “mules, machines, objects, robots, and tools.” In the second, workers expressed similar sentiments in their interviews, but their personal journal entries indicated that they were satisfied with their jobs. The workers’ reluctance to admit publicly that their work was challenging and engaging seemed to come from the fact that “when it comes to work, people do not heed the evidence of their senses... and base their motivation instead on the strongly rooted cultural stereotype of what work is supposed to be like.” In market capitalist faith, work is not meant to be enjoyable but to secure a paycheck. I think that workers are discouraged from recognizing the joy they may get from their jobs because if we consciously made joy one of the main criteria for employment we would stop working when it became drudgery. Instead, “economic rationality, a chief attribute of *Homo economicus*, encourages people to look at work in purely economic terms of a costbenefit analysis: what is the least amount of effort one can discharge for the most amount of monetary return... How can I maximize utility?”<sup>51</sup>

Mizzoni believes that the best way to combat this rationale is to see work as a calling. However, Max Weber sees the language of calling as essential to the capitalist spirit. In the capitalist system, “labor must be performed as if it were an absolute end in itself, a calling.”<sup>52</sup> A calling to a particular kind of work may imply that the work in and of itself is worthwhile to do, particularly for the fulfillment of the person doing it and, in some cases with the added benefit of helping other people. However, whether work is understood in economic terms or as a calling, the focus remains on the self-fulfillment of the individual. Both of these approaches also sustain the market through the continued production of goods for sale and accumulation. Mass volunteering is probably a bigger threat to the market capitalist doctrine of work than describing employment as a calling.

In the anthropology of market capitalism the consumer is an economic being that compliments the worker. While *homo economicus* works to gain buying power, *homo consumens* exercises that power through the purchase and accumulation of goods. The market communicates that “Our lives can only be lived well (or lived at all) through the purchase of particular commodities. Thus our major existential interest consists of

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<sup>51</sup> John Mizzoni, “Perspectives on Work in American Culture,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 2004: 97-101.

<sup>52</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 2d Roxbury ed. (Los Angeles: Roxbury, 1998), 62.

maneuvering for eligibility to buy such commodities.”<sup>53</sup> As James B. Twitchell puts it, “[H]uman beings, throughout history, have sought material luxury.”<sup>54</sup>

The consumer is essential to the survival of the market as a whole and the bull market in particular. According to an article in *Money* magazine, “consumer spending is the main engine of the US economy, accounting for approximately two-thirds of the gross domestic product.”<sup>55</sup> Consumption is so crucial to the market’s survival that when the attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001 threatened its stability, US Congressional members not only encouraged people to return to work but to “shop, go to the stores - get ready for Thanksgiving, get ready for Christmas.”<sup>56</sup> It didn’t matter what people bought as long as they bought something.

The consumer is also concerned with personal survival. People are encouraged to purchase the latest products to keep up with society. This sentiment is most clear in the realms of technology and fashion. Always, some new gadget assures us that it is necessary if we are to survive in today’s changing world, society, or business. Richard H. Robbins says that fashion generates “anxiety and restlessness over the possession of things that [are] not ‘new’ or ‘up to date.’ Fashion [pressures] people not to buy out of need but for ‘style’—from a desire to conform.” Consumerism helps people fit in and feel relevant. The consumer is driven by fear of obsolescence. Greed, happiness, appeasement of “free-floating desire,” fear of suffering, and the quest for luxury are other motivators.<sup>57</sup>

Loy takes this idea of survival one step further. He identifies market capitalism as a “salvation religion” and suggests that the consumer is ultimately engaged in the pursuit of salvation. “Salvation religions are often revolutionary due to the prophecy and charisma that motivate them and missionary because they inject a new message or promise into everyday life... Market capitalism not only began as, but may still be understood as a type of salvation religion: dissatisfied with the world as it is and compelled to inject a new promise into it.”<sup>58</sup>

Market capitalism promises that the accumulation of material possessions can bring new life and hope in the present, through the gracious bounty of the market. As Jon Pahl puts it, “[P]eople seek to ‘save’ themselves - whether from disease, failure or death does not much matter - through economically driven projects... the hopes and dreams people once sought to realize through traditional religious symbols and the institutions associated with them, are now sought through economic accumulation, status display,

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<sup>53</sup> This quote from Stephen Fjellman’s book *Vinyl Leaves* can be found at the start of Richard H. Robbins, *Global Problems and the Culture of Capitalism*, 3d ed. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2005).

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Robbins, *Global Problems and the Culture of Capitalism*, 38.

<sup>55</sup> Sivy and Garcia, “Forecast 2003,” 68.

<sup>56</sup> CNN.com, “Congress Looks to Shield Economy,” 15Sep01. <<http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/09/15/rec.congress.terror/>>

<sup>57</sup> Robbins, *Global Problems and the Culture of Capitalism*, 16, 37.

<sup>58</sup> Loy, “The Religion of the Market,” 4.

and shopping at the most fashionable malls.”<sup>59</sup> Consumers work and buy more because of this promise of deliverance.

## Market practices and institutions: advertising as evangelism and malls as sacred spaces

In 1923 an advertising promoter said to Philadelphia businessmen: “Sell them dreams - dreams of country clubs and proms and visions of what might happen if only. After all, people don’t buy things to have things. They buy hope - hope of what your merchandise will do for them. Sell them this hope and you won’t have to worry about selling them goods.”<sup>60</sup> Advertising is market capitalism’s vehicle for injecting new promises and hope into everyday life. It spreads the market’s gospel of consumption as a means of salvation, and those who accept this message experience conversion and are formed into consumers. According to Robbins, “[T]he goal of advertisers was to aggressively shape consumer desires and create value in commodities by imbuing them with the power to transform the consumer into a more desirable person... [Advertisers] began to emphasize the alleged effects of the products and its promise of a richer, fuller life.”<sup>61</sup> Advertising forms people to participate in the world according to market capitalism.

One of the biggest indicators of the importance and effectiveness of market evangelism, aside from overconsumption in capitalist societies, is the increased spending on advertising. In 1880 a mere thirty million dollars was invested in advertising in the US.<sup>62</sup> In 1998 national, local and private spending on advertising in the US totaled over 201 billion dollars. A mere five years later that figure had risen 15% to 237 billion dollars.<sup>63</sup> In 1998 the only national spending greater than advertising was spending on the military.

Just as advertising converts and forms people into consumers, malls are sacred spaces in which the consumer finds community, engages in the formative practice of shopping, and embodies the spirit of the market. Pahl’s work is a useful starting point here.<sup>64</sup> Malls serve the function that congregations and church buildings serve for Christianity. They are gathering spaces for believers in the promise of salvation in market capitalism. Two important thoughts to keep in mind are that malls are *planned* and *constructed* spaces - nothing about a mall’s exterior or interior is created by accident - and that most of the indicators of the mall’s sacredness are widespread, transcending geographic differences.

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<sup>59</sup> Jon Pahl, *Shopping Malls and Other Sacred Spaces: Putting God in Place* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2003), 66.

<sup>60</sup> De Graaf, Wann and Naylor, *Affluenza*, 138.

<sup>61</sup> Robbins, *Global Problems and the Culture of Capitalism*, 17.

<sup>62</sup> Robbins, *Global Problems and the Culture of Capitalism*, 17.

<sup>63</sup> Coen/McCann-Erickson, <<http://www.adage.com/page.cms?pageId=60>>

<sup>64</sup> Pahl, *Shopping Malls and Other Sacred Spaces*.

The mall is a communal space for consumers. The Mall of America, for example, boasts between more than 520 stores with 35-40 million visitors annually.<sup>65</sup> James Rouse, one of the most famous and earliest architects of the mall, said this about its function: “[I]t is in the marketplace that all people come together - rich and poor, old and young, black and white. It is the democratic, unifying, universal place which gives spirit and personality to the city.”<sup>66</sup> Malls are taking over where religious institutions left off. They are open seven days a week, providing a space for people to gather. Personnel treat visitors with patience and care, striking up conversations as they offer advice on what the consumer should purchase. People who go to the mall will likely run into someone they know or meet someone new. In short, “malls have become sacred places because traditional churches, synagogues, temples and mosques have failed.” While churches remain closed several days out of the week and are perceived as places of exclusion and judgment, the mall welcomes those who want to spend as well as those who seek to be in a place where they feel connected. Forty percent of visitors to the mall go there without intending to purchase anything.<sup>67</sup>

Malls are filled with religious symbolism. Most malls include popular religious symbols in their interior and exterior design. Their architecture usually provides for some kind of non-utilitarian water (e.g., fountains or reflecting pools); natural lighting (skylights, especially placed as central drawing points); and vegetation (artificial or ever-green, but never dying). Water, light, and vegetation are important religious symbols in many faiths. Ever-flowing water conveys to the visitor that the space and the activities that take place there are life-giving, soothing, refreshing, and purifying. Ira G. Zepp notes that malls usually have “a huge skylight or a colorful and often circular series of lamps shedding such bright light...that you know you are in a space set apart...malls, at their centers, strive to be places of vitality and energy.” Lighting is not solely utilitarian; it is used to highlight the ways the market promises to make us happy and invite consumers to spend. (Although forty percent of mall visitors do not intend to buy anything, only ten percent leave without actually having done so.) There are usually lush trees, flowers, and plants throughout a mall’s interior. Regardless of the season outside, the plants in the mall are in full bloom. Vegetation in a mall makes sense when water and light are also present. Altogether they give a message of “life - abundant, even eternal... Malls thus play upon the human desire to experience growth and new life,” reinforcing the idea that consumerism is natural. The undying vegetation in a mall connotes a message of “the Garden of Eden without the fall, the resurrection without the cross, spring and summer without fall and winter... that entices us to imagine that we’re inhabiting a garden of free delight.”<sup>68</sup>

Although Pahl identifies several other indicators of the mall as sacred space, such as pilgrimage and the display of bodies, this is the point that I find most interesting.

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<sup>65</sup> Mall of America, <<http://www.mallofamerica.com/>>

<sup>66</sup> Quoted in Pahl, *Shopping Malls and Other Sacred Spaces*, 70.

<sup>67</sup> Pahl, *Shopping Malls and Other Sacred Spaces*, 75, 71.

<sup>68</sup> Pahl, *Shopping Malls and Other Sacred Spaces*, 71-73, 143.

One can get married, plan a birthday party, and shop to one's heart's content in a mall. But it seems unlikely that malls have divorce lawyer offices, funeral planning supplies, or debt counseling services. There are no signs of pain, suffering or death there. Rather, the mall is a manifestation of market capitalism's promise that there is only happiness, devotion, love, abundance, and growth in the lives of those who are willing to consume. Shopping can assuage hurts or make one feel alive. All of these messages form consumers into persons that are willing to appease their desires and ease their troubles without a thought for tomorrow or the consequences that may arise.

Ultimately the mall is a place where consumers can not only be in the presence of the market but breathe life into it. It is a mechanism of support for a god that depends on the confidence and participation of people for its survival. This is made even clearer when one considers the transformation of the mall into open-air "lifestyle centers." As consumers have outgrown traditional, boxed-in, temperature-controlled malls, the market has been quick to respond, creating a new sacred space that looks a lot like urban centers the old malls replaced.<sup>69</sup>

## **A challenge to the church**

"When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered around Aaron, and said to him, 'Come, make gods for us, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' Aaron said to them, 'Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.' So all the people took off the gold rings from their ears, and brought them to Aaron. He took the gold from them, formed it in a mold, and cast an image of a calf; and they said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!'" (Ex. 32:1-4, NRSV)

Market capitalism's religious function, while masked by the assertion that it is valueless and secular, is evident in the reverence of its mythology, doctrine, missionary zeal and sacred institution. Yet the market, like the golden calf, is created by human beings and is dependent on humans for its survival. This fact reveals claims of the market's transcendence, omnipotence, and omnipresence to be false. Still the church as a whole has not been able to name it as a false god, in large part because the church doesn't acknowledge its claims of holiness. The end result has been that the church has either attempted to peacefully co-exist with market capitalism, relegating our Christian beliefs to Sunday morning, while we invest in Wal-Mart, shop at the Mall of America, and work on Wall Street the rest of the week. Or the church has emulated the market's evangelical success, building "megachurches" with roller rinks and fast-food restaurants, proclaiming a health and wealth gospel, and churning out widgets in

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<sup>69</sup> Andrew Blum, "The Mall Goes Undercover," *Slate Magazine* 6 Apr 2005, 1.  
<<http://www.slate.msn.com/id/2116246>>



the name of Christ. Both responses cause the church to lose its focus and its message of salvation. There is a reason why malls can contain Christian bookstores, chapels, and designated prayer rooms, and Francois and Marithe Girbaud feel free to portray Jesus' Last Supper with female models in expensive designer clothes: Christianity in its current form is not a threat to the market's growing reign. Cox writes, "I am beginning to think that for all the religions of the world, however they may differ from one another, the religion of the market has become the most formidable rival."<sup>70</sup> Loy concurs, saying "The major religions... have been unable to offer what is most needed, a meaningful challenge to the aggressive proselytizing of market capitalism, which has already become the most successful religion of all time."<sup>71</sup>

Reflecting on this challenge leads me to ask several questions: how can the church faithfully counter the proselytizing of the market without succumbing to its recruitment tactics? Has the church made peace with the market in an unhelpful or detrimental way? If consumerism is idolatry, how can we resist it? What can we offer to the hungry and hurting people trying to shop their way into spiritual well-being? These questions must be asked if Christians are going to move from trying to participate responsibly in the market to not being participants in it at all.

## The Triumph of the Image Over Reasoning

Thoughts On the World of Computing

by Bryan Winters

*Bryan Winters lives in New Zealand. His career in Market Development for IT Companies runs alongside his lifelong interest in the writings of Jacques Ellul.*

The move from text-based software to graphical applications was as agenda-based as any other race for "progress." It was heralded as bringing computing from the ivory towers of government and multinational corporations to the people. We saw the rise of upstart companies, complete with illustrations of the throwing off of chains, of liberation of information power, of triumphing over the "Big Brothers" of the industry. A now-legendary Super Bowl commercial by Apple promised, "1984 won't be like 1984."<sup>72</sup>

My interest here is in the effects of the media shift on the computing world. I will give a ringside view of the move from text to graphics in the I.T. world and associated shifts in business relationships and work practices. To those familiar with Jacques Ellul, especially *The Humiliation of the Word*, this may seem curious. Ellul wrote the work in 1979 conceding little to computers. "Computers are sometimes useful in their narrow

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<sup>70</sup> Cox, "The Market as God," 6.

<sup>71</sup> Loy, "The Religion of the Market," 1.

<sup>72</sup> Search [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) using "Apple 1984 superbowl advert" key words.

domain (very narrow despite their many possible applications) ... pretentious devices that arrogantly substitute themselves for the word and for reason.”<sup>73</sup>

I don't think Ellul saw how far-reaching computers' impact would be. Sometimes he speaks of audiovisuals and graphics in the same paragraph as a reference to computers, but not in the sense we understand today. In 1979, computers were mainframes, running banking and government applications, not colorful personal computers downloading movies and chirping to us when email arrives. In this essay I am going to “drill down” into this industry, within the text to graphics shift in the I.T. world itself. I believe that Ellul's concepts shed light on how that transition and changing work practices are weaved together.

Throughout the period I discuss I was employed in marketing by IBM in both New Zealand and Southeast Asia as well as by other smaller I.T. companies. Any viewpoints or opinions expressed here are from the perspective, say, of campaigning in the PC operating system wars, being present at the famous competing launch of Microsoft Windows 3.1 and IBM's OS/2 at the same huge hotel in Singapore, on the same day, on the same floor. I refer mainly to these direct experiences rather than the literature. Some reference to technology is unavoidable, and the writer expresses empathy with any who struggle with the terms.

## The triumph of the image

At the beginning of the 1980s, IBM, the I.T. industry leader, was six times larger than its nearest rival, a dominance based on scalable mainframes. Software applications were textual, requiring the user to enter data in a set order into open fields. Any computer games were text-based, quiz-like affairs.

Application development was a strict discipline. User analysis was followed by specification, then design confirmation. If one had to wait months or years for software, there was always a technical justification. The great banking and legacy applications appeared during this era, many of which still silently operate today in secure premises far from the public eye. They were robustly designed, perhaps missing a couple of digits to save space - hence the Y2K scare - but they worked nevertheless.

Cost and skill availability limited computing to large organizations, particularly financial and government entities. Operating systems and databases matured via version releases, not complete renewals. Hardware sales were far more profitable than software, so suppliers focused on moving iron. This fact enabled mainframe suppliers to build their operating systems up over many years, fixing field-discovered errors painstakingly. One did not throw out an operating system lightly, as it had tens of thousands of person-hours invested in it.

At this time, none of the big companies had a vested interest in personal computing, so it fell to Apple-and Commodore-sized firms to start that now global industry

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<sup>73</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,

in backyard garages. Start it they did, easily gaining press as the new arbiters of information freedom. IBM's hand was forced. In the early 1980s it commissioned its first personal computer, legitimizing the very term "PC." Short of both microcomputer chips and a PC-sized operating system, IBM contracted two then unknown firms, Intel and Microsoft, for supply. Both were clever enough to negotiate non-exclusivity agreements.

Growing under IBM's wing, the personal computer industry expanded throughout the 1980s, albeit still using the text-based DOS, or Disk Operating System, that every programmer understands to this day. On left stage, the maverick Apple, sticking with its own hardware design and operating system, launched the world's first graphical user interface. IBM and Microsoft together promised that they would deliver one as well.

When powerful enough, Microsoft chose to go it alone. Pushing their graphical Windows PC operating system, an inferior offering still running on DOS, they cut ties with IBM. The latter concentrated on its own Operating System 2, or OS/2, a technically superior platform by most analysts' assessments.

But IBM had the lost the battle for hearts and minds, and the world saw a chance to be free of the Big Brother that charged millions for mainframes and had been party to the perceived delays in application development. Watching Asian customers walk back and forth between IBM and Microsoft on that jubilant day of the launch in adjacent hotel conference rooms, one gained the sense of excitement and camaraderie that pervaded Microsoft, versus the easy confidence of IBM, smugly content with their better system.

Microsoft threw its weight behind those independent programming houses who were deciding whom to hitch their horses to. IBM, on the other hand, simply assumed that the independents would follow. The result was predictable and swift. Right from the start, the earliest graphical applications followed Microsoft's lead. Within a few years, OS/2 was silently dumped.

Beguiled by the colors and charts of graphical user interface software, senior management in companies worldwide made the decision to move. Compared to lines of green text, a multicolored panel with buttons one could visibly press was irresistible. Halfcompleted, untried applications lined up for multimillion-dollar deals. Once, in Malaysia, we became the key part of a thirty-million-dollar consortium after a five-minute exposure of a new Windows product to the decision maker, whom I had not met before. It didn't matter that the software was functionally slower - it was the graphical future. I also recall sitting with test users for a major Singaporean government entity who were upgrading a counter-front system in the mid 1990s. As they realized that moving between fields on the new graphics-based screen necessitated using the mouse, rather than the "enter" key as in the old text-based systems, their jaws dropped. Everyone could see that the older text system actually permitted faster data

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1985), 258.

entry. Blame was assigned to the new application, but it belonged to the operating system, the framework within which the end-user application was developed.

Frequently, companies didn't know what they were looking at. I have sat in countless software demonstrations and recall several, over two continents, where the entire system crashed in front of the customer executive team. Without a hiccup, a cool presenter would act as if nothing was the matter and chat away on a related topic while the software team, present in the very same room, keyboarded the system back up again. The executive teams were completely unaware that anything bad had happened. They simply never saw it. Later we would discuss this almost with disbelief. It dawned on me that purchasing decisions were based not on a methodical walk-through of the product but on the settings in the room, our professional demeanor, and the distracting colors and shapes being presented to them on the screen. At times I felt as if we were selling not applications to fulfill business functions but artwork. It is legendary that in the mid to late 1990s, commercial, off-the-shelf software packages (not just custom software) were sold to huge corporations before they were even written, such were the sleight-of-hand skills of software presenters. Hence the term "vaporware."

By far the greatest impetus to the revolution was the explosion of public computing. Those of us in the industry have always found it interesting to hear householders tell us about when computers "first came out." By this, they mean personal computing, mostly graphical user interface Windows-based applications. The public marketplace had its own impacts:

1. Every programmer dreamed of writing his or her own consumer application and becoming a millionaire. This drew away talent from the pool maintaining dull legacy text-based mainframe applications. Only shrewd old baby-boomer programmers, who knew they couldn't compete with graphical user interface whiz kids, would do that. This shrinking of skill for industrial-strength applications acted as another pressure to change.

2. It became publicly accepted that bug-ridden software was the norm. In its bid for information freedom, the world had opted for a firm that relied on the sale of operating system software. Microsoft must sell new operating systems to survive. Thus all PC users are confronted with a new Windows version every two or three years. This turnover foists bug-ridden operating systems on the public, as they have not had enough time to be hardened with many fixes generated from field discovery of errors before they are replaced with a new one. To this day, home PCs stop, seemingly of their own accord, from time to time. The phenomenon has been likened to cars suddenly stopping on the highway and requiring installation of a new engine to keep running. Most users are already content with the functionality provided by their existing version and now display the opposite reaction to that of thirty years ago - they want to stay on the same platform, not move. The same is true for the core Office applications, as the public furor over accepting both Vista and Office 2007 illustrates.

3. But the biggest demand was for games. In order to market to families, I.T. firms took to giving away software encyclopedias so that one could justify the purchase as

educational for the children. As soon as the home computer was installed, on went the games. Consumers may say they buy PCs for Internet access or to write letters and emails, but mainly they load games and movies or spend time on social networking sites, perhaps another form of gaming. The term “infotainment” is quite valid.

The 1990s also saw the emergence of the Internet, originally a library information research system. Its popularity surprised even Microsoft. Internet programming has spawned a huge industry of its own as every company, small or large, “needs” a website. Broadband is also seen as an essential part of economic progress, enabling visual applications to be brought into every home. The Internet has added further to the demand for advanced graphical applications. Early Windows software displayed colorful panels with fields for the user to fill in by means of mouse and keyboard. Graphical applications today are replete with imagery about nearly everything. A clothing company may have hardly any words on its home page. Visitors may be greeted by pictures of Greek horsemen whose colors and coats change when the mouse floats over them. One may go several pages deep, roaming through a visual store of images, needing to read text or enter data only when selecting something to buy. This process is meant to simulate the real shopping experience, which is visual, exotic, and emotive.

Technological divergence also affects the PC graphical sphere. Historically, the media told us that technologies will converge, enabling us to do such things as run the Internet on our TV screens. This once hyped commitment has not materialized. Many commentators now hold that technologies diverge.<sup>74</sup> Instead of mere cellphones, we have phones that specialize in camera technology, Internet connectivity, or diary functions. TV screens have diverged into LCD, plasma, wide-screen, and HDTV-compatible or not. In the programming world, divergence means that different companies splinter and develop different pieces of the graphical puzzle. Conflicts arise between hardware, operating system, screen drivers, and data compression algorithms, and much finger-pointing about others’ lack of compliance takes place. Consultants market skilled services to organizations to enable them to stay on a converged technology track. Without skilled effort, an entire organization may end up hostage to technological divergence.

Considering technological divergence and the overall thrust to graphical solutions, we find a number of factors leading to less functional software than many text-based mainframe applications several decades ago:

1. Graphical mouse-stimulated imagery takes time to download, which requires skill investment into picture quality and data compression.

2. It also requires “plug-ins” to work. As applications grow more graphical, more extras are required, such as Adobe Flash, screen software drivers, and new browser releases. Making a highly graphical application work is a challenging and changing skill set in its own right.

3. Therefore programmers find themselves diverted from application function into making the graphical system robust. It becomes difficult to separate application func-

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<sup>74</sup> See e.g. <http://www.technologyreview.com/business/12434/>.

tion out from graphical skill. In an earlier generation of text-based applications, little or no thought had to be put into whether the application could actually be seen on the screen in all its glory, because there was no glory. It was simply functional text, and the programming team could concentrate on function. Today, programmers have to concentrate on the ever-shifting world of graphics, and function comes in second place.

4. In many cases the old disciplined rules of analysis and development have disappeared. In a technology cycle too short to reintroduce discipline, programmers simply try different things until something works. This way of working also wreaks havoc with the concept of programming person-hours.

5. The most obvious result is the phenomenon of highly visual websites with spelling mistakes and grammatical errors in what sparse text remains within them.

The computer press predicted the mainframe's demise years ago. Contrary to such expectations, IBM had a banner year for mainframes in 2008. I suggest this resurgence is in part related to the failure of the modern graphical computing environment to provide solid backbone industrial applications, so the old ones remain. To put it bluntly: would you like your bank accounts to be run on a computer like the one you operate?

Finally, we note the incorporation of gaming into modern business computing. The boundary between games, advertising and software programs has blurred. Games are now part of the workplace. In previous eras, software products were launched complete with training programs. Assigned personnel attended classroom courses or sequenced computer training about the new application. Now new education techniques are emerging. Training courses can be constructed as online games, complete with all the graphics, thrills and competition of home computer gaming. Employees are encouraged to play these during work time to learn the firm's new application. Even online retail applications come with built-in games. A small but growing international pizza chain, Hell Pizza, leads the world in percentage of orders placed online. As the consumer decides what to order or awaits confirmation of credit card billing, he or she can fill in time playing with little demons running around the screen.

There will be no immediate end to this. The next generation of touchscreen technology is about to sweep through the marketplace. The futuristic computer workers in the Tom Cruise film *Minority Report* are a reality.<sup>75</sup> To watch it is beguiling. It is the triumph of the image.

## Work in the new paradigm

We westerners are subjected to 3400 marketing messages a day, if we simply swivel around in our chairs and start counting the logos in our living room, let alone our billboard-infested highways, websites, sidewalks and newspapers. Everyone seems to be wearing two or three brands as a "personal statement." This proliferation of imagery

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<sup>75</sup> For examples search [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) using "Microsoft Surface Demo" key words.

is largely due to the growing power of computer graphics, which has spilled into every other audiovisual medium now.

We are all more wary of marketing. I consult to companies selling complicated, high-value, high-technology products and services. We teach them how to sensitively use multiple forms of media to begin positive relationships with prospective customers. Such a concept or means of employment would have been meaningless thirty years ago. Then one simply phoned up prospective clients and arranged an appointment. That is almost impossible today. Businesspeople have barricaded themselves against the 3400 daily messages, including restricting salespeople from calling them. Therefore we employ short, targeted, business benefit statements using subtle combinations of media. These are psychological steps along the path to gaining face-to-face meetings.

This situation itself illustrates a shift in personal relationships. I give the following comparison as a trend I have noticed in business dealings:

1. Thirty years ago, in a sparser media environment, one could arrange a business meeting more readily, as outlined above. One needed a reasonable marketing pretext, but it was easier than today. At that meeting, the marketing company was given a chance to present its case. The prospective purchaser would listen to the pitch and watch the other party. Then a reasoned discussion would take place and judgments made about proceeding further, perhaps to another more detailed meeting, or perhaps to go no further.

2. Today, the prospective client may be subjected to a campaign using a variety of media, including emails, letters, CD or online video, brochures, webinars, newspaper or periodical branding, etc. Eventually a face-to-face meeting is arranged, but I have noticed by that time, the prospective client has often come to the conclusion in his own mind that he is buying. Simply agreeing to a meeting after the media campaign signifies a much higher percentage chance of a sale. But the media campaign was necessary in order to get the meeting.

An article recently appeared in New Zealand's major newspaper about new human relations methods. A young human resources manager at one of the country's leading companies revealed that he investigates new job applicants' profiles on Facebook before deciding whom to shortlist.<sup>76</sup> Presumably he assesses how competent they are at digital relationships, since that part of their job may be more important than face-to-face interaction.

Has the digital media explosion weakened abilities to handle personal relationships and decision making? Let me side with Ellul on this one. "We are not sure we can understand thoroughly what really has happened to each of us, but I believe one of the decisive factors in the mutation is that we live continually in a world of images."<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, April 25, 2009.

<sup>77</sup> Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 208.

Further, “A person must believe in language if he is to be open to the meaning of a reasoned argument.”<sup>78</sup>

I welcome research into this field.

## Reasoning and the image

We turn here to Ellul’s comparison between the word and the image. Even if it does not aspire to theological truth, a basic property of word-based communication is that even a single sentence has a beginning, and it must be listened to or read over a period of time in order to gain its full import. On the other hand, an image, as we open our eyes, is instantly there. Images fit into what Ellul calls “reality.”

I will make an analogy between a book and a computer program. A program is also a story. It has a beginning, a sequence of events, and concludes with an output of data. It has both a writer (most likely writers) and “readers,” or users. Marshall McLuhan’s concept of hot and cool media<sup>79</sup> is useful in this context. Text-based computing could be termed a “cool” medium, one that is low-definition in terms of data. There are written instructions and fields to fill in. The user can concentrate on these, because there is less distraction than in a graphical media environment. An earlier world of “cool” software applications required concentration and training on the part of both programmer and user. The programmer put a lot of thought and effort into logical functioning and sequential events. He or she was trained for this task. The user also needed to concentrate carefully to fill in the correct sequence of data, of menu choices, etc., and was accordingly trained.

Now we find a different set of expectations. Software has become a hot medium, rich with imagery, not portrayed as a story but as an adventure, game, experience, or simulation of real life. The user does not expect to have to learn anything to deal with representations of “reality.” Just as one does not need training to browse through a shop, one does not require it to use a computer program or website. Or training can take place by a computer game, played because it is thrilling. Users also expect to deal with applications quickly, as if examining a picture. So they blunder rapidly on. This is a two-edged sword for programmers, who know that this will take place. They have tried their best to account for it by placing signs like “invalid choice” or “incomplete entry,” hoping for user success. In a modern application, up to 70% of the software code simply stops users from doing wrong actions. But if users run into too many walls, they give up and inform management that the software is too difficult to use.

Or do programmers really try their best? They live in the same world of instant expectations as users. Faced with programming issues we have alluded to earlier, they simply try things out, hoping that something will work. One theory of programming

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<sup>78</sup> Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 215.

<sup>79</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 22-23.



teams is that if a team encounters too large a problem in writing a given function, they do not add more brains to solve it but instead abandon the module and reassign the team elsewhere. This form of “agile development” assumes from the start that programmers will encounter issues that they cannot handle.<sup>80</sup> Perhaps this assumption helps explain why up to 53% of software computing projects fail to deliver on time, or budget, or function. Therefore programmers are equal to users in their responses. Have both been infected by their orientation to the image? Both seem to be losing an earlier generation’s capacity for reasoning and reflection.

Ellul entitles a chapter in *The Humiliation of the Word* “The Image-Oriented Person.” There he says, “Experience tends to show that a person who thinks by images becomes less and less capable of thinking by reasoning, and vice versa. The intellectual process based on images is contradictory to the intellectual process of reasoning that is related to the word.”<sup>81</sup> Does this also shed light on the phenomenon of businesspeople who are less able to reason and reflect through personal conversational discourse and instead make their decisions based on images presented to them? Like Ellul, I cannot state confidently how far the digital image revolution has affected us, or what quarters of society are particularly influenced. However, he speculated, prophetically in my opinion, on the emotional intuition of the image-driven mind. “A sort of sympathetic vibration of knowledge is established between those who are indwelt by the same images. Sometimes they would have enormous difficulty expressing in words what this means.”<sup>82</sup>

In an almost eerie fulfillment of this statement, Leonard Sweet, a Christian writer who claims to be postmodern, speaks of showing his son a website that interested him.

”Dad, this is not a website.”

He clicked onto another and made the same pronouncement I insisted he tell me in words I could understand why these web sites weren’t web sites. After some struggle, he said, “Because nothing moves.” “So what?”

”Dad, I can’t see it if it doesn’t move.”<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Cf. Luke 14:28-30: “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish’” (NIV).

<sup>81</sup> Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 214.

<sup>82</sup> Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 212.

<sup>83</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Soul Tsunami* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 219.

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# Book Review

## From Faith to Fun: the Secularization of Humor by Russell Heddendorf

Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008.

ISBN-13: 978-1-55635-202-7.

Reviewed by Anthony Petrotta

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Books on humor are seldom humorous and often are not taken seriously. *From Faith to Fun* is not terribly humorous, but it should be taken seriously. Professor Heddendorf writes on the way that traditional religious values of culture have been replaced by secular ones and the role that humor plays in that change: “This book is an attempt to come to grips with the problem of a fragmentated and often dissolute culture.”

Heddendorf draws upon Jacques Ellul’s description of ancient Israel’s use of humor as they adjusted to life in a foreign culture where, particularly, wordplay subverted the culture by turning one word into another, thus undercutting the force of the original word. The ancient Hebrews did not cut themselves off from the dominant culture; they simply made it say “other things.” This, says Ellul, is the “subversion of culture.”

Many books have been written on the “curative” effects of humor; Heddendorf, however, focuses on the *erosive* effects. Humor is a “powerful cultural force” and, since the eighteenth century, has increasingly become a substitute for faith.

In the chapter “Secular Fun,” Heddendorf makes his claim on this shift to fun *as faith*. Fun “balances” the paradox in our lives of the “real” and “unreal” by illusion. In our postmodern world (post-therapeutic; post-faith), fun has become both “fundamental” and “functional.” In a “religious worldview”, humor looks at the world as God does, whereas in a “cultural worldview,” humor looks at the world as fun does.

Fun is typified by finding chaos, focusing on the imminent; it denies the tension of paradox, masks rather than reveals, provides a misapprehension of good will among others, and subverts moral boundaries.

In the chapter, “Sacred Fun”, Heddendorf argues that even those aligned with “orthodox” faith settle for an “uncritical” reconciliation of the divergent worldviews of the religious and cultural. The “high value” of personal and social well-being is co-opted by the cultural. He further argues, though, that fun can also lead to faith.

In a study of the Southside Gospel Church, Heddendorf finds an instance of fun leading to faith. The Southside community understands paradox as “divine incongruity”

and, through faith, leaves the solution to God. “Unbelievers” are more likely to “trivialize” immediate incongruities with fun and laughter. Discernment, he concludes, allows us to a proper use of both the humor and the seriousness of our world. “Indeed, one can often laugh at a culture of fun while also laughing with it.”

Heddendorf again quotes Ellul in the conclusion: “When God enters the picture, He destroys man’s sacred.” Heddendorf reiterates the value of humor and fun as we attempt to balance work, relationships, and so forth. He also warns the reader, “Humor may become a ubiquitous commodity that suffocates us with its banality.”

Heddendorf then addresses the obvious question, “How,” then, “can humor be rewarding without being reckless?”

Reckless humor lacks “accountability.” It ignores logic, morality, and meaning. It holds no responsibility to “the other.” Fun without faith, “wears a halo of its own making.” “Rewarding humor,” on the other hand, recognizes the “mystery of God’s penetration into our world”; it joins the transcendent with the terrestrial.

*From Faith to Fun* is a complex book, as is befitting of a book on humor, that most protean and gratuitous of all human responses to the complexity of our lives. I wanted to hear more; I had many questions and points to argue, but in the end Heddendorf has done his job well, pushing me to consider the paradox of faith and fun.

## Money and Power

by Jacques Ellul

*L’Homme et L’Argent* (1954)

ET: InterVarsity Press, 1984; Wipf and Stock, 2009.

**From the introduction to the new edition by David W. Gill** (St. Mary’s College, Moraga)

*Money and Power* was one of Jacques Ellul’s earliest theological/ethical. The title “Money and Power,” is not misleading, but it should be noted that Ellul’s title was more broadly “Man and Money” (“Humanity and Money”? “Money and Human Existence”? Even simple phrases can be hard to translate in a way that captures the nuance).

*Money and Power* has a wealth of information that will take your education to the next level. It is also full of typically Ellulian provocative opinions and challenges. If you want a mild, sanitized, middle-of-the-road essay, look elsewhere. Ellul’s approach will throw down a challenge to you or your book study group. You will be exposed to biblical teaching you may not have previously known; and some old scripture will be read in new ways. But as Ellul often said, he is not seeking disciples; he just wants to give us resources to work out our own understanding in faithfulness to our Lord.

*Money and Power* is delivered in five chapters. First, Ellul surveys the ways our culture, our economic thinkers, and our church traditions have thought about money. One of the takeaways is that the answer to the problem of money cannot be left to economic systems and structures; there always remains centrally, “how are we personally

going to relate to money?" The second chapter is an exhilarating tour of biblical, especially OT, teaching and stories about wealth, money, and poverty. We meet Abraham, Job, Solomon and company, along with Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

The third chapter is a marvelous series of studies, drawing in Jesus and the Apostolic teaching and practice, about how money can become a "principality and power" (very much as we saw that technique can become a god) —"Mammon." Ellul comments on interest and usury, saving and hoarding, wages and inheritance, on Jesus' parables about money and his relations both to the poor and the rich. He points out that the best way to "profane" a god is to treat it with disrespect and in a cavalier fashion. What better way to profane and reject Mammon, Ellul says, than to be recklessly generous in giving it away. Brilliant lesson! Ellul concludes with some advice on teaching our children about money (chapter four) and with a strong call to understand the cry of the poor as God's challenge to us (chapter five).

Too often Christian reflections on politics, economics, and other life topics feel as though the author's socio-cultural location really drove their point of view, and the scriptures were just cherry-picked to support and justify the position they started with. *Money and Power* and Ellul's other books never leave us so comfortable or reassured. This is a prophet worth listening to.

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The IJES (with its francophone sister-society, L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul) links together scholars and friends of various specializations, vocations, backgrounds, and nations, who share a common interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), long time professor at the University of Bordeaux. Our objectives are (1) to preserve and disseminate his literary and intellectual heritage, (2) to extend his social critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) to extend his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

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### **Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works**

by Joyce Main Hanks. *Research in Philosophy and Technology*. Supplement 5. Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 2000. xiii., 206 pages. This is the essential guide for anyone doing research in Jacques Ellul's writings. An excellent brief biography is followed by a 140-page annotated bibliography of Ellul's fifty books and thousand-plus articles and a thirty-page subject index. Hank's work is comprehensive, accurate, and invariably helpful. Visit [www.elsevier.com](http://www.elsevier.com) for ordering information.

**The Reception of Jacques Ellul's Critique of Technology: An Annotated Bibliography of Writings on His Life and Thought** by Joyce Main Hanks (Edwin Mellen Press, 2007). 546 pp. This volume is an amazing, indispensable resource for studying Jacques Ellul. All the books, articles, reviews, and published symposia on Ellul's ideas and writings are here.

**Living the Word, Resisting the World: The Life and Thought of Jacques Ellul** by Andrew Goddard. (Paternoster Press, 2002). 378 pp. Seven years after being published, Professor Goddard's study remains the best English language introduction to Ellul's life and thought.

#### **Librairie Mollat—new books in French**

Librairie Mollat in the center of old Bordeaux ([www.mollat.com](http://www.mollat.com)) is an excellent resource for French language books, including those by and about Ellul. Mollat accepts credit cards over the web and will mail books anywhere in the world.

#### **Alibris—used books in English**

The Alibris web site ([www.alibris.com](http://www.alibris.com)) lists thirty titles of used and out-of-print Jacques Ellul books in English translation available to order at reasonable prices.

#### **Used books in French:**

##### **two web resources**

Two web sites that will be of help in finding used books in French by Jacques Ellul (and others) are [www.chapitre.com](http://www.chapitre.com) and [www.livre-rare-book.com](http://www.livre-rare-book.com).

#### **Ellul on DVD/Video**

French film maker Serge Steyer's film "Jacques Ellul: L'homme entier" (52 minutes) is available for 25 euros at the web site [www.meromedia.com](http://www.meromedia.com). Ellul is himself interviewed as are several commentators on Ellul's ideas.

Another hour-length film/video that is focused entirely on Ellul's commentary on technique in our society, "The Treachery of Technology," was produced by Dutch film maker Jan van Boekel for ReRun Produkties (mail to: Postbox 93021, 1090 BA Amsterdam).

If you try to purchase either of these excellent films, be sure to check on compatibility with your system and on whether English subtitles are provided, if that is desired.

**Issue #45 Spring 2012 — Ellul in  
the Undergraduate Classroom**



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**For the Critique of Technological Civilization**



”At the beginning I couldn ’t see myself in a professor’s robe speaking to 150 students. And then, fairly soon, I came to love it, less for what I taught than for the students. ”  
-**Jacques Ellul** *In Season, Out of Season* (1981; ET 1982), p. 159

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### **For the Critique of Technological Civilization**

### **Founded 1988**

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## **From the Editor**

Typically *The Ellul Forum* is scholar-to-scholar. *Academics* who study the technological society explore issues for those of us who think and write about technology, often in reference to Ellul. The *public* is also the *Forum*’s focus on occasion — citizens, government workers, non-profit personnel, youth workers, and media professionals who deal with the meaning of this technological era in their everyday experience.

This issue makes *students* central. How can the scholarship on technology be taught? Where do Ellul studies fit into the curriculum? How can the liberal arts orientation of Ellul’s work be taught in liberal arts terms, rather than as a module in science and engineering? *The Ellul Forum* regularly reviews Ph.D. dissertations on Ellul written around the world. This time the focus is undergraduates.

Rather than a survey and overview of education generally, Issue #45 is an in-depth case study of an interdisciplinary course taught recently at Wheaton College (Illinois) entitled, “Jacques Ellul: Technology, Politics and Ethics.” Team-taught by professors in theological studies, urban politics and communication, it demonstrates how much serious learning can be accomplished in a semester. The materials indicate the positive spin-off efforts for the campus, and suggest ways to establish courses on Ellul and technology in the curriculum longer term.

Members of the International Jacques Ellul Society are guest editing the future issues of the *Forum*:

Fall 2010: Mark Baker, editor, “Technique, Ellul and the Food Industry” (mbaker@mbseminary.edu);

Spring 2011: Dell DeChant and Darrell Fasching, editors, “Religion and Popular Culture” (ddechant@tampabay.rr.com);

Fall 2011: Andy Alexis-Baker and John Zerzan, editors, “Anarchism” (*j esusradicals@j esusradicals.com*).

They welcome your suggestions and proposals.

2012 is the centenary of Ellul’s birth. Special issues of the *Forum* will be published and commemorative events are being planned. Please feel free to send us your ideas and suggestions and let us know of any other celebrations you know of.

Clifford G. Christians  
editor@ellul.org

## Encountering Jacques Ellul on His Own Terms

by Jeffrey P. Greenman, Read Mercer Schuchardt, & Noah Toly

*This article discusses a successful experimental course on Jacques Ellul developed at Wheaton College (IL), a Christian liberal arts institution in the evangelical Protestant tradition. Offered in 2009, the interdisciplinary course was co-taught by Dr. Jeffrey P. Greenman (Christian ethics), Dr. Read Schuchardt (media ecology) and Dr. Noah Toly (urban politics). The professors describe the aims of the course, discuss their approach to teaching, and offer reflections about lessons learned about teaching Ellul’s thought.*

”No one is using my studies in correlation with one another, so as to get at the heart of our crisis in a conscious manner, based on a Christian understanding of it...”<sup>1</sup>

### Background

The idea for a course on Jacques Ellul arose during a conversation that took place at the Black Dog Tavern in Martha’s Vineyard, Massachusetts in July 2008. During a dinner break from the workshop on experiential education they were attending, Noah

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Ellul, “On Dialectic,” in C. G. Christians and J. M. Van Hook, eds., *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1981): 307.

Toly asked Jeff Greenman a few questions about the theology of Karl Barth, and soon the discussion turned to the connections between Barth and Ellul. Toly and Greenman discovered their mutual interest in Ellul, and Toly added that their colleague, Read Schuchardt, was highly indebted to Ellul. Eventually someone said: “Maybe someday we should do a course on Ellul. After all, we’ve got the Ellul Papers on campus.” The course that eventually took place at Wheaton College during fall semester 2009 was the result of an integrative academic vision, fruitful collaboration among colleagues, and significant institutional support.

The academic vision for the course took shape based on the contributions of all three of us, each of whom brought to the table a unique experience with the study of Ellul. Toly first encountered the work of Jacques Ellul at the University of Delaware. He read *Technological Society* for a doctoral proseminar on Technology, Environment, and Society and found Ellul’s analysis trenchant. Introducing Ellul, the course instructor made passing mention of Ellul as a “Huguenot,” but did not acknowledge Ellul’s theological work. Following the Ellul trail in the library, Toly encountered the rich resources of Ellul’s explicitly Christian writing. Though his dissertation committee chair would later discourage him from pursuing that angle, saying he was sure that Toly could not connect Ellul’s theological arguments to environmental justice, Toly investigated the link more carefully, publishing an article on Ellul and climate change while still a Ph.D. student and beginning an encounter with the broader range of Ellul’s works. Still, he hoped for an opportunity to explore more deeply the connections between the sociological and theological halves of Ellul’s corpus.

For Greenman, his journey with Ellul’s thinking began with reading *Presence of the Kingdom* as a seminary student about 25 years ago. The opening chapter’s picture of the Christian in the world strongly captured his imagination, and played an important role in setting his personal and scholarly trajectory toward theological engagement with issues of public life. Ellul’s vision of the critical place of the layperson as the channel through which the Gospel reaches the world, and of the Christian way of life as fundamentally “agonistic,” was especially captivating. As a scholar of theological ethics, Greenman had engaged Ellul’s arguments about the nature of Christian ethics and the possibility of natural law as well as his withering critique of moralism. He had read *Technological Society* and some of Ellul on politics, but not much else of the Ellulian corpus.

Meanwhile, Schuchardt was interested in Jacques Ellul from his study in Neil Postman’s Media Ecology program at New York University. There he read *The Technological Society* and *Propaganda*; digging deeper on his own for dissertation research, Schuchardt also encountered *The Presence of the Kingdom*, *Sources and Trajectories*, and *The Humiliation of the Word*. It was not through the NYU courses that Schuchardt learned of Ellul’s deep Christian faith, however, but through his own research, which was both a thrilling and disconcerting discovery. Thrilling because here was a thinker who analyzed and understood the world around him through the lens of, or at least

alongside his understanding of, Christianity. Ellul sums this approach up most succinctly in his Introduction of *The Humiliation of the Word*:

Rather, I try to do here the same thing I do in all my books: face, alone, this world I live in, try to understand it, and confront it with another reality I live, but which is utterly unverifiable.

"Here is a man in whom there is no guile!" Schuchardt thought, for even if they differed on their interpretations of Christian theology, at least the cards were on the table. The pure intellectual honesty and academic integrity of this approach, no matter what one's theological commitments, inspired Schuchardt greatly. But as a Christian himself, the disconcerting thing was the discovery that Ellul's faith played almost no part of the discussion at the graduate level reading of his key works. This was especially troubling for him during the reading of *Propaganda*, in which Ellul's discussion on propaganda's effects on the church struck Schuchardt as both historically and philosophically profound - *but only if one took the possibility of divine authority seriously*. Schuchardt supposes he found, in retrospect, Ellul's assessment of modern society as further evidence, on the positive side of the ledger, for the reasonableness of the faith.

So we knew that the idea we had hit upon while at Martha's Vineyard was a very special one, promising as it did the opportunity for significant academic innovation: the in-depth study of a thinker whose interests ranged broadly enough that three different academic divisions could rightfully claim him as their own, conducted at a school whose heritage and purpose centers on engagement with the entire spectrum of the liberal arts within a Christian context. In short, we could offer a course on Ellul that honestly took stock of all of his claims and allegiances, one that looked at him and his work holistically. In fact, once back on campus, we were somewhat surprised to discover that Wheaton appeared to have never offered a full course on Ellul. So, in early fall 2008, Toly, Greenman and Schuchardt met to explore the idea of a semester-long, team-taught, interdisciplinary course: "Jacques Ellul: Technology, Politics & Ethics." We will provide a detailed description of the aims, strategies and requirements for this course later in this essay. A clear picture of the administrative logistics necessary for us to mount the course comes first.

It is important to understand that we intended that the course be offered as a cross-listed course between three departments: Political Science, Communication, and Biblical & Theological Studies. For now, it is relevant to know that Wheaton allows new courses such as ours to be offered under the category of "Experimental Courses." Approval for such a course is a matter of the department head's signature and the Registrar's endorsement. Department approval for an "Experimental Course" does not involve putting a detailed proposal before an entire department; this step is needed only after such a course is taught twice, at which point the department must vote to add the course to the official College Catalog. This policy encourages faculty innovation in the classroom and allows timely courses to go into action more quickly. Therefore in our case, all that was required was a simple one-page form, with a short summary of the course (akin to the eventual course description on the syllabus), that

was acceptable to the three department chairs. Since Greenman serves in this capacity for Bible & Theology, that meant we only needed the support of the chairs of the other two departments. Fortunately, both chairs were enthusiastic about this venture. That was the first hurdle cleared: the course could be tri-listed in the next year's course offering schedule, allowing students to receive credit for the course in one of three departments. Most students eventually registered with the department of their major.

The next steps required broader administrative support beyond the three departments. Our plan was for a four-credit hour course, with the goal that all three professors would be attributed with four hours toward their required teaching load, allowing all three to be in the classroom for the entire semester. A major part of our goal for the course was interdisciplinary discourse, a feature that seemed unlikely unless all three could interact with each other and with the students during each class period. Wheaton makes available each year a small amount of funding through its "Faith and Learning" program that operates out of the Provost's office. The program has several facets, mostly designed around faculty development in the area of practicing thoughtfully Christian scholarship and thinking through one's academic discipline from the standpoint of Christian faith. One aspect of the program offers funding for co-taught courses that cross disciplinary boundaries (e.g., a course on theology and art is shared by a theologian and an art historian). Since interdisciplinary thinking is a key feature of the liberal arts tradition, we felt we had a strong case. The endorsement of the Provost enabled Toly and Schuchardt to receive four hours of teaching load credit for their involvement, while their respective departments received additional funding to hire an adjunct professor to cover two hours of teaching. Thus, the department did not lose two hours of teaching, and the professors were able to participate in the entire class. (Greenman's teaching load is variable on account of his primarily administrative assignment, so that was not a factor for the Bible & Theology department.)

Without these specific forms of substantial institutional support for the course, the course probably would not have happened at all. We are grateful that it did not prove difficult to make the case that such a course would be a valuable addition to the course offerings at Wheaton. Ellul's stature as an eminent Christian thinker who engages the social, political, economic and technological dimensions of modern and contemporary culture made him an appealing subject for a course. Moreover, the presence of the Jacques Ellul Papers in Wheaton's Archives gave us a clear rationale and allowed us to offer undergraduates a rare opportunity to conduct archival research.

A final piece of financial background is also worth noting. We enlisted the help of a master's degree student in systematic and historical theology, Kirsten Guidero, to serve as a teaching assistant for the course. She participated in each class session, assisted the professors with course preparation and with course mechanics such as taking attendance and recording grades, and provided encouragement and guidance for students as they worked on their research papers. Elsewhere in this issue of the *Forum*, Kirsten describes her experience in this role. In financial terms, she was paid

an hourly wage for her involvement in the course through an account under Toly's auspices within the Urban Studies program.

## Course Aims & Organization

There were 14 students enrolled in the course, including one graduate student in theology. We also had an undergraduate auditor, as well as an auditor who was an American missionary to France. This proved to be an ideal size for a discussion-based, seminar course. We had hoped for some students in the class who were French majors or highly capable of reading French, but in the end, none of our students had strong French skills.

Here is the course description we used on the syllabus:

*Jacques Ellul (1912-1994), a French Protestant polymath, was one of the most fascinating and provocative Christian thinkers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This interdisciplinary, team-taught class explores his contributions to the fields of sociology, communication, political science, urban studies, and theology by focusing primarily on his work related to technology, politics and ethics. Special attention is given to the theme of freedom and necessity in his work. The course also aims to put Ellul into dialogue with key interlocutors in these various disciplines. The class operates as a seminar that assumes high levels of student interaction and discussion. In addition, the class emphasizes independent research on Ellul making use of a unique resource at Wheaton College: an expansive archive of Ellul materials (second largest such collection in the world).*

For our purposes in this article, we should highlight our two most important learning objectives. Our goal was that students would be able to (1) “describe and evaluate the main themes in the writings of Jacques Ellul as a major Christian thinker” and (2) “interact critically and reflectively with Ellul’s ideas in order to formulate deeper understandings of their implications for contemporary Christian engagement with the realms of technology, politics and ethics.” From these two items it can be seen that we wanted to enable our students to get to the heart of Ellul’s ideas. Also, it should be clear that teaching such a course at a Christian liberal arts college allowed us complete freedom to engage Ellul’s Christianity without any sense of embarrassment. Our students were interested in Ellul precisely because he was a Christian, albeit one whose theology differed in several respects from their own.

The course met twice a week for a two-hour class period for an entire semester. We found that there were a number of clear educational advantages in a full semester course, rather than a half-semester course (which is a popular format for electives at Wheaton). These included:

- 1) It takes several weeks for students to begin to figure out how Ellul’s mind works and to become comfortable with his unusual writing style. The full semester gave them enough time to become familiar with Ellul’s way of operating.



2) A full semester allowed us to assign a significant amount of reading from Ellul (as well as other thinkers) so that students could encounter Ellul's thought across a range of topics.

3) Gradually as the semester unfolded, students were increasingly able to make connections between the readings they had been doing and among the key themes of the course.

4) This format also gave us the opportunity to have students present the findings of their own research at the end of the semester.

## Getting Started

To begin the semester, Greenman provided a detailed lecture to introduce Ellul's life and thought. The lecture put Ellul in his French context, sketched some of the life experiences that so significantly influenced his thinking, and set the stage for Ellul's interaction with key thinkers such as Karl Marx, Karl Barth and Soren Kierkegaard. Next, the class watched the 1992 film "Betrayal by Technology" that features extensive interviews with Ellul. Then we received a tour and orientation to the Jacques Ellul Papers in the Wheaton Archives from David Malone, Head of Archives and Special Collections. The introductory section of our course concluded with a session led by Schuchardt that discussed Ellul's "76 Questions Concerning Technology." Using the iPhone as a case study, we engaged many of these questions to orient students to key concerns of Ellul and to his characteristic mode of thinking. In this context we also highlighted Ellul's characteristic emphasis on the primacy of posing the right problems while resisting premature answers. These components enabled our students to get their bearings. We were ready to start.

We began by spending three class periods discussing *The Presence of the Kingdom*, led by Greenman. Ellul himself stated that he felt this book was the best introduction to his thought. Since it is more accessible than many of Ellul's works, it was a relatively easy entree into a strange new world. But we were also keenly aware that Ellul was French, that none of our students (except for one graduate student who audited) spoke much, if any, of the language, and that given the 3060 year gap between the works we were reading and our own cultural context, we would need to do a lot of bridgebuilding and gap-jumping for the students.

So next, Schuchardt offered seven class periods devoted to discussions on the dense *The Technological Society* in which he gave a close reading of the text and tried to contextualize and illustrate its insights with current examples, one method of which was to show film clips from *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, *They Live*, and Mark Osborne's brilliant 6-minute film *More*, among others. As we reached the middle of the semester, students made class presentations based on an Ellul book that was not assigned reading for the course, a book of their choice designed to be used in their research paper due at the end of term. Then, Toly led six class sessions devoted to *The Meaning of the City*, followed by four days led by Greenman on Part 4 of *The Ethics of Freedom*. The course

concluded with a guest lecture by Dr. Cliff Christians, then four class presentations by students about their research papers.

Within the first week of the semester, uncertainty over who was “leading” the class was resolved by Dr. Greenman’s wonderful analogy, and we quickly became known to the students as “the three-headed dog.” They addressed each of us this way in conversation and often via e-mail. On the one hand this lent itself to all sorts of humor, from discussions of puppy-ness to rabies, to metaphors of being pulled in three directions at once, to one student creating a digital illustration of a Japanese manga dog with three heads, upon which he superimposed our three faces. But on the other hand, and most concretely, it gave students a way of addressing in the singular the plurality of our leadership, and so instead of saying, “I’m not sure which one of you I should address this question to...” they could simply say, “Three-headed dog, what do you think of.?” This metaphor also summarizes nicely how we each felt about our Ellul scholarship. No one of us had read all of Ellul, and none of us feels like we see the whole picture well enough to teach the course on our own, so one of the nicer aspects for the professors was the ability to enjoy their humility by recognizing that together we comprised a fairly decent comprehensive Ellul scholar.

Before we discuss in detail the pedagogical strategy we used, in summary the course requirements emphasized reading the Ellul texts, making class presentations, and writing a 20-25 page research paper using the Ellul material in our archives. Students prepared questions from their readings for each day of class. They wrote a short review essay on a supplementary Ellul text, made a total of four class presentations, and wrote a major essay on a topic of their choice.

## **Pedagogy**

Collectively teaching Jacques Ellul to Christian undergraduates is a unique pleasure, a bit like training goslings to fly. You know they’re going to take to it naturally once they get pushed out of their comfort zone, and you simply try to push them as gently and confidently as you can while downplaying the laws of gravity. Beyond the integration of faith and learning as a matter of harmony with Ellul’s own vision for his work, our course pedagogy was arranged around three further points of emphasis: interdisciplinarity, interlocutors, and inquiry.

From the beginning, the course was conceived as an interdisciplinary endeavor, one that would include instructors and students from multiple departments or programs at the College. The first thing to be agreed with regard to this course was that someone at the College should teach a course on Ellul, helping students to gain from his thoughtfulness, exploring his model of integrating faith and learning, and putting to use the material in Wheaton’s special collection. The second thing to be agreed, however, was that no one person would have the range of expertise required to do justice to Ellul’s thought. From our perspective, the course had to be interdisciplinary, and this would mean interdisciplinary instruction, with faculty from Biblical & Theological Studies,

Communication, and Politics & International Relations. This range represented every academic division at the College.

Interdisciplinarity would also mean reaching out to a broad range of students. Beyond our own majors, we had hoped to see students from many others. As the course was to be discussion-oriented, we intended for students from diverse majors to bring a wide variety of experience and expertise to bear upon Ellul's writing and anticipated that we would all benefit from the distinct student voices. In the end, we enrolled undergraduate students from a dozen different majors along with two graduate students. Their diverse interests and experiences made the seminar both more challenging and more enriching for its exchanges between students who would not normally participate in the same upper division course.

In this way, students served each other as interlocutors in a 15-week discussion of Ellul's work and its implications for our own lives. Importantly, though, students also engaged with several of Ellul's own interlocutors. In each "part" of our course—technology, politics, and ethics—Ellul's writing was put into conversation with three types of interlocutors: Ellul's influences, Ellul's contemporaries, and our own contemporaries. These interlocutors included film directors, guest speakers, and authors. All played important roles in realizing course goals.

In addition to their required readings, students were invited to spend an evening at each faculty member's home, enjoying dinner and a movie together. We took three extracurricular Sunday nights to watch full versions of feature length films taken from the range of film history in order to help students "see" and interact with some of Ellul's major themes. For the students these film screenings were not mandatory, but by offering dinner and a movie on Sunday nights (when Wheaton students are "on their own" for meals) it was gratifying to see the majority of the class show up each time. And the film discussions frequently carried back over into the classroom conversation, inspiring students who had not seen the films to rent them and watch them on their own. We watched *Koyaanisqatsi*, *Metropolis*, and *Brazil*, each movie roughly corresponding to a specific "part" of the course— *Koyaanisqatsi* to technology, *Metropolis* to politics, and *Brazil* to ethics. The Greenman, Schuchardt, and Toly families rotated hosting responsibilities and the three faculty alternated in facilitating discussion of the films. The movies gave students access to another mode of engagement with the themes and issues around which the course was organized. Dining together in faculty homes served to humanize our endeavor toward both a right understanding of and right living in technological society.

The humanization of our work was also aided by the two guest speakers who helped bridge the gap between Ellul's context and the students' lived experience. Schuchardt invited Eric Brende and Cliff Christians, having known about Eric Brende from his book *Better Off: Flipping the Switch on Technology* and knowing Dr. Christians through his membership and participation in the Media Ecology Association. Both guests spoke in class. Both also gave an evening lecture on campus in order to bring more of the College community into our project. Brende even joined students for dinner

and the showing of *Koyaanisqatsi* at the Schuchardt home. Both visitors put a human face on Ellul's interlocutors, personalizing the task at hand and making it easier to imagine and understand our "conversation partners" as real people, even when we may only have had access to their writings. Their contributions added wonderfully to the discussion in class, and also brought great attention to a) the Jacques Ellul archive and special collection; b) the course we were teaching; and of course, c) the individual authors themselves.

Eric Brende came first, during the part of the semester where we were discussing *The Technological Society*, and he came not as an Ellul scholar, but as an example of a plausible response to taking the problems of a Technological Society seriously on the individual level. Despite being a genuine neo-Luddite in many respects himself, Schuchardt felt it was important that we not end *TS* with the pre-emptive despair of the rhetorical question, "What can *possibly* be done about it?" Since turning back the clock was not an option in most students' minds, Schuchardt wanted to gently remind them, in living form, of G.K. Chesterton's comment that in fact, you could: all you had to do was reach behind it and turn it back. The students enjoyed the opportunity to interact with a living author, to get a signed copy of his book, and to ask detailed questions about he makes a living selling homemade soap and driving a pedal-cab rickshaw in St. Louis to support a wife and three children. To many students, just discovering that this guy "was for real" was a valuable education in our estimation. Brende was very insightful about the current world situation and living with an active resistance to the technological imperative, but he did not speak too much about these efforts in relation to his Catholic faith, nor did he address any specific aspect or element of Ellul's work.

For these purposes we had, at the end of the semester, Dr. Clifford Christians, Research Professor of Communications at University of Illinois, co-editor of *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays*<sup>2</sup> and General Editor of the Ellul Forum. Christians also joined us in Wheaton, offering the perspective of someone who has spent decades studying the work of Ellul. He gave a wonderful collegewide lecture with slides and video on truth-telling in a technological age, and offered examples from Al-Jazeera, the film *Elephant Man*, and the documentary *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*. In both lecturers' cases, there was heavy attendance from students in the class, even though the events were not mandatory, and college interest trebled or quadrupled from class interest. On a personal level, it was a treat to spend time with and eat meals with Eric and Cliff, and in both cases we agreed that future events of this type were well warranted.

As students soon learned, some of our interlocutors agreed with Ellul, while others did not. Those that disagreed were sometimes more, sometimes less, sympathetic toward Ellul's own positions. In assigning critical interlocutors, we assured ourselves that

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<sup>2</sup> Clifford G. Christians and Jay M. Van Hook, eds., *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1981).

students would attempt to hold Ellul to account as much as Ellul held us to account. We also hoped to honor Ellul's commitment to dialectical reasoning as a means of advancing understanding. He was committed to "the no" not only as a way to advance human history in a dialectical fashion, but also as an epistemology<sup>3</sup>. Hopefully the observation and practice of this approach has increased student capacities for critical negation of arguments both within and beyond the classroom.

Requiring students to read Ellul's detractors as well as his supporters also put students on more equal footing in the classroom, tempering any sense of the class as an Ellul fan club. Those who, more often than not, agreed with Ellul were in good company, joined as they were by Postman and others. But so were those who disagreed, accompanied by Moltmann and Mumford. In this way, students came to own both our assigned authors and each other as their own interlocutors. It was our hope that, by the end of the semester, students would have become accustomed to sharpening each other through this kind of intellectual accountability.

And they came to discover further interlocutors in their research, enriching the dialogue inside and outside of class. In the final weeks of the course, each student was required to present a research paper to the class—a not unusual requirement for a course of mixed upper division undergraduates and graduate students. The paper required students to discern a theme in Ellul's work, to trace that theme through a number of Ellul's works, including some from the special collection, and to write about how that theme intersected with a contemporary issue or controversy. In this way, students would become Ellul's interlocutors, themselves. One student, Daniel Saunders, discovered the work of Gabriel Vahanian in the Ellul Special Collection and wrote his research paper on the differences between Ellul and Vahanian. In a very real way, Daniel came to know Vahanian as his own interlocutor when he sent his paper to Vahanian, who graciously took the time and effort to respond.

Each research paper was also assigned a respondent, a student who would read the paper in advance and prepare a 10-minute presentation in response. The response was meant to be critical, affirming the research paper where appropriate, negating it where appropriate, and provoking thoughtful discussion during the ensuing time of question and answer. Just as Brede, Christians, and the authors whose work we read had done for the whole semester, spurring more careful consideration of Ellul and more thoughtful dialogue about his work, our students were expected to do at the end of our time together. So they came to discover themselves as interlocutors, and we enjoined them to accept the responsibility that came along with that role.

Given that this was a discussion-based course, student responsibility was a key to learning outcomes. Because we wanted students to be prepared for each class session's discussion, we needed some manner by which we could help to ensure not only their reading, but their active and critical engagement with Ellul and others. We needed an assignment that would not only provide accountability, but also promote classroom

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<sup>3</sup> Jacques Ellul, "On Dialectic," in *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays*: 291-308.

engagement through active engagement with readings. We were not only interested in ensuring that students could comprehend and recite main points, but also in encouraging students to ask significant questions of their interlocutors, in spurring them on toward inquiry.

We decided to require every student to submit three types of questions about each day's readings. The question types corresponded to three of the four tasks of New Testament ethics, according to Richard Hays' argument in *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*.<sup>4</sup> For each set of readings, students were required to submit descriptive, synthetic, and pragmatic questions. The first were supposed to interrogate the propositions, logic, and evidence of the arguments read for that day. That is, students were to submit a descriptive question concerning what the author might have meant. The second type of question, the synthetic question, was meant to help students to situate a reading within the context of the other readings assigned for that day or within the context of the course readings and discussion so far for the semester. And the third question type, the pragmatic, required students to inquire into the real world origins or implications of a given author's argument. By this means, all students were supposed to come to class prepared for discussion, having already explored the meaning of their readings and contextualized them in both immediate and broader senses—both within the class session and semester and according to their observations of and participation in the “real world.”

Perhaps this approach to the course afforded a fit between the ends and the means of our experience. If, indeed, this aspect of the course has been formative, then we believe it is consistent with Ellul's concern for articulating questions and problems before answers and solutions. Ellul regarded as perverse our inclination to answer what has not yet been rightly posed as a question, to solve what has not yet been properly problematized. In his essay, “Needed: A New Karl Marx,” he writes,

”This is the folly of our time: we claim to give solutions without even looking at the problems. We cast a superficial glance over the world and pretend to organize it for a thousand years. It is not one of the least contradictory traits of our epoch that we demand answers before we are capable of formulating clearly the questions... Solutions to what? That is one of the most suggestive surprises there might be... Nobody is concerned to know the problem. One begins with the very general and vague idea: ‘it's not working.’ What? Everything: the economic, the political, and social. More precisely? Unimportant. Vain analyses, mind games. What is needed is a remedy, and that right away.. Now these problems are all, without exception, wrongly posed because they are conceived as causes when they are only effects.. The problem is posed well enough in reality, in the practical life, but it is not formulated, it is not intellectually, analytically conceived. Now it is impossible to answer a question when the question is not thus posed.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Hays, *Moral Vision of the New Testament* (New York: HarperOne, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Ellul, “Needed: A New Karl Marx (Problems of Civilization II),” in M. Dawn, ed. *Sources*

We can only hope that our students have come to appreciate the interdisciplinarity, interlocution, and inquiry that we sought to model in the course. For the three of us, what were in some senses capricious choices at the beginning of the semester have become to greater extent pedagogical commitments. While we set out to provide an opportunity for Ellul to shape the ideas and dispositions of our students, in the end and as with most teaching experiences, we found ourselves shaped by the opportunity, as well.

## Takeaways

All of us—not just the students—learned from the course. Clearly, it provided an opportunity for the faculty to learn more about Ellul. But we also learned from each other. As Schuchardt’s approach was the media ecology angle, Greenman’s was theology, and Toly’s was environmental studies/political science, the course really did offer a tripartite dissection of Ellul’s work. If you borrowed Teilhard de Chardin’s concept of the Cosmosphere, Noosphere, and Biosphere, there was a rough parallel to our approach through theology, media, and environment. And this worked exceptionally well for the students, who themselves were coming from multiple different major areas of concentration, but who were (mostly) all strong enough students to benefit from a multilayered approach. Now that the course is over, however, each of us would feel much more confident in teaching an Ellul class on his own. It was a course we would have each liked to take, and by teaching it we did get to learn quite a bit from each other, not just on disciplinary approach, but on teaching methods as well.

Toly learned from Greenman to appreciate and communicate to students the context of an author’s work. Greenman’s hard work situating Ellul paid off with students and Toly was reminded of the importance of such work to student motivation and understanding. Toly also watched Schuchardt personalize the content of the course and connect with students in a way that modeled passionate inquiry.

Given Greenman’s background as a theologian, what was most illuminating about the course for him was discussing Ellul’s more non-theological works in the wider context of Ellul as a Christian thinker. This approach enabled him to gain a more comprehensive picture of Ellul’s entire project. Also, the courses’ “interlocutors” in media studies and urban politics were almost entirely new to him, and through our interaction with these figures he was better able to see the distinctiveness of Ellul’s thinking and to begin to trace the logic of how Ellulian “instincts” might operate with regard to current questions of media, technology and urban life.

Schuchardt came to the task of team-teaching a course on Ellul with a palpable joy. Of the three of us, Schuchardt was perhaps the least “objective” in his approach, as he was so enthusiastic and gung-ho about teaching Ellul from what he considered to

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*and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul that Set the Stage* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

be “his own” approach, that he probably was more of a cheerleader for the Ellul team than a dispassionate scholar considering his arguments. Schuchardt greatly valued the ability of Drs.

Greenman and Toly to teach from a more detached position, even as he recognized he was not there yet.

In short, teaching Ellul as a Christian thinker to a classroom of Christian students felt like teaching Ellul the way it was meant to be taught, and this to a very captivated audience. It was the class each of us looked forward to teaching (or participating in) the most each week, and several students said the same about their experience.

Overall, what did students think about our experiment? The personal reflections included in this issue of the *Forum* by four students should give a flavor of the class response. In addition, we used our standard course evaluation process. The student feedback was honest and constructive. A few themes emerged: students would have appreciated more variety in our use of classroom time, particularly more lecturing from the professors to go alongside the discussions of texts. They also recommended greater variety in our assignments. The submission of three questions related to the readings for each class period became monotonous in the eyes of a number of students. We were also interested to see that some students noted their appreciation that the three professors offered differing interpretations of Ellul’s thought, while others were somewhat frustrated since they felt that the three professors appeared to disagree too often. Some felt us too critical of Ellul, others saw us as not critical enough.

What will we change, or not change, when we offer this course again? We would continue to use three films, but perhaps change the films offered. It seemed that *Metropolis* worked the best, but the other two potentially could be replaced. We should work to integrate the films into the class discussions more directly and deeply, and perhaps even require a short written response to the films.

The class presentations of student research, with peer respondents, would definitely be continued. We would give clear, blunt instructions about what to do and what must be avoided in making an effective presentation.

Given what we affirmed in the course description about the importance of the theme of freedom and necessity as our chosen framework for reading Ellul, we agree that we did not stick closely enough to that strand. We touched on it often, and on occasion went into a good amount of detail regarding what Ellul was thinking about freedom and necessity. But this theme did not emerge clearly enough as the organizing thread of the course. Some students struggled to locate any strand to pull together a fascinating series of readings and conversations. “All this is interesting, but how does it hang together?” is the question we need to address more directly and concretely when we offer it again. An introductory lecture to frame this theme at the outset of the semester would probably be very helpful.

We would continue the use of “interlocutors” but consider engaging fewer figures so that we could interact more deeply with those chosen. For instance, we could focus on Lewis Mumford as the prime dialogue partner for our politics section, and work more



with Soren Kierkegaard as the chief interlocutor for the ethics material. It seems to have been overly ambitious to address both one of Ellul's contemporaries and one of our contemporaries. Perhaps we need to choose just one interlocutor for each major section of the course.

With regard to our assigned readings, we were generally pleased with our choices. We found *Technological Society* to be the most challenging text to teach, and would probably experiment with different approaches to handling that book when we teach it again. We agree that this book, as well as *Presence of the Kingdom*, is utterly essential reading for a course like ours. But *TS* is a peculiar and repetitive work that sometimes develops arguments in a decidedly non-linear fashion. It makes difficult plowing for newcomers to Ellul's work, and perhaps a more thematic approach to teaching it would yield deeper analysis and discussion. We also would like to somehow rearrange the semester's flow of reading to allow a few additional class periods to discuss *The Ethics of Freedom* toward the end of the semester. We discovered that this text was valuable in pulling together various threads of the course, and in helping students see better how Ellul's thought works itself out in more practical or concrete spheres of life.

Although we liked the assignment to require students to submit three types of written questions for each segment of reading, we realize that we did not take full advantage of these questions. We should use them more strategically as a mechanism for generating discussion, and if we did so, it would help students bridge the various teaching styles and personalities of the three professors. In addition, we understand why some students found the assignment monotonous or boring. We are inclined to periodically require a 1-page paper to a set question as an alternative to writing questions.

If we metaphorically trained our student goslings to fly by pushing them out of their nest, then we should also add that a lot of falling and flapping takes place before flight, and we did have a few broken, or at least injured wingings. One student dropped out mid-semester due to the difficulties of trying to add the class to a schedule and workload that was already overlaid; another nearly dropped but pulled it through at the last moment, though the work showed the strain of trying to digest too much too soon. So while, statistically speaking, the class was an overwhelming success, we would be remiss to not acknowledge that we set a fairly ambitious course and really did stick to it, which presented some challenges for some students. However, one of the nicest aspects was to team-grade student papers, and this was especially pleasant during the final grade assessment, where we really could discuss each student's strengths and weaknesses, could offer insights into aspects of student growth that others might have missed or not been aware of, and this we would say had the overall effect of boosting the grades of the weakest students by rewarding them for mid-course corrections or for simply having the stamina to not quit. The educational value of a C or a D is something undervalued in these days of grade inflation, but we continue to believe that even those students for whom the class presented their toughest academic challenge will benefit in the long run from their participation in this most unique experience. We learned along the way that Ellul had one of the highest drop-out rates among graduate students of

his in France; we felt like our experience was just the opposite. We had a high retention rate and, as a former advertising, marketing, and PR man, Schuchardt would say we would have no trouble filling the class to capacity if we offered it again.

Further experience bears out this observation. After the fall semester was over, some students gathered in northern Wisconsin for Wheaton's January one-week intensive classes, where the Ellul course was a significant part of their discussion. Two students came up to Greenman asking, "Can we talk some more about what Ellul means by desacralization?" Even now, mid-way through the next semester, there is still a lot of "buzz" on campus. As the director of Wheaton's "Media, Reformation, and Modernity" trip to Germany and Switzerland in summer 2010, then the fall 2009 Jacques Ellul class, combined with his pseudo-fluency in French, now has Schuchardt thinking that an academic travel to Bordeaux is not beyond reasonable consideration. If we three could make that a reality, then Schuchardt thinks both students and professors would eat it up.

## Ellul & Gojira

Technique, King of the Monsters  
by Lee Ketch

*Lee Ketch (Class of 2011, Wheaton College) is working toward his degree in Communications: Film and Media Studies.*

Jacques Ellul's doubts concerning popular cinema are well established. The industrialization and popularization of cinema has made it a mass medium. According to Ellul, the mass media is first and foremost a technique of propaganda, therefore popular cinema as part of the mass media is "only a game" (1979 p. 2) and not to be taken seriously. Even if we agree with Ellul on the dangers of popular cinema, is it possible that a film could still speak the truth? Ellul never used his self-contained theoretical model to analyze an actual film. If we apply his dialectical reasoning to an example, it becomes evident that popular cinema can in some cases be a conduit for truth, regardless of technological conditions. Ishiro Honda's 1954 horror classic *Gojira* is one such film in that it achieved cultural popularity while also addressing themes antithetical to the technological society.

## Technique of Popular Cinema

Ellul's opinion of modern art as a whole appears rather grim. For Ellul, the messages of modern art are all too often submitted to technique's rational frameworks and efficacious modes of distribution. Though he does not disdain rationale and efficiency in and of themselves, problems arise when rationality and efficiency become lifestyles and overextend their reach. This devotion to efficiency has produced the defining business

of the popular film industry: distribution. Whether a film is considered a “popular film” or an “art film” is entirely contingent upon how it is moved through the distribution machine. The content or the message of a film aids its popularity depending on the way the distribution industry interprets and packages that message. As Ellul says, “The great transformation of this century is that the utility of art is regarded as its function.” (1979 p. 26) Organizations with a totalizing economic outlook like film distribution can industrialize and therefore devalue artistic vision, making it a “mechanized mirage” (Wang, 2009 p. 462). This is simply one of the compromises of the popular film industry.

## Ellul and *Gojira*

But just how totalizing is this system? Even though it single-handedly established Japan’s popular cinema industry and launched the longest running franchise of all time, *Gojira* avoids the irresponsibility that Ellul feared. *Gojira* is a horror-monster film that is centered on the giant atomically-charged lizard Godzilla and its attack on Tokyo. The film does not boast an intricate or nuanced narrative, but its theme does speak to a complex issue: atomic power has disastrous consequences. Producer Tanaka Tomoyuki wanted a topic that would appeal to a skittish post-WWII Japan: “The theme of the film, from the beginning, was the terror of the Bomb ...mankind had created the Bomb, and now nature was going to take revenge on mankind” (Kalat, 1997 p. 129). There were two goals for the film: to appeal to a wide audience and to address a delicate topic artistically. As evident by its financial success, the filmmakers met their first goal. In order to determine whether they succeeded in their second, we should see if they meet Ellul’s standards.

For Ellul, nuclear development goes back to the fall of man, the moment when we “had taken over a realm reserved for God” (1982 p. 115). He asks, “are we not precisely at the limit beyond which we make ourselves equal to God, where we do what God does - and can we enter into this competition” (1982 p. 116)? When it comes to nuclear development, there “isn’t any respect either for the Creator or for the creation”; it is simply “research for power” (1982 p. 116). Man attempts to create using the basic building blocks of life, but his ends are only ever those of power and, ultimately, destruction. When man has given birth to a technology that disrespects the foundational authority of God, how can he expect anything less than a monster?

Honda’s film engages directly with this concept. Author William Tsutsui writes: “To Honda, Godzilla was a means of ‘making radiation visible’.. *Gojira* challenged the morality of the atomic age and rendered terrifyingly real the destructive power of radiation..Radiation is not something mysterious, antiseptic, or theoretical in *Gojira*, but is an unrelenting lethal force unleashed against nature and humankind alike” (2004, pg. 33).

Honda does not attempt either to explain away or to capitalize on the aftermath of WWII; rather he directly confronts the audience by visualizing a truth in a way only cinema can. Cinema offers aesthetic advantages that are exclusive to the medium.

Godzilla truly becomes “terrifyingly real” when it is larger than life, accompanied by a bombastic score, and put on display in a room full of hundreds of gaping audience members. The cinema is where Godzilla as a symbol truly finds efficacy.

Ellul also states that the first atomic bomb came about “because everything which is a technique is necessarily used as soon as it is available, without distinction of good or evil” (1965 p. 100). He bemoans that we “have neither the criterion nor the motivation *not* to pursue to the nth degree everything that can satisfy our power” (1982 p. 116). For Ellul, this inability to say “no” leads us to one of two points: either we finally attain the illusion that we can create without God, or we destroy ourselves in the process. Godzilla is the personification of the latter. It is not a force of nature inexplicably wreaking havoc on humanity; it is nature in revolt. The nuclear subtext, historically and symbolically, makes clear for us the primary personification of Godzilla: the destruction that nuclear power leaves in its wake.

## Conclusion

When Ellul says that popular cinema is “nothing but a game,” he does not mean that it is deterministically a dead medium. As both creators and watchers of media, we are to be “renewed men [and women] whose reordered consciousness opposes *la technique’s* tutelage.” (Christians & Real, 1979 p. 5) The avenue for truth begins at this foundation of renewal. Ellul only offers us a start; the specifics are up for evaluation. We must be dialecticians in our media consumption, affirming both the “yes” and the “no,” distinguishing truth from pure amusement, but recognizing that they may be present together.

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## Dialoguing Ellul & Vahanian

Technique: Dehumanizing Totalitarianism or Utopian Hope

by Daniel Saunders

Daniel Saunders (*Class of 2011, Wheaton College*) is working toward his degree in *Communications: Media Studies*.

After spending an entire semester embedded in the context of Jacques Ellul's *The Technological Society*, stumbling across Gabriel Vahanian's *God and Utopia* was eye-opening, if not completely transformative in my reading of Ellul and other "theologies of technology." My struggle to synthesize the dehumanizing totalitarianism of Ellul's technological society—a society in which the practical technological tool becomes the imperative technological system of *la technique*, a system that is all means and no ends—with Vahanian's utopian (but more emphatically, *eschatic*) hope led to a consideration of the fundamental nature of technique. For Vahanian, technique is not the quasi-Gnostic phenomenon Ellul derides when he writes that "technology reduces Christianity to the inner life, to spirituality, to salvation of the soul" (1981 p. 98). Rather, Vahanian expounds technology as the restorer of the eschatological dimension of faith—for changing the world is more incarnation-minded than removing oneself from the world. Thus one asks, in spite of Ellul's critiques, could technology be neutral? What does it mean for technology to properly situate humankind to its environment, enabling the existence of a truly incarnational presence of the church on earth? Where does our hope lie—in Ellul's apocalyptic or Vahanian's utopian understanding?

Christianity and Technique

The relationship between Christianity and technique remains essential to the dialogic synthesis of Ellul and Vahanian. In exploring the history and progression of technology, one cannot fail to see the (A) indelible impact wrought by the Christian church. Up to the sixteenth century the sacred and profane distinctions of medieval Christianity limited the use of technology to the practical tool, mediated by the sacred; however, the Reformers' "desacralization" of Christian thought based on a new self-awareness laid the foundation for technique as all-encompassing method. It is from

this point that Ellul traces the advent of the absolute technological system wherein “the technique of the present has no common measure with that of the past” (1964 p. xxv), aided by a (B) church (captivated by the sacred) that has accepted the substitution of technique for the truest desacralizer—the presence of Christ. For Ellul, the Christian church has been subverted by various outside sources and has been transformed into a vacuous religion. Nevertheless, subverted as it was and still is, the church and the Christian faith (C) will continue to be faithful through the Holy Spirit. The phrase Ellul leaves with us at the end of the seemingly hopeless *The Subversion of Christianity* is the Italian *eppur si muove*—yet it moves. It follows that  $A+B=C$ ; in other words, the history of the church is a history of sin and multiple failings and an existence marked by the “unlivable paradox” of remaining in the “point of contact” between this world and the *other-world* of Christ’s Kingdom. Yet for Ellul, this viewpoint looks *back* to humankind’s prelapsarian condition for its example of such a life “free” from technique and in full, unmediated communion with God, as it then looks to the *end* when God will reveal all.

#### From the Mythological Milieu to the Technological Milieu

For Vahanian, technique seems to be an integral part of our humanity: “Man is and always has been technological man, if only because technique exists from the moment that man invents himself, realizes himself” (1977 p. 96). According to Vahanian, technique gears us toward a shift in milieu—from the mythological to the technological. In the mythological milieu, redemption is understood as soteriological, based on otherworldly moralism and the changing of worlds in a life after death. In the technological milieu, redemption is understood as eschatic-utopian, based on an incarnational transformation of the world here and now. It is concerned with bringing the true incarnation of the Kingdom of God to His people, of truly humanizing that which is alien to humankind— simply understood as the fulfillment of God’s redemption of humanity:

The human is the “event of God,” though God is the ever-present other by which humans become what they are not ... Technological civilization gives humans an earthly dimension heretofore neglected in favor of the soul and its heavenly aspirations. Body language brings the utopian reality of the human and God into the realizable present and thereby makes the human body and the social structure the instrument of the kingdom and the incarnation of God! (Kliever, 1990, p. 9).

#### Apocalypse and Utopia

Ellul’s admitted problem with the semantics of *utopia* leads him to mistrust theories like Vahanian’s. Although he attempts to be as incarnation-minded as Vahanian, Ellul’s dialectic leads him to advocate an “active pessimism” of apocalyptic hope—as such, the Christian is to be a *sign* of hope, always *pointing* to the end of time when God will reveal and consummate all, a literal ‘apocalypse’ or revelation. But Ellul does not go far enough. The vision of the New Jerusalem Ellul gives us in *The Meaning of the City* (even if he does not admit it) is in the same utopian vein as Vahanian, predicating as it does the Garden of Eden (which although existing as myth is still technical and utopian—do gardens naturally occur in nature?). Ellul fails to take note of the fact

that (D) technique seems to play some vital role in God's plan for human redemption and that his New Jerusalem actually offers us the utopia of Vahanian's technological milieu. Ellul reminds us that our spiritual security cannot abide in any object *per se*, even technological utopianism. God alone grants the freedom to be spiritually secure, rooted in

Godself. However, a faith truly oriented towards the *eschaton*, in the already and not yet, must be a truly incarnational faith. And this means that the church may use technology as it becomes a body concerned with "wording the world and worlding the word" (Vahanian 2001)—an *iconoclastic* rather than a desacralizing entity. Only then will the Kingdom of God begin to be truly realized.

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## Putting Technology in Place

Ellul & the Environment

by Kari Amick

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This essay was written in twenty-first century America. It springs out of the work of a French intellectual writing in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, yet it is rooted in a distinctly American and western place and in a uniquely American understanding of land. This understanding of land is complicated by the technology used to manage and understand land, and can result in degradation and disconnection from place. Jacques Ellul provides a paradigm for understanding technology, but fails to fully delineate its impact on relationships with the natural environment.

Jacques Ellul (1964) defines technique as "the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency" (p. xxvi). Examples proliferate in the modern world, and appear in every area of life: education, politics, laundry, transportation. For Ellul, as described in "Technique in the Opening Chapters of Genesis", technique appeared as a result of the fall and its attendant curses (Ellul, 1984, p. 129). Prior to the fall, relationships required no intermediary: relationships between mankind, God and

nature were all immediate. The result of the fall was a series of ruptured relationships for humanity: they could no longer relate directly with God, and they could only eat of the ground through painful toil. Technique then appeared as a necessary buffer between man and his environments—physical, social and spiritual—and eventually progressed into Ellul's technological society.

The technological society's attempt to remove itself from its environment through technique has created alternative milieus, resulting in a multitude of troubles. At the core is the fact that "technique worships nothing, respects nothing. It has a single role: to strip off externals, to bring everything to light, and by rational use to transform everything into means" (Ellul, 1962, p. 142). The technological society offers a life full of means, but utterly meaningless. This consumes all aspects of human life, "our technological society stands ready to offer our neighbors, children, grandchildren, and God's good creation as burnt sacrifices to Mammon" (Toly, 2005, p. 75). Technological means demand constant sacrifice of material resources, and result in environmental degradation as well.

The mechanisms of physical technique are derived from natural resources. Machines require metal of all sorts: cell phones require coltan, copper is used in wiring, aluminum is demanded for cans (McPhee, 1971, p. 49). Energy, in its various permutations, goes into producing the trappings of technique. Food energy for humans is derived from the land as well. To ensure these resources are produced efficiently, production processes are themselves technicized, exacerbating degradation. Efficient food production often results in thoughtless land management, simply because the health and long-term viability of the land is not a factor in short-term productivity (Pollan, 2008, p. 1). And while food and other resources are certainly necessary, degradation results when informed land management succumbs to the efficiency of technique.

Three aspects of technique make land degradation permissible. Firstly, technique creates the situation Garrett Hardin (1968) describes in "The Tragedy of the Commons": the environment is seen only as a means of economic gain, and so this gain is given an inherent value which places it above the environment (p. 1207). Ellul (1978) rightly noted that "if man possessed land, he was in a position to command" (p. 85). Modern landowners transform this power into material wealth as quickly as possible, rather than understanding their land thoroughly and maintaining it well.

Second, most attempts to stem the tide of technique by setting apart land that should remain unused or 'wild' actually end up simply furthering the role of technique in society. While functional land should be limited and certainly should not be enmeshed with the land, it remained an unquestioned necessity. Thus, even the concept of wilderness—a place Ellul (1970) commends for the spiritual fulfillment Christ found there (p. 131)—becomes a means to various removed ends. Land is thus divided and defined, with different techniques allotted for the management of each type, while land itself remains merely a means to achieving one end or the other, fulfillment spiritual or physical.



Finally, as technique becomes our environment, the natural environment loses its value. This not only creates environmental problems, but spiritual ones as well: “What was once abnormal has become the usual, standard condition of things. Even so, the human being is ill at ease in this strange new environment, and the tension demanded of him weighs heavily on his life and being” (Ellul, 1964, p. 321). Technique has become our environment and god, yet fails to fully replace either of these, and thus humanity remains unsatisfied. Technique is not sufficient for us, and nothing is sufficient for it.

The technical relationship to land was questioned when Aldo Leopold (1966) proposed a novel treatment of the land to combat “a system of conservation based solely on economic self-interest” (p. 251). He suggested a “land ethic” which “enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land” (p. 239). The land ethic does not place the land above humanity, but simply expands the community of both, making the fields of the neighbor as valuable as the neighbor himself. While Leopold’s solution remains visionary, it is a vision crippled by its inability to reach fruition. As Leopold writes, “we shall never achieve complete harmony with land, any more than we shall achieve absolute justice or liberty for people. In these higher aspirations the important thing is not to achieve, but to strive” (p. 210). The technological society is what shackles Leopold’s vision. Yet Ellul saw a way to escape technique: Christ.

Christ changes what was wrought in Eden, and in so doing changes the Christian’s approach to the world. Simply put, Christ frees humanity, and “freedom in Christ means living in the real world and not a utopian world” or a world “fixed” by technological means (Ellul, 1976, p. 368). The Christian can acknowledge the extent to which solution is impossible: yet the Christian is the only one who can even begin to approach a solution. Christ has given us a gift so vast we can never repay it and can do nothing to deserve it: our salvation is an outpouring of his grace. This vitality of this grace allows us to “reciprocate by abandoning attachment to worldly things, that is, by directing [our] lives back toward God” and finally create the sort of community Leopold envisaged (Hyde, 2007, p. 69). This freedom, found only in Christ, allows the Christian to evade the demands of technology and live rightly on the land. While our work will remain incomplete until Christ’s return, we can begin to move forward, with “no legacy to fall back on; everything must be initiated” (Ellul, 1971, p. 300).

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## Economy & Ecclesia

Ellul on Capitalism, Church, & Individual

by Jake Rollison

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The reader of Jacques Ellul needs only a basic familiarity with his works to recognize that his combination of indiscriminate criticism of social phenomena and applied theology leads him to some practical conclusions which are somewhat unorthodox, at least, and quite radical, at most. This paper attempts to synthesize critiques of modern capitalist political economy (and the Christian church's relation to it) from Ellul's works and then to distill practical implications of Ellul's ideas for the life of the individual Christian. In doing so, we find that a serious consideration of Ellul leads the Christian to similarly unorthodox or radical practical conclusions.

Consideration of the modern political economy in Ellulian terms makes an already 'dismal science' even more dismal. The conditions of a society mired in technique leave little to no room for individual freedom, a situation so constricting that the human becomes a mere cog in a self-determining, totalitarian machine (Ellul, 1964, p.162; Ellul, 1984, p.11.). Ellul describes economics as absorbing all social activities to the extent that "Man *is* capital, and he must become perfectly adapted to this role" (Ellul, 1964, p.224, p.158, p. 239). The modern economy is abstract and impersonal, and money and political power are in fact powers themselves apart from any instrumental use (Ellul, 1979, p.2.; North, 1994 p.363). An emphasis on abstracted models and quantifiable data necessarily precludes "consideration of those dimensions of life unsuitable for quantification and measurement" (Clark, 1998, p.310-311; Ellul, 1984, p.13). The Ellulian view stands in direct opposition to the foundational premises of neo-liberal

economics, which view money as instrumentally neutral and see individual freedom as supreme, immutable, and unaltered by material conditions.

The modern economy is more than impersonal—it is *antipersonal*. The progression of the technological society and its economy create a milieu in which humanity is changed and adapted to detrimental conditions. The consideration of humanity in scientific, quantifiable terms shapes them in the form of the *homo economicus*—the abstracted, quantified humanoid of their models (Ellul, 1964, p.219). Moral reasoning is replaced with economic assumptions and spiritual life is replaced by economic life (Ellul, 1964, p.286; Ellul, 1968, p.2; Ellul, 1993, p.155). Thus human nature is in danger of spiritual retardation by the economic milieu in which it finds itself and the individual is devalued in light of the greater needs of an efficiency-oriented society (Ellul, 1967, p.5; Frank, 2006, ch.17). In fact, Ellul entirely rejects the efficacy of economic systems to create better static conditions for humanity at all (Ellul, 1984, p.15, 17; Ellul, 1991, p.14).

It would seem from this study that there is no hope for humanity—that we are caught in a web of techniques which end up controlling themselves and us. Personal agency is rendered ineffective, freedom is ruled out, and we are left to either aid the machine or to be removed from it. The reader who fails to incorporate Ellul's theology is largely stuck here in quite a depressing and desperate state. An examination of Ellul's theology, however, finds hope for humanity in one source—the work of Jesus Christ.

(Note: Because economics was not a separate subject before 1500 (and even then, it was only studied under the larger umbrella of 'political economy') (Landreth & Colander, 2002, p.15), we will consider earlier church-economy relations first in terms of centralized authority and then in terms of the problem of money.)

While the church is the bearer of this one hope, it has (in Ellul's perspective) often failed to fulfill its unique role. What is its proper role? Ellul interprets the Bible as consistently critical of all mechanisms of political authority, pointing out that God's 'mouthpiece' (the prophets) always spoke in opposition of the king and the state (Ellul, 1991, p.51-52). Christ continues and amplifies this tradition (Ellul, p.71). The church, then, should be an entity entirely separate from the state with no power, authority, or hierarchy (Ellul, p.62, Ellul, 1948, p.9). For Ellul, the church cannot build the kingdom of God through political action—despite its acting to the contrary for nearly 2,000 years (Ellul, 1968, p.4). Historically, it has tended either to isolate itself from secular politico-economic systems or be absorbed into them without distinction.

The church behaved in the proper (Ellulian) manner for roughly the first 300 years of its existence (Ellul, 1991, p.91-95), until the conversion of the emperor Constantine (Ellul, p.28). This resulted in the clericization of the church (adoption of a power structure) and a mentality of a 'christianized' state. Whether in terms of medieval Christendom or contemporary 'Christian patriotism,' these changes have persisted in some form until the present day (Ellul, p.28; Moltmann, 1968, p.58). In relation to

structures of power, then, the church has conformed instead of maintaining its unique situation.

In terms of the problem of money, the church has done a similarly poor job. The writings of Thomas Aquinas on just price theory and natural law represent a step away from the previously dominant Aristotelian view of money (in which profit-making was unnatural and dishonorable) and a break with Christ's radical warnings against serving Mammon (Aristotle, in *Source Readings* (1954), p.6). While not explicitly condoning profits (material gain above what was required for subsistence), Aquinas had a softer view towards them and implied that a positive instrumental use of profits legitimizes them, making arguments from practicality and efficiency (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Part II, Question 77, Art. 2). Writers during the Protestant Reformation continued the trend of moving away from ecclesial rejection of power structures and money and toward a view of them as inherently neutral and only valued instrumentally. Protestantism provided the common ethical beliefs which value theory and early classical economics were built. (Kauder, 1953, p.138-139; Witte, 2009; Hill, 2009; Pierotti, accessed 11/22/09). Thus, rather than rejecting money's power, the church effectively legitimized private property and changed social norms in *favor* of profit (through Thomistic natural law and the Protestant work-ethic). From here, academics such as Adam Smith built capitalism on the church's foundations.

Today, the church maintains a wide spectrum of beliefs about money and the state, ranging from newer (if revised) forms of Christendom to the 'prosperity-gospel' and everywhere in between. The vast majority of these are insufficient to Ellul.

In our ongoing attempt to strike the proper balance between complete withdrawal from the world and total assimilation, is there an Ellulian answer? Yes, but not an easy one. The freedom given to Christians through Christ's work causes serious difficulties in attempting to pin down practical admonitions (Ellul, 1976, p. 300, 309; Barth, 1960, p. 85). Freedom through Christ represents the only possible liberation from the necessity and determinism of the modern economic apparatus, and is the only force which can counter the economy's totalitarian nature. It is this Christian freedom which simultaneously protects Christians from corruption by the means of the world and rejects distillation into an easy, universal ethic. It is only there, in the tension between freedom and necessity that the Christian church can fulfill its unique role.

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## **A True Solidarity: Christian Community in the Thought of Jacques Ellul**

by Ben Robertson

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One of Ellul's most compelling arguments is his analysis of the social alienation experienced by the individual within the technological society. In reading Ellul, I wanted to uncover his thought regarding a possible Christian response to this alienation. Clifford Christians' article "Ellul on Solution" (1981), in which Dr. Christians discusses the frustrating nature of Ellul's "heavy individualism," was a great starting point and gave me a filter for reading Ellul on community. The three-pronged approach Dr. Christians identifies within Ellul's writing—awareness, transformation, and the concrete action based on these two—is most clear when it is understood in the context of Ellul's Christianity as a response to alienation, and we will approach his thought in this order (p. 154).

#### Awareness

As Ellul (1967b) says, "The first duty of a Christian intellectual today is the duty of awareness" (p. 98). Thus, we begin with an exploration of the sociological conditions of our technological society as described by Ellul. Ellul's concept of the individualist *and* mass society is integral to understanding the shift away from traditional sociological organization (1965 p. 90). For Ellul, alienation arises out of the sociological reorganization along technical values which accompanies the individualist trend in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe (p. 93). The rising value given to the individual eclipses the value of any group affiliation (p. 20). Thus, when "the small groups that are an organic fact of the entire society"—such as the family, village, or parish—are broken up, the individual does not become a free, self-made man, but is made defenseless against propaganda and social currents, resulting in "direct integration into mass society" (pp. 90-92). Western, technological society is a society of alienated individuals organized in an unstructured mass.

Ellul reveals the spiritual significance of the sociology of the mass in his *Meaning of the City* (1970). Here, Ellul describes the mass as a constant force and source of alienation; a "sheet of glass" between every individual that is invisible but completely isolating (p. 125). For Ellul, the mass society is a dangerous spiritual reality. Freedom comes only in the awareness brought by the presence of Jesus (p. 129). The Christian convert has a radically new framework for approaching the mass, the city, and technological society, granting him true awareness of his circumstances and the freedom change them. His spiritual freedom enables him to work as an acid, decomposing the bonds and structure of alienation within technological society (p. 133).

#### Transformation

What kind of sociological transformation does this spiritual freedom entail? Ellul treats this question in several books under different terms. In *The Technological Society* (1964), he discusses "real community," which is necessarily anti-technical because of its particularism (pp. 207-208). He develops this idea further in *Propaganda* (1965), with the depiction of "local, organic groups," which are able to resist psychological technique (propaganda) and to be well off materially, spiritually, and emotionally (p.

91). Furthermore, in *The Political Illusion* (1967a), Ellul advocates for the creation of “positions in which we reject and struggle with the state,” which take the form of “social, political, intellectual, or artistic bodies, associations, interest groups, or economic or Christian groups totally independent of the state, yet capable of opposing it, able to reject its pressures as well as its controls, and even its gifts” (p. 221). These associations must be intellectually, materially, and morally independent of the state in order to be truly confrontational and anti-technical, and their existence as such re-introduces value systems that are not technical in nature (p. 222). Nevertheless, what is it that allows the real community present within local, organic, independent groups to be *truly* independent and anti-technical?

The answer for Ellul is, of course, that they must be Christian. In *The Presence of the Kingdom* (1967b), we find a similar discussion regarding the role of the church in the technological society. For Ellul, Christians ought to create a new style of life that “permits them to escape from the stifling pressure of our present form of civilization” (p. 46). Most importantly, this endeavor is “a work that is both collective and individual,” and “necessarily a corporate act” (pp. 122-3). In fact, an essential condition for this new style of life is “the substitution of a true solidarity among Christians (a solidarity—voluntarily created by obedience to the will of God) for the sociological solidarity, purely mechanical in character, which is being dinned into our ears, and which people want to make the basis of the new world” (p. 124).

#### Concrete Action

Undoubtedly, there is overlap between Ellul’s ideas of real community, organic groups, independent associations, and true solidarity among Christians. Furthermore, there is an inherent opposition in his writing between the sociological forms of our society and the responsibilities of Christians. We would misunderstand Ellul, however, if we took him to be advocating a return to an idyllic past. Ellul’s ideas regarding dialectic and the ecological effects of technique prevent him from valuing any historical situation over any other; there is no dialectical progress, and regression is impossible. There is only change. Thus, Ellul is hesitant to advocate any concrete plan of action.

This is often what people find most frustrating about Ellul, yet he is simply attempting to avoid creating a group of his own followers, leaving the reader with great responsibility. It is difficult to find any concrete solution in Ellul’s writing, but this is only because Ellul knows that problems must be addressed at the level of the real man (1967b p. 82). What then is the significance of community in all this? Ellul (1976) answers in his typically overstated fashion: “the particularity of the individual makes no sense and has no value unless it finds expression in a community” (p. 296). Accordingly, we are to understand that Christ calls his followers out of technological alienation into communion with the Church, as a body that may prophetically point to the ever-imminent Kingdom of God.

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## Student Reflections on Ellul

Living the Dialectical Tension

by Graham Smith, Ashleigh Lamb, & Juliana Wilhoit

*Following are responses from three students in the Wheaton College Jacques Ellul seminar discussing what each gleaned from the course's format and content. We have chosen to adopt as the title for this entire piece the phrase Juliana Wilhoit used for her reflection because each student's contribution demonstrates a unique response to Ellul's challenge towards forming a lived ethic in any number of academic or vocational fields. Graham Smith is an Economics major, Class of 2012. Ashleigh Lam is a Biblical and Theological Studies major, Class of 2010. Juliana Wilhoit is a Political Science and Interdisciplinary Studies, Class of 2011.*

Graham Smith

The course on Ellul challenged my interpretations and theories of the world by opening it up to paradox and tension, particularly as I encountered Ellul's critique of both the growth of scientific consciousness and the doctrine of progress in a world of improving technology. Ellul's method of analyzing the milieus that humans actually inhabit, instead of stripped down, abstract or theoretical ones, challenged my Enlightenment assumptions. I became convinced that Ellul is the necessary foil to the confidence in universal conceptualizations and abstractions of the human being and human societies.

Ellul's method is a dialectical one, which gets us beyond reductionistic accounts of what it means to be human. Based on the lived reality he observes, his thought contains two poles that cannot be considered autonomously or neatly reconciled. Ellul's dialectic translated to the 21st century revolves around the aporia of the "One" and the "Many" and the seemingly endless permutations of this aporia: authority vs. libertinism, power vs. freedom, transcendence vs. immanence, multiculturalism vs. cultural conformity. Dialectic permits Ellul to address the full range of human meanings and purposes. He



offers a more robust understanding that extends beyond the purely rational, quantified, and abstract being.

I was further challenged by Ellul's critique of nominal Christianity, which in his view has conformed to the ethos of the world. Ellul's Christianity is a totalizing and substantive calling, not a cheap substitute like that described in *Money and Power*: "To try to respond [to the poor] by joining a party, by accepting a program, by working at an institution, is to refuse responsibility, to escape into the crowds when confronted with God's question" (159). Yet Ellul also says that Christians should

be involved: it is Christians alone who "can contend against the powers that are at the root of the problem.. .It is the heart of the problem that must be attacked. And Christians alone can do that—because the others know nothing of this" (*Violence* 164).

Studying Jacques Ellul for a semester deeply influenced my thoughts about the world around me. Throughout the course readings, it became increasingly clear that Ellul is relevant for today. I think that Ellul can be used as the basis for a renewed discourse on power, technology, money, corporate-led globalization, neoliberalism, western civilization, and human nature with as much ethico-political urgency and aplomb as other contemporary voices emerging on these topics. As Ellul's thought questions the genetics of the "globalizing village" and critiques the West's conceptions of "progress" and "development," he challenges technological assumptions about the purpose of human life and calls us to work towards a different reality indeed.

Ashleigh Lamb

Sometimes the things in life that you do grudgingly, out of obligation, end up being some of the most rewarding. Thus it was with me and the class I took last semester on Jacques Ellul. Prior to taking this class, I had no knowledge of Jacques Ellul or any of his writings or ideas. I was simply taking the class to meet a graduation requirement and was less than enthusiastic about it after I saw how much reading the class would involve.

I am a Biblical and Theological Studies major, with a concentration in Biblical Studies. Thus, I have spent more time studying the text of the Bible and its cultural context and history than I have studying theologians and their thoughts. I have become especially interested in studying issues of sexuality, gender, and marriage in the Bible and how they relate to modern Christian living. I did not expect those interests to be addressed in a class about ethics, technology, and politics. However, I found myself pleasantly surprised.

Throughout my reading of the works of Jacques Ellul and our class discussions, I was constantly struck by how applicable his works were to issues that I have developed an interest in, especially his ideas on technique and dehumanization. Though I did not at all expect to make connections between ideas learned in this class and my interest in sexuality, I found so many connections that I ended up writing my final paper for the class on how technique and propaganda influence modern adolescent romantic relationships.

Not only was reading the works of Ellul beneficial to my understanding of sexuality and romance, but I have constantly found links to Ellul in other classes, readings, and topics I have studied since. I find myself constantly thinking in a dialectical fashion and being rather skeptical of technology. I have also been greatly impacted by Ellul's ideas on the meaning and method of Christian living. His dialectical and tension-filled ideas on the Christian life may be difficult to live out, but I feel they are also more realistic and true to the gospel than other methods I have encountered.

So though I may have learned about Jacques Ellul out of obligation, his work and thought have positively shaped the way I think and will continue to do so.

Juliana Wilhoit

Dr. Toly encouraged me to enroll in the Ellul class because it would "help me answer some of the questions I was asking." These questions revolved around how to live in the world, and how to be a social critic without becoming cynical. Even with this encouragement, I doubted that anyone could help me figure out how to live, let alone a dead French man. The class looked interesting and was taught by an all-star cast, so I signed up for it anyway. Little did I know that not only would Ellul answer my questions but he also took my life, turned it upside down, shook it, and then set me off on a new trajectory.

Reading the *Technological Society* and *Technological System* paralyzed me; I found Ellul's critiques shockingly relevant and accurate. I was faced with the fact that I live in a society that is continuing down a path of destruction through its use of technology and technique. Instead of answering my questions, these works compounded them: "How can I live in a way that does not continue the totalizing nature of technique? Is it even possible for me to do anything?" While Ellul raised these questions, he also provided an answer through his use of dialectics and his clear articulation of the need to live within the tensions inherent to our lives. His dialectic called me to action, but to action injected with humor and a refusal to take myself too seriously, because, as Ellul stresses, I cannot do anything; only the Christian God enables true revolt from technique (*Meaning of the City*, ch. 5).

Ellul also impacted my understanding of how to be an academic. As a political science and interdisciplinary studies major, I am interested in issues of geography and place that transcend many disciplines. I have found few academics who are as interdisciplinary as Ellul, who weaves history, philosophy, sociology, and theology together. Reading dozens of articles and books by Ellul over the semester allowed me to interact with him broadly, letting me see the consistency of his framework between works. Works like the *Technological Society* may not be explicitly Christian and works like the *Presence of the Kingdom* may not be sociological, but his framework remains consistent throughout. Ellul encouraged me to continue to do interdisciplinary work and showed me an appropriate framework of doing it.

Jacques Ellul's impact on me has been permanent. I can no longer view the world in my black and white framework. Rather, I recognize the "both/and" quality and nature of the world in which I live. While this tension is difficult, it is also liberating because

no choice is inherently worse than another. I am no longer crippled by the world, but invigorated by the possibilities. Ellul has been an intellectual mentor as well, carefully showing me how to construct a comprehensive and interdisciplinary social critique. I will always be grateful for my semester with Ellul and the professors who walked me through his work. *Thank you, Jacques Ellul, for showing me what it means to live and be a scholar.*

## Advancing the Dialectic

T.A.-ing Ellul

by Kirsten Laurel Guidero

Kirsten Laurel Guidero (*MA, Historical & Systematic Theology, Wheaton College, 2010*) served as the teaching assistant in the interdisciplinary Ellul course at Wheaton College.

Sex. Guns. Prayer. Water privatization. Urban gardening. Nuclear power. Godzilla. The ethics of stop signs. Turtles, buffalo, geysers, clocks, and Disney dollars.

During Wheaton College's fall 2009 course on the thought of Jacques Ellul, all these and more became subjects in a discussion that progressively unfolded a bit further each Tuesday and Thursday. Sometimes talk grew heated and intense, sometimes it remained quieter, and sometimes participants were so overwhelmed with the magnitude of what was being encountered that the faces around the table depicted bewilderment, plain and simple. But the seminar was always provocative, and its effects remain considerable, as evidenced by the ongoing conversations generated by students, the buzz on campus over Ellulian themes, and in faculty discussions of what comes next.

TAing for the course was one of the highlights of my academic year. Having read a bit of Marva Dawn, a theologian who retrieves and builds off Ellulian themes in considering biblical criticism and spirituality, I was somewhat familiar with Ellul's thought and intrigued by what I had seen. When I heard the preceding summer that the course would be offered and would be team-taught in an interdisciplinary manner, I jumped at the chance to be involved. Having allotted most of my time at Wheaton to more specialized theology courses but having greatly enjoyed a previous interdisciplinary course on theology and hermeneutics, I was eager to re-enter a multi-faceted learning environment. Furthermore, I had spent much of my undergraduate years examining the thought of great philosophers and writers in a seminar setting, each student investigating the texts from a particular perspective and with an eye toward his or her specific research questions— courses handled in much the same manner as the Ellul seminar was to be run. So the course was right up my methodological alley, and I twisted Dr. Jeff Greenman's arm to be allowed to assist. I might even have begged, for I was keen to witness, support, and partake of the kinds of conversations I enjoy so much.

As we together uncovered layers of Ellulian thought, the value I place on such conversations only expanded. For in Ellul, we encountered a consistent emphasis on the importance of conversing on and living out the complexities of daily existence. Such an emphasis clearly motivates Ellul's critiques of technology and propaganda, his sketches of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Christianity, and his ethics. The critiques of technique I had already encountered within writers such as Wendell Berry and Kathleen Dean Moore, and the confrontation of limp Christianity I had seen in the writers from whom Ellul drew, particularly Kierkegaard and Barth. But it was my exposure to Ellul's ethics that added some missing pieces for my own theological and philosophical pursuits. I was utterly refreshed as well as challenged by coming across an ethics that focuses on *not being an ethical system*—a stance with which many practitioners of varied faith traditions remain uncomfortable, and a stance that often rubs against the grain of much reflection within my own Christian tradition. Ellul uncovers the long-armed reach of the 'system' from the arena of politics to the sanctuary of the church to the fields of agriculture to the circles of communication and family, and in this act of exposure also lies the act of overcoming such systems. In short, Ellul's ethic is one that champions a return to living day by day based on the full recognition of human weakness, including the insufficiency of all human constructs—one sees clearly the Christian Reformed roots from which Ellul draws. Yet this is not an ethic of self-flagellation or human degradation; rather, it points with joy to the consummation of humanity in the person of the Christ—one sees here Ellul's post-WWII understanding that even in the midst of chaos and destruction, hope may return.

Reading Ellul then reinvigorated my own research into Christology and into the Christian doctrine of deification, a doctrine that emphasizes the capacity of humanity to access divine life through Christ while remaining fully human. I saw deep connections between my research into deification and the kind of ethical life Ellul envisions—a life that challenges systems of means that isolate people from the end of truth and goodness, whether those systems be political, social, economic, or religious. And one of the primary ways to challenge the systems of our technological age is to engage in the kinds of conversations we embarked upon around that long seminar table, each student bringing a set of concerns and questions that enlivened the rest of the group. From environmental justice to the question of water access in South America, from the complexities of prayer to the formation of community, from modern practices of sexuality to the ideal of anarchy, the discussions ranged widely, doubled back, and informed each other. I left the class with more to chew on than I had expected as well as more clarity on the direction and importance of my own work, which will hopefully continue at the doctoral level next fall.

But life as a TA does not just consist of the joys of good discussions, although those moments are certainly some of the key elements that motivate such work. Working as part of the Ellul seminar team meant that I also juggled more mundane tasks such as attendance-taking, reflection-grading, and paper-consulting. The fact that the course was taught by a trio of professors rendered some of those responsibilities more complex:

we had to figure out together along the way what the grading standards should be and how that translated into each project. Three very different teaching styles also kept the class on its toes as we moved back and forth between the professors' areas of expertise and discussion-leading. Finally, learning how to help students move forward in their widely varied areas of interest was also a challenging exercise for me as I consulted with many on their paper topics, offered research resources, and helped organize their thoughts. In each of these sectors, we had the opportunity to practice what Ellul preaches by focusing on the particular needs at hand and by engaging in careful dialogue to find the best solution. The challenges of the course, both content-wise and in terms of structure and mechanics, represented the opportunity for me to learn more about the craft of teaching and to further form myself as an academic within a community that continues to surprise many with its meaningful contributions towards engaging the issues of the day.

## **The Jacques Ellul Special Collection at Wheaton College by David Malone**

*David Malone is Director of the Wheaton College Archives & Special Collections*

The Jacques Ellul Papers, housed in the Wheaton College Archives & Special Collections, are based upon a three-reel microfilm set donated by Dr. Joyce Main Hanks, an alumna of Wheaton's graduate school. Through the facilitation of Wheaton faculty, Hanks began transferring materials to the Special Collections in 1986. Dr. Hanks created the microfilm from Ellul's papers as she created "Jacques Ellul: A Comprehensive Bibliography," published in *Research on Philosophy and Technology*, supplement 1, 1984, prepared with the assistance of Rolf Asal. The comprehensive

bibliography was followed by an update in 1991 with "Jacques Ellul: A Comprehensive Bibliographic Update," in *Research in Philosophy and Technology*, vol. 11.

Upon receipt of the sixteen-millimeter microfilm, the staff of the Special Collections began to create a hardcopy print of each frame in the film. The prints from the microfilm, numbering over 6,000, comprise the bulk of the collection and measure over 7/2 linear feet. These prints are of Ellul's writings, dissertations, books, and articles on his writings and reviews of his books with dates ranging from 1936 to 1983, while the secondary material ranges in date from 1939-1984. The microfilm prints are followed by holographic and xerographic Ellul manuscripts totaling eight (8) inches. These are manuscripts for his books, lectures and addresses, and notes. Following the manuscripts are articles and reviews by Ellul, both xerographic and microfilm prints. The microfilm contains many of the hard-to-find Ellul essays, speeches and lectures. Within the collection, his writings are arranged chronologically. The prints follow the order found in the comprehensive bibliography and can serve well as a print finding aid. An on-

line finding aid can be found at: [http://archon.wheaton.edu/index.php?p=collections/control card&id=13](http://archon.wheaton.edu/index.php?p=collections/control%20card&id=13)

In addition to the manuscript material, the collection also contains secondary material (works on Ellul, critical reviews, correspondence concerning Ellul, and serials on Ellul studies).

In the time that the papers have been at Wheaton College, the collection has served the research needs of several doctoral students from around the globe as they pursued their studies. One of the earliest individuals to make significant use of the collection was Andrew Goddard's Oxford dissertation, eventually published as *Living the Word, Resisting the World* by Paternoster (2002). More recent dissertations have come from Lawrence Terlizze's "Hope in the thought of Jacques Ellul" (2003) and Kunihide Matsutani's "Social philosophy of Jacques Ellul" (2005). Whereas earlier students traveled to Wheaton's campus, these latter students were able to utilize copies of the original microfilm via Interlibrary Loan and engage Ellul's papers at a distance. Two copies of the microfilm are available for short loans and consideration is being given to digitizing elements of the papers for access via Wheaton's online archival database.

Even though the vast majority of the collection is available at a distance by film, the physical collection at Wheaton presents the fullest and most complete collection of Ellul materials available for scholars and students. The fullness and breadth come in many forms. In addition to the traditional manuscript materials mentioned earlier, the collection seeks to obtain any and all published material with a direct tie to Ellul (rather than the many dissertations that may use Ellul as an interpretive model for an area of study). The collection included print materials (books, monographs and dissertations); however work still needs to be done to draw in the vast journal literature that exists. The collection also houses hundreds of audio materials ranging from interviews with Ellul by Hanks to his Bible studies. The nearly two hundred studies were duplicated in 2002 with the assistance of David Gill from the personal collection of Franck Brugerolle, a friend of Ellul's. These may serve as a trove of material for future researchers, but await transcription and translation.

The goal of the Wheaton College Archives & Special Collections is to create the most extensive collection on Jacques Ellul possible. It is our desire to pull together Ellul's writings in their original form, as well as published editions and their translations into English and other languages. Along with this core we seek to surround the collection with associated resources and collections that can help inform the Ellul Papers.

If the reader would like to pursue access to the collection or to add to its resources he or she is encouraged to contact the Wheaton College Archives & Special Collections at the address below.

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E-mail: [special.collections@wheaton.edu](mailto:special.collections@wheaton.edu)  
Web site: <http://library.wheaton.edu>

# Book Review

## Death & Life in America:

Biblical Healing and Biomedicine

by **Raymond Downing**

*Scottsdale PA: Herald Press, 2008. 159 pp.*

Reviewed by David W. Gill

Professor of Business Ethics, St. Mary's College

President, International Jacques Ellul Society

Raymond Downing and his wife, Dr. Janice Armstrong, both work for the Department of Family Medicine, Moi University School of Medicine, Eldoret, Kenya. Since finishing medical school at the University of Tennessee in 1978, Downing has practiced medicine among the Appalachian poor, on a Navajo Indian Reservation, and in Sudan, Tanzania, and Kenya.

Trained in Western scientific biomedicine —but with a long clinical experience delivering healing and care outside of the West —and with a deep immersion in biblical thinking about these topics —Downing has written a truly outstanding, challenging, thought-provoking work. Western biomedicine is very powerful and Downing says “we need language that enables us to think and write about power.” Biblical language provides great tools and perspectives. Downing’s book sets up a dialogue between modern biomedicine and biblical healing.

Downing draws a lot on the insights of Jacques Ellul and two others who were profoundly influenced by Ellul: Ivan Illich and William Stringfellow. He was able to access some of Ellul’s difficult to find writings on medicine and health care. Illich’s *Medical Nemesis* (1976) and Stringfellow’s *A Second Birthday* (1970) —and each of their long personal struggles with serious disease and health issues —also play large in Downing’s book.

Downing sees 1980 as a true “watershed” year when modern biomedicine yielded, or began yielding to, four trends. First is the dominance of the market, especially after a 1982 FTC decision prohibited the AMA from restricting advertising. Medicine and medical care has since been commodified and hustled for profits and lost its traditional professional ethos. Second, Downing describes how “medicalized prevention” has increased rapidly after 1980. By this he refers to statistical studies of risk factors, increased testing, and precautionary treatments which, while well-intended, disembodied the patient.

The third change is the dominance of “systems thinking” —biotechnology and medicine become a system of which we are a part, instead of thinking of medical “tools” which are used by physicians as appropriate. We become “tools of our tools.” And fourth is the rise of bioethics as a discipline under the simultaneous influence of western moral philosophy and a reductionist view of life as mere biological existence.

With biomedicine outlined in its historical context, Downing then turns to a reading of the healing stories of the Bible . . . from the frequent association of healing with the demonic and exorcism, to Jesus’ admonition to “tell no one” after he healed them, to the raising of Lazarus, to the meaning of spitting on the ground to create some healing mud, to repairing Malchus’s severed ear, to the wounded Beast that is healed in Revelation, to the relationship of forgiveness and sin to healing, to Jesus’ own death and resurrection. It is flat out exciting, challenging, and illuminating to read and reflect on Dr. Downing’s understanding of these amazing texts . . . all the time alongside the work and thinking of modern biomedicine.

In the end, we are not told to abandon all of western scientific biomedicine but rather to dethrone it and restore it to a more humble and appropriate role within a larger frame of reference that is shaped by the revelation and insight of Jesus and Scripture.

Buy this book not just for yourself but for all the health care practitioners and professionals you know. It is without doubt one of the top ten books I’ve read over the past couple years.

## Book Notes

—Wipf & Stock Publishers, based in Eugene, Oregon, continues to delight and impress Ellul readers by their single-minded effort to publish or re-publish the works of Jacques Ellul. Wipf & Stock has already brought us Patrick Chastenet’s wonderful interviews with Ellul, *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology, and Christianity* (2005), Marva Dawn’s collection and translation of eight Ellul articles, *Sources and Trajectories* (2003), Lawrence Terlizese’s dissertation, *Hope in the Thought of Jacques Ellul* (2005) and Ellul’s *Money and Power* (2009). Next up will be new editions of Ellul’s *Hope in Time of Abandonment* and *Living Faith*. Wipf & Stock is also pursuing a couple exciting Ellul translations, books that have only been available in French up to now.

—In 2008, a collection of Ellul’s articles on Israel was published in French, *Israel: Chance de civilization* (Editions premiere partie, 2008; [www.premierepartie.com](http://www.premierepartie.com); 411 pages). Volunteers to review or translate it? Write to the publisher for a review copy.

—Dr. Roelf Haan of the Netherlands published *Teologia y economia en la era de la globalizacion: Un aporte al dialogo con la teologia latinoamericana* (Buenos Aires: La Aurora/Instituto Universitario ISEDET, 2007; 426 pp.). This work draws heavily on Jacques Ellul and cites Matthew Pattillo’s article on Ellul & Rene Girard in the Spring 2005 *Ellul Forum*. Reviewers and translators step up: we need to have a careful look at this impressive study.



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The IJES (with its francophone sister-society, L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul) links together scholars and friends of various specializations, vocations, backgrounds, and nations, who share a common interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), long time professor at the University of Bordeaux. Our objectives are (1) to preserve and disseminate his literary and intellectual heritage, (2) to extend his social critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) to extend his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

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*Pour Une Critique de la Societe Technicienne*

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Volume 5: "La Politique" (21 euros)

**Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works** by Joyce Main Hanks. Research in Philosophy and Technology. Supplement 5. Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 2000. xiii., 206 pages. This is the essential guide for anyone doing research in Jacques Ellul's writings. An excellent brief biography is followed by a 140-page annotated bibliography of Ellul's fifty books and thousand-plus articles and a thirty-page subject index. Hank's work is comprehensive, accurate, and invariably helpful. Visit [www.elsevier.com](http://www.elsevier.com) for ordering information.

**The Reception of Jacques Ellul's Critique of Technology: An Annotated Bibliography of Writings on His Life and Thought** by Joyce Main Hanks (Edwin Mellen Press, 2007). 546 pp. This volume is an amazing, indispensable resource for studying Jacques Ellul. All the books, articles, reviews, and published symposia on Ellul's ideas and writings are here.

**Living the Word, Resisting the World: The Life and Thought of Jacques Ellul** by Andrew Goddard. (Paternoster Press, 2002). 378 pp. Eight years after being published, Professor Goddard's study remains the best English language introduction to Ellul's life and thought.

### **Librairie Mollat—new books in French**

Librairie Mollat in the center of old Bordeaux ([www.mollat.com](http://www.mollat.com)) is an excellent resource for French language books, including those by and about Ellul. Mollat accepts credit cards over the web and will mail books anywhere in the world.

### **Alibris—used books in English**

The Alibris web site ([www.alibris.com](http://www.alibris.com)) lists thirty titles of used and out-of-print Jacques Ellul books in English translation available to order at reasonable prices.

**Used books in French:**

**two web resources**

Two web sites that will be of help in finding used books in French by Jacques Ellul (and others) are [www.chapitre.com](http://www.chapitre.com) and [www.livre-rare-book.com](http://www.livre-rare-book.com).

**Ellul on DVD/Video**

French film maker Serge Steyer's film "Jacques Ellul: L'homme entier" (52 minutes) is available for 25 euros at the web site [www.meromedia.com](http://www.meromedia.com). Ellul is himself interviewed as are several commentators on Ellul's ideas.

Another hour-length film/video that is focused entirely on Ellul's commentary on technique in our society, "The Treachery of Technology," was produced by Dutch film maker Jan van Boekel for ReRun Produkties (mail to: Postbox 93021, 1090 BA Amsterdam).

If you try to purchase either of these excellent films, be sure to check on compatibility with your system and on whether English subtitles are provided, if that is desired.

**Issue #46 Fall 2012 — Technique,  
Ellul, and the Food Industry**

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## **For the Critique of Technological Civilization**



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## **From the Editor**

Jacques Ellul was dismissed from his university position by the Vichy government during World War II. He fled to the countryside with his wife Yvette and out of necessity became a farmer for four years. His neighbors graciously taught him the basics. He raised sheep and grew potatoes and corn. His wife raised chickens and rabbits; and they had a vegetable garden. Many farms that resembled Ellul’s 70 years ago are today one crop or one animal agricultural factories. In Ellul’s lifetime there was increasing industrialization of farming and he occasionally used agricultural examples in his writings on technique. If he were alive today it is hard to imagine him not having much more to say about the pervasive role of technique in the food industry. In this issue of the *Ellul Forum* we seek to do that sort of reflection. I have asked three practitioners to look at the food industry today through the lens of Ellul’s writing on technique.

Each author stands in a different place and thus reports different things to us on his view through this lens. Robb Davis writes from the perspective of having worked internationally in community development -specifically in the areas of public health and nutrition. He challenges us to reflect on what the goal of the food industry should

be and how technique's focus on means undermines that goal. Randy Ataide worked in the fresh tree fruit business for twenty years. He has been involved across the spectrum of this agribusiness including, growing, packing, storing, selling and distributing fruit. He recounts for us what he saw and learned by bringing Ellul into conversation with his experience in the food industry, and how Ellul influenced his business practices. After completing college and a master's degree in New Testament Matt Regier and his wife Tia bought a 20 acre farm in Kansas. Unlike the other two authors he had read little of Ellul's work, but was very familiar with the works of Wendell Berry. I asked Matt to read Ellul as he worked the land and cared for animals this summer, and in his essay bring Ellul into conversation with Berry.

The three articles, through echoing some of the same themes and through applying Ellul's thought in distinctly different ways, point to the great importance and rich possibilities of taking a critical look at our food industry through the lens of Ellul's writing.

We are also grateful to have Dr. Raymond Downing's brief essay on "Ellul and Medicine" in this issue. Ray is a physician working in Kenya. Ray's book *Life & Death in America* was reviewed in a recent issue of the *Ellul Forum*. Food and health care are not unrelated topics!

Mark D. Baker, Guest Editor

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## Our Food System Equation

by Robb Davis

Our Food System Equation:

Inattention to Ends + The Imperative of Technique

Prodigious Food Producing Capacity *and* Food Insecurity for Hundreds of Millions

by Robb Davis

*Robb Davis has over 20 years of experience in international development in the field of maternal and child health and nutrition. He has worked for World Vision, Catholic Relief Services, and Freedom from Hunger. He was the executive director of the Mennonite Central Committee. He currently lives in Davis, California and directs support services at a local nonprofit working with churches to face the challenges of homelessness. He also works two days per week at a local organic farm. Robb holds a Master's degree in Public Health and a Ph.D. in Population Dynamics from the Johns Hopkins University School of Hygiene and Public Health.*

Inattention to Ends:

*The first enormous fact that springs from our civilization is that today everything has become means. There are no more ends. We no longer know towards what we are*



heading. We have forgotten our collective goals. We have enormous means and we put into place prodigious machines in order to arrive nowhere . . .<sup>1</sup>

The Imperative of Technique:

*[Reason] . . . takes account of the fixed end of technique–efficiency. It notes what every means devised is capable of accomplishing and selects the ones that are the most efficient... Thus the multiplicity of means is reduced to one: the most efficient<sup>2</sup>*

Prodigious Food Producing Capacity:

*Earl “Rusty” Butz, Richard Nixon’s second secretary of agriculture . . . revolutionized American agriculture, helping to shift the food chain onto the foundation of cheap corn. Butz made no secret of his agenda: He*

*exhorted farmers to plant their fields “fencerow to fencerow” and advised them to “get big or get out . . .” [He] began replacing the New Deal system of supporting prices through loans, government grain purchases, and land idling with a new system of direct payments to farmers*

*[T]he new subsidies encouraged farmers to sell their corn at any price, since the government would make up the difference . . . Instead of supporting farmers, the government was now subsidizing every bushel of corn a farmer could grow—and American farmers pushed to go flat out could grow a hell of a lot of corn<sup>3</sup>.*

Food Insecurity for Hundreds of Millions:

*Progress was made in reducing chronic hunger in the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s. For the past decade hunger has been on the rise<sup>4</sup>.*

*FAO estimates that 1.02 billion people are undernourished worldwide in 2009. This represents more hungry people than at any time since 1970 and a worsening of the unsatisfactory trends that were present even before the economic crisis. The increase in food insecurity is not a result of poor crop harvest . . .<sup>5</sup>.*

Our Food System: What Ends?

As the foregoing quotes reveal, we live in a world that simultaneously produces an extraordinary amount of food and sees a billion human beings facing food insecurity (which is not equivalent, but related, to the concept of chronic hunger). The reasons for this level of food insecurity are complex but an understanding of the pillars of food security reveals how it can exist in a world in which enough food is produced. Food security, according to the World Health Organization, is a function of food being

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<sup>1</sup> Ellul, J. (1948). *Presence au monde moderne*.

Geneva, Editions Roulet. P. 62–author’s translation

<sup>2</sup> Ellul, J. (1967). *The technological society*. New York, Vintage. p. 21

<sup>3</sup> Pollan, M. (2006). *The omnivore’s dilemma: a natural history of four meals*. New York, Penguin Press. pp. 51-53

<sup>4</sup> Grebmer, K. v. (2009). *2009 Global hunger index: the challenge of hunger, focus on financial crisis and gender inequality*. Bonn; Washington, D.C.; Dublin, Ireland: Welthungerhilfe ; International Food Policy Research Institute ; Concern Worldwide.

<sup>5</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United, . (2009). *The state of food insecurity in the world 2009: economic crises - impacts and lessons learned*. Rome, FAO.

physically *available* where people live, of people having sufficient financial resources to *access* food and of their ability to actually *utilize* the food they consume. This last point concerns whether a person's body can adequately absorb the nutrition from food s/he eats if that person has parasites or other diseases that impede absorption.

Increasing food security, then, requires that a complex set of factors be present within communities and households of which increasing food quantity (globally) is only one. This points to an initial problem in our current global food system: it is largely focused on the "end" of producing more food. In itself this end is not bad but is not really an "end" at all. Rather it is a means to another end—food security.

The theme of "ends" runs through much of Jacques Ellul's writing and he summarized its relation to *technique* in a series of interviews with William Vanderburg of the Canadian Broadcasting Network:

*Technology<sup>6</sup> is the extreme development of means. Everything in the technological world is a means and only a means, while the ends have practically disappeared. Technology does not develop toward attaining something. It develops because the world of means has developed, and we are witnessing an extremely rapid causal growth. At the same time, there is a suppression of meaning, the meaning of existence, the meaning of "why I am alive," as technology so vastly develops its power. (1981, p. 50)*

The fact that our industrial food system is not oriented towards the "end" of increasing human food security, leads to a number of pernicious effects, one of which is the use of food for other "ends" besides enabling human flourishing. The commodification of food is a simple fact of our industrial food system and places food at the mercy of global trade and markets. So a natural question might be "what are the 'ends' to which markets are oriented?"

William Cavanaugh (2008) suggests this response:

*In the ideology of the free market . . . [t]here are no common ends to which our desires are directed. In the absence of such ends, all that remains is the sheer arbitrary power of one will against another. Freedom thus gives way to the aggrandizement of power and the manipulation of will and desire by the greater power . . .*

*Where there are no objectively desirable ends, and the individual is told to choose his or her own ends, then choice itself becomes the only thing that is inherently good. When there is a recession, we are told to buy things to get the economy moving; what we buy makes no difference. All desires, good and bad, melt into the one overriding imperative to consume, and we all stand under the one sacred canopy of consumption for its own sake.*

That the market does not provide a sense of the ends to which our desires should be directed comes as no surprise, but what Cavanaugh argues is that many economists—and others—consider even questioning the ends of market exchanges as meaningless. However, if markets cannot assure a reasonable allocation of a commodity necessary

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<sup>6</sup> Technology is the translation here though Ellul would have preferred *technique* which I will attempt to use throughout.

for human survival (as the quotes at the beginning of this article suggest they do not) then the question of ends in relation to those markets would seem very relevant indeed.

In the 2009 documentary film *Food, Inc.*, which critiques the industrial food system, Richard Lobb of the US National Chicken Council says this about our industrial food system and its highly concentrated and intensive production approach: “What these systems of intensive production accomplish is to produce a lot of food, on a small amount of land at a very affordable price. Somebody explain to me, what’s wrong with that?”

Presumably, what is wrong is the confusion of means and ends implied in his argument. Is the end of our food system to produce more—more cheaply (note: Loob has a very narrow definition of the true cost of our food system which we examine below concerning sustainability)? Or, is the end of our food system to assure that everyone has sufficient food of sufficient quality to lead a healthy life? The *Economist* (2009), in an article concerning the prospects for increased food prices and future food crises, would seem to argue along the same lines as Loob:

*It may be too late to avoid another bout of price rises. Despite a global recession and the largest grain harvest on record in 2008, food prices are heading up again. Still, countries have a brief window of opportunity in which to set long-term policy goals without being distracted by panic measures. They need to do two things: invest in the productive capacity of agriculture and improve the operation of food markets. . . Boosting world food production without gobbling up land and water will also require technology to play a larger role in the next 40 years than it has in the past 40, when people have been more or less living off the gains of the Green Revolution. Technology means a lot of things: drip irrigation, no-till farming, more efficient ways to use fertilisers and kill pests. But one way of raising yields stands out: developing genetically modified (GM) crops that, for example, use less water. (p. 14)*

While the writer raises two critical elements concerning food insecurity, dealing with both the question of availability (boosting production) and access (improving markets), nowhere in the article is the question of the ultimate ends of the food system discussed. It is really all about “means”: more food and better distribution.

The *Economist* article also takes us back to Ellul—the belief that technique will enable us to solve the problems that led to the 2008 food crisis so that it will not be repeated. Our fixation on technique and means are two sides of the same coin. For newspapers like the *Economist* this faith in technique is unquestioned. Mennonite economist Henry Rempel (2003) summarizes the two sides of our technique-and means-focused economic system this way:

*Our economic incentive system promotes continued technological change, but it does not encourage or welcome questions about its purpose.*

*We are working longer and rushing onward without deciding where we want to go... We have tried to avoid the issue by elevating progress to a matter of faith. (pp. 92 and 262).*

Ellul says much the same thing in the short film *The Betrayal by Technology: A Portrait of Jacques Ellul*,

*Technique does not accept to be judged. In other words, technicians cannot accept that someone articulates an ethical or moral judgment concerning what they do. And yet, to ethically, morally, and spiritually judge something is the highest human freedom. (Author's translation, emphasis added)*

And so we are left with a food system that is capable of producing large quantities of food but incapable of focusing on the true ends for which it exists. And, because we focus on the technological means of producing and distributing, rather than on the ends, to question whether our technique—our prodigious means—are good or useful becomes a meaningless question—or, rather, a question that simply cannot be asked.

Joel Salatin, a self-proclaimed “grass farmer” in Virginia summarizes our modern food system’s inattention to ends this way in *Food Inc.*

*You know, we've become a culture of technicians. We're all into . . . we're all into the how of it. And nobody's stepping back and saying . . . "But why?"*

So, what is the result of our modern food production system? If it is not focused on ends what do all these prodigious means actually produce? We have already seen what they do not produce: increased food security. But what are the results? I would like to briefly suggest four results of our industrial food system: the output of the system is unsustainable; the system produces commodities rather than food; the system produces great wastage and obesity in the industrial world—even as people struggle to eat elsewhere; and the system neglects critical elements that make for a truly *human* system.

#### Result: An Unsustainable System

Space does not permit a full analysis of the sustainability challenges of the industrial food system.

In general, one can argue that the logic of *technique* has led to a system that solves every problem that comes its way, but in the process lays the groundwork for even more unforeseen problems. Ellul (1967, p. 105) addresses this reality, interestingly, in talking about modern “capitalistic” agriculture and Michael Pollen articulates it eloquently in the film *Food, Inc.* Notice how he returns to the theme of efficiency and links it to the problem of unpredictable and unsustainable systems that follow in the wake of the search for (as Ellul has put it) “the one best way:”

*The industrial food system is always looking for greater efficiency but each new step in efficiency leads to problems. . . The industry's approach when it has a systematic problem . . . is not to go back and see what is wrong with the system, it's to come up with some high tech fixes to allow the system to survive. . . We've had a food system that is dedicated to the single virtue of efficiency. So, we grow a very small number of crops, a very small number of varieties, a very small number of companies. And even though you achieve efficiencies, the system gets more and more precarious.*

And so technique is piled upon technique to maintain efficiency and find solutions to the inevitable emerging problems. The solutions applied then create their own prob-

lems. In the 2009 documentary film *Fresh* corn and soybean farmer George Naylor says this:

*I'm a conventional farmer. Most of the chemicals and the technology that conventional agriculture uses is aimed at eliminating risk so you can produce the most "efficiently." It's not necessarily good for the environment, it's not good for the farmers, it's not good for our rural communities or consumers. But that's the way the system works. You produce the most to survive.*

Notice that the challenge farmers face—the only way to survive is to produce “the most.” We return, therefore, to the theme of “ends.” The only end in sight is to increase production, even though that end is not sustainable for the land, for the farmer or for farming communities.

#### Result: Food as Commodity

I have already alluded to the problems that arise when food becomes merely another traded commodity. When food is a commodity not only does its price depend on markets—which, despite all the rhetoric are not “free” in any real sense (this is the point of *The Economist* article cited previously)—but it also becomes seen more and more merely as an input used to produce other consumer goods. This is the case for corn in the US, which is used to feed cattle that have evolved not to eat corn but to eat grass. In itself using food crops to produce other forms of food may not be a problem (despite the real problem of feeding corn to beef cows), but when crops destined, even indirectly, for food are transformed into non-food products the ends of human food security are completely lost.

Mark W. Rosegrant, the Director of Environment and Production Technology Division at the International Food Policy Research Institute in testimony for the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs (May 7, 2008) stated that nearly 40% of the increase in the price of corn and 20% of the price of wheat and soy during the 2008 food crisis was due to corn being shifted into biofuel production.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, even the price of rice in Asia was influenced by corn’s shift away from food to biofuel because dry season rice in places like Thailand was replaced by corn which fetched higher prices on world markets. This non-food use of a food product led to higher prices for the basic staple of the world’s poorest people and was promoted by the US government.

In addition, since World War II industrially produced food has become a commodity of a very different type as well. In their book *Food Aid After Fifty Years: Recasting its Role*, Christopher Barrett and Daniel Maxwell describe how excess food commodities (primarily corn and soy) have become a major element of the US government’s contribution to international “food aid.” And while the relative quantities going into food aid are small in comparison to the total amount of food produced, the authors show that this system has benefitted grain producers, grain processors, grain transporters

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<sup>7</sup> See

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SRY5Klj8R9w> accessed 23 September, 2010

and non-governmental humanitarian organizations much more than it has benefitted food insecure people around the world.

Again, the picture here is quite complex but official US assistance policy, which requires nearly all food aid to be grown and processed by US interests, shipped on US flag carriers and distributed by US-based NGOs, has created perverse incentives for all those concerned to keep the system in place despite its questionable impact on food insecurity. Barrett and Maxwell conclude a series of chapters in which they describe the development of food aid policy in the US and beyond over the past generation by saying this:

*[I]n many ways, the global food aid regime remains tied to objectives that are often only tangentially related to the needs or rights of food-insecure people. (p. 192)*

If the true ends of food production are not identified, food becomes a commodity like any other. This means that something produced to feed humanity can, if the prices are right, be diverted into the production of nonfood consumables and be used as a political pawn in a global “humanitarian aid” system. In addition, if food is merely a commodity, its price determined in global markets, then those with financial resources can afford it—and do what they like with it—even as those without those resources go without. We turn to the implications of this in the next section.

Result: Wastage/Obesity

During the 2008 food crisis Homi Kharas a food policy analyst at the Brookings Institution summarized succinctly the reality of the crisis on the PBS Newshour (23 April 2008):

*[T]his is not a problem of a global food shortage. This is really a problem of distribution. This is a problem of people who don't have enough money to buy food.*

When food is a commodity those who have no money cannot get it. And what of those who *do* have the money? In the USA and other wealthy nations (and even among the wealthy in poorer nations) we see two realities that stem from cheap (relative to income) and plentiful food (keep in mind that the 2008 crisis occurred in the face of plentiful food): obesity and massive food wastage.

Summarizing data from the Centers for Disease Control a publication by the non-profit Trust for America's Health (2010) notes the following:

*Nationally, two-thirds of adults and nearly one-third of children and teens are currently obese or overweight. Since 1980, the number of obese adults has doubled. Since 1970, the number of obese children ages 6-11 has quadrupled, and the number of obese adolescents ages 12-19 has tripled.*

While it is true that obesity is due to many factors including lack of adequate physical exercise, the availability of inexpensive and highly processed food with its high quantities of fat, salt and sugar is also a contributor. When a limited variety of food (such as corn in the US) is overproduced, means are deployed to transform it for use in many ways, such as extracting its sugars for inexpensive sweeteners. These sweeteners then show up in a variety of cheap processed foods, fueling the obesity crisis.

A second result of cheap, plentiful food is food wastage that occurs during production, processing, and shipping, and in what is thrown out by consumers. A recent study by Hall, Guo, Dore and Chow (2009) estimated the following:

*In 1974 approximately 900 kcal per person per day was wasted whereas in 2003 Americans wasted approximately 1400 kcal per person per day or about 150 trillion kcal per year. . . [F]ood waste has progressively increased from about 30% of the available food supply in 1974 to almost 40% in recent years . . .*

Our industrial food system produces large quantities of food and for those who can afford it this means wastage and overconsumption—even as one billion people remain food insecure.

#### Result: Neglect of Critical Elements of a Truly “Human” Food System

One other, rarely assessed, result of our industrial food system is that it neglects important elements of what make for a truly *human* system—one that honors humans in their roles as producers, preparers and consumers of food. We see this neglect in things such as consumers no longer being in contact with producers, the loss of fellowship during food preparation and eating, disconnect from the land, the loss of family farms and the devaluation of the role of farmers.

We will look at just one specific example of this neglect that concerns one of the most critical parts of our food system that serves the most vulnerable members of our global community. I am referring to the role of breastfeeding in the first two years of life.

In a landmark study of childhood mortality published in the *Lancet* (2008) researchers estimated that suboptimum breastfeeding is responsible for 1.4 million child deaths each year around the world. (p. 243)

Our industrial food system has no place for encouraging “optimal breastfeeding” because breastfeeding cannot be commodified. Indeed, food companies such as Nestle have spent a great deal of money convincing mothers to abandon this critical element of the human food system in favor of breast milk substitutes which *are* produced by the industrial food system.

If the ends of our food system were human food security we would take a more holistic look at all elements of the system to determine how best to achieve this end. In such a case we would be compelled to consider how to best support mothers to breastfeed their children given the critical place of this practice for the health and development of children. This is but one example of how our industrial food system neglects a critical element of a truly human approach to food.

#### Reorienting our Ends: Understanding our Food System as a “Power”

The foregoing argues that our industrial food system is a “technique-dominated” system that is focused on deploying prodigious means but pays scant attention to the ends of human food security. Ellul understood that such systems—indeed *technique* itself—was a “power.” He described it as an “objectifying power” (1981, p. 49). Space does not permit an analysis of the concept of principalities and powers in the writing of Ellul, but we live in a time when theologians have begun to recapture a broader

understanding of the concept from the writings of St Paul.<sup>8</sup> Included in this broader understanding is the idea that institutions and systems which God has created for good act as dehumanizing forces; essentially trading their true role in maintaining the conditions for human flourishing for other ends, including their own survival. In this way they reveal their “fallenness.”

Our industrial food system has the potential to do great good. It is capable of producing food efficiently and in great variety. The markets that are part of the system have the potential to move food to places where it is in deficit. Governments have the potential to use the excess to meet acute suffering in the face of disaster or conflict. Despite this we find a system that is not focused on the ends of human food security. This, I have argued, has led to outcomes that do not honor human flourishing. In this sense one could argue that the system acts as a fallen power.

If indeed our “technique-dominated” food system is a fallen power the question then becomes, what should our response be? Ellul (1981) provided one way for Christians to think about how to face the power of technique (his words are echoed by others such as Stringfellow, Barth and Wink):

*[O]ur attitude will be what may be called iconoclastic Iconoclasm means the destruction of*

*religious images, but what does it mean here? It simply means that we must destroy the deified religious character of technique. . . . If we see technique as nothing but objects that can be useful (and we need to check whether they are indeed useful); and if we stop believing in technique for its own sake or that of society; and if we stop fearing technique and treat it as one thing among many others, then we destroy the basis for the power of technique over humanity (pp. 108-109).*

Applied to our modern food system, Ellul’s words present both a way forward and a challenge to the received wisdom of what it will take to “feed the world.” Technique does not focus on ends. However what we desperately need at this time is to focus on the true ends of our food system. Perhaps initially this means raising the simple question of what, exactly, the end of our food system should be. Joel Salatin, in *Food, Inc.*, does just that.

*Imagine what it would be if, as a national policy, we said we would only be successful if we had fewer people going to the hospital next year than last year? How about that for success? The idea would be to have such nutritionally dense, unadulterated food that people who ate it actually felt better, had more energy and weren’t sick as much? Now you see that’s a noble goal.*

In addition to focusing on ends we need to challenge the idea that our industrial food system is the only way to “feed the world” as many would argue. There is a deep

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<sup>8</sup> Some critical writings include: Berkhof, H. (1962, 1977). *Christ and the Powers*. Scottsdale, PA, Herald Press. Wink, W. (1992). *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*. Minneapolis, MN, Augsburg Fortress. Dawn, M. (2001). *Powers, Weakness and the Tabernacling of God*. Grand Rapids, MI, Wm. B. Eerdmans. Yoder, J. H. (1994). *The politics of Jesus: vicit Agnus noster*. Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans / Paternoster Press (esp Chapter 13). Stringfellow, W.



faith that the “means” we have deployed are the best way forward (if only we can continue to apply better *technique* to improve them). It would thus seem that as we focus more on the ends of our food system we must also be willing to challenge the belief that it is necessary to maintain the current industrial food system as the “one best way.” This is a complex task that will require time and the creation of alternatives to what we have. Such alternatives are being created in many places around the world and this provides hope that we can faithfully challenge the “religious” commitment to the “essentialness” of our industrialized food system.

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## **IF WE SERVE THE GOD OF PRODUCTIVITY IS THERE ROOM FOR JESUS?**

ELLUL'S TECHNIQUE, SACREDNESS AND DISTORTION IN THE MODERN  
FARM ECONOMY

by Randy Ataide

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### **I. Introduction**

In the opening years of the new millennium, aficionados of global economic and technological systems were in full bloom. The harnessing of the amazing power of supercomputers allowed the global banking system to consolidate and ever-more sophisticated financial products rapidly came to market, proffered by multinational trading platforms, replacing once and for all the genteel and conservative tools and methods of the traditional banking industry. While the all powerful economic engines of the U.S., German, U.K. and other highly developed economies roared on, we concurrently observed previously moribund economies enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century; Spain undertook residential housing construction at record levels producing approximately 200,000+ new units per year while tiny Iceland and Ireland became bastions of global capitalism with powerful banks loaning billions of dollars and euros. China emerged as an economic superpower and with its astounding annual growth in the 10+% range underscored the era of the "new economy."

These powerful and seemingly positive economic forces that took root in global economy in the 1980's had taken hold in the farm economy long before. Since the advent of the Industrial Revolution, farmers had freely embraced all sorts and forms of technological innovations to spur productivity. No less a figure than Alan Greenspan, the U.S. Federal Reserve Chairman from 1987-2006 stated in 1999 that "Over the past thirty years, farm value-added per hour worked has grown at an average rate of more than 4.5%, roughly three times the rate of increase in output per hour in the nonfarm

business sector of our economy.”<sup>9</sup> The use of computers and modern technology was fully embraced by the global farming industry, most notably the U.S. and Western Europe, and most pundits and politicians were quick to point to the farm economy as a significant part of the “productivity revolution.” Even small farmers had access to global positioning satellite (GPS) technology; genetically modified seed reduced the use of pesticides and increased profits and production; water-monitoring and management systems allowed crops to be planted in areas and on soil types that were unthinkable just a generation ago. It was a heady time, perhaps reminiscent of the late 1920’s.

In contrast to Greenspan’s exuberance about the global economy generally and the farm economy specifically, I ventured into the conversation with my Master’s Thesis titled *If We Serve A God of Productivity Is There Room For Jesus? An Analysis and Application of Jacques Ellul’s Thesis of Technique In The AgriBusiness World* in fulfillment of my M.A. in Theology from the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in Fresno<sup>10</sup>. Returning to complete a long dormant graduate degree in theology, I was encouraged by the faculty to attempt an integration of some of Ellul’s work into the everyday agri-business world that I had inhabited for over 20 years—Ellul was provocative indeed, but how did he look in the “real world” and could one draw any practical conclusions from this analysis? I was spurred on in from a variety of sources and experiences to this inquiry into Ellul. One example was the jarring headline from a agricultural trade journal with the following banner headline on the front page—“*Raisin Growers Look to Machines for Salvation.*” The article went on to profile the newest generation of mechanical raisin harvesters, and the owner of the machines featured confidently stated “By using some modern technology...we have got things down to where it is almost a perfect system for the times we are in.”<sup>11</sup> Such overt statements that farmers frequently make towards the benefits of technology for farming only serve to underscore a troubling and harmful underlying philosophy towards the land: it has too often become a means to an end, just another asset to exploit.

I concluded that there were indeed significant and generally negative impacts upon farmers and agriculture through “the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency for every field of human activity” which Ellul identified as the *Thesis of Technique*. My conclusions, of significant concern for the farmer and perhaps even more importantly, the consumer, held that this efficient aggregation of methods when applied to farming will inevitably lead to a profound distortion of the authentic relationship between farm and farmer. What has occurred I viewed as a violation of the sacred trust between those who are “on the land” and principles of land ownership and stewardship found in the ancient Hebrew Scriptures. But what

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<sup>9</sup> Greenspan, Alan. *The farm economy* At the Annual Convention of the Independent Bankers Association of America, San Francisco, California March 16, 1999.

<sup>10</sup> The thesis is available from Hiebert Library at Fresno Pacific University or from the author, RandyAtaide@pointloma.edu .

<sup>11</sup> Terry Kibler, “Raisin Growers Look to Machines for Salvation,” *Fresh Fruit & Raisin News*, 1 Jan. 2003, Vol. 19, Number 1, 1.

were the practical implications of this violation that we could find in modern farming? These included:

- Unreasonable expectations and demands of farm employee & land productivity.
- Domination and subordination by the employer over the farm employee.
- The inevitable demand and drive for larger and larger farms, leading to huge corporate operations.
- The loss of personal identity and self-worth for those caught in the productivity demands of modern farming.
- A pervasive attitude of domination and subjection of the environment.
- The rise of modern government farm policy and the widespread use of farm commodity subsidies.

Each of these are developed at great length within the thesis, but they are best understood within the context of a long and systemic decline in farm product prices, in numerous commodities, sectors and products across all farming regions. I was alarmed, and remain so to this day, at how the rise of modern farming productivity practices has paralleled widespread decline in prices to farmers, farm bankruptcies, massive cycles of under and over-production and depression in the farm economy. My research utilized my experience as the co-founder and President of a diversified tree fruit company (peaches, plums and nectarines), which by the time that I wrote the thesis in 2002 had grown to a company that provided fresh fruit to many of the leading grocery retailers throughout North America, a large cold storage, shipping and sales facility, ten packing sheds and an alliance with other competitors to provide retail customers with ready to eat fruit. As is typical in our industry, our fruit was sourced from dozens of small and mid-size independent farmers, for whom we acted as their exclusive sales, marketing and storage agent. What was not so typical was that from our 1994 start, we attempted to have a greater level of openness and communication between our company and these independent farmers than was customary in our industry, most specifically by seeking our input from them on key strategic decisions of the company, an area that was normally reserved for owners of similar situated companies. The operational model that we had built was considerably different than competitors, and yet in a very difficult economic environment we were successful and to this day the company and most of these growers have thrived. In my original thesis, I attempted to analyze this farming and agricultural business experience, to dig into the motivations and principles as to how and why we had built a viable company when most others had failed.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Indeed, industry statistics show that tree fruit growers and packers have consolidated a great deal

What emerged in my study of farming through the lens of Ellul was a far clearer theological framework than I had previously had, one from which to evaluate the application of technology to the farmer so that I could offer some practical counsel to the farmer. This analysis ultimately led me to an in-depth study on the word *augment* and drew from its Latin and Sanskrit etymology to show that it included vitality, luster, splendor and energy, and that to augment something meant “to furnish abundantly with something, to heap upon, give to, enrich, endow, bless and load with.”<sup>13</sup> This is not mere kindness but rather a realization that the individual, firm or venture and its products and services exist not merely for productivity and profitability, but rather for deeper and generally unexplored or unconsidered purposes. The unbridled power and influence and distraction of technology is checked, indeed confounded, when collaboration is a vital and active part of the business model and I offered some key choices and examples of collaboration over competition that our companies had introduced that had led to not only a healthier view of technology but actually enhanced business viability for ourselves and our many fruit growers and community.

Since the completion of my thesis, much has changed in my personal life as well. In 2006, I left the day-to-day business operations of my agricultural and farming company to take a position in the faculty of the Fermanian School of Business at Point Loma Nazarene University (PLNU) in San Diego, moving from the Fresno region where I had spent most of my life. I now teach entrepreneurship and management at both the undergraduate and graduate level and also am currently the Executive Director of the Fermanian Business & Economic Institute of PLNU, and with my skilled colleagues generate business and economic forecasts, studies and reports for both clients and PLNU. However, for the first time since 1986, I am no longer an executive of a California-based agricultural company for in late 2009 I completed the sale of my business interests to the co-founder of our firm. But I remain close to many within the industry and retain ownership of a large tree fruit farm (now leased to a local farmer who lives near the property) and while my interests and research has broadened to the larger economy, agriculture will always be of great interest to me both personally and professionally.

The present article will offer a brief review and address selected questions from the original thesis in 2002. Much has changed since that time: It has been noted by leading economists that we are in an era of an “economic reset” with little present clarity as to what the future may hold. What is clear however is that individuals, institutions, organizations, companies and even entire nations or economic zones are under enormous strain, reorganization and restructure and the global food industry remains in great turmoil. Having a clearer understanding of what may have caused (or

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over the past twenty years, with approximately 75% of all going out of business and leaving farming.

<sup>13</sup> Charlton T. Lewis, and Charles Short, *A New Latin Dictionary*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1898), s.v. “augeo.” Also, John Grimes, *A Concise Dictionary of Indian Philosophy—Sanskrit Terms Defined in English*, (New York: Macmillan, 1976), s.v. “ojah.”

continues to cause) this economic reset should be important to all of us, farmer and non-farmer, American and non-American, and Christian and non-Christian alike.

## II. Does Technology Provide Freedom for the Farmer?

In my original Master's Thesis, I summarized selected Ellul writings, drawing primarily from *The Technological Society* and *Money and Power*, and affirmed his assertion that technology was an act of subordination: regions, countries, economic and political systems, regional and local cultures and communities and finally even the most fundamental human decisions were continually subject to the power of subordination that technological superiority demanded. For example, Ellul pointed to the influence of technique into areas of scientific research and energy, as a way to illustrate the large scale power of technique. But he also believed that "Death, procreation, birth, habitat: all must submit to technical efficiency and systematization, the end point of the industrial assembly line. What seems to be most personal in the life of man is now technical" and "The essence of civilization is thus absorbed."<sup>14</sup>

With such provocative statements, Ellul has been roundly criticized by technological advocates and apologists; however, a closer reading of Ellul reveals that his hostility was not towards technology *per se* but rather the unbridled power of "technocrats" who appeared to be no different than other oppressors exercising any form of excess power and influence.<sup>15</sup> In my view, the more interesting question is the inquiry as to the *neutrality* of technology, for this is the bedrock of technology apologists, claiming that in the final analysis technology has improved the majority of people's lives, and that additional emphasis needs to be placed on technology to solve our remaining problems. But is technology's value and benefit actually *neutral*? Is it devoid of values and the imposition of these values upon those around it? Is it only of negative value when negatively used?

In the ordinary usage as an abstract noun, value means goodness, desirability or worth. In other words, value is that property of a thing that makes it worthy of realizing or embracing or by extension to the negative, something worth avoiding, minimizing or eliminating. But for the farmer, my evaluation and conclusions drawn of technology's positive and negative value needed an additional consideration, one that Ellul brought us to in many settings: *does it create freedom for the user(s)*? My analysis of technology in the farm economy demonstrates that it frequently, if not inevitably, reduces rather than enhances individual as well as collective freedom. How could this be when the technological prowess of the farmer is held up as an ideal user of technology?

I concluded that unbridled reliance on technology— such as "the almost perfect system" for raisin farmers previously cited—distracts us from the authentic, spiritual

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<sup>14</sup> Jacques Ellul. *The Technological Society*. (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1964), 128-129.

<sup>15</sup> See for example

<http://www.tentmaker.org/biographies/ellul.htm>

and universal nature and blessing of food production, distribution and consumption. It in effect destroys any consideration of a philosophy of food and for the Christian, the more important loss of a theology of the land. And while technology cannot be severed from farming, it must be viewed and used with caution and discernment. Equipment, chemicals, computers, mechanization and many other technological manifestations all would point to the need for discernment. It distracts the farmer from the true purposes of farming, food production, food consumption and all ancillary issues, which Scripture points us to on many occasions. The farmer finds him or herself far less free than supposed.

For the modern farmer and consumer the wide diversity of products available is often validation of technology's value and that having more products is proof of having freedom. But Ellul disagreed: "First of all, freedom is not necessarily having lots of consumer goods to choose from. A person can be utterly free and yet never have anything to eat but rice. And he can be utterly alienated in a restaurant where he has his pick of a thousand different dishes. In reality, all that exists is kinds of choices, which are not of the same nature (choosing the man or woman to build one's life with is different from choosing an electric coffee grinder), and zones of choices."<sup>16</sup>

For the Christian, freedom is a topic that the Apostles returned to time and time again in their counsel to the churches. (See for example Gal. 5:13-16; 1 Cor. 5:1-8; 7:17-24; 8:1-18; 1 Pet. 2:16). The Christian of any strata, setting or time should as well maintain the position that technological processes must be subordinate to human processes, or more precisely, human relationships are always superior to technical relationships. In the final analysis the Christian, and indeed many other world religions, places the personal relationship with God at the highest level, followed closely by the community relationship. By introducing freedom as a critical component of our hierarchy of value, I believe we avoid the frequent entanglement of most discussions of technology, for freedom within human, community and spiritual relationships is a clearer and superior analysis to simply "keeping score" between technology aficionados and critics alike as to the various benefits and drawbacks of technology. As Ellul urged, we must seek ways in which we may *transcend* technique, and freedom is a primary example and standard in which we can do so.

### **III. Violation of the Sacredness of Land through the Distraction of Technology**

Turning to food production, in my original thesis I articulated a *theology of the land* and argued that what had developed was a distorted view of the land entrusted to us. The starting point for this can certainly be the Scriptures, as the word rendered as 'land' appears over 2,500 times in the Hebrew Bible, leading to the remarkable statement by a renowned scholar that "Statistically, land is a more dominant theme

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<sup>16</sup> Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 320.

than covenant.”<sup>17</sup> Christian theologian John Calvin referred to the natural world as “the theater for his glory”<sup>18</sup> while C.S. Lewis noted that “God and nature have come into a certain relation. They have, at the very least, a relation—almost, in one sense, a common frontier—in every human mind.”<sup>19</sup>

Ellul was also not silent on the topic of nature and the human relationship to land. “The novelty of our era is that man’s deepest experience is no longer with nature. For most practical purposes it no longer relates to it. From the moment of his birth, man lives knowing only an artificial world (and)...nature is now subdued, subjugated, framed, and utilized. No longer is it the threat and the source, the mystery, and the intrusion, the face and the darkness of the world—either for the individual or the group. Hence it is no longer the inciter and the place of the sacred.”<sup>20</sup> This is a rich and powerful commentary by Ellul, and gives opportunity for formidable personal and communal reflection. My own reflection and study of the possibility that nature is subdued and subjugated led me to the analysis and conclusion that there were at least six substantive examples of the violation of the sacred within the modern farm economy, which were noted in the introductory section of this paper.

What all of these six points have in common is the theme of distraction: what is real and authentic is supplanted by the unbending ritual of larger, bigger, more and faster. I concluded that technology in food production was not neutral, and that what has occurred is that many in food production have lost the sense of the sacred: the land and all that it offers to the wise steward is instead supplanted by a factory approach with a dullness and automatic view of land as something to be exploited. And while I did not develop it in my original thesis, I came to conclusion long before the 2006 film “Fast Food Nation” that most consumers had long since lost any sense of the sacred in consumption of food. It was disposable, cheap, standardized and of little enduring value other than satisfying basic hunger impulses, and if 1,000 calories was what was needed to satisfy hunger, 2,000 or more calories, even in single food items, was even better. Food as having any sense of sacredness was long lost by most of us. No wonder that the entire industry of food production, harvesting, distribution, economics, policies and consumption is so easily distracted: it has been commoditized and reduced to its lowest common denominator.

Many of us who are 50 years of age or older can recall the uniqueness of the seasonality of fresh fruits and vegetables: strawberries in spring and early summer, peaches in mid-summer, sweet white corn and watermelon in late summer, pumpkins in fall. Our families adjusted our diets, and more importantly our expectations, as the year unfolded. But this farming reality is lost on most modern consumers—the nexus be-

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<sup>17</sup> Elmer A. Martens, *God’s Design—A Focus on Old Testament Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981), 97-98.

<sup>18</sup> William A. Dyrness, *The Earth is God’s—A Theology of American Culture*. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1997), 116.

<sup>19</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Miracles*, (New York: MacMillan, 1960), 31.

<sup>20</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom*, (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1989), 109.



tween consumers and stores is such that farm products of incredible diversity are in effect demanded throughout the year. This has caused huge, yet widely ignored and unchronicled, damage to the farmer. Ellul predicted this modern reality and ignorance—what he called the advent of the “technological environment”—with “This means that man has stopped existing primarily in his ‘natural’ environment (made up by what is vulgarly called ‘nature’: countryside, forests, mountains, ocean, etc.) He now is situated in a new, artificial environment. He no longer lives in touch with the realities of the earth and the water, but with the realities of the instruments and objects forming the *totality* of his environment. He is now in an environment made of asphalt, iron, cement, glass, plastic and so on.”<sup>21</sup>

Consider the indictment by Victor Davis Hansen of the modern consumer: “The ultimate enemies of agriculture are more insidious and imperceptible. They, like you, are actually rather nice to see and meet. They are ourselves: ‘good people.’ But they, who work so hard and so long at hospital, plant and office, have become— have had to become—accustomed to cheap food, to the economy of scale at all costs. They want food pretty, cheap and now! Always. And from very far away! Whatever the cost, damn the consequences...they must expect—and can always get—food at the only price they are willing or able to pay. It is true of all of us. Because our food is so inexpensive, so attractive, safe, and plentiful, they have a margin to put our money elsewhere.”<sup>22</sup>

Thus, the obligation and opportunity to develop a healthy theology of the land rests not upon the shoulders of the farmer alone. And the Hebrew Scriptures provide to all of us in the community—not just the farmer but the non-farmer as well—two specific regulations that ensured that the land holder remained fully aware of the ultimate owner of the land: Sabbath and Jubilee. These practices imputed to the Israelites a community oriented life-style, based upon clear theological instruction, that developed a mindset of consideration, mutual aid, and concern. Additional agricultural festivals only served to reinforce the Sabbath and Jubilee mindset, through joyous communal thanksgiving celebrations.<sup>23</sup> We need to be aware that the underlying principles of these two land regulations have been so ignored by the distraction of the technique of modern farming that I believe that we are facing a stern warning: “But if blessing follows obedience, curse within the land and even deportation from it will result from disobedience.”<sup>24</sup> Accordingly, it is a communal obligation to renew the importance of the sacredness of the land.

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<sup>21</sup> Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 38-39.

<sup>22</sup> Victor Davis Hansen, *The Land Was Everything— Letters from an American Farmer*, (New York: Free Press, 2000), 110-111.

<sup>23</sup> See Ex. 23:34; Lev. 23; Num. 28; Deut. 16.

<sup>24</sup> Martens, *God's Design*, 110.

## IV. An Alternative Business Model for Farmers

The demise of the modern family farm has been widely chronicled, and the reasons for the decline are many, and beyond the scope of the original thesis and this update to fully address. However, there is significant uncertainty as to the future of farming in the U.S. None other than US Agricultural Secretary Tom Vilsack summarized in Congressional testimony the state of the American Farmer in 2010, specifically noting that the farm economy has been in recession for more than 20 years and that "In the past 40 years, the United States lost more than 1 million farmers and ranchers. During that period, income from farming operations, as a percentage of total farm household income, plunged to half of the previous level. Today, only 11 percent of family farm income comes from farming. These factors have changed the face of rural America. We need to develop new strategies to bring prosperity back to rural America in a sustainable and significant way."<sup>25</sup>

In my thesis I rejected the assertion by many farm advocates and politicians that the answers to restoring viability to the farm would come from farm policy, subsidies and political action. Rather, I concluded that these actions often led to the destruction of farms and only furthered the negative impact of the distraction of technology upon the farm. In its place, I offered advice from my own farming and farm business experience, all of which can be best understood by embodying the spirit of collaboration, communication and cooperation over unbridled productivity and competition. Some examples from my own business experience served to provide practical counsel as to how farmers could both be both theologically astute and operationally viable.

For the first five years of our business, specifically 1994-1999, our company utilized a business model that is fairly standard for most businesses: we would compete in the marketplace head to head vs. other similarly situated tree fruit producers. While we had some success with this strategy, it wasn't until a fortuitous business meeting with a competitor that the business took a significant and lasting positive turn. In 1999, after developing a new product of ripe and ready to eat peaches and nectarines called Summeripe®<sup>®</sup>, we were asked to a meeting by a company who had suffered some loss of customers due to our new product line. During this meeting, the owners of the other company floated the idea of their purchasing our company and my partner and I going to work for their company.

While selling our company was not a tantalizing idea for either my partner or I, it did lead to an interesting opportunity, one which to our knowledge had never been used in the tree fruit industry: while our companies would remain independent, we would create a strategic alliance based upon mutual company support of Summeripe®<sup>®</sup> and customers and prospects would be pursued for the benefit of both companies.<sup>26</sup> In

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<sup>25</sup> USDA News Release No. 0198.10. Agriculture Secretary Vilsack Makes Case for Stronger Rural America. April 21, 2010.

<sup>26</sup> Note that this alliance is different than traditional agricultural cooperatives, which are federally chartered and require a common ownership process. Ours was an alliance of independently owned

time, what developed was an alliance among six different independent companies, all supporting Summeripe and common standards that included a code of ethics, grower practices, customer solicitation procedures and other practices intended to bring a higher level of communication, trust and respect to the production side of the tree fruit industry. The model was embraced by some in our industry and scorned by others, and while not perfect in design or in execution, it was a significant breakthrough from the traditional practices of the industry that has had lasting effect. We shifted the focus away from volume and onto quality. We determined that we would not attempt to be the largest tree fruit company but rather be the one that was singularly focused upon providing the consumer the best tasting fruit possible.

The dedicated growers, employees and customers of the “Summeripe Alliance” permeated into other areas of our company. Growers now found their own fruit loaded on the same truck with fruit from former competitors for a common customer; regular meetings and sharing of technical information was enhanced among growers and packers for the common good not only within our own company but among the entire Alliance. In our own firm, we worked hard at creating a less hierarchal organization, one where all departments and employees were united around the common purpose of promoting our premium product. Within just a few years, Summeripe® branded premium tree fruit was securing a price premium of \$2-\$3 a box over our regular fruit, creating a significant incentive for our growers and providing what was likely the critical amount of increase in their income to remain in tree fruit farming. I am convinced that what we successfully did was to confound technique.

I am pleased to report that despite continued negative economic forces in the fresh fruit market through the 2010 season, the company I co-founded in 1994 is thriving and many of its growers remain viable family farms. By many accounts, the foundational principles of the company and its relationships of collaboration, communication and cooperation remain intact, albeit now under different leadership than my own.

## V. Conclusion

I remain convinced, and in fact I believe that current experience is even more compelling than in 2002, that unbridled competition in not only the farm economy but in all elements of life does not in the final analysis serve more than just a few who master its tools and techniques. One should not conclude that I am anticompetition or anti-technology (which I am not), but rather what I am for is collaboration as a balance to competition, as a powerful force that confounds the distraction of technique. This is at its core a movement towards not only reimagining the sacred in areas far beyond the rites and rituals of the contemporary Christian, but for the non-Christian

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companies with no intention of changing the ownership of our companies, but rather for the mutual goal of supporting a common premium brand of fruit. Participation was wholly voluntary and as companies joined the alliance they paid a per box charge for the use of the brand and support services.

as well. How our food is grown and how we consume it, but even more importantly how we conceive of it is something that affects us all. This reimagining and rediscovery of the sacred will in the final analysis lead to a better farming, consumer and theological experience for all of us.

## Jacques Ellul & Wendell Berry on an Agrarian Resistance by Matthew Regier

*Matthew Regier and his wife Tia Regier live outside of Peabody, Kansas where they are slowly working to restore a neglected farm that sits on twenty acres. They sell eggs and vegetables at the local farmers markets. He completed a M.A. in New Testament at Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary.*

In his books on technique, Jacques Ellul describes a world that is *of necessity* plunging towards death. Perhaps, his popularity as a writer would have blossomed had he not said that the “technical system has *definitively* escaped from control by the human will.”<sup>27</sup> The world does not like to be told that it is not in control. Or, for that matter, that the “worst has become much more probable” or that we must “give up thinking we can improve the world.”<sup>28</sup> Reading an Ellul book on technique is a bit like being in an instructional pamphlet for school children during the cold-war nuclear scare. We can follow the authorities’ directions to duck under our chairs, but it won’t save us from the coming destruction.

And yet other works (namely his theological ones) show that he believes passionately in freedom and hope. Is this a contradiction? Well, yes . . . and no. It is not with confusion or ambivalence that Ellul embraces this dialectic of hope and fatalism. Nor does Ellul think that his proclamation of hope in any way undoes what he has said about the inevitability of technique enslavement of humanity. Perhaps the best word to describe Ellul’s dialectic is *apocalyptic*. The destruction of the world<sup>29</sup> is at our doorstep and Ellul is prophesying in the streets.

What then is the source of Ellul’s unlikely hope? He himself says that it is only God’s action which gives any him any hope.<sup>30</sup> Does this mean that humans can do nothing but passively wait for God’s action? Not at all. Rather, Ellul is holding out

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<sup>27</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), p. 101, my emphasis.

<sup>28</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Presence of the Kingdom*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Seabury, 1967), p. 7.

<sup>29</sup> I use this phrase in the way that the biblical apocalypticists often do, describing events of such singularity and significance that only “end-of-the-world language” will do. And yet, the literal destruction of the world is not out of sight for Ellul, both in the sense that technique signals the end of human civilization (and the beginning of Technical civilization) and in the more material sense of nuclear threat and ecological ruin.

<sup>30</sup> Jacques Ellul and Patrick Troude-Chastenet, *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology, and Christianity*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), p. 22.

hope for a *true* revolution.<sup>31</sup> In his interview with Patrick Troude-Chastenet, he says (paraphrasing Marx) that “when man realizes that he no longer has the means of influencing the situation he begins to revolt.”<sup>32</sup> For Ellul such a revolt or revolution will not occur at the national level but rather at a communal (and individual) level. The community Ellul envisions would “question unceasingly all that man calls progress, discovery, facts, established results, reality.”<sup>33</sup> It would be an other-(material) worldly community living in the reality of the eschaton.<sup>34</sup>

But what, concretely, might such a community look like? Moreover, is such a community possible? How does such a community resist in the midst of the technical environment? I would like to propose that the most effective community of resistance would be an agrarian community. And I can think of no better spokesman for an agrarian resistance than the novelist, poet, essayist and farmer, Wendell Berry.

A French Sociology professor and a Kentucky farmer might seem strange candidates for a comparison or even a conversation. Berry gives no indication of ever having read Ellul, nor does he speak of a great technological phenomenon such as Ellul describes. Berry does not speak of a “technical” society, nor does he generally speak of an autonomous technological force behind political and economic realities. He is more likely to speak about the “modern world” or the global economy. However, he sometimes comes close to describing the same kind of autonomous phenomenon as Ellul:

*Without that willingness [to limit our desires] there is no choice; we must simply abandon ourselves to whatever the technologists may discover to be possible.*<sup>35</sup>

*Technology can grow to a size that is first undemocratic and then inhuman. It can grow beyond the control of individual human beings—and so, perhaps, beyond the control of human institutions. How large can a machine be before it ceases to serve people and begins to subjugate them?*<sup>36</sup>

Both Ellul and Berry have developed a reputation of going “against the tide” and have been rejected by both sides of the political spectrum for being either impractical radicals or reactionary technophobes. Both decry specialization in thought as well as in practice, as both have written in many disciplines (with the consequence of sometimes being ignored by “serious” scholarship). Each has created over decades a corpus of work marked by remarkable thematic continuity, exploring the same phenomena from multiple disciplinary postures. Both saw the magnitude of the current ecological crisis with considerable prescience<sup>37</sup> and connected it to the rise of modern agriculture and the consequent rural depopulation and the general contempt for rural people and rural

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<sup>31</sup> See esp. *The Presence of the Kingdom*.

<sup>32</sup> *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology, and Christianity*, p.26.

<sup>33</sup> *Presence of the Kingdom*, p. 37.

<sup>34</sup> *Presence of the Kingdom*, pp. 38-40.

<sup>35</sup> Wendell Berry, “Horse Drawn Tools and the Doctrine of Labor Saving,” pp. 104-112 in *The Gift of Good Land*, (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 1981), p. 112.

<sup>36</sup> “Agricultural Solutions for Agricultural Problems” pp. 113-124 in *The Gift of Good Land*, p. 121.

<sup>37</sup> Ellul and Bernard Charbonneau were “advocating for the country people” and addressing the

places.<sup>38</sup> Both explicitly decried the polarization between the “conservationists” who view all human intervention in nature as bad, and the conquistadors who see the world as infinitely exploitable.<sup>39</sup>

Both men quote with no small amount of bewilderment from the utopian futurologists. Both see the technical world as creating a new kind of slavery, more comprehensive than anything the world has seen before.<sup>40</sup> Accordingly, both authors see the only possibility of freedom existing outside this system. And while they speak of freedom in different ways, both insist that it must be found *within* the acceptance of limits, rather than in “liberation” from restrictions of any kind.

The absence of limits is not simply an economic problem (where the idea of limitless growth has caused much devastation), but a wider cultural one.<sup>41</sup> In an essay on modern poetry, Berry critiques the modern poet’s rejection of form and narrative.<sup>42</sup> If an “anything goes” approach is good for writing poetry, it will also be good for how we treat each other (evident in modern views on sexuality) and how we treat the earth (be it removing mountains or topsoil). “When the self is one’s exclusive subject and limit, reference and measure, one has no choice but to make a world of words.<sup>43</sup> And this gives to one’s own suffering and death the force of cataclysm.” Where Berry speaks of a “world of words,” Ellul speaks of a “verbal universe.” For Ellul, a philosophy without limits (where the self dissolves into an endless sprawl of linguistic modifiers) is no philosophy at all,<sup>44</sup> but rather a rabbit trail leading to absurdity.<sup>45</sup>

Knowledge too must be limited (a scandal to the modern intelligence); “some things must not be learned.”<sup>46</sup> This is what Berry means when he says that, “In ignorance is our hope,”<sup>47</sup> and, I think, what Ellul means by rediscovering “the limits of the Holy.”<sup>48</sup>

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“economic consequences of emptying the countryside” in an ecological context back when they were both active in the *Espirit* in the 1930s, see Jacques Ellul on *Politics, Technology, and Christianity*, p. 64; Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1977), pp. 27-38.

<sup>38</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), p. 155 and *The Technological Bluff*, p. 229, 252; Wendell Berry, “What Are People For?” pp. 123-125 in *What are People For?* (New York: North Point, 1990).

<sup>39</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*, 229; Berry exposes the errors of both sides in many essays, see esp. “Getting Along with Nature” pp. 6-20 in *Home Economics* (San Francisco: North Point, 1987).

<sup>40</sup> Berry makes the point memorably in *The Unsettling of America*, p. 12; cf. Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, (New York: Vintage, 1964), p.117;

<sup>41</sup> Ellul insists that technique will accept no limitations, *The Technological Society*, pp. 134, 180.

<sup>42</sup> See esp. “The Specialization of Poetry” pp. 3-23 in *Standing by Words* (San Francisco: North Point, 1983).

<sup>43</sup> “The Specialization of Poetry,” p. 8.

<sup>44</sup> *The Technological Bluff*, p. 216.

<sup>45</sup> *The Technological Bluff*, p. 201.

<sup>46</sup> Wendell Berry, “People, Land and Community,” pp. 64-69 in *Standing by Words*, p. 68; see also “The Way of Ignorance” pp. 53-67 in *The Way of Ignorance* (Shoemaker & Hoard, 2005).

<sup>47</sup> Wendell Berry, “Healing,” pp. 9-13 in *What are People For?*, p. 13.

<sup>48</sup> *The Presence of the Kingdom*, p. 110.

Both authors condemn simple or fast solutions that rest on an “ends-justify-the-means” doctrine (where the advocates of such solutions assume far more knowledge than they actually have or is even available).<sup>49</sup> Berry sees such an approach as a failure to recognize the connectedness and patterns of life itself, where Ellul has shown that technique actually creates a situation where the means *become* the ends. This is because technique cannot recognize humanistic ends but only aims at efficiency, speed and quantity of production.<sup>50</sup>

Ellul’s insight is particularly apt to understanding the situation of modern agriculture. The primary goals of any agriculture must be something like (A) to feed humans, (B) to maintain the fertility of the land, and (C) to earn a wage for the farmer. This is hardly controversial. Yet, modern agriculture fails miserably in meeting these needs. Most obvious is the rapid degradation of the land and the loss of its soil. The economic stability of farmers and farm families has been almost as equally a failure, with massive numbers of farms being dissolved or absorbed in the last sixty years or more. Finally, although a great deal of food is certainly being produced, much of it fails to nourish humans. Some of it must be discarded to ensure a good price, some of it is stored indefinitely because of overproduction, some is converted to fuel, and large amounts of grain are fed to cattle and other ruminants for which a grain diet is neither natural nor healthy. Likewise, much of our food is processed, pasteurized, hydrogenated, transported and stored to such an extent that it loses its ostensible nutritional value. The ends are not met (and remarkably seldom even discussed) because the means (efficiency, speed, production) have become the ends.

Of course, when this happens, absurdity entails. There can be no doubt that modern agriculture is driven by organization, rationality, and efficiency. But the actual results are more often disorder, unreasonableness and remarkable inefficiency. When a calorie of food requires at least three calories of petroleum energy (or up to 35 calories for grain-fed beef), how can we say the present system is reasonable or efficient?

There are other themes and ideas which are crucial to both authors: waste, the creation of new needs to ensure technological progress, the uselessness of technological gadgets, the replacement of physical work with sport or exercise, the dangers of escapism, the problem of “experts,” the myth of objectivity and the actual partiality of a science in service to the technical economy, collective culpability, the ugliness of the modern technical world (aesthetics are not a mean and hence not a technical end), the necessity of a local culture and the destructiveness and actual impossibility of a universal or technical culture, and many others.

Of course, Ellul and Berry are not without their differences, and it would be interesting to explore these if space permitted. But I believe by exploring their points of

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<sup>49</sup> See esp. Berry’s exposure of the Sierra Club’s investments in Exxon, General Motors, Tenneco, steel companies “having the worst pollution records in the industry” and others, *The Unsettling of America*, p. 17. Remarkably enough, the Sierra Club nevertheless published the book.

<sup>50</sup> This is because technique itself is a use, *Technological Society*, p. 98.

contact we can begin to trace the contours of a community that is in position to resist the powers of destruction that surround it.

I suggest that a community of resistance must be agrarian, because only a community dependant on agriculture can have any true independence. To live in recognition of our dependence on the land is an act of gratitude as well as sanity; as Berry observes, “To the extent that we must eat and drink, and be clothed, sheltered, and warmed . . . the idea that we have now progressed from a land-based economy to an economy based on information is fantasy”<sup>51</sup> It is a fantasy, nevertheless, that forms the narrative of the global economy.

With the term “agrarian” I aim to evoke a world in which technique is held in check by moral, religious, and aesthetic customs. An agrarian community will be marked by face-to-face relationships developed over generations, rootedness in place, attention to context, reliance on each other, and the development of a truly local culture. People in such a community will cultivate the skills necessary for careful living (rural skills), they will pursue knowledge rather than information, they will know the land as they know each other, and their knowledge of the land and each other will teach them how to care for *that* place.

Inherent in all of this, is the recognition and appreciation of limits. Such a recognition is the necessary prerequisite to personal humility, but it is also the first step to understanding a place. Good agriculture mimics nature.<sup>52</sup> A “global culture” assumes to a large extent that *anything* may be inserted into *anyplace*, be it a retail store, a tree, or a bean field. A local culture rather grows out of a place by observing it for generations and passing on those observations to posterity. These “observations” are not so much recorded data, but shared stories and experiences that form the collective memory of a people on the land. It should by now be apparent that such a community cannot be created *ex nihilo*, but is a long time in the making. This alone is a scandal in an age of the instantaneous. Even so, it will not be enough for a community to resist the modern obsession with mobility. Members (to use Berry’s word) of the community become at least as knowledgeable about local plant and animal species as they are of local sports teams. Moreover, the task of understanding and managing a local ecosystem is made more difficult by the preponderance of invasive species. But there is also pleasure to be had—the pleasure of naming birds or wildflowers, planting a garden, or gathering eggs. These are pleasures more promising (if more taxing) than those proffered by the entertainment experts who can only give us the desire for a life that is not our own.

It will be objected that such a community can only be conceived in rural areas. One response would be to immigrate back to the country. It is a painful irony that while the world anguishes about over-population, the countryside (where watchers and

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<sup>51</sup> Wendell Berry, “Local Knowledge in the Age of Information,” pp. 113-125 in *The Way of Ignorance* (Shoemaker & Hoard, 2005).

<sup>52</sup> This, in a nutshell, is the thesis of Sir Albert Howard, whose work Berry acknowledges over and over.



stewards of the land are desperately needed) continues to be emptied. (Ellul after all has said that dispersing the city would mean the end of the machine, the end of modern technology.)<sup>53</sup> Another response is that our cities must also become more agricultural, which is to say less parasitic, which is to say less like cities.<sup>54</sup> This will not happen without resistance. There is a great deal of fertility and water in cities given over to the growth of “ornamentals” which could support the production of surprising amounts of food given adequate care and skill. Animal husbandry is an important compliment to horticulture, and so we must also introduce livestock into our cities. It need not be said that urban and suburban communities which outlaw clotheslines, will not look kindly on backyard goats or pigs. And yet, these same neighborhoods assume that the same backyard is a perfectly sane place to house a man-eating dog.

Moreover, rural places are not necessarily at an advantage for an agrarian revolution. Much of the land has been urbanized or abandoned (to disuse or absentee farming). Just as rural places have not been able to keep their land, so also they have not been able to keep their “best” people. The mark of success in a small rural town is (upon graduation from school) to never be seen there again. The education system conspires with the urban-technical “culture” to enforce (and finance) this idea of success. What remains of the town after decades of faithfully sending off the “successful?” The two small towns closest to our own farm are paradigmatic: unemployment, high crime rates, sometimes dismal living conditions, homelessness (despite an abundance of abandoned homes), obesity and substance abuse, failing literacy, and other typical incarnations of despair. What is the possibility of inciting a revolution in such a place?

While Berry does paint a somewhat less fatalistic picture than Ellul, he never advocates for a kind of optimism. The lure of false optimism is as strong as ever with the recent (in America) rise of the “green” movement. While this very admirable movement has already produced much that is good, there are still great dangers in its becoming fashionable. “Organic” has already become a label under which modern agriculture can continue without fundamental change. Meanwhile, the “ecological crisis” is often reduced to the issue of greenhouse gases and carbon emissions which the world hopes can be “solved” with non-petroleum energy sources. But there is no technology that will replace our topsoil or revive the many dead-zones in our world. Moreover, the reduction of our ecological problems to energy conservation, will drive people (who are unwilling to limit their desires) to find solace in a technically simulated reality (what Albert Borgman calls hypermodernism or hyperreality<sup>55</sup>). The recent explosion of communicational gadgetry confirms that what Ellul twenty years ago called the

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<sup>53</sup> *The Meaning of the City*, p. 155.

<sup>54</sup> See *The Meaning of the City*. In this book, Ellul would seem to suggest that a sustainable city is simply impossible, or contrary to the nature of a city. He nevertheless, advocates for a kind of resistance in the “heart of the city.”

<sup>55</sup> *Crossing the Postmodern Divide*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

“erotico-communicational world of science fiction”<sup>56</sup> was then only in its beginning stages.

Berry does not promise that any course of action will solve the problems our world faces. For Berry, as for Ellul, hope is something profoundly different than optimism, something that would persist even in the certainty of destruction. In this sense Berry, too, is something of an apocalyptic voice:

*It is presumptuous, personally and historically, to assume that one is part of a “saving remnant.” One had better doubt that one deserves such a distinction, and had better understand that there may, after all, be nothing left to save. Even so, if one wishes to save anything not protected by the present economy—topsoil, groves of trees, the possibility of goodness or health of anything, even the economic relevance of the biblical tradition—one is part of a remnant, and a dwindling remnant too, though not without hope, and not without the necessary instructions, the most pertinent of which, perhaps, is this, also from Revelation: “Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die.”<sup>57</sup>*

## Ellul & Medicine

by Raymond Downing

*Raymond Downing is a physician working in Kenya.*

Four years ago, as part of the research for *Death and Life in America: Biblical Healing and Biomedicine*, I wrote to Joyce Hanks requesting help with finding Jacques Ellul’s writings on health and medicine. She kindly sent me an entire envelope of articles, clippings, and book chapters, most of them in French. The earliest was his “Positions bibliques sur la médecine” from *Les deux cites: Cahiers des associations professionnelles protestantes*, vol. 4 (1947). Finding no published English translation, I asked a friend to translate it, and found that my thinking and writing were essentially following the outline he had roughed out in that early article.

His thesis was straightforward, and at core neither surprising nor unique. People, he said, have “two parts: soul-body and spirit, [which are] closely linked, interpenetrated one by the other, to such an extent that no one can distinguish them and separate that which is natural from that which is supernatural in man.” But more than just this link, “the physical only seems like a sign of that which is spiritual... The true drama, the true action has a place in a theatre where we haven’t our ticket, where we aren’t at ease.” That sign is often an illness for which we seek medical help, but biomedical doctors usually don’t have a ticket for the spiritual theatre, the ultimate source of the illness. They therefore focus on the physical, which Ellul calls “only a consequence, only a secondary phenomenon” - only a symptom.

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<sup>56</sup> *The Technological Bluff*, p. 264

<sup>57</sup> Wendell Berry, “God and Country” pp. 95-102 in *What are People For?*, p. 102.

I have considerably condensed his argument. He takes pains to point out that “this link between illness and sin must not be understood in a simplistic sense,” such as “it’s the worst sinner who is the most ill - or that illness is a sign of a bigger sin.” Not at all. However, “to cure illness without the forgiveness of sins is only an adjournment, a whitewash, a fleeting crack of the whip: it isn’t health. This deliverance from illness isn’t of value in itself: it could mean being better only temporarily.”

”Illness,” he says, “possesses a profound meaning... and the doctor must evidently be attentive to not divorce illness from its meaning.” Unfortunately, biomedicine cannot tell us what that meaning is, and thirty years later Susan Sontag wrote a polemic against the cultural meanings of illness she saw - still present, perhaps, because of the remnant of understanding in our culture that illness *does* have meaning. In her writing, however, she wanted “not to confer meaning. but to deprive something of meaning.” She was troubled by the inappropriate and damaging metaphors of illness she confronted, and wrote to demonstrate “that illness is *not* a metaphor”<sup>58</sup>. Ironically, she was left with only biomedicine, and betrayed a confidence and faith in it far beyond my own.

It is this difficulty we have with meanings, and the temptation to deny them altogether, where Ellul’s 1947 argument begins to anticipate so much of what he later wrote about technology. He suggests that biomedical treatment is not only incomplete, but could also be counterproductive. Denying meaning that is there is certainly counterproductive, because it leads us away from healing. There is a similar dynamic when biomedicine (successful productive biomedicine) “generates hope and provokes faith.” In doing so “it clothes itself in things that do not belong to it: it wears praise and the recognition which belongs only to God.” This is “when medicine becomes an idol, when it becomes a power which addresses itself independently to God.” Any idol, whether secular or spiritual, is counterproductive precisely because it is false.

But there are other more direct forms of counterproductivity that Ellul mentions. For example: “We note that man succeeds in part to suppress pain but not to defeat or to make illness subside. Because if an illness ends, how many other forms reappear or crop up for the first time?” The question was speculative, but half a century later research seemed to show that Ellul was on the right track. In the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was a study of treatment methods for newly diagnosed early prostate cancers: half received surgery, and the other half didn’t. Those with surgery were less likely to die of prostate cancer, but 6 years after diagnosis overall death rates in both groups were the same. In other words, “prostatectomy does not change the date of death; all it changes is the likelihood that prostate cancer will be the direct cause.”<sup>59</sup>

Ellul goes on: “If acute illness is arrested, to what extent are such things as general health, racial resistance weakened? If microbial illnesses seem defeated, to what extent are mental and emotional illnesses increased?” Again, recent research confirms Ellul’s

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<sup>58</sup> Sontag, Susan, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (Picador USA, 2001), p. 3, 93, 102.

<sup>59</sup> Hadler, Nortin, *The Last Well Person: How to Stay Well Despite the Health-Care System* (McGill-Queens University Press, 2004) p. 96.

insight. Considering cancer survivors, those people with a diagnosis of cancer who have been treated and are still living, studies in the last decade have shown the following: “Compared with their peers, cancer survivors experience significantly decreased quality of health; increased incidence of chronic health conditions; increased levels of psychological disability; and other physical, emotional, and financial challenges.”<sup>60</sup> We may have defeated the cancer, but we clearly did not defeat ill health.

And finally, Ellul says, because of our individualistic and materialistic approach to remedies, we are left with “only one aim: to suppress suffering.” In doing so, “we have lost the sense of the relativity of life and the insertion of the individual in the communities and real generations. All this distorts the idea of remedies. The true remedy is one which reaches illness in its roots, and one which acts more or less in the long term, which likewise can only take effect in our descendants.” To 21<sup>st</sup> century ears, this sounds like gene therapy, but gene therapy does nothing to situate us in our communities and with our ancestors and descendants. Symptom relief remedies, which do not “reach illness in its roots,” are ultimately counterproductive because they draw attention away from the true nature of the illness. True healing, as Ayi Kwei Armah demonstrates in his novel *The Healers*<sup>61</sup>, is healing not just of disease, but of entire communities.

In light of this very early interest that Ellul had in medicine, and the increasing relevance of all of his technology studies to biomedicine, I find it interesting - well, troubling actually - that there is so little “Ellulian” analysis of biomedicine today. I reviewed all the issues of the *Ellul Forum* since its inception, and found only 2 articles devoted specifically to health or medicine (in Issue #8 on Illich). Even followers of Illich focus elsewhere: the new *International Journal of Illich Studies*<sup>62</sup> - a welcome addition to these conversations - is led mostly by educators. If *Medical Nemesis* was his most successful book, where are the doctors, nurses, pharmacists, therapists and counselors in this discourse?

Admittedly, doctors, nurses, and the lot are practitioners, busy practical people, not always given to reflection on what we do. Fair enough, but where are the medical sociologists? Actually, the problem here is not their silence, but the inaccessibility of what they write. In continuing research following *Death and Life in America*, I encountered a lot of their ideas and analyses of my own profession that were quite new to me - and discovered in the process how little overlap there is between our conversation and theirs. Of course our writings are as inaccessible to them as theirs are to us. I wonder what Illich or Ellul would say about this “expert” writing that only other experts in the same field can understand? Yet even the sociologists, when they mention Illich, refer mostly to *Medical Nemesis* - certainly a fine work, but only

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<sup>60</sup> Sunga, Annette, et al, *Care of Cancer Survivors*. FP Essentials, Edition No 352, AAFP Home Study, Leawood, Kansas, American Academy of Family Physicians, September, 2008.

<sup>61</sup> Armah, Ayi Kwei, *The Healers* (Per Ankh, Popenguine, Senegal, 1978).

<sup>62</sup> <http://ivan-illich.org/journal/index.php/IJIS>

the first of his many other even more cogent reflections on biomedicine. Why have we gotten stuck on *Medical Nemesis*?

Of course there are those who seem to have never heard of *Nemesis*, and most public debates in healthcare focus elsewhere. The biggest concern today, especially in the US, is finance reform, not healthcare reform: how can we finance the system we have? That introduces a slightly more important issue, the nature of that system. But again, we get derailed: instead of looking honestly at that system to see what it really accomplishes, we concentrate mostly on making it more efficient (Ellul would not be surprised). Our concern is not “illness in its roots” but our system in its roots.

One reason we get away with emphasizing these superficial debates is that healthcare is such a huge industry in the West - some 16% of the GNP in the US. Of course we don't want to reduce this; it is a significant part of our economy's growth. We simply need to make it more efficient so that we can offer this same healthcare package to those who now can't afford it. Besides, the products of this system - technologies of symptom relief - are remarkably effective. When we choose to ignore the roots of illness, we get away with becoming triumphalist because our offerings “generate hope and provoke faith” - and of course “wear praise and the recognition which belong only to God.”

Such triumphalism itself then becomes a debate. On the one side are those who are impressed with such technological wizardry, and who delight in predicting 21<sup>st</sup> century “biofutures”. On the other are bioethicists who analyze each new electronic or genetic advance, and walk us through an “on the one hand this, on the other hand that” analysis, often concluding with a warning about being too hasty in adopting the latest - while being careful not to reject it out of hand. Illich, on the other hand, just 8 years before his death, called it all a Brave New Biocracy<sup>63</sup>-the end result of unchallenged medicalization we saw in *Medical Nemesis*.

I understand this hesitance to confront and criticize biomedicine. I first read *Medical Nemesis* in 1976 or 77, around the time I started reading Ellul. I was troubled, but did not know what to do with the critique; I was a newly graduated doctor, and apparently could not practice in the presence of such dissonance. I put *Nemesis* aside and focused on Ellul's theology. Over 20 years later I reread *Nemesis* (by then, it did not seem all that radical) and began reading Ellul's studies on technology. Perhaps by then I was more aware of the limitations of my own profession. A decade after that I was entranced by Illich's subsequent writings on medicine, and now more aware of the influence of Ellul on Illich.

Intellectually, I had moved - but what then could I do about biomedicine itself? I had gone into medicine because (like so many others) I liked science and wanted to help people. I had also assumed (like so many others) that healthcare was neither as dangerous as the military (or fast food) industry, nor as useless as the celebrity (or fast food) industry; healthcare, I had assumed, *helped* people. I understand the reluctance to

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<sup>63</sup> Illich, Ivan, “Brave New Biocracy: Health Care from Womb to Tomb”, *NPQ: New Perspectives Quarterly*, Winter94, Vol. 11 Issue 1

put healthcare in these same categories. Of course, there are things about biomedicine that I still think are good; I wouldn't be working in an academic department of Family Medicine if I felt otherwise. In fact, it is precisely that environment which encourages, or rather *requires*, that we ask very serious questions about what it is that we are teaching.

So how can we do this? For a start, Ellul's "Biblical Positions on Medicine" needs to be made available to an English-speaking audience. It is more relevant today than it was 63 years ago. But it needs contemporary comment; it needs to be built on. At the same time, the academic Ellul and Illich communities need to actively recruit those interested in biomedicine - and vice versa. There is a dynamic community of social scientists with a profound critique of biomedicine, but it is little known outside their academic community. And - far more difficult - medical practitioners need to be aware of these discourses. We, after all, are the ones who "practice" medicine; we need to think more deeply on *what* it is that we are practicing.

Finally, public debates on healthcare need substantial redirection - how, I don't know. The US needs to get beyond the insurance question and look more directly at what that insurance is buying. Europe and the US need to confront the elephant in their medical room: the massive exodus of patients from biomedicine to alternative healing approaches, which bespeaks profound dissatisfaction with what we offer. And in this light, we all need to stop assuming that the poor countries in the world always need what we have developed, whether family planning or ARV drug treatment for AIDS or legal abortions or kidney transplants.

In fact, maybe it's time to start learning something about healing from them.

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# Book Review

## The Omnivore's Dilemma & In Defense of Food Reviewed by Mark D. Baker

### **The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals**

By Michael Pollan

New York: Penguin Book, 2006. 450 pp.

### **In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto**

By Michael Pollan

New York: Penguin Book, 2008. 244 pp.

Reviewed by Mark D. Baker

Associate Professor of Mission and Theology, Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary

In *The Omnivore's Dilemma* Michael Pollan presents the history of four meals from their source to his plate. He follows the path corn takes from Iowa to his fast-food meal; he compares the journey of two organic meals, one purchased at Whole Foods and the other from a single farm; and he describes the hunting, gathering and growing he did to produce the fourth meal. His book, *In Defense of Food*, explores the origins and ill effects of what he calls the "age of nutritionism" and "the Western diet" and proposes guidelines for escaping those ill effects.

The books provide a wealth of opportunities for reflecting on Ellulian themes. I recommend reading the books with questions like: what do I see when I read this work through the lens of Ellul's *Political Illusion* or *Money and Power*? Where do I see evidence of Ellul's theory of technique or description of the powers? How does Pollan's work illustrate Ellul's thought and how do Ellul's ideas illuminate Pollan's work?

Rather than giving an overview and evaluation of Pollan's books I will share a few examples of my responses to the above questions. Technique is a dominant theme in the books. Often it is explicitly on the surface. How could one not think of Ellul and technique when reading sentences like: "There are a great many reasons American cattle came off the grass and into the feedlot, and yet all of them finally come down to the same one: Our civilization and, increasingly, our food system are strictly organized on industrial lines. They prize consistency, mechanization, predictability, interchangeability, and economies of scale" (2006, p. 201). Many topics in Pollan's books illustrate characteristics of technique described by Ellul and are also illuminated by Ellul's insightful analysis of technique. For instance the move from stone-ground wheat to roller-ground, highly refined wheat illustrates that in our technological age tech-

nique marches on without external impetus. If it is more efficient we adopt it. Steel rollers made it possible to remove the germ, and thus the oil, from wheat and grind the remaining endosperm into a fine white powder. This increased the shelf life of flour by many months. As a result each town did not have to have its own mill; the flour could travel great distances. Milling operations were centralized in big cities. “The problem was that this gorgeous white powder was nutritionally worthless, or nearly so” (2008, p. 108). Wherever these refining technologies flourished epidemics of pellagra and beriberi soon followed. Ellul tells us that when encountering problems caused by technique, rather than going back to the source of the problem the default approach is to use more technique to solve the problem. What was done? Nutritional science discovered vitamins and millers begin enriching flour with vitamins that had been removed or destroyed in the refining process. Pollan goes below the surface in an Ellulian manner and observes that we have been overconfident in thinking we know all the nutrients in a particular food and have failed to recognize that food is more than a collection of nutrient pieces. Technique’s solution of adding vitamins to flour does not equal whole wheat flour. Pollan writes, “Deficiency diseases are much easier to trace and treat . . . than chronic diseases, and it turns out that the practice of refining carbohydrates is implicated in several of these chronic diseases as well— diabetes, heart disease, and certain cancers” (2008, p. 109).

Technique bashing is not Pollan’s primary aim. In fact, Joel Salatin, the farmer most praised in the *Omnivore’s Dilemma*, uses a lot of technique in doing sustainable agriculture. Here are just two examples. The schedule of what happens on a particular section of pasture is carefully controlled. Chickens follow cattle, and neither are allowed to graze too long; Salatin seeks optimum yield by allowing the grass to grow for a specific amount of time before bringing the cattle back. A superlightweight portable electronic fence is a vital element in the whole operation. Many frequently misunderstand Ellul as being against all technology.

Contrasting case studies in Pollan offer the opportunity to ask the question: what is the difference between the role of technique at an industrialized cattle feedlot operation and at Joel Salatin’s farm? How does Ellul’s thought illuminate the difference? In one we see what concerned Ellul, the rule of the spirit of technique and its focus on absolute efficiency driving every decision. In the other we see individual techniques and technologies used. Yet at times the most efficient approach is intentionally not taken because it conflicts with the overall goal of seeking to farm in a way that follows nature and leads to good relationships between the farmer and his neighbors and to health for all involved.

Sadly the books overflow with examples of diverse and widespread alienation brought about by unquestioningly following the spirit of technique. Pollan does an excellent job of not demonizing individual actors in the industrial food system. Although he does not present a conspiracy theory the alienating elements are so strong and effective that at one point I thought: it is as if you asked a commission to make changes to our agricultural food system so that it would ruin our health, make



us more oil dependent, damage the environment, and stress farmers in a myriad of ways including economic. There was, of course, no commission, but we do see these results. As I read Pollan's books I increasingly found myself reflecting on Ellul's writing about the biblical theme of the powers. In *Ethics of Freedom* he writes "the powers seem to be able to transform a natural, social, intellectual, or economic reality into a force which man has no ability to resist or control" (p. 152). What then does an ethic OF freedom look like in relation to the food system today? Pollan provides information, concrete examples of alienation and freedom and he offers guidelines for consumers. Bringing Ellul into conversation with Pollan will lead to an even richer ethic of freedom.

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If you try to purchase either of these excellent films, be sure to check on compatibility with your system and on whether English subtitles are provided, if that is desired.

**Issue #47 Spring 2011 — Pop  
Culture, Jacques Ellul, and Thomas  
Merton**

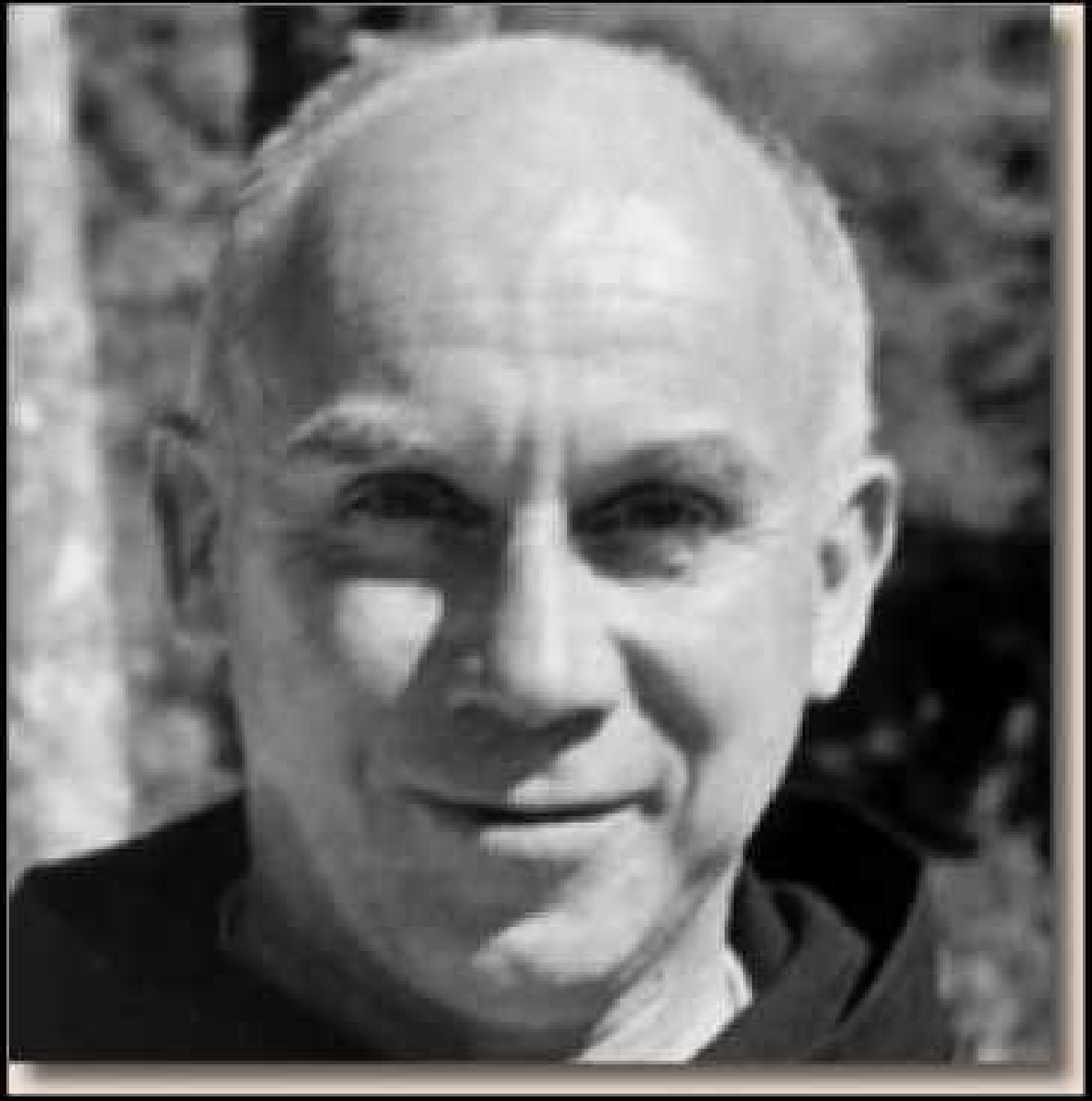
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### **For the Critique of Technological Civilization**



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## **From the Editor**

Readers of The Ellul Forum over the years have seen its content expand to countries around the world. The North Atlantic axis has welcomed such issues as Ellul in Korea, Mexico, and Denmark. Also, scholarship on Ellul and technology continues to deepen; it’s become more intellectually sophisticated over the life of the Forum.

With this issue we take note of another development—the multiplying of topics for Ellul studies. Popular culture is the topic here. Through Ellul’s theory and method the authors develop a critical assessment of popular culture. Ellul’s work on Propaganda, his analysis of media technologies in *Humiliation of the Word* and *The Technological Bluff*, are the stepping stones to a popular culture critique. But here the media arts are addressed directly, and it contributes to the expanding scholarship on religion and contemporary popular culture.

One topic of longstanding interest to Ellul Forum readers is the Jacques Ellul - Thomas Merton relationship. Jeffrey Shaw’s article is included in this issue as a re-



view of the Ellul-Merton critique of technological civilization. Of special interest, it gives an account of their mutual relationship to Kierkegaard and it provides a helpful bibliography of the Merton literature.

Our thanks to Dell DeChant a member of the International Jacques Ellul Society, Board of Directors, for guest editing this issue. The next two issues of the Ellul Forum will focus on “Anarchism” (Fall 2011, guest editor Andy Alexis-Baker) and “Ellul and the Arts” (Spring 2012, guest editor David Lovekin).

We celebrate the centenary of Ellul’s birth in 2012 with an international conference July 8-10 at Wheaton College –chosen for its central location near Chicago, its investment in developing the best archive of Ellul books, papers, tapes, and letters west of Bordeaux, and the indefatigable promotion of Ellul studies by Prof. Jeff Greenman. Call for papers on back cover - more registration info in the fall Ellul Forum. Let’s gather all the Ellul students, novice to veteran, for a great time of celebration and serious reflection together. Plan now!

**Clifford G. Christians, Editor**

[[mailto:cchrstns@illinois.edu]][cchrstns@illinois.edu]

## The Emerging Field of Religion and Popular Culture

by Dell DeChant

*Dell DeChant is Senior Instructor and Associate Chair in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of South Florida.*

Aside from their scholarly merit as critical inquiries into specific topics at the intersection of religion and contemporary culture, the articles in this issue are of particular interest in two important ways. First, they suggest a greater range of application for Ellul’s project, and second, they contribute to the theoretical enrichment of the emerging field of Religion and Popular Culture.

In the first area, these two studies clearly show the relevance of Ellul’s general theories and specific categories of analysis to formulating questions and developing critical assessments related to popular culture. In this regard, they remind us that Ellul’s theory and method are as pertinent and as applicable today (and in the most immediate moment of the present) as they were in the 60s and 70s. In short, and to use a sports analogy, these studies give Ellul “fresh legs.”

In the second area, the studies may make a greater contribution by expanding and deepening the theoretic options available to scholars working in the field of Religion and Popular Culture. The

development of Ellul-derived questions and deployment of Ellul-derived categories of analysis not only significantly expand the theoretic horizons of this field, they also add new problematics otherwise absent in the literature.

Ferreri and Bennett are, thus, in dialogue not only with Ellul specialists, but also the broader (and growing) scholarly community concerned with the religious dimensions of contemporary popular culture. For readers unfamiliar with the field of Religion and Popular Culture, and to briefly contextualize the articles, Ferreri's examination of the Obama presidency exemplifies the category of "Popular Culture as Religion." Questions in this category focus on the ways in which popular culture phenomena function as religion. The relevancy of Ellul's work to this area should be quite apparent. Ferreri's particular interest is the richly nuanced intersection of Civil Religion and popular culture in the person and symbol of Barack Obama. For Ferreri, Ellul serves as a bridge between Robert Bellah's conception of American Civil Religion and the sacred of contemporary popular culture, which yields "the technology of consumption" as the manifestation of the sacred and Obama as "the longitudinal extension of JFK."

Bennett's analysis of contemporary Christian religious communities is located in the category of "Popular Culture in Religion." Inquiries in this area are concerned with the impact of popular culture on religious communities and ritual practices. Again, as with the previous category, Ellul's relevance is selfevident. Using a number of Ellul's texts, most importantly, *The Meaning of the City*, Bennett isolates and critiques the "rippling effects and unforeseen consequences" that are inevitable when churches become enamored of popular culture elements and artifacts, appropriating them without reflection. In this treatment, the world of popular culture is analogous to the Ellulian *city*; and as Bennett observes, following Ellul, "the values of the city are in direct juxtaposition to the values of the Kingdom of God."

It is hoped that these articles will be followed by other studies by our featured contributors, and that others may find merit in the deployment of Ellul's theories and methods as modeled here.

Should this occur, it will benefit not only the theoretic development of the field of Religion and Popular Culture, but also promote the continued evolution of the theories of Jacques Ellul. Ultimately, then, I commend these articles to you with the observation that Ferreri and Bennett are teaching us that Jacques Ellul's inquiry into religion and culture is as relevant today as it ever was, and perhaps even more relevant today in the world of Barack Obama and the mega-church.

## **Pop Culture's "New Demons" Obama, the Sacred, and Civil Religion"**

by Frank Ferreri

*Frank Ferreri, M.A. and J.D., is a legal editor at LRP Publications and an adjunct instructor at University of South Florida Polytechnic. He earned his B.A. and M.A. from the University of South Florida and J.D. from the University of Florida.*

Since Barack Obama arrived in the public eye commentators have compared him to John F. Kennedy, a hallmark figure of American civil religion. Naturally, Obama's campaign for and election to the U.S. presidency further amplified such comparisons.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, in much the same way that JFK became an enduring figure in American popular culture, Obama's time in the White House has played out voluminously in the consumer-oriented carriers of popular culture.<sup>2</sup> Thus, a question arises: what is the link in the American popular consciousness connecting Obama to tropes of the American civil religious tradition and how does that manifest itself in American popular culture? In exploring this question, this article considers whether and how, from the view of American popular culture, Obama fulfills civil religious ideals for American society and the degree to which this has implications for the religious dimensions of contemporary American culture.

To conduct this analysis, this article examines the Obama presidency in the context of Jacques Ellul's concept of political religion, as developed in *The New Demons*, and in light of Robert Bellah's understanding of American civil religion, which he first expounded in the wake of JFK's presidency and assassination.<sup>3</sup> Viewing Obama through the intersection of pop culture and civil religion in the context of Ellul yields an understanding of civil religion that goes beyond Bellah's initial confines. Namely, this type of exploration suggests the possibility that the civil religious sense of the sacred has an embodied, immanent presence in contemporary American culture that combines with its idealistic strands to instruct Americans about their identities, an instruction that comes almost exclusively from the carriers of popular culture.

## Bellah's Civil Religion

For Bellah, civil religion is a "collection of beliefs, symbols, and rituals with respect to sacred things and institutionalized in a collectivity" that is "at its best a genuine apprehension of universal and transcendent religious reality as seen in or, one could almost say, as revealed through the experience of the American people."<sup>4</sup> Bellah goes on to explain that though American civil religion is seeped in biblical archetypes, "it is also genuinely American and genuinely new. It has its own prophets and its own martyrs, its own sacred events and sacred places, its own solemn rituals and symbols."<sup>5</sup> It also seeks, in Bellah's view, a God-accorded society that is an example to the rest of the world. Intentionally or not, Obama presented a rendition of this theme in his

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<sup>1</sup> A Lexis search returned 1,000 results for " 'Barack Obama' + 'John F. Kennedy' " and a Google search produced more than 10,000.

<sup>2</sup> For purposes of this article, "carriers" are those vehicles or institutions that bring popular culture to individuals in contemporary American culture. Such carriers include, most notably, television, Internet, radio, and print media, all of which, in contemporary American culture, are dominated by consumer capitalism.

<sup>3</sup> See Jacques Ellul, *The New Demons*, trans. C Edward Hopkin (NY: Seabury, 1975 [1973] ).

<sup>4</sup> Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* 96 (1967): 8, 12.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

inauguration address when he announced, "Let it be said by our children's children that when we were tested we refused to let this journey end, that we did not turn back nor did we falter; and with eyes fixed on the horizon and God's grace upon us, we carried forth that great gift of freedom and delivered it safely to future generations."<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that Bellah publicly supported Obama for the 2008 election.<sup>7</sup> In his endorsement, Bellah is especially drawn to Obama's deployment of "the language of Martin Luther King Jr. and William Sloane Coffin—that is, a language that expresses the dominant biblical concern for those most in need, a language that reminds us of our solidarity with all human beings."<sup>8</sup> Bespeaking the nature of Obama's political rise and testifying to the nature of information-spreading in contemporary American culture, Bellah first learned of Obama because of his speech at the 2004 Democratic National Convention, something millions watched on television and read about in papers, magazines, and online.

Viewing Obama through the lens of American civil religion aids in a fuller understanding of how civil religion continues to function in American culture and the relatively central place it still holds in American political life. From a communitarian perspective, Obama's demonstration of civil religious ideals and deployment of civil religious language show that this new phase of history argues in favor of Bellah's understanding. Obama himself has employed it, at times, such as when, prior to his run for president, he wrote of "the need to think in terms of 'thou' and not just 'I'" that "resonates in religious congregations all across the country" and his belief that "democracy demands that the religiously motivated translate their concerns into universal, rather than religion-specific, values."<sup>9</sup> Such thoughts are at home with Bellah's supposition that American civil religion is "an understanding of the American experience in the light of ultimate and universal reality."<sup>10</sup>

An important part of Obama's place in American civil religion is his relationship to the African-American church tradition. R. Stephen Warner has asserted that Obama's public disagreement with the Rev. Jeremiah Wright in 2008 was a teachable moment in understanding African-American Christianity,

American civil religion, and Obama's ongoing religious pilgrimage.<sup>11</sup> Tellingly, the Wright-Obama episode played out in the media, with Wright drawing intense media attention for a brief time. One could barely turn on any of the major media outlets without encountering some kind of reference to what Obama's relationship to Wright meant for his presidential bid. However, few (with the possible exception of Bill Moy-

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<sup>6</sup> Barack Obama, "President Barack Obama's Inaugural Address," January. 20, 2009, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/inaugural-address/>

<sup>7</sup> See Bellah, "Yes He Can: The Case for Obama," *Commonweal*, March 14, 2008, 8-9.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>9</sup> Obama, "One Nation . . . Under God?" *Sojourners*, November 26, 2006, 43-47.

<sup>10</sup> Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," 18.

<sup>11</sup> R. Stephen Warner, "Civil Religious Revival," *Religion in the News* 11, no. 1 (2008), [http://www.trincoll.edu/depts/csrpl/RINVol11No1/Ci\\_vilreligiousrevival.htm](http://www.trincoll.edu/depts/csrpl/RINVol11No1/Ci_vilreligiousrevival.htm).

ers), asked what the relationship meant for Americans' understanding of themselves. However, Ellul's concept of the sacred supplies an appropriate category for which to conduct this line of inquiry. For Ellul, in the post-Christian world, the sacred, among other things, is embodied in a person and is, therefore, incarnate.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the incarnate one "is not in himself the point of reference of the entire world order, but he is the point of reference for all the people, to show them how they should act, how they should appear, and how they should behave toward the sacred."<sup>13</sup> In other words, the incarnate one is the chief repository of all that is sacred and the prime human example of it. The furor over the Wright episode shows that, when it comes to American politics, something of a sacred nature is at play in the American popular consciousness and arrives at its status through the consumption of mass media.

## Ellul's Political Religion

Such a notion of the sacred takes on special significance in Ellul's analysis of political religion. For Ellul, simply, "Politics has become a religion."<sup>14</sup> And it is the kind of religion that produces a "sacred" hero who is the "complete model" and "consecrated by a god."<sup>15</sup> In Ellul's assessment, the pantheon of heroes in political religion throughout history serve, among other things, "as examples of the life approved by God."<sup>16</sup> This has remained the case in the modern age because "there is . . . unquestionably the need for moral examples to which to refer."<sup>17</sup> Implicit in this is an arrangement by which the examples set themselves out to a public eager to grasp them as such.

Addressing the nature of public figures, Ellul hints that the exploration of political religion is at home in the context of popular culture. In a somewhat tangential analysis, Ellul considers the way celebrities delve into political religion to become part of the heroization that pop culture attaches to political figures. He explains, "Thanks to political religion, the stars are finding their place. They are at last having a part in serious worship."<sup>18</sup> The early stages of the 21st century make it appear that Ellul was on to something. As the carriers of the cultural myths are ever-commodified, the amalgamation of celebrity, politics, and the sacred increasingly shapes what it means to be an American. Perhaps this is why it is par for the course when Obama makes an appearance on the *Tonight Show* or *The View*. Maybe he is concerned about poll numbers and the seemingly endless cycles of elections; however, he also may be living out how the sacred expresses itself through pop culture to reach people in a contemporary milieu.

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<sup>12</sup> Ellul, 55-56.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 175.

## Obama and Pop Culture

With Obama, it can be argued that celebrity and political religious heroism collide. His election made global headlines, prompting Americans of various political persuasions to proclaim him as some version of the American dream and representative of numerous American ideals. If Ellul is right about the sacred, then Obama's pop culture presence argues in favor for Bellah's original interpretation of civil religion. After all, "hope" and "change that we can believe in," traditional civil religious ideals, became not just rallying cries but fashion statements festooned on clothing, plastered on bumpers, and made trendy by Shepard Fairey's artwork. As the campaign commodified ideals, Obama supporters responded, "Yes we can."

Further, looking to Obama's demonstration of American civil religion in the age of "2.0," one cannot ignore Ellul's thoughts on technology, particularly in examining Obama's inkling toward JFK-like policies promoting America's technological innovation and global leadership. For Ellul, technology supplies modernity with a utopian narrative that supports "faith in man, in history, and in science."<sup>19</sup> Such a narrative naturally has implications for political religion in Ellul's analysis, particularly where, by narrative, "the technological effort is in perfect conformity with the will of God."<sup>20</sup> From there, technology comes to sacralize the society, becoming "the center of the new sacred"<sup>21</sup> just as it becomes the hope-giving, faith-deserving force of liberation one would expect from the "god who saves."<sup>22</sup>

Thus, building on Ellul, it stands to reason that what is sacred in contemporary American culture relates to its technology. And the technology that features so prominently in the lives of so many contemporary Americans, and so is a means by which the sacred is carried to them, is the technology of consumption. The mass-oriented nature of the various devices that increasingly define Americans' existence has not been lost on Obama. To be sure, Obama takes technology seriously, particularly forms of technology that resonate most emphatically in popular culture. His campaign and administration have made use of social media, e-mail, online videos, and other such instruments like no previous U.S. president. In turn, this has spawned a pop culture take on Obama's technophilia.<sup>23</sup> During the 2008 campaign, this presented a contrast that seemed to resonate in contemporary America, particularly in pop culture: the younger, tech-savvy Obama versus the older, laggardly McCain, who reputedly did not know how to use e-mail.<sup>24</sup>

To cite some examples: in late 2008, the pop culture world was all atwitter about whether Obama would keep his BlackBerry once he became president; a Facebook ap-

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>23</sup> See, e.g. Jeff Zeleny, "Lose the BlackBerry? Yes He Can, Maybe," *New York Times*, sec A, November 16, 2008.

<sup>24</sup> See, e.g. Richard Sisk, "Mac that can't Email?" *New York Daily News*, 18, September 13, 2008.

plication lets users "Obamaize" their profile photos to look like Fairey's "Hope" posters and stickers; and Obama's weekly address appears on the Web in high definition video with links for viewers to easily share with others through various electronic channels. These are also examples of technology as mass-produced consumer commodities: BlackBerry-like devices are

ubiquitous; the Facebook application allows for personalized customization (including replacing the word "Hope" with any word the user desires); and the White House's online videos are intended and encouraged to be widely distributed and consumed (watched). Other examples abound as well and further point to Obama as the mass-market technology politician *par excellence*. However, in many ways, he is the longitudinal extension of JFK, who used television to his advantage and was filmed and photographed frequently for a land of eager media consumers. In Ellul's words it would seem that, much like with JFK's command of America's mass media, Obama's utilization of numerous carriers of pop culture shows a familiarity with "the liturgy of the cult of consumer goods."<sup>25</sup>

## Technology in Civil Religion

It would seem, too, that the current place of American civil religion is shaped by the contours of how technology shapes what is sacred and how that, in turn, focuses the narrative of American exemplariness at home and on the world stage. No doubt Obama's use of and affinity for personal and consumer-oriented technology demonstrates his confident foray into sacred pop culture territory, but his 2010 State of the Union address demonstrates his concern for America's international technological prowess, once again resonating with Ellul's consideration of how the sacred functions in the seemingly secular realm of politics. During the address, Obama makes reference to America as the world's technological power and to the threat America's position faces from burgeoning technological powers across the globe. In doing so, he employs civil religious language to sacralize a technology-as-savior narrative about America's financial crisis and future viability of superpower status. For example, the address contends that America needs to re-establish itself as an economic and technological superpower because countries like China, India, and Germany "aren't playing for second place. They're putting more emphasis on math and science. They're rebuilding their infrastructure. They are making serious investments in clean energy because they want those jobs."<sup>26</sup> Obama goes on to explain, "I do not accept second place for the United States of America" before extolling the virtues of American innovation and high-tech education.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ellul, 195.

<sup>26</sup> Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President in State of the Union Address," January 27, 2010, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-state-union-address>

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

Obama's 2011 address strikes similar themes, calling for national investment in education, infrastructure, and clean energy through metaphorical reference to the gold standard of technological competitiveness, Sputnik.<sup>28</sup> What this shows is that, from Obama's perspective, technology carries ideals worthy of national moral concern, the kind of which is at home in an American civil religious context.

Yet, anyone moderately interested in American popular culture, or at least its middle-brow elements, will note that *New York Times* columnist Thomas L. Friedman has been making those same arguments for years in newspapers, books, on the Web, and on television talk shows. And, interestingly enough, where Friedman makes a case for American investment in green technological innovation, he often makes reference to JFK's civil religious crusade to put a human on the moon before the Soviets. For example, in a 2006 column, Friedman refers to energy independence as this generation's "moon shot."<sup>29</sup> And just as JFK's moon shot changed the face of pop culture in the 1960s, with NASA regularly coming into homes through television, so too, Obama's efforts to reach the public through various electronic media daily put his presidency on Americans' laptops and mobile devices. The important point with all of this is that it appears in mass-consumed form through mass-distributed channels of popular culture and, thereby, mass-oriented carriers of contemporary American culture's beliefs and values.<sup>30</sup>

Such mass-oriented politics is consistent with Ellul's analysis of political religion's call for absoluteness in which "everything is political" and "politics is the only serious activity."<sup>31</sup> It is arguable as to how far Ellul's take extends into the analysis of Obama, civil religion, popular culture, but what makes it worthy of attention is that it plays out and reaches Americans through media channels, most notably television, talk radio, and the Web. As with other aspects of Obama's candidacy and presidency, what distinguishes him from his political opponents is fodder for media distribution and Americans' consumption. Arguably, that has been true for every U.S. president, with developments in radio then television then the Internet amplifying the reality as the populace gets more and more "wired" (or "wi-fied," as it were). Yet, Obama presents a different case. For one thing, his election, for obvious reasons, remains historic. Importantly, it was the kind of history-making event that is at home in the civil religious

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<sup>28</sup> Obama, "Remarks by the President in the State of the Union Address," January 25, 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-state-union-address>. It is worth noting that, with the 2011 address, the White House rolled out an interactive, social media-esque website for the occasion.

<sup>29</sup> See, e.g. Friedman, "Bush's Waterlogged Halo," *New York Times*, sec. A, September 21, 2005; "A Green Dream in Texas," *New York Times*, sec. A, January 18, 2006; "Will Pigs Fly?" *New York Times*, sec. A, February 3, 2006.

<sup>30</sup> Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that during composition of this article, the White House Twitter page featured the following "tweet": "Obama: 'we can't... let China race ahead to create the clean energy jobs & industries of the future.'"

<sup>31</sup> Ellul, 199.



context, with Obama supporters and critics alike drawing on "shining city on a hill" language to characterize its meaning for America's position in the world.<sup>32</sup>

Of course, Obama's election is also the kind of history that is at home in the narrative of JFK's social vision, arguably because of its civil religious dimensions. But what makes this all the more powerful is that it is also at home in Ellul's understanding that what a culture holds sacred always has an embodied, tangible persona that lends itself to some form of tactile, consumptive apprehension. In contemporary American culture, that embodiment cannot happen without pop culture, which not only tells the passive observer about a culture's beliefs and values but also tells the culture what is believable and what is valuable. Ultimately, no matter how deep and abstract the meaning of Obama to American civil religion gets, the basic pattern reaches and teaches Americans through popular culture.

Obama's political rise and pop culture status demonstrate at least two things relative to the study of religion, particularly as it relates to contemporary American culture: a) Ellul's concept of political religion has continued to present helpful analytical tools despite major changes in global politics since he published *The New Demons*, and b) Bellah's civil religion thesis has wide applicability in grasping the religious nature of American culture. However, what makes all of this come into view is understanding how studying religion and pop culture yields a deeper, more thoroughgoing understanding of culture. Applying Ellul's analysis of the sacred and political religion to Obama's still-developing place in American civil religious history shows that, potentially, the civil religion thesis needs to include an understanding that the sacred in contemporary American culture has an imminent, embodied presence to go along with its more transcendently abstract ideals. No where is that more apparent than in popular culture, where Obama, like so many others in the public spotlight, is part of the mass-distributed media package the American public continuously consumes.

## Conclusion

Perhaps it is fitting, then, that Obama's presence in pop culture is the window through which to explore these civil religious possibilities. After all, part of what makes him an embodiment of the sacred in an Ellul-like sense is that he is a living example of the transcendental ideals Bellah isolated in his original piece. In other words, a study of Bellah's work helps to make sense of why so many Americans rallied around Obama in the 2008 election. Yet there is another sense in which there exists a "something else" at play with Obama's overall status in the popular American consciousness, and that something else comes into focus in how Obama's persona enters the realm of pop culture through mass-consumed media avenues. If it does not seem identifiably religious to the average American (and it most likely does not), it only stresses how

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<sup>32</sup> See Kevin Rafferty, "Audacious Dream No Other Nation can Offer," *South China Morning Post*, 13, November 7, 2008.

the sacred moves and functions implicitly in contemporary American culture. As Ellul puts it, "The pomp and exaltation are gone. Everything turns horizontal, direct and human, but no less religious."<sup>33</sup> Though it may seem just a part of the way things are, the "no less religious" is where the study of religion explores the way people learn about reality and their place in it. So too, at the intersection of pop culture, civil religion, and the American sacred, one begins to make sense of Ellul's claim that national socialism, Marxism, and American democracy all play the same roles.<sup>34</sup> A culture's narratives and what it holds sacred have a mutually reinforcing relationship with another, a relationship that shapes and guides the culture regardless of who is cognizant of it.

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<sup>33</sup> Ellul, 195.

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<sup>35</sup> Paul Tillich, "What is Wrong with the 'Dialectical' Theology?" *Journal of Religion* 15.2 (1935): 127-45.

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## **Snap, Crackle, Pop Christianity: Discerning the Church in the Age of Entertainment by Stephanie Bennett**

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Glitz, glamour, and the unmistakable air of celebrity - -the room is thick with it. The air is electric, pulsing with expectancy. Blue lights stream from behind the stage setting the tone for what is to come. Supersized screens descend from each corner and the crowd quiets as the gentle swell of an electric guitar rises to meet its match in a reverberating bass. Then, with the sizzle of a swish cymbal and a sudden crack of the snare drum it all begins.

Welcome to Church 2.0, the 21<sup>st</sup> century version of what was once humbly known as the Body of Christ. No longer broken, battered, bathed in blood and the robes of righteousness, this version is brimming with promises of financial prosperity, a seamless transition from darkness to light, and all of the wonders of technology that will take us from boredom to bedlam and back again. Just click and you're sure to find an edifying sermon pod cast, a small group of believers exchanging text online to discuss eschatology, or a twitter feed that offers scripture-of-the-day. It's all there in whatever mobile computing network one might choose. Only one problem: *the community of faith is absent*. All of these popular technological experiences remove congregants from the actual presence of other human beings.

In many ways popular techno-culture is paving the way for a virtual church. Online churches and longdistance prayer groups are making up increasingly greater portions of those who practice their faith each day.<sup>36</sup> Some examples of this are websites that allow believers to choose an avatar so they may simulate the experience of receiving

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<sup>36</sup> Hundreds - even thousands - of websites offering "online church" are available to "join" or visit. Clicking into prayer, sermons, and the sacraments is now becoming commonplace. One example is the CBN.com Prayer and Counseling Center. 2010. [Retrieved June 19, 2010]

the Eucharist.<sup>37</sup> Other instances involve the online presence of traditional churches where members may pay a tithe or offering through a secured web portal.

Music, long a mainstay of worshippers in every expression of the church throughout its 2000 year history, has taken a decisive leap into the world of entertainment. Since the inception of the Gospel Music Association (GMA) in 1964, the place of popular music has moved from the peripheral purview of a concert-going youth culture to a primary focus of activity in a growing number of contemporary church settings.<sup>38</sup> Still many other expressions of the local church blend with cultural goods to include the use of media and technology for ministerial purposes such as evangelism and teaching. Powerpoint, YouTube, celebrity speakers, television commercials, streaming video, the simulcasting of sermons to satellite congregations -even interacting in virtual worlds such as Second Life - all these are finding a place in churches throughout the West.<sup>39</sup> Even within the walls of more traditional churches –Evangelical, Protestant, and Roman Catholic, alike –such artifacts of popular culture are becoming the norm. These are the crossroads - a junction on the highway to heaven where religion and popular culture meet –the Christian version, that is, power-packed with all that is relevant, slick, and efficient. *This is the Church in the Age of Entertainment.*

Before we advance any further, let my bias be clear: It is completely unfair to say that edgy music and a light show cancel the core meaning of the church. It is equally unacceptable to dismiss the need to share the Gospel message in the vernacular of the day, or to disparage well-intentioned means. Yet, what exactly do these elements accomplish aside from providing the *relevance* that is regaled in so many churches throughout America today? This is an important question to ask, for although the blending of popular culture and religion has significant historical precedence, the contemporary melding of the two is creating an entirely new environment in which Christians throughout the globe meet, transmogrifying Christianity, both in the way it is perceived by those outside the church, and altering the behavior, perception, –even the very definition of the church - for those within its walls. Although the Church is

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<http://www.cbn.com/SpiritualLife/prayerandcounseling/>. Another is the Alpha Church, where one may get baptized or receive holy communion. For more details, click on this link:

<http://www.alphachurch.org/>. To “participate” in worship, click here:

<http://www.alphachurch.org/worshipmusic10.htm> [retrieved June 24, 2010].

<sup>37</sup> See Savior.org for details. Managed by the Holy Spirit Adoration Sisters, Philadelphia, PA. 1916. [Retrieved June 19, 2010]<http://www.savior.org/devotions.htm>. This group cites papal authority in going to the Net to function in an ongoing virtual adoration of the Eucharist.

<sup>38</sup> The Gospel Music Association (GMA) recognizes a wide variety of genres: urban. pop, rock, Rap/Hip Hop, bluegrass, alternative, and traditional Gospel music. All of these genres have found their way into contemporary church settings.

<sup>39</sup> Developed by Linden Research Inc. Second Life is the trade name for a virtual environment for social interaction.

<http://secondlife.com/>. LifeChurch.tv was one of the first organizations to set up virtual church in the popular game site, Second Life. [retrieved June 19, 2010]

<http://swerve.lifechurch.tv/2007/03/12/lifechurchtv-has-a-second-life-church-campus/>.

largely defined today as an institution, for the purposes of clarity we will interchangeably describe the church with several biblical terms: Family of God, Body of Christ, and *Ekklesia*, or community of faith.<sup>40</sup>

Jacques Ellul, twentieth century philosopher, social theorist, and professor of law and the history of institutions, wrote much that pertained to the intersection of religion and popular culture. Although his area of scholarly focus was primarily the political and religious climate of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, Ellul advanced a connection between the various modes of propaganda and the encroachment of a technological society into the church in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He saw the same forces of propaganda and power at work in the Church as are evident within the wider context of societal institutions. It is this threat of technological tyranny that Ellul explicates in *The Technological Society* along with many of his books in his theological track such as *The Presence of the Kingdom*, *The Subversion of Christianity*, and *The Meaning of the City*, each of which serve to inform this article, a work that seeks to uncover implications of the blending of popular culture and the church. To do so, we will explore Ellul's understanding of the place –or mission –of the church in the earth. Then, addressing the emergence of popular culture in the church we will briefly discuss the metaphorical meaning of “the city” and ponder several questions pertaining to popular culture in the church, namely: 1) how might such a blending serve to advance or detract from the mission of the church, and, 2) what (if any) significance does the blurring of popular culture with the church have to do with the furtherance of socio-spiritual interaction among those in the church?

#### Presence of the Kingdom

What follows is not a comprehensive assessment of the place of popular culture in the church, nor a complete treatment of Ellulian thought on the matter, but a preliminary exposition that is offered in the spirit of exploration and investigation. It is my fervent hope that these ideas would invite dialogue and help to advance the important questions that need to be asked. Let us begin, then, by engaging with perhaps the most ecclesiastically-focused work in Ellul's corpus, *The Presence of the Kingdom*.

This is Ellul's self-described, “little book, short and easy on the presence of the Christian in the world” (1989, ix). Here, he offers a description of the church and its role in society, stating that “a Christian is a ‘sign’ of the reality of God's action, [. . .] a sheep in the midst of wolves, [...which is] why it is essential that Christians should be very careful not to be wolves in the spiritual sense - that is, people who try to dominate others.” (pp 4-5). As a gathered people, the church functions as a living witness of sacrifice, - -the sacrifice of Christ and its outworking in the midst

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<sup>40</sup> *Ekklesia* is the Greek term used by Paul of Tarsus to describe those gathering to worship. Literally, “gathering” or “assembly,” it refers to those called out of a larger body to assembly together for a specific purpose. In the case of the New Testament, this purpose was to gather to declare the message of Jesus Christ, worship together, and share in the *koinonia*. *Koinonia* is the Greek word used to express kinship and close, shared, life together.

of life together. Herein, the church occupies a very important place in the world, one that does not strive to live a life informed by “rules, principles, or slogans,” but lives by a distinctly Christian ethic that is rooted *in Christ, himself* (1989, p.12). The ability to walk in this ethic as a people is beyond the efforts and strivings of human beings; it necessitates living rather by the *life* and redemptive work of Jesus Christ (p. 5). In fact, this life is decidedly agonistic, that is, it is informed by sacrifice and decisive conflict. It is a life that makes a complete departure from the “will of death” and “suicidal tendencies” of the world (1989, p. 19). Thus, we begin to see the fine line that appears between using (or refusing) the propagandistic means of media saturation and consumer-driven techniques that are embedded in popular culture to advance the message of the Gospel.

Although he does not consider the book theology, *The Presence of the Kingdom* is one of the most accessible among his theological works, the essence of which involves what Ellul calls “the situation of the Christian in the world,” an ongoing conundrum that finds its application in numerous ways throughout the centuries. What is this conundrum?

To start, it involves individual recognition that the Christian is actually living in two worlds; one, the world of means and techniques, a world in which capitulation to structures of power and organizational efficiency is mandatory if one wants to survive, and the other, a spiritual life of transcendence in the midst of the material world. This is an existence in which the Christian fully engages in life but recognizes its temporal nature. Pursuit of this life “in Christ” involves wrangling with this tension rather than acquiescing to a universe of means. This tension is dialectical, one that necessitates the ability (and willingness) to deal with the challenges one must face as an active participant in this world while simultaneously understanding that Christians “are not of this world, but belong to the Kingdom of Heaven. This quandary also involves the ability to mitigate the institutional challenges and the responsibility and freedom of individual believers. By no means does this infer that the church is to remove itself from the everyday affairs of society, rather:

Christians are not meant to live together in closed groups, refusing to mix with other people. The Christian community must never be a closed body. Thus if the Christian is necessarily *in* the world, he is not *of* it. This means that his thought, his life, and his heart are not controlled by the world, and do not depend upon the world, for they belong to another Master. Thus, since he belongs to another Master, the Christian has been sent into this world by this Master, and his communion with his Master remains unbroken, in spite of the world in which he has to live. (1989, p 2).

Essentially, this is what Ellul terms the situation of the Christian in the world. Although he approaches “the situation” from several angles, we will deal primarily his thoughts regarding the need for a “revolutionary Christianity.”

#### Revolutionary Christianity

For Ellul, “revolutionary Christianity” represents a type of faith and presence in the world that does not get swept up into alliance with politics, religion, or any other hu-

man system or institution. Rather, it is a Christianity that is distinctively embedded in the community of faith, thoughtful, and serious about its identification with Jesus Christ as Head, Shepherd, and Master. It is clear that by using the term “revolutionary Christianity,” Ellul does not intend to stir a physical revolt or war against the government, nor does he imply that the situation of the Christian in the world necessitates becoming a “culture warrior” or warrior of any sort.<sup>41</sup> Instead, he likens the place of both Christians and the church in the world to what he terms the “revolutionist position” in history suggesting that this position is vastly different from conformists in the past or in the present. To be a revolutionary, Ellul claims, is not the normal course of history. It involves an individual deciding not to follow the beaten path, but to exercise free will in such a way that “he pits against all the constraints and conventions which surround him.” (p. 30). For the Christian, this position is an act of “superhuman effort for the sake of a hope which is beyond himself,” a position that confronts tacit religious thought with the reality of a living, indwelling God who is active in the world (1989, p. 29).

Contrary to what it might appear at first blush, Ellul’s revolutionary Christianity is not wholly anarchistic, but a type of faith that has a peculiar flavor –a faith that is situated in presence rather than tradition. Much more than an idea or a metaphor, revolutionary Christianity is a daily reality; it is a way of being in the world without succumbing to its ways. Citing Paul’s Letter to the Romans (12:2-4), Ellul describes the relationship of the Christian to society thusly: “Be not conformed to this world,” writes the apostle, “but be transformed by the renewal of your mind. . . .” The importance of these two ideas - ‘be not conformed’ but ‘be transformed’ occupy much Ellulian thought. In fact, in terms of the church’s presence in the earth, they are two sides to the same coin –ideas that carry over into every aspect of life in the church, from its mode of operation, methods of evangelism and very idea of ministry to its infrastructure, the way it is perceived by others, and its primary function as witness or sign of the reality of God. How this manifests itself in contemporary ecclesial praxis is a major part of the dialectical conundrum embedded in the subject of popular culture and the church.

A prominent example of this problematic is the rash of business model materials, marketing strategies, and church growth consultants used in churches throughout the United States.<sup>42</sup> From Rick Warren and C. Peter Wagner to Jack Hayford and Robert

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<sup>41</sup> Some 21st century pundits use this term as a means to express the need to return to more clear-cut traditional values. Others, theologians and opinion leaders such as Andy Crouch, Charles Colson, and others have framed the need for such a return as a fight or war to redeem culture. See details at: <http://www.culture-making.com/about/andy-crouch/> and “About us” at <http://www.breakpoint.org/about-bp>.

<sup>42</sup> Among the many examples of this trend is the following church growth consultancy business that promises to increase revenue and numbers. Earl B. Hall, professional coach and internet marketing. “How to Grow Your Ministry - church growth that works.” June 7, 2010. [retrieved June 30, 2010]<http://www.earllhall.net/internet-marketing/how-to-grow-your-ministry-church-growth-that-works/> For more examples, see also Ken Godevenos, Accord Resolution Services; 2010. [retrieved June 30, 2010]<http://accordconsulting.com/?page-id=158>. Also of note are the following websites:

Schuller, the implementation of marketing strategies for church growth and revenue increase is nothing new, but using language and methods that combine marketing models with church life is a trend that has found much traction and seems to be becoming the norm in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. An outgrowth of utilizing these techniques is that the church is distracted from its primary function as *a sign* of the active presence of Christ in the world to something that more closely resembles a business venture, social club, or nonprofit charity.

Another example is the traditional role of a single pastor/parish priest whose primary duties are preparation and dissemination of a sermon or homily every Sunday morning. Without detracting from the other valuable socio-spiritual duties taken on by clergy it must be noted that this monologic model diminishes the laity's responsibility. Because of the long tradition of this model, many churches have become comfortable with a type of pastoral care that values institutional organization over mutuality. The result may be unintended, but adopting organizational models of the business world indubitably fosters hierarchical leadership with "top-down" authority structures rather than a mode of operation that functions even remotely like a family. As it continues, Christians are faced each Sunday with the false idea that the pastor and the building are the most significant aspects of the church. For Ellul, this makes the role of the layman particularly significant and more difficult than the clergy's role, for, unlike the paid clergy member, the lay person:

[. . .] in particular, cannot be separated from the world, [. . .] for the Christian is not free to lead his life as he would like to do, so also the Christian layman has to submit to a mechanical solidarity which hinders him from playing the drama of his faith. He is part of the whole body of humankind . . . (1989, p 6).

Implications of the layman's role in the Body of Christ are many; it is a subject about which Ellul has much to say. However, the layman's role in the church is beyond the scope of this essay. Instead, we come to the idea of the City. Just what *does* Ellul mean by "the city?"

#### The City

For Ellul, the city is symbolic of all that is amiss in the world, from the looming evils of war, organized crime, prostitution, economic injustice, and violence of every ilk, to the mundane repetitiveness of traffic snarls, listlessness, avarice, greed and just plain, old, human boredom. In Ellulian thought, all of this corruption begins with "the city's curse," which stems from man's distinctive step outside of fellowship with God in the Garden, in the Genesis narrative.<sup>43</sup> Writing about this in one of his most riveting works, *The Meaning of the City*, Ellul sought to bring insight to the cyclical struggles of the Church. In contradistinction to the Garden's representation of a life

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[http://doubleyourchurchattendance.com/?gclid=CIV0\\_kf2WyKICFQHGsgodkhBk5w](http://doubleyourchurchattendance.com/?gclid=CIV0_kf2WyKICFQHGsgodkhBk5w), and  
<http://www.churchcentral.com/article/Translating-Church-Growth-theory-into-action>

<sup>43</sup> To understand his concept of the city in greater depth Ellul draws readers' attention to the beginning of recorded history to locate one of the earliest examples of this curse. Here, in the book of Genesis we see Cain, son of Adam and Eve, who built the first city, a place that he named after his son,



of organic splendor and vitality, the city is symbolic of a life dependent upon the tools of humanity's own making, and life outside of fellowship with God.

Strategies and plans associated with the city's curse carry over into the church. In particular, when the church mimics the administrative necessities of the city it sets itself up for weaknesses and decline. For Ellul, the city is always a place that is subject to "the sociological claws governing administration," a situation he describes as having dominance in the city.<sup>44</sup> When these "claws" embed themselves into the church the result is disastrous. One ongoing example of this disaster is when the church mimics the administrative necessities of the city and treats parishioners as constituents or clients rather than family members. Rather than nurturing a life-giving communion with God and each other this often leads to dehumanizing effects on personhood. Instead of functioning as the "light of the world" pointing the way to wholeness and salvation, the church reduces itself to a mere religious organization incapable of nourishing the "life abundant" Jesus promised his disciples..

In positing "the city" as the symbolic "construction of man," Ellul describes it as a place where people attempt to divest themselves of the quandaries and uncertainties of the human condition - of all that has resulted from separation from God in the Garden. Rather than flowing in the fecundity of human relationships, life in the city foists the values of the world on its inhabitants. Like Cain, people are drawn to the city in hopes of finding greater freedom and comfort –a place to call home, a place where life outside the presence of God might be tolerable.

Similar to the association with popular culture, the blending of politics with religion has also been highly influential in reaping a disastrous return. In fact, the infusion of politics into the *ekklesia* represents a defining moment of change for the Church, establishing a means by which the Gospel was no longer primarily spread by the witness of a community of people caring for each other in Jesus' Name, rather this same community coming together by governmental edict. This change did not occur slowly, over many centuries. Rather, once Constantine was converted to Christianity it became not only safer for Christians to express themselves in public, but politically correct. When, in 323 A.D. the Emperor Constantine mandated that the pagan temples become houses of Christian worship, the newly converted believers were expected to meet each Sunday in a centralized location. Ellul speaks directly to this transformation

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Enoch . Cain was cast out of God's presence because he murdered his brother, Abel, and instead of humbling himself and acknowledging his evil deed, the son of Eve determined to find a way to survive on his own. Cain, therefore, continued the separation from his creator which began in the Garden, and relying on his own natural resources continued - in a sense –to eat of the fruit of his own knowledge of "what is good."

<sup>44</sup> An interesting correlation with Ellul's view is found in the New Testament in Hebrews 13:12-14, which reads: "Jesus also suffered and died outside the city's gate in order that He might purify and consecrate the people through the shedding of His own blood, and set them apart as holy - for God. Let us go forth, from all that would prevent us, to Him outside the camp . . . For here we have no permanent city, but we are looking for the one which is to come."

of the faith when it morphed from a practice that centered in a living, active community of participation and “word” to a sacralized building:

It is evident that when temples dedicated to the gods of Greece and Rome were confiscated and baptized as Christian churches, the very architectural structure would remind people forcibly of the ancient religion, for example, by the division into a sacred place and a “profane” place (*profanum*, ‘before the sanctuary’) (1989, 61).

This seemingly small change in venue created sweeping changes in early church praxis, moving the “place” of worship to a specific locale rather than a mobile, life-sharing people. The change created a new environment for church life, redefining it as place instead of “a people” or “a family” gathering around the living Word (i.e., Jesus Christ). The church now became “a building,” and the gathering of believers became an event rather than “a life” shared together.<sup>45</sup> Over time, what was deemed holy or pious came to be associated with what could be seen, was separate, distinct from culture, and objectified.<sup>46</sup>

The significance of this architectural change must not be minimized. Prior to Constantine and the external and often propitiously convenient conversions to Christianity, early believers gathered house-to-house. Ellul refers to this period of Church history as “primitive Christianity” and explains that:

The first Christians had no particular reverence for the places where believers met and where they heard God’s word and celebrated the sacraments. But once such places became splendid imperial buildings and the theory of the sacraments changes, these places, now radically different from others, were invested with the beliefs that appertained to pagan temples. God was *especially* present in such places (1989, p. 61).

Now, instead of the mystery of the Gospel, which was, as Paul described to the local believers gathering in Colossae as “Christ in you”<sup>47</sup> the living, organic expression of the community of faith, the church became demystified, formalized.<sup>48</sup> Whereas, the faith of those who followed Jesus as the Christ was initially based on Christ as person and *topos*, now, new elements of paganism emerged as the place of worship shifted from the “living temple” embodied by each believer to a particular building, or what soon became

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<sup>45</sup> As Winston Churchill wrote: “We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us,” so the structural organization of the city shapes the church as it takes root. Winston Churchill, British House of Commons, Oct. 28, 1943.

<sup>46</sup> Ellul explains this exchange further when writing about the way the visible indemnifies the sacred. “the visible that characterizes the sacred makes a massive entry into the church, and in this way believers unwittingly take the path of paganism. The visual object is typical of the sacral world and very quickly becomes sacred itself” (SOC p. 65).

<sup>47</sup> The “you” here is plural. Paul was writing to a gathering of believers in Colossae, not an individual reader.

<sup>48</sup> Colossians 1: 20-27 Paul, the itinerant apostle/preacher is speaking to the church in Colossae. The “you” is plural, but often interpreted by those reading the Bible as indicative of the individual. When read in the correct context it is clear that Paul was directing his greetings and admonitions to the church as a people - a community - not a place.

known as the “house of God.”<sup>49</sup> This occurrence Ellul refers to as part of “the mutation.” As it takes place in the church “[t]he sense of the sacred thus reappears. What is more, the church is now divided into two parts, like pagan temples. The more profane the other part, where there religious ceremony takes place, is for the priests”(1989, p. 61). And so we see, even from the beginnings of ecclesial history, there was the tendency to bifurcate the Church and the wider culture, separating God’s presence –what is holy - from his involvement in every aspect of life. A further exploration of this shift is called for if we are to gain insight to the subject of the church and its relation to popular culture.

In the early centuries of Christianity the Church functioned as vibrant community; after Constantine the move toward entrenched institutionalism became more apparent. For some historians this change is recorded as helpful to the expansion of the Christianity, but it so deeply changed the essence and concept of the church that it may more significantly be perceived as a near-fatal gash in the Body of Christ, for as Ellul explains, the “Christian God is a hidden God. Nor can any image of Jesus be preserved or imagined. We have here a religion of the Word alone, and Jesus is himself the totality of the Word, living and not ritualized.” (1986, p. 59) This is not to say that ritual or pagan syncretism did not exist prior to the 4<sup>th</sup> century, rather that the movement away from meeting informally in individual domiciles represents one of the most significant changes, one that not only ushered in many changes in church praxis but also paved the way for the message of Jesus Christ to be presented in a skewed way. Religious acts of worship became increasingly associated with the building rather than with the message or the community. As Ellul describes, “To mark the fact that the church is a sacred place, people had to make certain gestures on entering, such as covering themselves, genuflecting, or sprinkling themselves with holy water. In such gestures we again see belief in the sacred” (1986, p. 62).

How this change in form and environment restructured church practice is a matter of history, but the way it reformulated thinking about the nature of the church and its definition is a matter that has been less noted. In the meantime, most *everything* changed. Whereas in primitive Christianity the Good News centered on the redemption of Christ and his central place in the midst of believers who gathered as his “body” and community of faith (Acts 2 - 4), in the fourth century the emphasis began to switch from redemption and *koinonia* to organization and place.<sup>50</sup> The church morphed from “a people” to “an event.” The practice of allowing political influence to set the tone for the church in the fourth century was central to the change in the church’s course. All of this is inextricably linked to a devastating mutation of the actual faith, not of the sort that Ellul finds necessary to becoming the sign or witness of the church. Today,

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<sup>49</sup> *Topos*, a Greek word meaning “place.”

<sup>50</sup> *Koinonia*, shared life together, was practiced throughout the first century as a way of life. This “shared life” was not always communal as it appeared to be in the early chapters of the book of Acts, but it did involve the *communion*, or coming together of the young Christians over shared meals and shared responsibility for the vibrancy of the church.

popular culture is in a similar position as it is situated to set the tone for contemporary church praxis.

## Popular Culture and the Church

Along with secular marketing strategies, business models, and corporate power structures of organizational management, popular culture has played an increasingly significant role in the church, one that often sets the tone and style for services and agenda. This has been evident in previous generations to some degree, but today –because media are pervasive and ubiquitous –the artifacts of popular culture have become more akin to a new language than merely tools to help disseminate the Gospel message. The language of popular culture creates an environment in which everything else is understood - including what it means to be a Christian. Media ecologist Peter Fallon discusses this inherent bias, explaining that “[. . .] different media impose upon the societies that make use of them different specific and identifiable - though frequently invisible - metaphysical ‘frameworks’ through which we understand ourselves, our lives, our societies, and our world.” (2009. p. 24) Thus, in many ways, popular culture becomes the message itself.

The various rhetorics of popular culture present in church music, architecture, worship style, and leadership paradigms have long been aspects that influence church functioning, but are especially curious today because of the exponential way they are disseminated through mass media. The reach and influence of popular culture on people and institutions is magnified by an environment of digital media, and thusly require a good deal more critical analysis when considering their use in the church.

We can begin to see this as we look a bit more closely at the relatively recent trend of the melding of popular music with Christianity as the introduction of “Jesus music” in the 1960s.<sup>51</sup> Whereas “Jesus Music,” and then contemporary Christian music (CCM), began as indigenous expressions of newfound faith associated with youth culture, the rock style soon found its way into the local churches and eventually morphed into what is currently called “contemporary worship.”<sup>52</sup> Today, for many congregations “the music” is now synonymous with worship, the words being used interchangeably.<sup>53</sup> William Romanowski paints a vivid picture of this evolution, pointing to the way the popular music found entree into the church. “In the absence of a critical faith perspective that

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<sup>51</sup> In the 1960s music became an influential force in the church and has since been known as CCM (Contemporary Christian Music) or CCW (Contemporary Christian Worship).

<sup>52</sup> The “CCM” term was apparently coined by the founder of *CCM Magazine*, a holy version of *Rolling Stone* just for Christians.

<sup>53</sup> Throughout civilization, music has served many communicational purposes, carrying the stories of families and tribes from generation to generation through whatever popular medium of the day. “Whether it is spoken, written, or sung, reiteration of the meta-narrative or “the story” of God’s intervention with humanity plays a primary role in the formation of one’s faith. When the message is embedded in as powerful a medium as popular music as it is in other expressions of popular culture such as film, television, radio, and literature and drama, the persuasive influence of the message is magnified.

shapes aesthetic and commercial ventures, CCM adopted the goals and strategies of the secular mainstream commercial market - the culture of celebrity and hyperbole, sensation, consumption, mass identification - and ultimately equated these with doing ministry”(p. 11). Popular music is but one example, but as the artifacts of popular culture appear in the church with increasing force increasing changes appear, ultimately in the framework through which the church understands itself.

Another example of this trend to adopt popular culture as a means to an end appears in the emergence of personal mobile computing. As digital devices become increasingly ubiquitous many local churches have adopted the programs and practices of digital culture. But, just as architecture and music have altered the identity, mission, and perception of the church, the aforementioned expansion of the online church is creating an entirely new understanding of what it means *to be the church*. In one way, this expansion online may seem to disseminate the message with greater expediency and efficiency, but it also completely changes the meaning of the church as actual community of faith/family/body of Christ. Proponents of the online church point to the many ways the message of the Gospel can reach into the lives of those who might never step into a church building, but experiencing the church virtually also helps people avoid the messiness of human relationships. As much as this may seem desirable, without local interpersonal relationships the church becomes little more than another means to express one’s individuality. A highly personal spirituality, something akin to a *faith du jour*, begins to emerge rather than presence and participation in a local community of faith. It may allow those who are physically disabled to enjoy sermons, prayer connection, and “discussion” from a distance but simultaneously relieves the responsibility for a local congregation to reach out to those in need of transport.

On the face of it, the infusion of popular culture into the church has some merit if the accepted view of the church is as an agent of societal change whose primary mission is evangelism. However, when that prevailing view is confronted by a more biblical view of the church as Body/Family/Community, popular culture does more than provide a persuasive draw or relevance. Essentially, the blending transforms the experience of the church into something that is far removed from its mission as faithful witness or sign.

Certainly, the changes that transformed the primitive Church into an institutionalized entity occurred over time, but the propensity to substitute form for function has notoriously been a part of every era in the ecclesiastical age. As well, the drive for rank, certainty, and structure has rarely been missing from the church. The desire for centralized, visible power among the people of God has been oppositional to the notion of divine leadership - even in the church -and this has been so since the beginning of recorded time. How does this relate to the infusion of popular culture in the church?

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It may even be said that music becomes a language through which the Spirit can speak and a means by which tribes can communicate the sacred truths of their history with each other. Excerpted in part from: Bennett, Stephanie. "Contemporary Christian Music Goes Digital,." *Understanding Evangelical Media*. Eds. Q. Schultze and R. Woods. Grand Rapids: InterVarsity Press.

Precisely in that the values of “the city” are in direct juxtaposition to the values of the Kingdom of God, and as the church continues to opt for efficiency, power, and relevance, it will have them, along with all the other ills that are attached to survival in the city. And so, as consumer-driven values grow in prominence within the walls of the church more people may be drawn to visit, and even declare that they are Christians, but what they are receiving is often far removed from the pure Gospel.

Understanding Ellul’s stance on the Kingdom of God and applying his metaphor of the city one might see that being part of the *ekklesia* of God has more to do with presenting an alternative way of life than being relevant or approachable to the wider culture. Rather than living in the chains of “the city,” Christians are called to live differently. How so? Simply, the church is called to “love one another” and in that love and mutuality, walk in freedom from the powers and structures that produce institutionalized mentalities in the world.<sup>54</sup> Key to understanding this radical call is the importance of grappling with the fact that all the violence, corruption, and oppression that has been ever-present in ‘the city’ has no place *in* the church, that is, as a part of the church’s government or organizational structure. The church, as totally separate from the world, exists to function in a way that is distinctively different from the competitive, money-seeking, power-tripping corruption of the world’s systems, whether these values are ensconced in politics, a consumer economy, or the popular culture of the day. Yet, in understanding the decisive conflict associated with the “city’s” moral and deathladen weight Ellul emphasizes the utter importance of the church’s mission in the world to be fully present. He writes: “... it is by placing themselves at this point of contact that Christian can be truly ‘present’ in the world and can carry on effective social or political work, by the grace of God.”(1989, p. 20). Essentially then, the church’s form is not consistent with its primary function.

## Summary

In dealing with the perplexities of our time many church leaders look to popular culture as the great equalizer - an aspect of life that is common to all, namely, a means of equalizing or leveling the field of engagement among Christians of such diverse background and belief. Seen as a means to engage those who are not believers and draw them into the community of faith, these leaders seem to have placed hope in the idea that because it is a commonplace, pop culture will have a harmonizing, coalescing effect. Using popular music, film, television programming, YouTube clips, and social media, the hope is that it will simply make the church relevant to a new generation. This may make much sense except for one thing: the artifacts of popular culture become so entwined with the message that they soon become the ground upon which Christians

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<sup>54</sup> 1 John 4: 7-8 is one among many of the teachings of Christ that focuses the attention in the church to a call to love - not just “the world,” but each other. In fact there are over fifty mentions of “one another” in the New Testament alone, each nudging the new believers in the first century to relate to one another in kindness, generosity and as a family. “Love one another, deeply from the heart...”

meet - that which they have in common instead of the true ground of the church, which is Christ. This is no small thing, for the centrality of Christ in the church is the key differentiator between social clubs, community organizations, and every other human association that is not the church.

To be clear, my aim in this explication is not intended to thwart the church's engagement with the wider society through popular culture or deny its possible usefulness. Nor is this the tact taken by Ellul in his critical examination of the church as it intersects with the wider world. Rather, it is to uncover the rippling effects and unforeseen consequences of this approach; to create awareness that these techniques work like yeast to dislodge and distract the church from its core mission, which is primarily *to be* that family/body/community -sharing life together in the *ekklesia* - a gathering that is free from the demands of the city-free to be a sign and a witness to the wider society.

In these pages I have made no pretense to supply the reader with a comprehensive treatment of Ellulian thought regarding the church. Instead, grappling with several key Ellulian concepts I have aspired to "stir the pot" of contemporary ecclesial thinking about the relevance of popular culture, for the proponents of popular culture in the church fail to realize that as the music, film, poetry and the rest of popular culture make their way into normal church practice, these things become a new language, shaping, reforming, restructuring reality. This new reality is often antithetical to the organic nature of the church, placing focus on "fitting in" with the many media-driven cultural expectations rather than proclaiming a solution to the dullness and vanity of worldly pursuits. Ultimately, then, not only is popular culture mostly irrelevant to the church's mission, but its blurring with the church ultimately makes it even more difficult to discern the church in the midst of the world. Why? Because it is embedded in the structure of power that mimics that of corporate America, celebrity, entertainment, and the market (in general) that makes the church about "being relevant" rather than "being family." Without the family/body/community foundation of the church all else built upon it is doomed to crumble. The church, like salt "loses its savor" and ceases to be that faithful witness to a different quality of life, the life "in Christ" that Ellul so avidly proposes.

Escape from the city is no small task. As the overlap between religion and pop culture becomes more entrenched, the differences between the two become increasingly indiscernible. If the church is truly all about the number of bodies in the pews, expansion of the property, the size of the sanctuary, and the "reach" of the pastor's voice, then using the artifacts of popular culture as a mechanism to attain these goals may work. But, if the mission of the church is to remain more closely aligned with the biblical metaphors of body, family, a community of faith, the artifacts of popular culture will not - cannot - serve as the glue that holds the church together in cultural relevance.

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# Illusions of Freedom: Thomas Merton and Jacques Ellul on Propaganda by Jeffrey Shaw

*Jeffrey Shaw is a graduate student and adjunct professor at Salve Regina University in Newport, RI, and an instructor in the Strategy and Policy Department at the Naval War College. This paper will be expanded upon in a doctoral dissertation on the impact of technology on the human condition in the thinking of Thomas Merton and Jacques Ellul.*

"Reading Jacques Ellul's book *The Technological Society*. Great, full of firecrackers. A fine provocative book and one that really makes sense. . . I wonder if all the Fathers [currently convened in Rome] are aware of all the implications of a technological society."<sup>55</sup>

What would Thomas Merton, a Roman Catholic monk, find so interesting in the writings of a French Protestant philosopher? What would compel Merton to mention Ellul's thoughts on the technological society in his journal? It turns out that Merton and Ellul actually have a great deal in common. Their respective views on the condition of society in the middle of the twentieth century are remarkably similar. This paper examines Merton's and Ellul's views on propaganda, some intellectual antecedents to their thinking, as well as the connections between Ellul's view of the concept of technique and Merton's view of the "mass man."

While some Americans are familiar with Thomas Merton's writing, few are familiar with Jacques Ellul. A French philosopher of the mid twentieth century, Ellul has been described as both a scholar and a lay ecclesiastic.<sup>56</sup> Ellul's style is often considered verbose and dense, and his work should be approached as a whole rather than trying to figure out his worldview through reading only one or two of his major works. While it is not the intent in this paper to examine his worldview and his extensive writing on Christian faith, there is one topic that will need elaboration, and that is his concept of *technique*. This fundamental idea is central to most of Ellul's writing on modern society and on the condition of the modern world and man's place in it. In order to understand Ellul's central thesis, and also to understand the similarities between Merton's and Ellul's points of view regarding the condition of man in the modern world, it is first necessary to address the concept of technique.

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<sup>55</sup> Thomas Merton, *Dancing in the Water of Life*. Edited by Robert Daggy (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1997): 159-160.

<sup>56</sup> David Menninger, "Jacques Ellul: A Tempered Profile." *The Review of Politics* 37 no. 2 (April 1975): 235.

## Ellul's *La Technique*

Ellul defines *la technique* as “the totality of methods, rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency in every field of human activity”<sup>57</sup> It is important to distinguish the idea of *technique* from technology itself. The products that result from advanced technology should be seen as only the most visible manifestation of technique. As Ellul clearly states, *la technique* pervades every field of human endeavor, whether it be politics, medicine, or education. Propaganda is a phenomenon which is also subject to the demands of *technique*, but there is a symbiotic relationship between technique and propaganda. Ellul states, “I want to emphasize that the study of propaganda must be conducted within the context of the technological society. Propaganda, which is defined as information presented to compel individuals to act in a certain, preconceived manner, is called upon to solve problems created by technology, to play on maladjustments, and to integrate the individual into a technological world. In the midst of increasing mechanization and technological organization, propaganda is simply the means used to persuade man to submit with good grace.”<sup>58</sup> It is along this line of thinking that we see the first comparisons between Ellul's thoughts on propaganda as contrasted to Merton.

## Merton's “Mass Man”

Thomas Merton is a well known Catholic author and monk. He is the author of *The Seven Storey Mountain* as well as numerous other books and stories. Like Ellul, Merton was concerned with the moral and spiritual state of the world and sought to not only explain how man had come to such a state, but how to transcend the situation as well.

While Merton never met Ellul or corresponded with him directly, there are citations in Merton's journals that reference the idea of technique, as well as numerous topics in Merton's writing that correlate quite well with the concept of technique in general. Merton's views on propaganda—its nature and its effect on modern society—are quite similar to Ellul's.

While Ellul presents his idea of technique as the primary obstacle to human fulfillment, Merton presents the idea of the “mass man” in many of his works. The mass man is essentially one that has surrendered the autonomy of a thinking individual for the comforts and conveniences of the modern world. In other words, mass man can be seen as the man or woman unknowingly cast into an allotted position in society based on the unseen and all powerful demands of technique. Merton says of this person “The inner life of the mass man, alienated and leveled in the existential sense, is a dull,

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<sup>57</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*. Translated by John Wilkerson (New York: Vintage Books, 1964): xxv.

<sup>58</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda*. Translated by Konrad Keller & Jean Lerner (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965): xvii-xviii.

collective routine of popular fantasies maintained in existence by the collective dream that goes on, without interruption, in the mass media.”<sup>59</sup>

What role does Merton ascribe to propaganda? Much like Ellul, he sees propaganda as conditioning man to accept the reality of his condition as mass man. Merton believes that “action is not governed by moral reason but by political expediency and the demands of technology—translated into simple abstract forms of propaganda”.<sup>60</sup> He goes on to say that this propaganda conditions the mass of men and women to react in a certain way to various stimuli.

Merton mentions Ellul specifically in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*. Referring to propaganda, Merton states that “Jacques Ellul shows that a mass of factual and correct information can, even if not illogically presented, have the same effect as completely false and irrational propaganda.”<sup>61</sup> While Ellul and Merton both spend some time in their respective writing dealing with particular forms of propaganda, such as Communist and Capitalist propaganda, not to mention Nazi propaganda, it is in a general, all encompassing propaganda that is found in the mass media, such as the press, television, and through advertising that the similarities between Ellul and Merton on the topic of propaganda are most pronounced.

Both Ellul and Merton share the idea that man cannot choose to disregard the message that is continually broadcast through propaganda. According to Merton, one of the primary reasons for this is that in the West, it is customary to assume that technological progress is seen only as something inherently good, as well as *inevitable*.<sup>62</sup> The idea that technological progress is inevitable is congruent with Ellul’s explanation of automatism as a defining characteristic of technique. Ellul explains that technique is self-augmenting, as he writes in *The Technological Society*, “let no one say that man is the agent of technical progress . . . and that it is he who chooses among possible techniques. He can decide *only* in favor of the technique that gives maximum efficiency. But this is not choice.”<sup>63</sup>

Merton shares a similar observation concerning freedom and choice when he states, “Because we live in a womb of collective illusion, our freedom remains abortive. They can never be used. We are prisoners of a process, a dialectic of false promises and real deceptions ending in futility.”<sup>64</sup> Merton’s view that technical progress is inevitable is similar to Ellul’s view that technique determines its own path, irrespective of man’s choices. Regarding choice, “Merton saw the effect of the secular myth of progress as a surrendering of human freedom and spontaneity to an unseen yet pervasive principle of efficiency that promises to fulfill our desires if we accept our roles as cogs in the

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<sup>59</sup> Thomas Merton, *Mystics and Zen Masters* (New York: Noonday Press, 1961): 268.

<sup>60</sup> Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (New York: Image Books, 1965): 65.

<sup>61</sup> Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 236.

<sup>62</sup> Thomas Merton, *Turning Towards the World*. Edited by Victor A. Collins (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996): 4.

<sup>63</sup> Ellul, *Technological Society*, 80.

<sup>64</sup> Thomas Merton, *Raids on the Unspeakable* (Abbey of Gethsemani: New Directions, 1961): 14.

machine.”<sup>65</sup> Here we see similarities to not only the role of technique as defined by Ellul, but also the notion that our desires are fulfilled for us, and that it is through propaganda that these desires are both manufactured and made known to us.

Merton hoped for some degree of control over technology. He recorded in his diary that “those who foresee and work for a social order—a transformation of the world—[must work] according to these principles: primacy of the person . . . control of technology . . . etc.”<sup>66</sup> Control of technology can be seen in this light as either the freedom from the demands of technique, or a refusal to continue to participate in the mindless consumption so prevalent in American society as Merton goes on to say in the same diary entry, “primacy of wisdom and love, against materialism, hedonism, etc.”<sup>67</sup>

Merton’s reading of Hannah Arendt’s *The Human Condition* influenced his thinking on the relationship between man and technology. While it is sometimes difficult, as we have seen, to distinguish in Merton’s writing between his opposition to the products of technology and the process of technological “progress,” it is clear in his reflection on Arendt that his opposition is to the process itself. This line of thinking more clearly parallels Ellul. Merton notes in his journal that Arendt believes that “Being has been replaced by process. The process is everything. Modern man sees only how to fit without friction into productive processes and in this he finds ‘happiness.’”<sup>68</sup> This thought is remarkably congruent with Ellul’s observation on the effects of technique although there is one major difference. Merton seems to imply that man has chosen to fit himself into the process whereas Ellul would argue that technique molds man into the process unknowingly. For Ellul, technique determines its own path, whereas Merton, in his reflection on *The Human Condition*, seems to imply that man has chosen to go along with process willingly, yet without adequately reflecting on the price he has paid.

Soren Kierkegaard’s writing is an antecedent to the thought of both Ellul and Merton. In *The Present Age*, Kierkegaard, a Danish philosopher of the midnineteenth century, presents the concept of leveling. Examining this idea will lead us to conclude that both Ellul and Merton have incorporated some of its basic tenets into their own thinking on the condition of man and society in their age, which is about a century after Kierkegaard.

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<sup>65</sup> Christopher J. Kelly, “Thomas Merton’s Critique of Technological Civilization,” *The Ellul Forum* no. 21 (July 1998): 5.

<sup>66</sup> Merton, *Turning Towards the World*, 10.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

## Kierkegaard as Antecedent

Soren Kierkegaard refers to leveling as an “abstract power.”<sup>69</sup> He also refers to his times as an “age of advertisement and publicity.”<sup>70</sup> The notion of advertising is important to the process of leveling, through which man is forced into a herd-like existence, devoid of passion and individuality. Describing the forces responsible for the process of leveling and its results, Kierkegaard states that “the Press is an abstraction . . . which in conjunction with the passionless and reflective character of the age produces that abstract phantom: a public which in turn is really the leveling power.”<sup>71</sup> Merton picks up on this theme in his own writing when he states, as we have already seen from his quote in *Mystics and Zen Masters*, that “the inner life of the mass man, alienated and leveled in the existential sense, is a dull, collective routine of popular fantasies maintained in existence by the collective dream that goes on, without interruption, in the mass media.”<sup>72</sup>

Kierkegaard makes a point to stress that his age is lacking in passion. Both Ellul and Merton also make reference to their societies lacking passion. Merton says that Western society is in the grip of pseudopassion, “fabricated in the imagination and centered on fantasies.”<sup>73</sup> Ellul claims that in his view, technique “attacks man, impairs the source of his vitality, and takes away his mystery.”<sup>74</sup> In presenting an idea that corresponds to both Kierkegaard’s leveling process and to the idea of technique as a force which will act on all men, Merton states that “the abstract leveling process, that self-combustion of the human race produced by the friction which arises when an individual ceases to exist as singled out by religion, is bound to continue like a trade wind until it consumes everything.”<sup>75</sup> Ellul does not specifically reference any of Kierkegaard’s philosophy or his ideas in general in *Propaganda*, but he does make reference to him in *The Technological Society*. He states that “In the middle of the nineteenth century, when technique had hardly begun to develop, another voice was raised in prophetic warning against it. The voice was Kierkegaard’s. But his warnings . . . were not heeded. They were too close to the truth.”<sup>76</sup>

## Conclusion

We can see that examining Jacques Ellul’s and Thomas Merton’s writing on propaganda, it would appear that we have little hope of recapturing anything resembling an

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<sup>69</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, *The Present Age*. Translated by Alexander Dru (New York: Harper & Row, 1962): 52.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>72</sup> Merton, *Mystics and Zen Masters*, 268.

<sup>73</sup> Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, p. 32.

<sup>74</sup> Ellul, *Technological Society*, 415.

<sup>75</sup> Merton, *Mystics and Zen Masters*, 264.

<sup>76</sup> Ellul, *Technological Society*, 55.

authentic human life outside of the bonds of the mass. However, at least one of the two writers offers us hope. Thomas Merton believes that through *kenosis* and *metanoia*, one can begin to escape from the bonds imposed on society by the twin pillars of spiritual malaise and the increasing demands of modernization, secularization, and “progress.” *Kenosis*, or the selfemptying that one finds in the mystical traditions, is one of the great lessons that the West can learn from the East. Kenosis is an ego-shattering practice.<sup>77</sup> *Metanoia* is a Greek word for the concept of total personal transformation.<sup>78</sup> Emphasizing either of these practices and focusing on spiritual renewal through contemplation, one can transcend the mass. However, Ellul offers us no way out of our predicament. His assessment of technique is more of an autopsy of modern society than any kind of remedy for escaping the grip that technique holds on us all. Concerning the completion of the edifice of technical society, he says that “it will not be a universal concentration camp, because it will be guilty of no atrocity. It will not be insane, because everything will be ordered. we shall have nothing more to lose, and nothing to win. we shall be rewarded with everything our hearts ever desired. . . and the supreme luxury of the society of technical necessity will be to grant the bonus of useless revolt and of an acquiescent smile.”<sup>79</sup>

Jacques Ellul and Thomas Merton share many similarities when it comes to their views on the nature of propaganda. They both see propaganda as a force that compels man to accept his position in a technological society, as in Ellul, or as the mass man, as per Merton. They can both be seen to have intellectual antecedents in the philosophy of Soren Kierkegaard. While Ellul offers us no hope of liberating ourselves from the clutches of propaganda, Merton offers us at least some consolation in the form of ascetic withdrawal and moral renewal.

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<sup>77</sup> Henri Nouwen, *Thomas Merton: Contemplative Critic* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1975): 83.

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# Book Notes

## Jacques Ellul On Freedom, Love, and Power

Compiled, edited, and translated by  
Willem H. Vanderburg  
University of Toronto Press, 2010. 247 pp.

Willem Vanderburg is the long-time Director of the Centre for Technology and Social Development at the University of Toronto. He is the author of *The Growth of Minds and Cultures: A Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Experience* (1985), *The Labyrinth of Technology* (2000) and *Living in the Labyrinth of Technology* (2005) a massive attempt to analyze, understand, and explain in depth our contemporary civilization. Vanderburg's 1981 interviews with Jacques Ellul were edited and published as *Perspectives on Our Age: Jacques Ellul Speaks on His Life and Work* first in 1981, and recently in an expanded edition (2004).

Vanderburg was a postdoctoral fellow in Bordeaux, studying with Ellul, from 1973 to 1978. He has been a tireless, impassioned promoter, organizer, and interpreter of the legacy of Jacques Ellul. *Jacques Ellul On Freedom, Love, and Power* may be Vanderburg's most interesting contribution yet. A fuller review of Ellul's work here as edited and presented by Vanderburg will have to await another time but here is an introductory note.

This volume is Vanderburg's edited translation of audio tapes of some of Ellul's Bible studies (over 200 of which are archived in the Ellul Collection at Wheaton College). Part One is Ellul's Bible studies on Genesis 1 - 3, taped by Vanderburg. Part Two is Ellul's studies of Job 32 - 42, taped by Dr. Franck Brugerolle. Part Three is Ellul's studies of the parables of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's Gospel, taped by Vanderburg. Part Four is a brief study by Ellul of the opening of John's Gospel. Vanderburg concludes the book with his own summary of Ellul's amazing exposition of the Book of Revelation.

-David W. Gill

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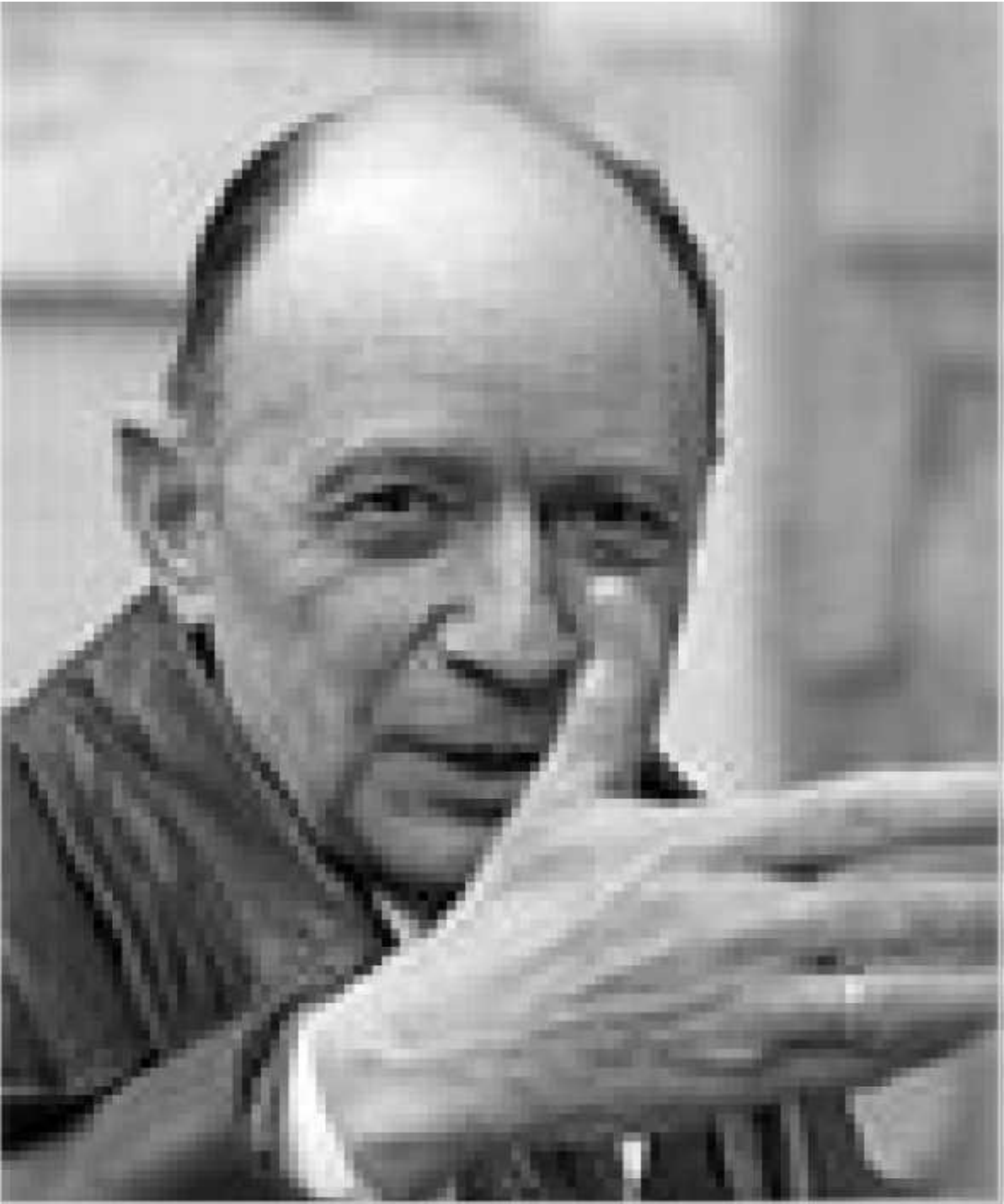
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## **From the Editor**

This issue of the *Ellul Forum* deals broadly with Ellul and Anarchism. The first two essays look at various aspects of Ellul’s biblical interpretation with regard to anarchism. Thomas Bridges examines how Ellul uses the rise of kingship in 1 Samuel 8, arguing that a close examination of the Deuteronomistic History very much supports Ellul’s reading in *Anarchy and Christianity*. Wes Howard-Brook takes a different approach, and draws from Ellul’s ideas in *Meaning of the City*. The very idea of civilization—a way of life based on cities—according to the Bible is at the root of much violence and domination in human history. Wes Howard-Brook tries to advance Ellul’s analysis further by asking whether the origin stories in Genesis “challenge the agriculture-based imperial assumptions of the Babylonian creation epic” and then asks how this potential

challenge relates the holy city of Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation. Ellul's critique of the city and agriculture have not been the focus of much scholarly attention. Howard-Brook thus carries the conversation forward and points in helpful directions.

My own contribution to this volume leaves the biblical studies realm and asks what Ellul thought of the police and how this thought relates to recent work in Christian ethics on "just policing"—the idea that an international police force could replace the system of war and make the world a less violent place. I don't think Ellul would support this, and would have a number of pointed observations. Thus my article is more "Ellulian" than analysis of Ellul's work *per se*.

Finally, Brenna Cussen Anglada — a Catholic anarchist from Dubuque, Iowa — takes up some of Wes Howard-Brook's themes as she examines her own use of the personal computer. She draws on Ellul's analysis of technique, arguing that for her, giving up the use of a personal computer is one small step toward recovering a life focused on things that matter, in ways that matter. Computer manufacturers have exploited the earth, oppressed laborers, and for an anarchist like Cussen Anglada, these are deeply troubling things to be implicated in.

Ellul's thought on anarchism hasn't really received the due attention it deserves. Sometimes *Ellul Forum* readers have dismissed his anarchist claims as naive and things he really didn't mean. In this issue, we take him seriously and look at what it means for a number of areas. I hope further explorations of this type can be done in the future.

Andy Alexis-Baker, Guest Editor

## **Yahweh is Still King: Engaging 1 Samuel 8 and Jacques Ellul by Thomas Bridges**

*Thomas Bridges is a Ph.D. Candidate in Systematic Theology at Marquette University.*

### **Introduction: Ellul's Anti-Monarchic Deuteronomist**

In attempting to show how the Bible has an "orientation to a certain anarchism" in *Anarchy and Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991; p. 3), Jacques Ellul places significant weight on the account of the institution of kingship in ancient Israel. In his reading of Judges and 1 Samuel, Yahweh resists the institution of Israelite kingship, so that Yahweh is presented as "an enemy of royal power and the state" (p. 50). Judges narrates pre-monarchic Israelite history, when God was the "supreme authority" and not represented by a human leader (it was not technically a "theocracy" because of this). This "flexible system," which Ellul treats as somewhat of an ideal (Ellul is actually ambiguous on this point, never praising this time period, yet lamenting its demise), ended with the beginning of centralized royal power in 1 Samuel 8, and the warnings from God through the judge Samuel on the dangers of kingship were fulfilled

in Israel's subsequent history (pp. 46-55). Ellul argues for a biblical current toward anarchy by way of a "naive" reading (p. 45)—something of hermeneutical value, for sure—but will Ellul's case hold when a sustained scholarly reading is applied to 1 Samuel 8? It is the goal of this paper to answer that question indirectly, by reading 1 Samuel 8 within its context in the "Deuteronomistic History" (DH).

As Vernard Eller explains ("How Jacques Ellul Reads the Bible," *Christian Century* 89 no. 43 (1972): 1212-1215), Ellul employs a "wide angle" hermeneutic—meaning he tries not to lose the forest by only seeing individual trees. Ellul also utilizes a "continuous reading" of scripture, by reading each scriptural text within the context of all canonical books. In the spirit of Ellul—agreeing that the current of Christian scripture flows in an an-archic direction—I offer a narrower angled reading of the origins of Israel's monarchy. I argue that despite the establishment of human kingship in 1 Samuel. 8, Yahweh is still considered king, and I will conclude with some insights my analyses have unveiled regarding kingship in the DH, relating them to Ellul's *Anarchy and Christianity*. I will (1) be assuming that the Samuel and Kings books are the work of the same single author/redactor (Dtr), and (2) I will be only concerned with the received ("Masoretic") form of the text.

## The Kingship of Yahweh

Before delving into 1 Samuel, I must clarify that the kingship of Yahweh was not a prominent pre-exilic theme for Israel. The work of Anne Moore has shown that—regardless of pre-exilic sources redacted by later editors, which are surely included in the MT—the only clearly pre-exilic reference to the metaphor "God is king" is in Isaiah 6:1-11 (Anne Moore, *Moving Beyond Symbol and Myth: Understanding the Kingship of God of the Hebrew Bible Through Metaphor* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 87-89). This makes 1 Samuel 8 and 12 some of the earliest developments of the metaphor, alongside Exodus 15:1b-18 and 19:3-6 (Moore, pp. 106-109). The latter are exilic texts establishing that Yahweh became king over Israel, and as such is the divine lawmaker who offers protection, and in return has the right to Israel's praise and obedience to the laws of the covenant. It was not until Israel's and Judah's monarchies had failed that they devoted much intellectual rigor or reflecting on the metaphor of divine kingship (pp. 93-105). Many scholars have mistakenly followed the timelines of the history of religions school, rather than actual dating of Hebrew bible texts, to discern the development of Hebrew thought, and therefore many scholars state that the Israelite view of divine kingship originated from a common stock ancient near eastern myth in which a deity who combats chaos or the forces of evil with victory, with the result that humans build the deity a house or abode and declare the eternal kingship of the deity with annual enthronement festivals (pp. 44-45).

Correcting this error has two important implications for my project. First, the late development of the metaphor of divine kingship, as well as the fact that it arose in response to failed human monarchy, should prevent over-determining the identity of



Yahweh under the category of kingship; as Walter Brueggemann has labored to make clear, there are other metaphor's of Yahweh's governance present in the Hebrew Bible, including judge, father, and warrior (Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, pp. 233-39). None of these images of Yahweh's sovereignty adequately represent Israel's Lord, and no human pattern of governance ought to be projected on to Yahweh. Moreover, Ellul argues (*Anarchy and Christianity*, 32-33) that the image of God as king is subverted by images of God creating through mere words, speaking softly in the wind, and self-limits unlike human kings of the time. Second, the kingship of Yahweh is to be seen as originating in the Exodus and the covenant, rather than primarily as a focus on Yahweh as a divine warrior. Yahweh's sovereignty is the result of liberation and protection of Israel as a Suzerain. 1 Sam contains an early appearance of Yahweh's sovereignty in relation to the metaphor of kingship.

## 1 Samuel 8: The Crisis of Yahweh's Kingship

1 Samuel 8 contains a riddle: it describes the people's request for a king as rejecting Yahweh, yet Yahweh grants the request and even chooses Israel's first king. Some scholars resolve this tension by positing that a redactor pieced together the text from disparate pro-and anti-monarchic sources (See V. Philips Long, "How Did Saul Become King?," in *Faith, Tradition and History*, edited by A.R. Millard, J.K. Hoffmeier and D.W. Baker (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994): 271-84). But rather than a collection of ill-fitted sources, I read 1 Samuel 8-12 as a rich and complex narrative (regardless of the origins of Dtr's sources): Yahweh does not really surrender kingship, but uses human kingship as an office subordinate to divine kingship. Here Yahweh is not a "flat" character but a "round" one, graciously subverting Israel's rejection of divine kingship by giving them a king subservient to Yahweh. Thus, we can understand the claim that Israel rejected Yahweh and Yahweh's response in the following manner: although the people should not have requested a human king, Yahweh maintains the covenant and Israel's elect status while granting them a gift they were wrong to demand.

Here is the context: 1 Samuel 4:1-22 narrates a battle in which the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant, which was in Eli's sons care. Though not stated explicitly, the captured Ark is a consequence of the corruption of Eli's sons (David Toshio Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 185). After the Philistines return the Ark to Israel (6:1-21), and Israel defeats the Philistines (7:3-14), chapter 8 informs us of Samuel's old age and his sons' unjust ways (8:1-3). Then the people state that they want a king because (1) Samuel's sons are unlike Samuel (8:4-5), and (2) they want to be like other nations and have a king to govern them and fight their battles (8:20). That they single out Samuel's corrupt sons shortly after suffering a defeat (which is partly blamed on Eli's corrupt sons), suggests the people feared that military defeats would continue if Samuel's sons held leadership positions. Corrupt leadership would surely result in the same consequences, for Yahweh

had previously punished Israel for her leaders' sins (1 Sam 4:21. Thus, the request for kingship arises in a context when the Ammonite king Nahash is an imminent danger (12:12 states this retrospectively). This makes sense if we understand defense from oppressors as an integral duty of Israelite leadership, and see that the people had good reason to lack confidence in the leadership of Samuel's sons. Also, Israel's elders were right in their uneasiness about Samuel placing leadership in his son's hands, for, as Ellul notes, the judges had no permanent power, but were roused to the occasion by the Spirit of God—judgeship was not a hereditary role, but a Spirit-guided one (As Ellul mentions, the judges had no permanent power, but were roused to the occasion by the Spirit of God. Cf. *Christianity and Anarchy*, 46-7).

Though we understand Israel's request to relate to her overall safekeeping—a reasonable desire—another reason must be behind this request, for Yahweh interprets it as rejecting Yahweh's Kingship. To understand this rejection, we must remember that Israel viewed Yahweh as their covenantal sovereign. In this regard, two sub-themes of Yahweh's sovereignty are important. First, the Mosaic covenant made the Israelites into Yahweh's subjects—in Deuteronomy 33:2-5, 26-29. If Yahweh ruled as the Suzerain, then any leaders Yahweh established would by definition be vassals (Anne Moore, *Moving Beyond Symbol and Myth*, 163-9). Earlier in the DH, when Israel sought to institute a dynasty of judges with Gideon and his family, Gideon insists that only Yahweh must rule over Israel (Judges 8:22-23). All political authority was subservient to Yahweh, regardless of the title. Second, although "king" was not a title used early and frequently by Israel to designate Yahweh's role, Yahweh was seated on the cherubim of the Ark, similar to a king seated upon a throne (1 Samuel 4:4) (See also Tryggve N.D. Mettinger, "YHWH SABOATH—The Heavenly King on the Cherubim Throne," in *Studies in The Period of David and Solomon*, ed. Tomoo Ishida (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1982)). If Yahweh is their king and they ask for a king, then they reject Yahweh's kingship—as Yahweh explicitly states in 1 Samuel 8:7.

Therefore, most scholars agree that in requesting a king "like other nations" (8:5) Israel rejected her elect status as Yahweh's covenant people (Lyle Eslinger, *The Kingship of God in Crisis: A Close Reading of 1 Samuel 1-12* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 257; Klein, *1 Samuel*, 76-79; Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 249. Cf. Exodus 19. All quotations are from the NRSV, unless otherwise indicated). In Lyle Eslinger's words, "The request of Yahweh's people to become like the nations in political structure is, therefore, not only a rejection of the theocracy and its judges, but even more it is a rejection of the covenant" (Eslinger, *God's Kingship*, 257). Thus, although the elders are concerned about the Ammonites at their door and about Samuel's sons placing them in peril, the people neither ask for Samuel's intercession (as they had in 7:8, when the Philistines were a threat), nor cry to Yahweh for help. Furthermore, they could have asked for different judges than Samuel's corrupt sons, since judgeship was not a hereditary role. Instead of choosing one of these options, they reject the whole covenantal system, discarding their status as a holy nation. The shift from Yahweh's battles (Judges 4:14, 2 Sam. 5:24) to Israel's battles shows that they rejected Yahweh as their defender,

and hence as their king (8:19) (As Ellul points out, the people thought a king would be a better military leader (*Anarchy and Christianity*, 48). Cf. Klein, *1 Samuel*, 78; Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 261). Israel's request for a king was a request for a replacement of this covenantal relationship.

Yahweh tells Samuel that it is not he who is being rejected, but Yahweh (8:7). The people should have cried to Yahweh for safety from Nahash, based on Yahweh's previous faithfulness in rescuing the people through judges (cf. 12:12), therefore Israel sinned in rejecting Yahweh, which Israel later confessed (12:10, 19). However, Yahweh grants their request, which brings us to our antinomy (i.e., Yahweh says yes to a sinful demand). But if we look closely we can discern how Yahweh undermines their demand and maintains kingship over Israel.

The discrepancy is only apparent because Yahweh delimits kingship. Eslinger puts it this way: "Yahweh, though not liking the request, does not deny it; instead, he [sic] simply subverts it" (Eslinger, *God's Kingship*, 259). The first thing the Lord tells Samuel is to "protest [ha'ed] solemnly unto them" (8:9, AV), and secondly to show them the mishpat ("ways," NRSV) of the king, which are determined by Yahweh. Eslinger notes that this "king will not be like other kings, but under the stipulation (ha'ed) of Yahweh" (p.268). Samuel takes this stipulation as a bad thing, and adds content to the mishpat—the king will usurp Israel's sons and daughters for military purposes and various forms of conscripted labor, and take Israel's first fruits in agriculture, livestock, and so on (8:11-18)—although Samuel's warning includes words not explicitly attributed to Yahweh in the text. Samuel seems to have added a negative prediction of what would happen with actual kings (p.p. 260, 270). The people reject Samuel's warning: "No! But we are determined to have a king over us, so that we also may be like the other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles" (8:19b-20). But Yahweh is still in charge, as the Hiphil verbs in verse 22 demonstrate: "stipulate the stipulation" (ha'ed taid), "declare the manner of the king," and "make them a king" (p. 281). Yahweh has maintained authority over Israel, yet allowed room for a certain amount of freedom in the covenantal relationship.

The account of Saul's anointing solidifies my reading that Yahweh retains rule when Yahweh commands Samuel to anoint Saul as *nagid* over Israel (10:1). Two things support my reading. First, Yahweh appoints Saul *nagid* to save Israel from the Philistines. Seeing their need, Yahweh interprets their request for a king as a cry for deliverance from their enemies (p. 307). They make a sinful demand—but a demand for help, and Yahweh offers deliverance. Second, the term *nagid* does not mean king, but vicariate. The people want a *king* (*mlk*), but God gives them a "regent" (*nagid*), *mlk* signifying when the power originates in the people, *nagid* when God is preeminent (M. Tsevet, "The Biblical Account of the Foundation of the Monarchy in Israel," in *The Meaning of the Book of Job and Other Biblical Studies: Essays on the Literature and Religion of the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Ktav, 1980), p. 93). Although Saul is later called *mlk* (10:24; 11:15), what institutes the "kingship" is the occasion for a human to act on

Yahweh's behalf. Thus far in the narrative Yahweh is still king and still responds to the cries of the oppressed.

Next, Saul's kingship is fully consummated as Yahweh empowers him to rout the Ammonites (11:1-11), and Samuel invites the people to Gilgal to "renew the kingship" (11:14-12:25). Samuel gives a speech, and in recounting the recent events he reminds them of how the kingship came about: "But when you saw that King Nahash of the Ammonites came against you, you said to me, 'No, but a king shall reign over us,' though the Lord your God was your king" (12:12). He adds that the "wickedness you have done in the sight of the Lord is great in demanding a king" (12:17). But we may observe that as they recognize their sin, Samuel assures them that if they follow Yahweh's command, then Yahweh will not cast them away, but if they act wickedly Yahweh will oppose them and their king (12:19-25). Once again, there is room for play in this covenantal relationship between Yahweh and Israel: Yahweh has given them the monarchy, but the human king will be only a vassal, and whether Yahweh will stand behind the king and the people depends on whether they "will follow the Lord" (12:14). It is conceded that all will go well with the people if the people will serve the Lord (12:14). But this is conditional, based on four requirements: they must fear, serve, listen to, not rebel against Yahweh, or the Lord will "be against" the people and their king (12:15) (Cf. Klein, 1 Samuel, 113). We may deduce that the people will have misplaced their trust if they do not perceive that Yahweh is still king, and the covenant is still intact.

Within one chapter the demise of the first human king begins, and Yahweh initiates a search for "a man after his own heart [sic]" (13:14). Saul performs an unlawful sacrifice, which prompts this search, implying that Israel's human kings are interchangeable, but the Lord is the indispensable ruler over Israel. If the king is only as good as the extent to which Yahweh is behind him, then is it not the case the Yahweh is still the king of Israel? Yahweh appointed the first king, and then searches for a new one, therefore the answer is a resounding "yes."

I have attempted to show that the account of the rise of kingship in Israel need not be seen as an ill-fitted composite of pro-and anti-monarchic sources. The apparent contradiction between the request for a king being wicked, and the fact that Yahweh responds to this request, ought to be uncovered: Yahweh answers this request by generously subverting it, accommodating the demand without sacrificing the divine kingship, or the covenant. Yahweh selects a nagid, who is subservient to king Yahweh. As the philosopher Martin Buber concludes concerning this passage, this political solution means, "that, nevertheless, it will not be a monarchy such as all the nations have, but rather might style itself as a vicariate of God, not simply reporting to heaven, but really a government held accountable to the higher authority and so replaceable by it" (Martin Buber, "Der Gesalbte," *Werke* II (Munich: Kosel; Heidelberg: Lambert, 1964), 738; quoted in Eslinger *God's Kingship*, 268). Yahweh responds to their demand without annulling the covenant.

## Some Further Issues with Kingship in the Deuteronomistic History

Thus far in this essay I have tried to show how Yahweh graciously subverted Israel's request for a king, and now I will take a brief look at the final Deuteronomistic assessment of human kingship.

The DH ends with Judah in exile and the last Davidic heir in prison; whatever Dtr's view is of kingship, the following claim from Brueggemann seems irrefutable: "One defining mark of Israel's life is that the royal system was not finally effective in sustaining Israel" (Buber, 614). However, the hope for Davidic kingship did not die out, even with the ambiguous ending to 2 Kings. As we saw in 1 Samuel 12, it will only go well for a king if he meets certain conditions, and as we saw from analyzing the meaning of *nagid*, the purpose of an Israelite king is to serve the higher king. David's line is guilty of sin in the DH, and this results in political disaster for Israel: Solomon's heart turns from Yahweh, therefore all the tribes but one will be torn from his son (1 Kgs. 11:9-13); Rehoboam intensifies his father and grandfather's forced labor policy and the northern tribes secede (1 Kgs. 12:1-19); and a final blow comes with Manasseh, who causes all Judah to sin, drawing Yahweh's judgment (2 Kgs. 21:10). Amon did evil in the sight of Yahweh, (21:20), as did Jehoahaz (23:32) and Jehoiakim (23:37). The reign of Josiah was a high point in the DH sandwiched between the evil kings, but, as Brueggemann puts it, "it was too little too late" (Brueggemann, "Ancient Israel on Political Leadership: Between the Book Ends," *Political Theology* 8.4 (2007), 464). Because of the sins of Manasseh, Nebuchadnezzar razes Judah (24:4), and Judah enters exile (25:21). Dtr makes it clear that certain conditions have not been met (proper worship, monotheism, and so on), and exile is the proper consequence.

2 Kings 25 is intentionally ambiguous regarding whether there is hope for Israel to return from exile, and whether the monarchy will be restored (Walter Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2000), 606; David Janzen, "An Ambiguous Ending: Dynastic Punishment in Kings and the Fate of the Davidides in 2 Kings 25.27-30," *JSOT* 33.1 (2008): 39-58). The northern dynasties are said to be permanently deposed for causing the people to sin, and this could also be the case with Judah's kingship, but, on the other hand, Yahweh never explicitly annuls the promise made to David in 2 Samuel 7:13—to "establish the throne of his kingdom forever." David Janzen's verdict is worth quoting at length (Janzen, "Ambiguous Ending" 58):

*In the light of the earlier specificity of dynastic punishment, Dtr seems intentionally to create ambiguity at the end of Kings in regard to the future of the Davidides. Writing in the exile—or possibly in the early postexilic period—Dtr simply wishes to hedge his or her bets. The ambiguous fate of the Davidides suits a time frame when it was impossible to tell what the fate of the Davidide would be. This intentional ambiguity does not commit Dtr to any one outcome for the Davidides, and provides the Historian with flexibility to cover various possible eventualities.*

I also find helpful Brueggemann's suggestion that there is a hint of hope in Evilmerodach's kind treatment of Jehoiachin in 2 Kgs. 25:27-30 (Brueggemann, *1&2 Kings*, 606-7). What is not said is important here—there *may* be hope. But whatever the case, surely Hans Walter Wolff is right in saying that the people are to *turn back* (*shubu*) from their evil ways (Hans Walter Wolff, "The Kerygma of the Deuteronomistic Historical Work," in *Reconsidering Israel and Judah: Recent Studies on the Deuteronomistic History*, ed. Gary N. Knoppers and J. Gordon McConville (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), p. 71). Solomon prayed that if the people go into exile, that they would repent and be forgiven, and that their captors have compassion on them (1 Kgs. 8:46-53). The Dtr may be daring Judah and Israel to hope, but, once again the royal system was unable to sustain Israel, and Dtr gives no reason for the reader to believe that another royal system would do better.

## Some Conclusions

What I believe my analyses have made possible are the following conclusions, which I will relate to Ellul's work:

(1) Yahweh never renounced kingship, but installed vicariates to act on Yahweh's behalf, for the good of the people. This is the generous subversion of the Israelites rejection of their identity as Yahweh's covenant people (Cf. Gerbrandt, *Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History*, who sees the people's sin residing in asking for a king *like the other nations* (109). In his view Dtr is pro-monarchic, but against kingship in the manner of the gentiles). Ellul is justified in reading 1 Samuel in a way that maintains that Yahweh is still the supreme authority over Israel after the institution of monarchy. The monarchy in Israel was really a dynasty of vassals who led Israel into idolatry and betrayal of the true king, but Yahweh faithfully did what was best for Israel, which ultimately meant the end of the monarchy. Ellul is right—at least in relation to the DH—to interpret scripture as not dictating a certain political system. Ellul merely advocates that people "not rule out anarchism in advance, for in my view this seems to be the position which in this area is closest to biblical thinking" among all of the political options (Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 4). When Yahweh is the ultimate authority, any political system will have an anarchic leavening from the Spirit of God within it, whether this authority is acknowledged or not (Babylon is the perfect example of a human *arche* that does not acknowledge Yahweh, yet is still under Yahweh's control in the view of Dtr). There simply is no human *arche* able to maintain rule outside the providential permissiveness of Yahweh.

(2) Though kingship was sometimes a good, such as when David executed justice (2 Sam. 8:15), or when Josiah turned Judah from idolatry, for the most part the kings led the people into sin. The kings are responsible for the exile of Yahweh's people. This would seem like an obvious point, if there were not other possible and actual explanations for the exile (Brueggemann (*Old Testament Theology*, 587) notes that exile could have been explained in many ways, but was not for Dtr. Also, the

Chronicler does not blame the kings as much as Dtr does, placing responsibility on the people, whereas Dtr blames the kings). Also, David Janzen notes that Dtr distinguishes between the sin of kings and of people, because kings *cause* people to sin, lead them into it (Janzen, “Ambiguous Ending,” 44). Dtr’s cumulative view of kingship is that they are subordinate to Yahweh. Kings are faithful, unfaithful, or some mixture, but are never just “a king.” And when they are unfaithful, Yahweh would rather the people be in exile than be led astray by kings into idolatry. This is a harsh pronouncement, but I do not see any other conclusion to the DH concerning kingship.

(3) The following question must be entertained: would a reinstatement of the Davidic dynasty bring Judah and Israel back to Yahweh? David’s heir is alive at the end of the DH, but we must remember that he too had a history of evil in the eyes of Yahweh (2 Kgs. 24:9). It is the sin of kings that has brought catastrophe about, so why should the kingship of Israel or Judah be restored? I think the human run at kingship was not so good for Yahweh’s people. If the return of a king could reinstate centralized worship, I imagine Dtr would find this an act of Yahweh’s good grace. Otherwise, it seems to me that the DH has demonstrated the risk of the Exodus people losing their identity when led by kings. Yahweh’s vicariates failed to serve Yahweh and the good of the people, and were rightly deposed. Yahweh is still king, for Yahweh brought about these destructive events. The question remains unanswered as to why this line of kings ought to be restored, and the goodness of monarchy stands in serious question from the perspective of the DH.

(4) At the end of the DH, with the future of Israel’s monarchy seemingly over, the future is nevertheless open: hope for a good king persisted, and as we know it developed into messianism, and, eventually, Christology. Although the promise to David in 2 Samuel 7 surely did not have Jesus of Nazareth in mind, this passage would later be interpreted as the seeds of messianic hope (Brueggemann, 1&2 Kings, 608-10). Surely this is not the view of Dtr on kingship, but the open-ended nature of the DH allowed for such flexible reinterpretations. Whatever the case, if my analyses are sound, the people at least were given reason by Dtr to trust that Yahweh was still king, exile could be a perfect opportunity to learn once again what it might mean to live with only one king—Yahweh.

With such an open-endedness to the DH concerning political structures (aside from the certainty that Yahweh is Lord of all nations), all political systems are placed in a tentative position. Ellul is overstating the case in claiming that the dominant thinking in Israel from the 8<sup>th</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> centuries was primarily antimonarchic (Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 51); what would be more accurate is to say that from an exilic or post-exilic perspective the monarchs were blamed for leading Israel into sin and its political consequences, and yet Judah still hoped for a true Davidic king. Resistance to monarchy paved the way to Christology. Yahweh graciously subverted Israel’s sinful demand for a king, but—at least from a Christian perspective—sent the true king in human flesh to judge and transform the standards of monarchy. A “continuous reading” of scripture must then see Yahweh as playfully responsive to the chosen people,

taking an often oppressive structure (monarchy), giving it a chance, and, when it failed, demonstrating in the Christ how Yahweh's sovereignty differs from all other authority by centering on Servanthood, rather than domination (See John Howard Yoder's reading of the book of Luke in *The Politics of Jesus*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), especially 36-39). But it must also be remembered that kingship is only one of the many metaphors used in the Hebrew Bible to portray Yahweh, so it should not surprise us if Yahweh turns out to be a different kind of king.

Once again, Ellul employs a "wide angle" hermeneutic, reading the Hebrew Bible continuously in his *Anarchy and Christianity*, without pausing to make specific claims about 1 Samuel or the institution of kingship—he merely comments that 1 Samuel 8 marks the rise of royal power and the rejection of Yahweh the liberator. What I have attempted to do is look at the patch of trees surrounding 1 Samuel 8 to make sure Ellul has the forest right, and I conclude that he has. The DH makes clear that Yahweh is Lord, not kings and their chariots, and any political system stands under the gracious judgment and Lordship of Yahweh.

## **"Come Out, My People!" Rethinking the Bible's Ambivalence About Civilization**

by Wes Howard-Brook

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Few books have been more formative of my understanding of God's relationship to human social structures than Jacques Ellul's *The Meaning of the City*. He shows like no one before him and few after how clearly Genesis roots the origin of the city in human violence and domination. It is part, of course, of Ellul's larger critique of technique: the human attempt to take control of what God has provided as gift.

Ellul continues in *Meaning* to trace the Bible's attitude toward the "holy city," Jerusalem. He powerfully explores how Jerusalem is portrayed as both "holy" and of no inherent importance. "Her only meaning is to testify of a new Jerusalem" (p. 110). The reality of Jesus Christ replaces Jerusalem as the locus of encounter with God.

In the forty years since *Meaning*, biblical and other scholarship has discovered many important elements of the ancient world and of the Bible's composition. The source criticism that developed in the eighteenth century has been challenged on all sides, and new ways of understanding the original contexts of the Bible are being actively explored. Further, developments in political, anthropological, and language theory have led to radical reconsideration of the relationship between texts and historical contexts.



One trajectory arising from these recent discoveries has been the expansion of Ellul's concern with "the city" to that of "empire." Throughout biblical history, God's people were surrounded by and embedded within the great empires of Babylon, Persia, Egypt,

Greece, and Rome. In our own time, we are increasingly able and willing to name "empire" as our own context, whether one thinks of that in terms of American Empire or global corporate empire. How do ancient texts such as Genesis and the narrative of Israel's monarchy sound different when considered from within the framework of acceptance of or resistance to empire?

This is, of course, a huge topic, one which I have addressed at length in my book, *"Come Out, My People!:" God's Call Out of Empire In the Bible and Beyond* (Orbis, 2010). In this brief essay, I can only offer some suggestive lines of inquiry. First, how do Genesis' narratives of origin challenge the agriculture-based imperial assumptions of the Babylonian creation epic, Enuma Elish? Second, how might we hear the stories of origin of Israel's relationship with the "holy city," Jerusalem, not as "scripture" but as political propaganda aimed to coopt the Name of YHWH for an imperial act of city and nation building?

#### Cursing agriculture

Ellul begins *Meaning* with the story of Cain, the first city builder. However, Genesis' antiurban narrative begins earlier, with the first verses of Genesis 1. Traditional source criticism—which Ellul eschewed in any event—saw Genesis as presenting two creation stories: Genesis 1, part of the so-called "Priestly" strand of the Pentateuch, and Genesis 2, part of the "Yahwist" strand. The Priestly narrative is understood to be post-exilic, focused on establishing order via genealogical lists and other apparatus deemed the provenance of an urban priestly elite. The supposed purpose is to substitute ritual order for monarchical order. The Yahwist narrative, on the other hand, is usually understood to be older, often associated with the supposed "Solomonic enlightenment" in which "wisdom" flourished amid the prosperity and security of imperial Jerusalem.

As noted, recent discoveries have increasingly discredited this two source theory. Instead, interpreters are frequently reading Genesis 1-11 (if not the entire book) against the background of the Babylonian exile of Jerusalem's elite in the early 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE. The experience of exile was akin to the experience of German scientists brought to the US after World War II. The place was "foreign," but overflowing with wealth, culture and technology. The source of such splendor, according to the Babylonian Enuma Elish, was an urban divine order established in primordial time. That is, the city of Babylon was not a human building project, but a gift of the gods. The hierarchical social structure was similarly a "given," established as part of the order of creation. Humans—that is, other than the royal elite—were designated by the gods to serve Babylon by working the irrigated agricultural fields that surrounded the city, as well as conducting the necessary tasks of urban maintenance. To serve the human king was to serve the divine king, the god Marduk.

Ellul, of course, correctly read Genesis' Tower of Babel story as a caricature of this pretension to divine legitimation. In "Technique and the Opening Chapters of Genesis,"

he read the Garden and Expulsion stories as expressive of the beginning of “technique,” focusing his discussion on the question of “work” before and after “the Fall.” Ellul accepted the common translation of the divine command in Gen 2:15 as “to cultivate it and keep it.” However, recent Genesis scholarship notes that the Hebrew *‘bd* translated “cultivate” or “till” more often means “serve.” Thus, the question of “cultivation” in the sense of working the earth does not actually arise in the Garden, but only with the Expulsion. In the “curse” proclamation in Genesis 3, the voice of YHWH undermines the root of the imperial claim that generating surplus agriculture is part of the divine command to humanity. Rather than receiving the divine gift of food from trees, people are “sentenced” to agriculture, as we hear in this passage:

And to the human [*‘adam*] God said, *“Because you have listened to the voice of your woman, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the topsoil [*‘adamah*] because of you; in painful work [*‘itstsavon*] you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the topsoil, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”* (Gen. 3:16-19)

Several specific words underscore the point. The previously sacred relationship between the *‘adam* and the *‘adamah* is now “cursed,” a technical biblical term expressing the inability to bring forth life. Instead, the human will experience pain in wresting “bread” from the ground. Of course, “bread” is not a product of creation, but of human technological manipulation. “Plants of the field” specifically refers throughout the Bible to domesticated crops. “Thorns and thistles” refers to inedible species that arise when soil has been disturbed and eroded by plowing (Carol Newsom, “Common Ground,” in *Earth Story in Genesis*, ed. Normal C. Habel et al. (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2001), 73-86). The divine speech-act ends with the expulsion of the humans from the garden to live “in the east,” which for Israelites, signified the Tigris-Euphrates river valleys upon which Babylonian and Assyrian empires were built.

Agriculture is the basis for what we call “civilization.” Surplus agriculture allows for division of labor, social stratification, and military-based security that undergirds “empire” throughout history. Key here is that Genesis presents this state of affairs as a divine curse. It valorizes instead human life experienced in direct contact with the Creator God who provides all that humans need as gift. More concretely, it presents the original state of divine blessing as food gathering. The other half of the usual pair, “hunter-gatherer,” comes only after the Flood narrative as a divine concession to the persistence of human violence against creation and one another (Gen 9.1-6).

Throughout Genesis (and Exodus), the question of food is a central test of trust in YHWH. Immediately after Abram’s unconditional response to YHWH’s call to leave empire behind, he experiences “hunger” (Hebrew, *ra’av*, usually translated as “famine”). This designates not a “natural” condition, but a function of urban empire controlling access to agricultural surplus. Abram is willing to sacrifice his wife to the king of Egypt in order to gain access to Egyptian food (Gen 12.11-20). But the clearest expression

of this relationship between “bread” and “empire” is in the Joseph story at the close of the Genesis narrative. The background here is likely no longer exile and Babylon’s Enuma Elish, but the experience several centuries later of Ptolemaic Egyptian control of

Jerusalem and environs. Joseph, like Jerusalem’s elite, has not only collaborated with Egypt’s imperial establishment, but has claimed that it is the will of God for Jacob’s family to come to Egypt for food and to “settle” there (Gen 45.7-10). But once the family of Israel has left the Promised Land for Egypt, we hear the true nature of Joseph’s imperial authority (Gen 47.13-26). With further “hunger,” the people come to Joseph seeking “grain.” They receive it, but not before they have surrendered money, animals, land and freedom to the imperial representative.

Thus, from beginning to end, Genesis not only condemns “the city,” but reveals the unholy mechanism by which the city is possible. The human yearning to take control of the food supply, “from the beginning,” leads to enormous pain and suffering.

Solomon’s “wisdom”

Ellul’s critique of Jerusalem, as noted, accepts its vocation as “holy city,” even if its ultimate purpose is to be transcended in and through Jesus Christ. Ellul largely takes the monarchical narrative as given, including that God has “chosen” Jerusalem in ratification of David’s taking of the city from the Jebusites, and that Temple and ark make the city “holy” (Meaning, pp. 95-96).

Closer study of the David-Solomon narrative, however, can lead one to radical questioning of these premises. Biblical historical Baruch Halpern has shown in great detail that the narrative is likely an attempt to legitimize the reign of David and his son (See Baruch Halpern, *David’s Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004). As such, we must be highly suspicious of what otherwise sound like standard claims that echo across imperial history: that the “high” God lives in his temple in the capital city, and the human king is his representative. What might these suspicions lead us to discover behind the “official” viewpoint?

David, as encountered on the surface of the biblical narrative, is not what anyone would call “holy.” He is a extortioner, adulterer, murderer and gang leader, who is willing to battle Israelites on behalf to the dreaded Philistines (1 Sam 27). As king, he brutally puts down popular rebellion, including one led by his own beloved son, Absalom. On his death bed, he instructs his successor, Solomon, to execute those whom the old king thinks had been unfaithful to him. Solomon’s willingness to carry out these orders is attributed to his “wisdom” (1 Kg 2.6, 9).

Indeed, the subsequent narrative attributes divinely-given “wisdom” to Solomon via a dream, a wisdom which will exceed that of “all the people of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt” (1 Kg 4.30). But shouldn’t we be suspicious of an all-too-familiar “wisdom” that includes strategic assassination?

Whatever Solomon’s wisdom was, immediately upon his death, “all the assembly of Israel” go to his son-successor, Rehoboam, to complain that “Your father made our yoke heavy...” (1 Kg 12.3). Behind the royal propaganda machine’s portrayal of Judah and

Israel “happy.sitting in security.under their vines and fig trees” (1 Kg 4.20, 25) is another story which manages to reach the surface of the narrative. Yes, the monarchy can provide military security (maintained by Solomon’s forty thousand horses and chariots), but at the usual great cost: imperially enforced taxation that provides enormous wealth and luxury for the elite but slave labor for the ordinary folk. Is this what YHWH-provided “wisdom” is supposed to look like?

The textual evidence for Solomon’s God-given wisdom is the report of a royal dream. Of course, there is no way, then or now, to challenge directly the authenticity of such a claim. But the narrative provides a clear, if subtle, clue, as to both the truth and nature of this supposed “wisdom” in an oft-overlooked story. Immediately upon waking from the dream, we are told of the only public act of Solomon’s entire reign: the resolution of a maternity dispute between two street prostitutes (1 Kg 3.16-28). Was this the reason for wanting a king “like other nations” (1 Sam 8.5)? The entire episode practically shouts to be interpreted allegorically rather than literally, not least because the wider David-Solomon narrative has already presented two blatantly allegorical stories about royal behavior (2 Sam 12, 14).

Studying the details of this story reveals plainly what Solomon’s “wisdom” was: holding together by imperial control the two otherwise separate peoples, Israel and Judah. The moment Solomon was dead, Israel rebelled from Jerusalem-centered control to form its own, decentralized identity. Although Israel eventually succumbed to the same kind of urbanbased empire from which it had escaped, there are strong hints that the original vision was for something radically different. As I explain in more detail in *Come Out, My People*, the core Exodus narrative may well have been composed to legitimate and support both the rebellion and the alternative vision of a wilderness-based covenant relationship directly between YHWH and the people.

Thus, “from the beginning,” Jerusalem was an imperial project, hardly different from that of Babylon or Egypt. Throughout the remainder of biblical history, prophets and apocalyptic visionaries proclaimed judgment on Jerusalem for its participation in empire, both “at home” and “abroad.” The collection of apocalyptic texts gathered as 1 Enoch express such a radical critique of this imperial participation that the Jerusalem-centered scribes and priests who established the scope of “scripture” excluded the texts from the eventual canon. Of course, it was Jesus’ own harsh critique and rejection of Jerusalem that led Jerusalem’s defenders to provide him an imperial execution.

Space does not permit exploration of how consistently the core texts of what we know as the New Testament continue this rejection of Jerusalem’s claim to embody the divine will even as it collaborates with the Roman Empire. Ellul anticipated this in his groundbreaking interpretation of Jesus’ relationship with Jerusalem, both in the gospels and in the book of Revelation. However, as we know, a few centuries later, the unthinkable became reality: the claim of the Roman Empire to be “Christian.” Constantine’s audacious act of imperial authority is in many ways a perfect analog for Solomon’s own claim for a YHWH-authorized empire.

But Christians should have no basis for accepting such propaganda, given how radically it conflicts with the Good News of God's kingdom of love-based peace. Imperial propaganda, as Ellul so cogently noted throughout his career, has an amazing capacity to convince people of what they otherwise know to be false. The revelation in Jesus Christ of God's true purpose for human life continues to be the most powerful means of defeating empire and its propaganda. We should all continue to be grateful to Ellul for opening doors that allow the Light to shine in the darkness.

## Just Policing: An Ellulian Critique

by Andy Alexis-Baker

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Since the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, many pacifist-minded Christians have begun to explore differences between policing and warfare with the noble hope of limiting or even abolishing war as we know it. For example, Catholic theologian Gerald Schlabach has developed a theory he calls "just policing." Schlabach argues that the differences between policing and war are significant enough to merit a wholesale realignment of just war and pacifist thinking. Rather than justify war according to abstract criteria, just policing would draw upon international law to pursue suspected criminals, which should limit civilian casualties and demonizing of individuals and groups (Gerald Schlabach, ed. *Just Policing, Not War* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2007), p. 4). If just war theorists would honestly explore these distinctions, they would recognize policing is more appropriate to Christian duty than war. If pacifists would "support, participate, or at least not object to operations with recourse to limited but potentially lethal force," then a *rapprochement* might occur between just war theorists and pacifists through policing (Schlabach, p.3).

In *God's Politics*, Jim Wallis claims that since 9/11 many Christians have re-read Jacques Ellul, "who explained his decision to support the resistance movement against Nazism by appealing to the 'necessity of violence' but wasn't willing to call such recourse 'Christian'" (Jim Wallis, *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 166). Similarly, Christian pacifists might respond to terrorism, Wallis claimed, by advocating that the international community create a global police force to deal with violations of international law and human rights (Wallis, 164-67). Such a force, Wallis wrote, is "much more constrained, controlled, and circumscribed by the rule of law than is the violence of war, which knows few real boundaries" (p. 166).

Wallis' suggestion that Ellul's works may help to formulate a response to terrorism, and that such a response ought to be "policing" raises the question of what an Ellulian

analysis of policing might look like. Ellul was after all an anarchist and viewed the police as a technique. In fact, his most famous text, *The Technological Society*, by my count uses police as an example of technique over thirty times. In what follows, I will use Ellul—rather than summarize his views—to critique just policing. Those who advocate for just policing have not adequately tested whether police are less violent because of the rule of law, and they make ahistorical arguments that do not countenance the possibility that policing may in fact sustain or even worsen violence, not lessen it.

The importance of history

At the outset of his book *The Technological Society*, Ellul decries the scholarly tendency to reduce technique to machines, stating that this “is an example of the habit of intellectuals of regarding forms of the present as identical with that of the past” (Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 3). But the caveman’s tool differs qualitatively from modern technology. This same bad habit applies to current reflections on police. Police have not always existed; they are a modern invention.

Greco-Roman cities did not employ officials to prevent or detect common criminal activity; citizens themselves performed these tasks. (For more on law enforcement in ancient Athens and Rome see David Cohen, *Law, Violence, and Community in Classical Athens* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995) and Wilfried Nippel, *Public Order in Ancient Rome* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995)). Athenian law centered on private prosecution, which meant that the victim or her family prosecuted the perpetrator in Athenian courts. For public crime like stealing city property, any citizen could prosecute and would do the necessary detective work and witness solicitation (Virginia Hunter, *Policing Athens: Social Control in the Attic Lawsuits, 420-320 B.C.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 125). Athenians usually settled disputes through negotiation, mediation and arbitration with minimal formal structures or authorities and stressed keeping peace over blame. To Athenians, democracy meant “consensus rather than coercion, participation rather than delegation. At the judicial level, the principle of voluntary prosecution . . . was fundamental” (Hunter, p. 88) Far from pandemonium, the Athenian system worked well. A state police would have been unthinkable.

Roman society worked in a similar way. If a person witnessed a crime, they cried out for those nearby to help aid in capturing the perpetrator and in aiding the victim. The Roman military never involved itself in such acts unless a riot or rebellion was about to ensue that would disrupt the flow of goods to Rome. Classicist Wilfried Nippel even claims, “We do not even know to what degree (if at all) the Roman authorities undertook prosecution of murder” (Nippel, *Public Order in Ancient Rome*, 2).

This informal “hue and cry” system prevailed through the Middle Ages as see in Chaucer’s Nun’s Priest’s Tale. As Chaucer described it, the hue and cry involved shouting to draw attention to a crime. Those nearby gathered to witness, to help, to investigate and even to right the wrong. They might form a *posse comitatis*, led by

the shire reeve (later called “sheriff”) who was an estate manager, to hunt for a fleeing felon. The entire process was a community activity, not the responsibility of a professional police. This description is confirmed in legal codes throughout Europe. For instance, the municipal code of Cuenca, Spain, published around 1190 C.E., describes city employees such as judges, an inspector of market weights, a bailiff to guard incarcerated individuals, a town crier and guards for agriculture (The English translation is published as *The Code of Cuenca: Municipal Law on the Twelfth Century Castilian Frontier*, trans. James Powers (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000)). But the code does not mention any officials to detect or prevent crime. At most medieval cities had night watchmen, who were not police but firemen who might also warn of other danger.

The American colonies used the hue and cry and night watch system, memorialized in Paul Revere’s night-time warning, “The British are coming!” The English-speaking world developed professionalized preventative policing during the nineteenth-century. In America, these police forces evolved along two paths.

Southern police forces evolved from state-mandated slave patrols, which monitored every aspect of slave life to prevent revolts. These armed patrols morphed into southern police forces before and after the Civil War. Despite occasional white protests, the police carried firearms because, they claimed, the shadowy fear of slave revolts and the mythical physical prowess of a revolting slave necessitated well-armed police (See Bryan Wagner, *Disturbing the Peace: Black Culture and the Police Power after Slavery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009)). Most southern police departments, however, formed postbellum, simply taking over slave patrol disciplinary methods and applying them to the newly freed black populations through arrests on disorderly conduct, public intoxication, loitering, arrest “on suspicion,” “on warrant,” larceny and prostitution. Born in 1868, W.E.B. DuBois later said (*Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), 124, 25):

*The police system of the South was originally designed to keep track of all Negroes, not simply of criminals; and when the Negroes were freed and the whole South was convinced of the impossibility of free Negro labor, the first and almost universal device was to use the courts as a means of reenslaving the blacks. It was not then a question of crime, but rather one of color, that settled a man’s conviction on almost any charge. Thus Negroes came to look upon courts as instruments of injustice and oppression, and upon those convicted in them as martyrs and victims.*

In the North, police departments emerged in the nineteenth century to suppress the “dangerous class.” In city after city police departments combated working class vices such as drinking and vagrancy, not violent crime. For instance, from 1873 to 1915 police superintendents in Buffalo, New York consistently requested increased funding to hire more police, citing as a reason not a rise in violent crime, but labor strikes (Sidney Haring, “The Buffalo Police—1872-1915: Industrialization, Social Unrest, and the Development of the Police Institution” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1976), 43). Arrest records confirm this focus. The 1894 records from Buffalo—

then a city of 300,000— show that police arrested 6,824 people for drunkenness, 4,014 for disorderly conduct, 4,764 for vagrancy, 1,116 for being tramps (p. 201). Yet they arrested only 98 people for felonious violence (murder, robbery and rape) (p. 192). The superintendents—invariably tied to big businesses— used “public order” arrests alongside more violent methods to break strikes and control unions.

Besides maintaining class order, northern police also helped consolidate political power. The police controlled elections by promoting turnout, monitoring voting stations, and harassing electoral opposition to the current administration since new regimes usually replaced existing police with loyalists. This happened following elections in Los Angeles (1889), Kansas City (1895), Chicago (1897) and Baltimore (1897) (See Robert Fogelson, *Big-City Police* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 30).

Understanding this history of policing is important. Do the police represent a natural desire for security that is central to all societies, dismissals of which reveal a profound naivete? Or is modern policing a technique that represents a profound shift in western history as Ellul sees it? My contention is that instead of promoting the common good or protecting the weak, police have historically promoted particular interests, siding with their employers and with dominant racial and economic groups. Police technique is applicable to many areas, as Ellul claimed. The police did not result from inevitable historical forces but from calculated moves to maintain social stratification that continue into the present.

The rule of law is an illusion

Besides mistakenly making the police into an ancient and natural institution, the notion that the rule of law restrains police violence unlike the military remains untested. For Ellul, the rule of law is a pure illusion: “We must unmask the ideological falsehoods of many powers, and especially we must show that the famous theory of the rule of law which lulls the democracies is a lie from beginning to end” (Jacques Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 16). Taking this statement seriously, rule of law as it functions in just policing should be challenged at two levels. First, when the U.S. military charges a soldier with a felony, such as abusing prisoners or killing civilians, 90% are convicted and most are incarcerated. (According to the 2009 “Annual Report of the Code Committee on Military Justice” 1098 soldiers across all military branches were charged with the equivalent of a serious felony under military law. Of those 972 were convicted. See <http://www.armfor.uscourts.gov/annual/FY09AnnualReport.pdf> accessed July 21, 2010). By comparison, in 2009 only 33% of American police officers charged were convicted—even if they killed unarmed, innocent people—and only 64% of those convicted were incarcerated. (The statistics on police misconduct are created by an NGO called The National Police Misconduct Statistics and Reporting Project and are “low-end estimates” based on news reports across the United States. See <http://www.injusticeeverywhere.com/?pageid=1588> accessed July 21, 2010). These statistics contradict the assumption that law operates more on the police than the military.



More fundamentally, however, policing advocates have missed that police operate as a sovereign power that stands above the law through their discretionary powers whereby they determine when, where and upon whom they will implement law. This discretionary power conflicts with western democratic theory, which gives pride of place to the rule of law. John Locke, for example, argued that “settled and standing rules” should circumscribe discretionary authority; due process should prioritize individual rights over coercive police powers; and the rule of law should protect citizens from arbitrary arrest and ensure their fair treatment while in custody. For “wherever law ends,” Locke proclaimed, “tyranny begins” (John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government, and a Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. Ian Shapiro (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 189, 90; Bk 2, §202). Locke prohibited discretion as tyrannical except in emergencies where “the safety of the people . . . could not bear a steady fixed route” (169; Bk 2, §56). At that point the executive could “act according to discretion for the public good, without the prescription of the law, and sometimes even against it.” (Locke, 172; Bk 2, §60. For a discussion of Locke’s notion of prerogative see Pasquino Pasquale, “Locke on King’s Prerogative,” *Political Theory* 26, no. 2 (1998): 198-208). Locke thus pushed discretion—a decision outside the law—to edge of government, denying its necessity in quotidian governance.

Echoing Locke, Jeffrey Reiman argues that “police discretion begins where the rule of law ends: police discretion is precisely the subjection of law to a human decision beyond the law” (Jeffrey Reiman, “Is Police Discretion Justified in a Free Society?,” in *Handled with Discretion: Ethical Issues in Police Decision Making*, ed. John Kleinig (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1996), 74). Because police operate in “low visibility” conditions, the only people likely to know that the police officer decided not to invoke the law are the police officer and the suspect. Thus discretionary decisions are unreviewable and risk becoming arbitrary and prejudiced, particularly in cases of racial profiling, police brutality and class bias. In using discretion, police act as sovereigns in a state of emergency and can disregard law. Thus the assumption that police operate under the rule of law ignores routine discretion that transforms the police from an institution that enforces law, into a sovereign institution that can act without lawful authority and even against the law. In the fictional HBO series, *The Wire*, which is a hard-hitting critique of not only current American policing, but other institutions as well, one of the seasoned police officers named McNulty tells his fellow officer: “Let me let you in on a little secret. The patrolling officer on his beat is the one true dictatorship in America. We can lock a guy up on the humble, lock him up for real, or say fuck it and drink ourselves to death under the expressway and our side partners will cover us. No one, I mean no one, tells us how to waste our shift!” (*The Wire*, Season 4, episode 10). The police are thus an autonomous technique.

In states of emergencies, sovereigns suspend law and use their monopoly on violence most often in police actions both externally and internally. Internally, the Holocaust was a police action within a state of emergency that Hitler had declared soon after taking office. In the Holocaust, the police did not violate German law; the entire operation

was legal, which the legally police carried out. Other scholars have also noted that the Holocaust was legal and a police action. See Michael Berenbaum, "The Impact of the Holocaust on Contemporary Ethics," in *Ethics in the Shadow of the Holocaust: Christian and Jewish Perspectives*, ed. Judith Herschcopf Banki et al. (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2008), 256. Quoting a Nazi official Hannah Arendt writes, "only the police 'possessed the experiences and the technical facilities to execute an evacuation of Jews *en masse* and to guarantee the supervision of the evacuees.' The 'Jewish State' was to have a police governor under the jurisdiction of Himmler." (Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1965), 76). These states of emergencies are not confined to totalitarian states. The United States, for instance, has experienced nearly uninterrupted states of emergencies since the 1800's, using them to suppress labor disputes, deport "communists," and to execute people in the Civil War. Police actions are characteristic of sovereign power in times of national emergency, and this power has often been of the most brutal kind. These powers have been routine and are not exceptional at all, as Ellul argues (*Violence: Reflections from a Christian Perspective* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1970), 86):

*But so long as it faces crisis or encounters obstacles, the state does what it considers necessary, and following the Nuremberg procedure it enacts special laws to justify action which in itself is pure violence. These are the 'emergency laws,' applicable while the 'emergency' lasts. Every one of the so-called civilized countries knows this game.*

Community, policing and order

With discretionary powers, police primarily maintain order rather than enforce law. But, Ellul would remind us (*The Technological Society*, 103):

*This order has nothing spontaneous in it. It is rather a patient accretion of a thousand details. And each of us derives a feeling of security from every one of the improvements which make this order more efficient and the future safer. Order receives our complete approval; even when we are hostile to the police, we are by a strange contradiction, partisans of order.*

The trick for police is to make people "partisans of order," and since the police represent order itself, we must see the police as indispensable. This is how community policing theory works.

Community policing theorists have long recognized the distinction between law and order and therefore promote broader discretionary police power, not less. According to Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers, "'Community policing' combines greater police/community cooperation with increased police discretion" (See Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers in the Editors preface to Tracey Meares and Dan Kahan, *Urgent Times: Policing and Rights in Inner-City Communities* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), xv). For them, procedural rules and laws inordinately restrict the police to observing an individual's legal rights over the community's well-being. Thus ostensibly minor issues such as panhandling, loitering and vagrancy remain unchecked but grow into larger problems as they signal lack of communal welfare to criminally-prone outsiders who subsequently invade the neighborhood. Community policing argues that police should

have discretionary power to “clean up” these initial “disorders” even if their actions are not “easily reconciled with any conception of due process or fair treatment” and would probably “not withstand a legal challenge” (James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling, “Broken Windows,” *Atlantic Monthly* 249, no. 3 (1982): 35, 31).

The underlying premise of community policing bifurcates and simplifies community into “orderly” people (the community) and “disorderly” people (outsiders). It strips some people of rights and constructs a simplified community whose sole problems tend to be deviant outsiders and those inside who neglect quality of life issues like “broken windows.” The very word “community” connotes positive images, and masks the contested and complex nature of real communities. Furthermore, community policing deploys the word *against* some people and advocates that police be permitted to use any means necessary to rid a “community” of these “disorders.” By putting cops back on the beat and giving them a seemingly friendly face in the creation and maintaining of white bourgeois order, police do exactly as Ellul describes them in *The Technological Society*. They appear to protect “good citizens,” relieving the citizenry of any fear and by patrolling openly lose their secretive aura, and therefore are not felt to be oppressive. Thus most citizens do not seek to oppose or escape police technique because the police have removed any desire to escape. That is the ideal of technique: to make itself invisible and internalized in its object (*The Technological Society*, 413).

But to do this it has to exclude some people from the notion of community. Anybody who might cause “orderly” people to feel uncomfortable must be stripped of liberal rights and chased out. They do not have to be violent, but in the words of prominent community policing theorists merely “disorderly people. Not violent people, nor, necessarily, criminals, but disreputable or obstreperous or unpredictable people: panhandlers, drunks, addicts, rowdy teenagers, prostitutes, loiterers, the mentally disturbed” (James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling, “Broken Windows,” *Atlantic Monthly* 249, no. 3 (1982): 30). These are “broken windows” who if left unchecked will cause a spiral of crime and urban decay, indeed, they are the first signs of decay and must be eradicated with “zero tolerance” policies. This scapegoating mechanism has caused police to become much more violent toward these mere objects of police power (See Andy Alexis-Baker, “Community, Policing and Violence,” *Conrad Grebel Review* 26, no. 2 (Spring, 2008): 104-5).

The criminal abstraction of the technological society

This scapegoating mechanism also reveals another problem in policing. From his experience working with gangs, Ellul argued that preventing youth from sliding into a life of violence “could not consist in adapting young people to society” (*In Season, Out of Season* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 120). For Ellul, these youth were part of those “who do not conform to the level of efficiency society demands [and] are pushed aside” (129). Thus instead of helping them become professional bureaucrats, Ellul took “a stand against the technological society” and helped them become rightly “maladjusted” themselves. He saw that society’s labeling of them as criminals and delinquents was simply part and parcel of the technological society.

More deeply, I think, the technological society must redefine such people not as criminals and delinquents rather than enemies because criminality creates a permanent class of misfits to justify the state and its police. In just war thought—which, as a Christian pacifist, I am also against—enemies rightly construed have a political agenda that obligates the other side to treat them with a certain degree of equality and fairness. At war's end, people go home. And war ends eventually through some kind of negotiation. But once that enemy is redefined as criminal, terrorist or delinquent, they are depoliticized. Instead of legitimate political claims, such people act out of insanity and hatred. One only needs to remember how those who planned the attacks on 9/11 were described and how no thought to negotiation was countenanced to see that this relabeling serves to create a permanent conflict and justify the state, including its police technique. The technique becomes much further entrenched and the violence more intractable with this shift in identity.

#### International war in police garb

A global police force will only quicken the march of the technological society and is really only a technical solution to technological problems. Ellul himself saw modern policing as a technique designed “to put . . . useless consumers to work” (*The Technological Society*, 111). Techniques intertwine into a system so that a technique applies across disciplines. So policing naturally carries over into economics. When the emerging capitalist system called for more laborers, the police were created to put nonproducers to work, outlawing loitering, gathering firewood and other necessities from the commons, all of which made it harder for nonproducers to stay outside the emerging economic order. Thus technique expands. The police are no exception. It seems naive to suggest that the police would not expand into economic techniques, for example, on the international order. What would a broken window look like on the international scene? Who are the “panhandlers, drunks, addicts, rowdy teenagers, prostitutes, loiterers, the mentally disturbed” that are the human embodiments of broken when one's community is the whole world? If international broken windows must be addressed so that they do not invite a spiral of unrest and violence, who is to notice and fix these windows? In community policing theory it is an outside police force that aggressively drives out undesirable elements, often violating their rights in the name of community. It seems unfathomable that an international police force would not be used to expand global capital markets.

#### Looking outside the system

As one example of a non-technical way of thinking about security we might look to the Paez tribe in Colombia, 100,000 people strong, who have completely disarmed their indigenous guard. This guard is not a professional force, but is made up of all volunteers and includes over 7,000 men, women and youth. They carry a three foot long baton decorated with various colors as a symbol of their authority, not as a weapon. When there is encroachment on their territory they communicate via radios and many of them gather together to confront the intrusion and try to persuade them to leave (a hue and cry). This does not mean that such a decentralized, democratic,

and nonviolent practice is always effective in warding off outside aggression: currently the tribe is facing increased pressure from both the government and FARC rebels with encroachment from both sides. However at times they have been able to persuade the rebels to back off and to release hostages. They provide security at great personal risk to themselves and their communities. This is not really “policing,” in the normal sense of this word, but a communal practice of care and concern for communal wellbeing through resolving conflicts nonviolently.

#### Conclusion

Just policing advocates distinguish between war and policing in such a way that policing must necessarily be less violent than war. They have historically maintained social stratification and expanded into new areas to justify their existence and operate not under the rule of law, but under the assumption that they should create order, a subjective concept that looks different to a radical anarchist than to a police officer. I have tried to demonstrate the flaws in this argument. In the end, Ellul’s statement on these distinctions holds true (*The Political Illusion*, trans. Konrad Kellen (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), 74-75):

*We hardly need to point out how simple-minded the distinction made by one of our philosophers is between “police” (internal), which would be legitimate as a means of constraint, and an ‘army,’ which would be on the order of force. In the realm of politics these two elements are identical.*

## Going Offline

by Brenna Cussen Anglada

*Brenna Cussen Anglada lives at the New Hope Catholic Worker Farm in Dubuque Iowa where she and others try to live out Peter Maurin’s vision of a “worker-scholar” by combining farming and education*

”There are almost seven billion people in the world. Since it is not ecologically sustainable for each one of those people to use a computer, *why you?*”

This question, posed by Ethan Hughes to a small group of us visiting the Possibility Alliance, an intentional community in Northeast Missouri living without the use of fossil fuel, has made a lasting impression on me. Ethan’s challenge, pointed at the privilege that I take for granted, and backed by the weight of sobering statistics about the destructive effects computers have on God’s creation, has triggered my decision to give up the personal use of computers by the end of 2011.

I say I will give up the personal use of computers, because I realize it is currently beyond my ability and imagination right now to stop using the computers that are involved in my daily activities like using public transportation, banks, or telephones, or purchase anything. One exception I *may* make to the personal computer ban is if I travel to Occupied Palestine or another area where extreme oppression is taking place.

Then I may use a computer as a means to communicate such injustices. However, I have not yet made this decision

My decision did not come in a vacuum. Already, I live in a Catholic Worker farm community that is trying in multiple ways to simplify, and care for, our own basic needs. Eight adults and five children use one washer (no dryer), share three cars, heat our homes with wood, compost our human waste, and raise the bulk of our food. While we still use refrigeration, cook with propane, and depend on electricity (with some solar) for lights and appliances, we hope to implement alternatives for these conveniences in the near future. Part of the reason I live this way is because, in recognizing the immense privilege I inherited as an educated white American, I no longer want to assume that somebody poorer (or browner) than me will perform the daily tasks that keep me alive in order that I can pursue more “intellectual” or “spiritual” interests. And though I don’t own a computer, the fact that I still borrow friends’ laptops or use the library desktop - the very creation of which wreaks havoc on the environment and the lives of the poor - is yet another way I capitalize on another’s misery.

Admittedly, for some, computers are amazingly helpful tools. On a personal scale, computers have served as a convenient way for me to stay in touch with my family and friends across large geographical distances. I have used them to edit and publish my ideas on issues of justice and faith, about which I am passionate. More generally, computers assist communities of people from across the world to exchange ideas, and have served as a means through which activists can promote awareness about important causes. The recent nonviolent, democratic revolution in Egypt owes much to the computer for its efficient means of communication (though the actual extent of its valued role has been debated.) Computers can be used in modern medicine to prevent death and promote healing. Often, computers can help us save lives.

According to Jacques Ellul, such advantages of “technique” (as he refers to what is more familiarly called “technology”) are usually concrete and obvious to the common person. My readers can probably come up with an even longer list on the benefits of computers than I have already presented. However, as Ellul posits in his book *The Technological Bluff*, the disadvantages of technique (which are of a different type than and usually cannot be compared to the advantages) are very real, though generally more abstract than the advantages, and often only come to light after long arguments. Ellul offers as an example the invention of artificial light, the benefits of which are plain to see. A major, though less obvious, disadvantage, as he points out, is the fact that such artificial light has enabled human beings to work and live as much at night as during the day, “breaking one of life’s most basic rhythms,” and leading to the expectation of industrialized society that people work as machines work (Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990), 43). Ellul asserts that, contrary to common assumption, and unlike many other inanimate objects (i.e. a knife being used either to slice bread or to kill a neighbor) technique is *not* neutral. He says, rather, that no matter how technique is used, it carries with it a number of both positive and negative consequences (p. 35).

If this is true, then it would behoove our society to begin a serious argument over the effects of the computer, weighing the positive against the negative. Below I have listed a sampling, by no means exhaustive list, of the negative environmental impacts alone (please take into account that since the computer industry is such a rapidly changing field, it is difficult to get the most up-to-date statistics). I hope for this short essay to contribute to a larger, much more comprehensive, discussion.

- The manufacturing of a typical desktop and monitor takes 500 pounds of fossil fuels, 47 pounds of chemicals, and 1.5 tons of water in a world where one third of the human population does not have access to clean drinking water (Worldwatch Institute, “Behind the Scenes: Computers,” *State of the World* (New York: Worldwatch Institute, 2004), 44

<http://www.rohan.sdsu.edu/faculty/dunnweb/StateofWorld2004.dat.pdf>).

- Each year, between five and seven million *tons* of e-waste (trashed toxic components of computers that are impossible to recycle) is created (Annie Leonard, *The Story of Stuff* (Free Press of Simon and Schuster, 2010), 58). The majority of this is sent to China, India, South Asia, and Pakistan, as it is cheaper to send trash abroad than it is to deal with it domestically.
- An investigation by the Basel Action Network and Greenpeace China in December 2001 found that most computers in Guiyu, an ewaste processing center in China, are from North America and, to a lesser degree, Japan, South Korea, and Europe. The study found that computers in these “recycling” facilities are dismantled using hammers, chisels, screwdrivers, and even bare hands. Workers crack CRT monitors to remove the copper yoke, while the rest of the CRT is dumped on open land or pushed into rivers. Local residents say the water now tastes foul from lead and other contaminants (Worldwatch Institute, 45).
- A single 320-megabyte microchip requires at least 72 grams of chemicals, 700 grams of elemental gasses, 32,000 grams of water, and 1200 grams of fossil fuels. Another 440 grams of fossil fuels are used to operate the chip during its typical life span - four years of operation for three hours a day (Worldwatch Institute, 44).
- More than two thousand materials are used in the production of just one microchip (smaller than a pinky fingernail), a single component of one machine: given this, it is next to impossible for human rights watchdog groups to track the origin of all the materials that go into making an entire computer. It can be safely assumed, though, that all of the same problematic mining practices of environmental contamination, health problems, and human rights violations (for the gold, tantalum, copper, aluminum, lead, zinc, nickel, tin, silver, iron,

mercury, cobalt, arsenic, cadmium, and chromium that are used in computer manufacturing) are involved (Leonard, 58).

Knowing all of this, if I neither want to mine the parts for, nor build, a computer myself, nor want any member of my family to do so, then why would I ask somebody else to do it for me?

There exist other persuasive arguments - social, psychological, physical, and spiritual - against the use of the computer. I'm sure you are familiar with many of them, so I will only touch on a few: the average American child spends 30 hours a week in front of a screen, no doubt contributing to the worrying rise in obesity, diabetes, and other related diseases. This also exposes children to more violence and pornography than with which they would otherwise come into contact. Since 90% of human communication is nonverbal, the pervasiveness of email, Facebook, iPhones, and other forms of electronic interaction have led to the loss of much authentic communication in relationships. And as both spiritual and physical beings, created by God to be in the material world, such mediated access to our environment disrupts a more direct access to the divine.

As a Christian and an anarchist trying to live an authentic life, the most compelling reason for me to give up computer use is that *computers make me reliant on an unjust system I claim to resist*. Both the manufacturing and the running of computers require strip mining and the extraction of fossil fuels. Most of the funding for computer science research comes from the military. Worse, it is due to the military's occupation of foreign lands that we have easy access to resources like oil and other materials we need to run our high-tech lifestyles. If I believe in a world where military and corporate domination do not exist, then I need to start practicing for that world. And, as far as I can see, such a world cannot have computers. The farmer-writer Wendell Berry, in his well-known essay "Why I Am Not Going to Buy a Computer," says, "I would hate to think that my work as a writer could not be done without a direct dependence on strip-mined coal. How could I write conscientiously against the

rape of nature if I were, in the act of writing, implicated in the rape?" (Wendell Berry, "Why I Am Not Going to Buy a Computer," published in *New England Review* and *Bread Loaf Quarterly* in 1987 and reprinted in *Harper's*).

<http://www.jesusradicals.com/wp-content/uploads/computer.pdf>.

Again, the computer is not the only culprit here. My refrigerator, the gas I put in the car I drive, the stove on which I cook meals for my family - all of these were likely manufactured or obtained in unethical ways. Thankfully, there exist alternatives to the gas or electric stove, to electric refrigeration, and to petroleum-powered transportation. I encourage us all to seek out such alternatives and begin to experiment with them, as our community is currently doing. But the computer has no such alternative. As Ellul says, "There is no choice. The computer brings a whole system with it ...offices, means of distribution, personnel, and production all have to be adapted to it" (*The Technological Bluff*, 9).



In such an enormous system, you may ask whether my action as one person opting to discontinue computer use will even matter. Ellul would not think so. Rather, he laments, “Whom should we hold responsible? The scientists who were there at the beginning? But they do only theoretical studies. [T]he experts who examine the plans? But they only give advice.” Ellul places the majority of the blame—curiously, considering he’s an anarchist—on politicians, whom he says “decide in favor of useless and wasteful projects” and who must “lose their mandate and be refused the possibility of reelection.” (p. 301). Ellul says we, the people, “must take seriously our citizenship” and hold the politicians accountable. But if we seek to create a world free of computers and the State, why would we bother with a state-based solution? I find Wendell Berry, in this regard, more compelling. Berry is critical of those who only point fingers at the elite: “The consumption that supports the production is rarely acknowledged to be at fault. To the extent that we consume, in our present circumstances, we are guilty. To the extent that we guilty consumers are [environmentalists], we are absurd. But what can we do? Must we go on writing letters to politicians and donating to conservation organizations until the majority of our fellow citizens agree with us? Or can we do something directly to solve our share of the problem?”

I assume that most people who are reading this article, are most likely one of a privileged few in the world who owns a computer. In fact, to put computer usage into perspective, Americans own 40% of all of the computers in the world. If we want to begin to unfetter ourselves from the disastrous consequences of a technological society, the abandonment of personal computer use, which seems to be possible for the majority of the world, is one very simple step in that direction. For ultimately, if we cannot find more creative ways to transform society, ways that do not depend on oppressive means, then we will only bolster, lend credence to, and finance the very injustice we seek to eliminate.

# In Review

## **Christian Anarchism: *A Political Commentary on the Gospel***

by Alexandre J. M. E. Christoyannopoulos Imprint Academic, 2010

Reviewed by Tripp York

*Tripp York has taught religion at Western Kentucky University and has authored several books including his latest, *The Devil Wears Nada: Satan Exposed*.*

The subtitle of Christoyannopoulos' book, *A Political Commentary on the Gospel*, may give some readers the impression that there exists an apolitical "Gospel" in need of political commentary. It is as if there exists some reality beyond the gospel called the "political" that can offer objective observations on what political import, if any, the gospel contains. This would hardly be innovative as theologians, especially in the past few centuries, have often made just such an assumption. The life and teachings of Jesus appear to have nothing to say about "real life" until someone fills the gaps by aligning it with a secular political theory of their own predilection.

This is not, however, the intention of Christoyannopoulos' book. Instead, his purpose is to offer a "detailed and comprehensive synthesis of the main themes of Christian anarchist thought" (p. 1).

In order to do this, Christoyannopoulos attempts the incredibly arduous task of weaving together the various thoughts, meanderings, and arguments offered to us by numerous Christian anarchists. By doing so, he not only hopes to provide both a broad and succinct account of Christian anarchism (by delineating the cardinal tenets of their shared agreements and disagreements), but to contribute to the growing arena of political theology (p. 4). (Note 1)

Christoyannopoulos divides his book into six chapters and a concluding word on the prophetic role of Christian anarchism. His introduction outlines and discusses numerous Christian anarchists and how their work can be located amidst current political theologies. The introduction provides a hint as to how his entire manuscript will read: this is not so much a book making a specific argument as much as it is an encyclopedic account of the arguments made by Christian anarchists. To his credit, Christoyannopoulos is exhaustingly exhaustive. The introduction contains almost 200 footnotes, while some of the chapters include more than 400 footnotes. I do not point this out as a criticism. My point is quite the opposite. In order for him to achieve

his objective, Christoyannopoulos, it seems, incorporates everything ever discussed by Christian anarchists in regards to the kind of things Christian anarchists like to discuss.

For instance, chapter one is a sustained reflection on the Sermon on the Mount. The author examines how various Christian anarchists have exegeted, for example, the text “do not resist evil” in order to display commonalities of approach from thinkers such as Tolstoy, Ellul, Eller, Myers, Ballou, Wink, Andrews, Hennacy, Day, Bartley, Penner, Berdyaev, and Yoder (among many others). This is, for the most part, how the entire book runs. Christoyannopoulos breaks his chapters into sections and subsections that comprise a range of topics including, but not limited to, Romans 13, taxes, nonviolence, the state, revolution, exorcism, economics, the swearing of oaths, conscription, the beatitudes, institutional religion, and civil disobedience. He then provides a thorough juxtaposition of what many Christian anarchists have said about each of these topics, therein providing an indispensable commentary on key biblical passages. For some, such a read could be tedious, while for others, this could replace their bible.

Perhaps, in some ways, such a format is both the book’s greatest strength and its greatest weakness. It is a dissertation, and it reads like one. The author goes to great lengths to be as comprehensive as possible— something not always possible when you are trying to sell a book to a publisher. Such comprehensiveness can often make for a slower read, yet, given the nature of his task, it is necessary. Christoyannopoulos’ goal is that of synthesizing the main themes of Christian anarchist thought, and, to this end, he succeeds. This is the book to examine when the situation dictates knowing what Ellul, Tolstoy, Cavanaugh, etc., have to say about Christian life in, under, and outside of governmental authorities.

*Christian Anarchism* is certainly an important part of the Christian anarchist canon. Actually, it may be the canon *of* the canon. There is simply no other book I am aware of that brings together so many Christian anarchist voices on so many key theological issues. In this manner, it functions as an essential guide to everything a Christian anarchist may ever want to read. In a book with more than 2,000 footnotes, it provides you with all the resources your little anti-capitalist heart can afford (assuming you are not one of those strange anomalies known as an anarcho-capitalist). Speaking of affordability, this book will, ironically, make the most ardent defender of capitalism shout with joy. It is expensive. It is eighty dollars expensive. Perhaps it should have included a preface similar to the one found in Wendell Berry’s *Sex, Economy, Community and Freedom* (NY: Pantheon Books, 1993): “If you have bought it, dear reader, I thank you. If you have borrowed it, I honor your frugality. If you have stolen it, may it add to your confusion” (p. 18). Regardless, the author promises that within the next year, a shorter, revised, and a “foot-note freer” version will be released (vii). I am assuming (or at least hoping—as I am sure the author is as well) it will also be less expensive. If you are inclined, however, to have a version that functions as a guide to everything that combines a cross with a circled ‘A’, then this may be your best bet.

My only word of warning is the same word I offer to any person compelled to adopt the label of Christian anarchism: Avoid labels that tend to be both novel and reactionary (note, I say “tend to be” as opposed to “are”). The best Christian anarchists I have ever read never considered themselves to be Christian anarchists. Fortunately, Christoyannopoulos shows us that many so-called Christian anarchists have far higher aspirations than some of the reactionary postures we all tend to embrace. This book offers an excellent manual for how to not only live like a Christian anarchist, but, and more importantly, how to live like a disciple of Jesus. Hopefully, at its best, Christian Anarchism will serve to remind us that Christianity is about living the kind of life that may best be called anarchistic, while remaining well aware that Christianity was lived faithfully, by many others, for seventeen-hundred years prior to the creation of words like anarchistic.

*Note 1: The very existence of something called “political theology” may assume the kind of posture I was critical of in the first paragraph. It, inherently, suggests the existence of a different kind of theology that is somehow apolitical—which very well may be the reality given North American Christianity’s overwhelming tendency toward Gnosticism. Nevertheless, the idea of a political theology seems to posit, and reinforce, the notion that there can be some sort of reflection on God that lacks any bearing on how creation interacts with itself. Granted, I imagine the real reason such terminology exists is, in part, due to the heretical bifurcations created and perpetuated by modern theologians, as well as the need for such theologians to garner interest in their increasingly irrelevant field of study.*

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**Issue #49 Spring 2012 — Art,  
Technique, and Meaning in Jacques  
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For the Critique of Technological Civilization



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"A major section of modern art and poetry unconsciously guides us in the direction of madness . . . only madness is inaccessible to the machine. Every other "art" form can be reduced to technique."

-Jacques Ellul,

Technological Society, page 404

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## **From the Editor**

In this 49<sup>th</sup> issue of the Ellul Forum our long-time friend and Contributing Editor, David Lovekin, not only probes the meaning of art in our technological society, with the aide of Jacques Ellul, Andy Warhol, and others — he sets a record for the longest article we have ever published.

Far be it from us to quench the musings of our motorcycle-riding, bass-playing, philosophy professor. Ellul’s big book on art *L’Empire du non-sens* (1980) has never been translated. Ellul’s mother was a painter - I recall vividly a beautiful portrait of Jacques Ellul as a young boy which hung in their living room.

Professor Lovekin has just retired from active teaching, paper-grading, and academic bureaucracy at his longtime academic home, Hastings College in Nebraska. His doctoral dissertation *Technique, Discourse and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul* was published in 1991.

Lovekin’s friend and colleague Samir Younes, Professor of Architecture at the University of Notre Dame, contributes a companion article on “Technique and the Collapse of Symbolic Thought.” Younes’s latest book is *The Imperfect City: On Architectural Judgment* (2012).

Richard Stivers reviews Bill Vanderburg’s latest book, as always, delivering important Ellulian insights to our intellectually and spiritually often-impooverished world.

We are closing in on 25 years of publishing the Ellul Forum. We will always do some paper but we must also connect with those who rummage through cyberspace so watch for an increased Ellul Forum presence on the internet.

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David W. Gill, Associate Editor

## Looking and Seeing: The Play of Image and Art

The Wager of Art in the Technological Society

by David Lovekin

*David Lovekin is Professor of Philosophy at Hastings College in Hastings Nebraska. He is the author of one of the first published dissertations on Jacques Ellul, Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness (1991)*

### Prologue

This study began with a fascination for the enigma of American artist Andy Warhol (1928-1987). I began to collect his words. I had been intrigued by German philosopher, literary critic, essayist Walter Benjamin's (1892) philosophical snapshots and with the notion of an aura that could be peeled from objects by photography. And I was taken by French philosopher, professor of law, and theologian Jacques Ellul's (1912-1994) claim that religion, philosophy, and aesthetics were mere ornaments that had gone the way of the ruffled sunshade on McCormick's first reaper. Aura, the capacity of the object to look back and to direct the viewer in search for origins, fleshed out Ellul's claim. The symbol had lost its symbolic dimension in the technical process where words became images and images became concepts; this insight informed my reading of Warhol and Benjamin with Ellul.

### The Image and the Celebrity

"The Look" is everywhere. Everywhere people look there are people looking back, hoping to see and to be seen. To be is to be seen. Bishop Berkeley's catch-phrase is the logic of celebrity washed America, Andy Warhol's America, and the current America as well. Warhol's America does not go away. Reality TV became possible when TV became reality, when the celebrity became a primary archetype in some fifteen minutes of fame, and when art and celebrity became interchangeable.

Riding across the country in 1963 to his second show—the Liz-Elvis Show at the Ferus Gallery in L A.—Warhol realized that the countryside was *Pop* and had become a sign, a label. It was there to be seen and consumed. He wrote:

*The moment you label something you take a step—I mean, you can never go back to seeing it unlabeled. We were seeing the future and we knew it for sure. I saw people walking around in it without knowing it, because they were still thinking in the past.*

*But all you had to do was know you were in the future, and that's what put you there. The mystery was gone, but the amazement was just starting.*<sup>1</sup>

Warhol saw what America stood for. Past, present, and future coincided in the label, the power of the image that was an eternal present, digitized time. The image substantiates being in two directions. It both offers the product and it reveals the celebrity. Before the images, the mystery was gone. Warhol was amazed.

Warhol's last book, *America*, was a chronicle of that amazement. Composed of photographs taken over the last ten years, Warhol revealed the many paradoxes and mysteries that had become America. These mysteries were resolved in the image. In America there was so much wealth and so much poverty. The solution was style. Warhol observed:

*One of the great things in American cities today is not having all that much money but having so much style that you can get into any place for free. Free parties, free drinks, free food—you just need the right attitude, the right clothes, and being clean.*<sup>2</sup>

Style was a function of right attitude, right appearance, and proper hygiene. Style was a discipline of mind and body. Poverty and death challenged this discipline, Warhol revealed. He was concerned.

Mystery denied was mystery regained. What was the right dress, the proper hygiene and attitude, when anything goes (Ellul would call it *N'importe quoi*)? Granted, it must be seen, but by and for whom? Moreover, was this propriety not tied to commodity, to consumption? First, the very people needing the free meal, the free drink, the shelter and warmth, were those too poor to purchase it. Second, there was so much to purchase in so many places. Style was the resolution, the knack to intuit the proper look. Style was what the look was about. Warhol advised:

*You need one kind of look to get into the clubs that the kids go to, you need another to freeload at the Broadway opening night parties, and You need another for the sports parties. It takes a lot of work to figure out how to look so good they'll want you; it's easier to get a good job and buy your way in, which is what most people do. But that's never been the chic way and, in reality, the clubs have more respect for those with style and they treat them much better than those who pay.*<sup>3</sup>

Style was beyond commodity and yet what commodity addressed. Behind the seeming clarity of the image was another dimension, a place of rest within the flow of products. Americans were offered a blinding choice between this product, this occupation, this style of life, this form of entertainment. Choice, as Warhol saw it, was no longer a matter of traditional wealth and social status, although wealth was likely included. Style involved purchases, the proper purchases.

On the one hand, mass production democratized choice. Warhol said:

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<sup>1</sup> Andy Warhol, *America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 112.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 199

*Buying things in America today is just unbelievable. Let's say you're thirsty. Do you want Coke, Diet Coke, Tab, Caffeine-Free Coke, Caffeine-Free Diet Coke, Caffeine-Free Tab, New Improved Tab, Pepsi, diet Pepsi, Pepsi Light, Pepsi Fee, Root Beer, Royal Crown Cola, C&C Cola, Diet Royal Crown Cola, Caffeine-Free Pepsi, Caffeine-Free Diet Pepsi, Caffeine-Free Royal Crown Cola, Like, Dr. Pepper, Sugar-Free Dr. Pepper, Fresca, Mr. Pibb, Seven-Up, Diet Seven-Up, orange, grape, apple Orelia, Perrier, Poland, ginger ale, tonic, seltzer, Yoo-Hoo or cream soda?*

*And not only are there all these choices, but it's all democratic. You can see a billboard for Tab and think: Nancy Reagan drinks Tab, Gloria Vanderbilt drinks Tab, Jackie Onassis drinks Tab, Katherine Hepburn drinks Tab, and, just think, you can drink Tab too. Tab is tab and no matter how rich you are, you can't get a better one than the one the homeless woman on the corner is drinking. All the Tabs are just the same. And all the Tabs are good. Nancy Reagan knows it, Gloria Vanderbilt knows it, the bag lady knows it, and you know it.<sup>4</sup>*

There seems so much choice, so much freedom, which appears in the hands of the consumer that are truly in the hands of the corporation and the technical system. To consume, however, is to appear to be free, which, in turn, seems to flow from the technical system; joblessness and poverty seem the unfortunate results as well. Even in the pressure of poverty, however, the celebrity may appear as guide for the wisdom of consumption, which is a function of being seen.

The celebrity, then, has become the guide for recovering the many fragmentations and disjunctions that are modern life. The celebrity's visibility illuminates. To be visible, however, is to risk reduction and fragmentation, a fate the ordinary as well as the Platonic Forms might suffer. To be dressed punk one night and to be at the opera in tie and tails is to dare dissolution and that dare is style. To be able to do both is to have style. The celebrity is both moments, knowing that what matters is what happens "now" perpetually. The celebrity is this or that appearance at every moment. To seek coherence and consistency beyond the moment is to not understand the logic of the celebrity, something understood by contemporary politicians as they attempt to become all to nobody and everybody. The celebrity is this peculiar unity, imminently transcendent as a master of the art of the ephemeral. Warhol would agree, having had in mind this specific type:

*I've always thought politicians and actors really summed up the American Way. They can look at the various pieces of themselves, and they can pick out one piece and say, "Now I'm only going to be this one thing." And the piece may be smaller and less interesting than the whole person-ality, but it's the piece that everyone wants to see.<sup>5</sup>*

The politician and actor are inevitable identities. Each presents the real as now with no continuity beyond appearance.

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-22

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

In 1968 at Andy Warhol Enterprises, known as The Factory, Warhol was shot by Valerie Solanis, one of his celebrities. Warhol thought about death, about a possible epitaph. He concluded: "I always thought I'd like my own tombstone to be blank. No epitaph, and no name. Well, actually, I'd like it to say 'figment.'"<sup>6</sup> Death provided a marvelous focus, a question of what was beyond the here and now? Warhol concluded with celebrity style:

*Dying is the most embarrassing thing that can ever happen to you, be-cause some-one's got to take care of the body, make the funeral arrangements, pick out the casket and the service and the cemetery and the clothes for you to wear and get someone to style you and do the makeup. You'd like to help them, and most of all you'd like to do the whole thing your-self, but you're dead and so you can't. Here you've spent your whole life trying to make enough money to take care of yourself so you won't bother anybody else with your problems, and then you wind up dumping the biggest problem ever in somebody else's lap anyway. It's a shame.*<sup>7</sup>

Here we have the major celebrity problems of modern life: detail, appearance, and efficiency. What surrounds the concerns of the here and now is problematic, embarrassing. Death is embarrassing, a nuisance and an annoyance, and, finally, shame. The shame is that this moment style is ultimately called to question.

Warhol had the look, but his words seem tinged with irony, although of this we are not sure. Are his assembly line portraits of products and celebrities mere replications of consumer-producer products or are they sardonic commentaries on the superficialities of his age? Are they what I will later call bad infinities?

Warhol's style was a concern from the moment he entered the art scene. Irving Sandler in his review of Warhol's work in the 1962 *New Realists* exhibition at the Sidney Janis Gallery in New York wrote: "In aping commercial art does Warhol . . . satirize its vulgarity or does he accept its value complacently?"<sup>8</sup> Sandler assumed that art was not commercial, that art adopted a transcendent perspective. Sandler betrayed his hope in Warhol to suggest that Warhol only "apes" commercial style. Presumably, the sin of painting commercially was absolved in ironic intention. Irony is a transcendent pose, but Warhol's irony was uncertain. Did his words and his art match up and for what purpose: did they reflect, question, or abdicate? Or did they mean anything at all beyond their expression and style?

Warhol was an enigma, studied or not. In interviews, for example, Warhol avoided facts and said, "I never give my background, and anyhow I make it all up different anytime I'm asked."<sup>9</sup> And then, the famous quote: "The reason I'm painting this way is that I want to be a machine."<sup>10</sup> Since the Renaissance it was a commonplace to see

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 129

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>8</sup> As quoted in Claude Marks, *World Artists: An H. W. Wilson Biographical Dictionary* (New York: The H. W. Wilson Co. 1984), 880.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 879.

<sup>10</sup> Andy Warhol, "What is Pop Art?," interview with Gene Swensen, *Art News* (62) (1963), 26.

the artist as visionary, divinely inspired, rising above time and place, leading society to greater sensibility and awareness. The artist might also appear as a rogue and a charlatan, as long as the artist was clearly astride the social order. Sometimes the artist was both hero and rascal. Erwin Panofsky noted a Venetian forger, who, in his reproduction of a fourth or fifth century BCE Greek coin, could not resist adding a variation of Michelangelo's *David* and the *Risen Christ*.<sup>11</sup> Sartre, more recently, recommended the authenticity of Jean Genet as both poet and thief, a true and admirable outsider. The artist as outsider must be clever and not a dupe. Warhol must not be a dupe. But, where does the celebrity as artist stand? The answer, in part, resides in a relation of the artist to the artistic process that is, at the same time, a social process.

## The Reproducibility of Art; the Art of Reproducibility

Walter Benjamin, in his 1936 essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," argued that the photographic means of reproduction appearing in the nineteenth century required a rethinking of the reality and the place of art. Most notably, the art object as a conveyer of "aura" was diminished. In traditional cultures the art object possessed aura in its uniqueness, in its capacity to unite its audience in a ritual pose, and in its representation of a tradition, which it at once founded and furthered. The gods were named and sacred images produced and rituals could be followed. The gods were often eaten or celebrated through sacrifice. The "aura" of an art object, like totemic and cave art, projected that object beyond its time and place to engage other traditions that encountered the object's uniqueness, though not necessarily in the same way. Benjamin explained that the stature of Venus for the Greeks was an object of veneration, while for Medieval society, it was ominously regarded as pagan idolatry, but, nonetheless both perspectives revealed "aura."<sup>12</sup> For both societies the aura-laden object extended the powers of uniqueness and permanence. The artist, anonymous or not, shared in those powers. In traditional societies the artist appeared as shaman or hero.

The photographic process changed the notion of the art object and the natural object, both in the photograph's power to copy an "original" art object or a natural object, and in the photograph's capacity to become an "original" art object. In both cases the notion of "original" was transformed. A photograph that reproduced the Eiffel Tower was a copy like a painting or drawing and yet fundamentally different. The photographic process introduced transitoriness and reproducibility that seemed to parallel the worker's condition. In this relationship, the artist and viewer were separated from

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<sup>11</sup> Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (New York: Icon Editions/Harper and Row, 1972), 41.

<sup>12</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproductions," *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn and edited and introduced by Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 223-224. There were three editions of this work and I am using the third edition, which Benjamin understood as a work in progress.



the “object” like the laborer in the factory. The device did the work, while the artist guided, focused, and snapped the picture. Of course the camera could become a tool like a pencil and brush, (and was more like one with analogue photography mastered in a dark room) and thus separate the photographer from the process, but that is not how the photograph or camera was typically understood and used. The camera took pictures apparently any one could take with the result that the photographer and the viewer became “anyone.” This would seem, however, a further alienation. Traditionally, art required an awareness and intention beyond a “technical intention,” whereas in the past technique served and became intention. Those relations had been inverted, Benjamin understood.

Benjamin understood that photography had changed the nature and perception of daily life, changes which he understood in political and aesthetic terms. The newsreel served to co-opt the image formed by the unaided eye. He wrote:

*To pry an object from its shell, to destroy its aura, is the mark of a perception whose “sense of the universal equality of things” has increased to such a degree that it extracts it even from a unique object by means of reproduction. Thus is manifested in the field of perception what in the theoretical sphere is noticeable in the increasing importance of statistics. The adjustment of reality is to the masses and of the masses to reality is a process of unlimited scope, as much for thinking as for perception.*<sup>13</sup>

Thus, film could bring a level of unprecedented objectivity. In “The Work” Benjamin made two claims worthy of note: (1) The camera, with the aid of cutting, a variety of camera angles, and other sophisticated techniques, moved the viewer through and beyond the media that supplied the image that made the immediate seem more immediate. As the presence of the camera faded from the viewer’s attention, the way the proscenium arch in a theatre never does, the immediate itself appeared: “The equipment-free aspect of reality here has become the height of artifice; the sight of immediate reality has become an orchid in the land of technology.”<sup>14</sup> That is, as the hitherto invisible was viewed, the miracles of the camera were transferred to the eye itself. The viewer became the miracle. (2) The viewer became an expert, privy to what was only apparent from an otherwise impossible perspective. “It is inherent in the technique of the film as well as that of sports that everybody who witnesses its accomplishments is somewhat of an expert.”<sup>15</sup>

”The Work” was a work in process going through three editions that differed more in emphasis than in substance. The second edition emphasized the need to free the worker from bourgeois tradition and the cult power of aura through photography and populist art media to help further the cultural revolution. He wrote of two technologies: the first that sought mastery over nature, an aggressive technology, and the second that invited creativity and play: “The origin of the second technology lies at the point

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

<sup>14</sup> *Illuminations*, 233.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

where, by an unconscious ruse, human beings first began to distance themselves from nature. It lies. . . in play.”<sup>16</sup> The primary goal of second technology was benign and to reintroduce the human to nature. He wrote optimistically:

*The primary social function of art today is to rehearse that interplay [between man and nature]. This applies especially to film. The function of film is to train human beings in the apperceptions and reaction needed to deal with a vast apparatus whose role in their lives is expanding almost daily. Dealing with this apparatus also teaches them that technology will release them from their enslavement to the powers of the apparatus only when humanity’s whole constitution has adapted itself to the new productive forces which the second technology has set free.*<sup>17</sup>

Benjamin was not naive and understood as well that as long as technology was in the control of an imperialistic and fascist state great evil was possible. He noted:

*Imperialist war is an uprising on the part of technology, which demands repayment in “human material” for the natural material society has denied it. Instead of deploying power stations across the land, society deploys manpower in the form of armies. Instead of promoting air traffic, it promotes traffic in shells. And in gas warfare it has found a new means of abolishing the aura.*<sup>18</sup>

Benjamin was quite aware of Fascist and imperialist propaganda that employed technology to aestheticize war and violence. He wrote “The Work” in exile from Nazi Germany.

The senses of aura were becoming complicated: from ritual to poison gas. Benjamin further observed. The film responds to the shriveling of the aura with an artificial build-up of the “personality” outside the studio. The cult of the movie star, fostered by the money of the film industry, preserves not the unique aura of the person but the “spell of the personality,” the phony spell of a commodity. So long as the movie-makers’ capital sets the fashion, as a rule no other revolutionary merit can be accredited to today’s film than the pro-motion of a revolutionary criticism of traditional concepts of art. We do not deny that in some cases today’s films can also promote revolution-ary criticism of social conditions, even of the distribution of property.<sup>19</sup>

The “movie star,” like the celebrity mentioned above, reclaimed aura paradoxically, only to make the film even more of a commodity. The movie star became the commodity itself. Adorno had criticized Benjamin’s sometimes non-dialectical embrace of reproductions that tended to become commodities and fetishes, objects of phony aura.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> “The Work of Art in the Age of its Reproducibility,” in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, trans. Emund Jephcott, Howard Eiland, and Others, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), vol III, 107, hereinafter cited as *SW*.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 107-108.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 121-122.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>20</sup> Theodor Adorno, “Exchange with Thodore H. Adorno, in *SW.*, vol. III,55-60.

By 1939, in “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” Benjamin had expanded his representation of aura that would complicate his cultural critique. Experience of the aura thus rests on the transposition of a response common in human relationships to the relationship between inanimate or natural object and man. The person we look at, or who feels he is being looked at, looks at us in turn. To perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return. This experience corresponds to the data of the *memoire involontaire* (These data . . . are unique; they are lost to the memory that seeks to retain them.) Thus they lend support to a concept of the aura that comprises the “unique manifestation at a distance.” This designation has the advantage of clarifying the ceremonial character of the phenomenon. The essentially distant is the inapproachable: inapproachability is in fact a primary quality of the ceremonial image.<sup>21</sup>

In this essay Benjamin moved back and forth between kinds of art—painting photography, poetry and literature still wondering about a sense of “authenticity” and an “original” that powered artistic expression. Voluntary memory responded to the will and to a present seeking a past, but to which past: a nearby past, a conscious past, or a deeper past? Involuntary memory, credited to Proust, was a past we did not quite see but one that we felt, one that revealed aura. Benjamin, quoting Proust, said, the past is “somewhere beyond the reach of the intellect, and unmistakably present in some material object (or in the sensation which such an object arouses in us), although we have no idea which one it is.”<sup>22</sup> We are in the presence of the famous “madeleine” and in the power of the word to invoke what was only present as semblance, seeming. Looking and seeing were in tension.

Benjamin will suppose, however, that photography typically plays in the realm of voluntary memory, which, though visual is different from painting. “The painting invites the spectator to contemplation; before it the spectator can abandon himself to his associations. Before the movie frame he cannot do so. No sooner has his eye grasped a scene than it has already changed. It cannot be arrested.”<sup>23</sup> Apparently, the photographic image does not return the gaze, Benjamin concluded, and remains thinglike on the view of Valery.

. . . a painting we look at reflects back at us that of which our eyes will never have their fill. [. . .] What distinguishes photography from painting is therefore clear . . . : to the eyes that will never have their fill of a painting, photography is rather like food for the hungry or drink for the thirsty.<sup>24</sup>

”Aura” now becomes an epistemological notion in a metaphysical undertow. The object of the look is not merely seen but is seen and looks back; the viewer’s gaze is returned to provide a sense of an original. We look for and then see the object that exceeds the grasp as both near and far. Aura appears as the object and the viewer meet

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<sup>21</sup> *Illuminations*, 188.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

and confront one another and complete one another provisionally, with the otherness of each intact. The art object with aura presents a totality that overflows the reduction of it to one sense, say to the sense of sight, which tends to distance and abstract. Aura rejects reification and the reduction of even things to things.

The photographic image appears as the complete and real as a painting will not, and yet it does not satisfy. As an extension of voluntary memory, photography “. . . reduces the scope for the play of the imagination.”<sup>25</sup> For Valery and Proust, aura, imagination, and involuntary memory connected in depth. The involuntary memory finds what is not expected and not merely repeated. From these insights the value to the worker and the ordinary person remained unclear beyond the photograph’s capacity to bring the exotic and the inapproachable into the home and marketplace beyond the proliferation of commodities. Nonetheless, Benjamin would try to find a dialectical place for the mechanical image.

In his “Little History of Photography,” in 1931, Benjamin was looking at the photography of Atget’s that advanced art beyond the “stifling atmosphere generated by conventional portrait photography in the age of decline. He cleanses this atmosphere . . . he initiates the emancipation of object from aura.... [ . . . ] He looked for what was unremarked, forgotten, cast adrift. And thus such pictures, too, work against the exotic, romantically sonorous names of the cities; they suck the aura out of reality like water from a sinking ship.”<sup>26</sup> But, what is sucking? By conventional portrait photography Benjamin understood that the prestige of the poser held aura. Atget’s pictures showed what tourists did not want to see. Atget’s pictures worked against the “sonorous names” of cities, and here we could understand these as the bearer’s of bourgeois aura. Does Benjamin mean that Atget’s photos leave some measure of aura—good aura, non bourgeois order, if there is such a thing—intact? Or is he taking the side that photography was simply the death of aura, period? Conventional portraits and romantic picturesque landscapes could be seen as sucking the aura out of nature that had been denaturalized by a first technology. Does Atget’s work reinstate aura as the aspect of surprise working against voluntary merely repetitive memory? Later in the essay Benjamin states: “It is no accident that Atget’s photographs have been likened to those of a crime scene. But isn’t every square inch of our cities a crime scene?”<sup>27</sup>

In the “Little History” Benjamin asks:

*What is aura, actually? A strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close it may be. While at rest on a summer’s noon, to trace a range of mountains on the horizon, or a branch that throws its shadow on the observer, until the moment or the hour become part of their appearance—this is what it means to breathe the aura of those mountains, that branch. Now to bring*

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>26</sup> *SW*, Vol. II, 518. A very complete and far reaching discussion of aura can be found in Mirriam Bratu Hansen, “Benjamin’s Aura,” *Critical Inquiry* 34 (Winter 2008). Particularly note page 356 where she entertains something like the notion of a false aura.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 527.

*those things closer to us, or rather to the masses, is just as passionate an inclination in our day as the overcoming of whatever is unique in every situation by means of its reproduction. Every day the need to possess the object in closeup in the form of a picture, or rather a copy, becomes more imperative. And the difference between the copy, which illustrated papers and newsreels keep in readiness, and the original picture is unmistakable. Uniqueness and duration are as intimately intertwined in the latter as are transcendence and reproducibility in the former.*<sup>28</sup>

Aura meant breath in Greek. In this understanding of natural aura we are in two distances—the distance before the eye on an horizon and the distance between word and origin, with which Benjamin played. The eye moves—not the lens—and shadows further the distance and open to a source of illumination where the received is also the made. This is what is seen in a bodily moment that is named. Aura is the experience, the name, and the breath. The name is a copy too, just as the act of perceiving produces a copy. The photograph would be a further copy. Nonetheless, aura provides in a space an opening in time beyond reproducibility. Here we both look and see. This could be called the aura in perception seeking an aura in the object, although I think this is a false dichotomy. Aura seems to require the inseparability of subject and object at and in that moment when the near and the far combined. Landscape painting and photography would attest to this original power of view that furthers endless reproductions. The photos of Atget, Benjamin continued, furthered the work of the crime scene investigator with the suspicion that:

*Every passer-by [is] a culprit? Isn't it the task of the photographer—descendant of the augurs and haruspices—to reveal guilt and to point out the guilty in his pictures? "The illiteracy of the future," someone has said, "will be ignorance not of reading or writing, but of photography." But shouldn't a photographer who cannot read his own pictures be no less accounted an illiterate? Won't inscription become the most important part of the photography? Such are the question in which the interval of ninety years that separate us from the age of the daguerreotype discharges its historical tension. It is in the illumination of these sparks that the first photographs emerge, beautiful and unapproachable, from the darkness of our grandfathers' day.*<sup>29</sup>

Here, Benjamin appears to suggest that these images—photographs—could return aura with the power of the word although that aura would be of a different order. Adorno had noted in *The Jargon of Authenticity* that Benjamin's aura labored against an already cliched status tainted by theosophy and by the neo-classicism of Stefan George<sup>30</sup> The notion of aura was beginning to promote a cottage industry that is still productive today. We could see this notion of an altered order or aura as a response to this problem.

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 518. These words are nearly reproduced in the second edition of "The Work," in *SW*, vol III, 104-105.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 527.

<sup>30</sup> Trans. Knut Tarnowski and Frederic Will (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 3-13.

Two deep concerns were in tension for Benjamin—a sense of authenticity and meaning. Atget's photos were suggestive of the surrealist's attempts to call inauthentic society—bourgeois society—to question. They sought the mystery amid the commonplace: "We penetrate the mystery only to the degree that we recognize it in the everyday world by virtue of a dialectical optic that perceives the everyday as impenetrable, the impenetrable as everyday."<sup>31</sup> Benjamin understood Proust, Baudelaire, and Valéry on such a mission. They were to find and to show that the beautiful was ugly and that the ugly—the transformed object—was sublime as it was called to question.

Baudelaire considered the traditional virtue of heroism. What was heroism, if not modernity itself, like? He wrote:

*Regarding the attire, the covering of the modern hero, . . . does it not have a beauty and a charm of its own? Is this not an attire that is needed*

*by our age, which is suffering, and dressed up to its thin black narrow shoulders in the symbol of constant mourning? The black suit and the frock coat not only have their political beauty as an expression of general equality but also their poetic beauty as an expression of the public mentality: an immense cortege of undertakers— political undertakers, amorous undertakers, bourgeois undertakers. We are all attendants at some kind of funeral.—The unvarying livery of hopelessness testifies to equality And don't*

*the folds in the material—those folds that make grimaces and drape themselves around mortified flesh like snakes—have their own secret charm?*<sup>32</sup> The old aura of heroism was gone. The modern hero was not unique in beauty or courage but suffered a commonality—what masqueraded as political equality—in funereal dress without hope. Even the folds of material offered no pleasure or warmth; perhaps the funeral was for the death of hope and courage and, likely, beauty past. The new beauty—ugliness—ironically framed, iconically repeated the oppressions of the past. Only the old was again new, albeit de-auratized, which, on the other side was the "ever-same." To contend the old and the traditional was new until it was not; then it became tradition in a new guise. This was modernity's fate and its problem, revealed in Nietzsche's notion of the eternal return.<sup>33</sup> This backs up to the notion of the authentic. The authentic had to be re-established by the dialectical optic to look and to further see. Benjamin hoped to learn to read the city like Baudelaire.

Benjamin presented a remarkable series of analogies that linked the striking of a match, invented by the middle of the nineteenth century, to the lifting and replacing of a phone receiver, to the snapping of a photograph, and to other types of ". . . switching, inserting, and pressing

[...] Haptic experiences of this kind were joined by optic ones, such as are supplied by the advertising pages of a newspaper and the traffic of a big city."<sup>34</sup> He further

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<sup>31</sup> *SW.*, vol. II, 216.

<sup>32</sup> *SW.*, vol IV, 46.

<sup>33</sup> "The Influence of *Les Fleurs du mal*," *SW*, vol. IV, 97.

<sup>34</sup> "Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Illuminations*, 174-175

considered amusement park rides with cars jolting into one another as training for being in and out of work. Play and work coincided as Benjamin hypothesized in his second technology but it is not clear that the worker was being returned to nature or that the play was anything but distracted habit.<sup>35</sup>

Benjamin's description of gambling was crucial and remarkable.

*Gambling even contains the workman's gesture that is produced by the automatic operation, for there can be no game without the quick movement of the hand by which the stake is put down or a card is picked up. The jolt in the movement of a machine is like the so-called coup in a game of chance. The manipulation of the worker at the machine has no connection with the preceding operation for the very reason that it is its exact repetition. [. . .] The work of both is equally devoid of substance.*<sup>36</sup>

The worker and the gambler were devoid of substance. Did Benjamin think this observation would reinstate an alienated condition?

The crime scene was being investigated and thefts of bodily integrity, grace, and balance were in progress. Citizens lived the fragments that Benjamin translated, finding the true among the ephemeral. The true was then revealed as more oppression and enslavement, freely accepted and pursued in "leisure time." The means of enslavement had become more efficient and over-reaching because less detectable, but it is not clear that aura of any kind was being returned, unless the true would reinstate the beautiful. But what kind of true, what kind of beauty would this be?

Begun in 1927, but never finished, Benjamin worked on his *Arcades Project* to show how the reifying forces of technology, politics, and economy developed in the nineteenth century and had produced new forms of behavior and new human types—the flaneur, the collector, and the gambler—who were subsumed by the ". . . phantasmagoria of the market place."<sup>37</sup> They were consumers of and consumed by the "new." Baudelaire had considered himself a *flaneur*, a leisurely walker, and had made many of his observations of the new in the past's demise. Benjamin remarked that Baudelaire in his later years was pursued by his creditors and his illness and had had little time for a stroll.<sup>38</sup> The "new" was nothing to be taken lightly. Benjamin stated:

*Newness is a quality independent of the use value of the commodity. It is the origin of the illusory appearance that belongs inalienably to images produced by the collective unconscious. It is the quintessence of that false consciousness whose indefatigable agent is fashion. This semblance of the new is reflected, like one mirror in another, in the semblance of the ever recurrent.*<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>37</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin and Prepared on the Basis of the German Volume Edited by Rolf Tiedemann (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 14.

<sup>38</sup> *SW*, vol. IV, 41.

<sup>39</sup> *Arcades Project*, 11.

The phantasmagoria were semblances of the true but not true or beautiful semblances if I understand Benjamin correctly, which would be for anyone a difficult task. Much of what he left behind were fragments, which he may have considered essential to his style. Nonetheless, I join the many in taking a stab at a Benjamin, whom some regard as a Jewish atheist, a mystic driven by the *Kabbalah*, a luddite, a Marxist, a de-constructionist.<sup>40</sup> Etc. would be meaningful.

What was the purpose of art? is the first question to ask. He hoped that it could “redeem” the alienated human condition. Technology one had provided one level of alienation but what was the original world of the human? In *On the Mimetic Faculty* he wrote:

*“To read what was never written.” Such reading is the most ancient: reading prior to all languages, from entrails, the stars, or dances. Later the mediating link of a new kind of reading, of runes and hieroglyphs, came into use. It seems fair to suppose that these were the stages by which the mimetic gift, formerly the foundation of occult practices, gained admittance to writing and language. In this way, language may be seen as the highest level of mimetic behavior and the most complete archive of nonsensuous similarity: a medium into which the earlier powers of mimetic production and comprehension have passed without residue, to the point where they have liquidated those of magic.<sup>41</sup>*

The mimetic faculty was the drive to turn experience into language, to name what was not named. How would art then be connected to aura, which would be tied to the mimetic drive to imitate and to express the unique that would return the gaze? In “On Semblance” he wrote:

*In every work and every genre of art, the beautiful semblance is present; everything beautiful in art can be ascribed to the realm of beautiful semblance. This beautiful semblance should be clearly distinguished from other kinds of semblance. Not only is it to be found in art, but all true beauty in art must be assigned to it.<sup>42</sup>*

Art is an appearance of what was original and true in that sense but was not the true or even the beautiful. Art would provide semblances of these things. Thus, things should not be reified or fetishized. This would be not appropriate for true or beautiful semblances. The new in commodity form would not be new, as above, but would only be repetitions and mere copies, aping phony aura. This kind of “new” or phony aura is what I will refer to as products of a bad infinity.

In his *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (May 1924-April 1925), which failed to earn him his *Habilitation*, he prophetically said: “The authentic—the hallmark of origin in phenomena—is the object of discovery, a discovery which is connected in a unique

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<sup>40</sup> See Esther Leslie’s *Walter Benjamin: Overpowering Conformism*, (London, Sterling, Virginia: Pluto Press, 2000) for a well reasoned Marxist interpretation and well placed criticism of opposing views. Richard Wolin’s *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) takes the mystical/religious stand. Both have excellent bibliographies. I was helped by both.

<sup>41</sup> *SW.*, vol. II, 722.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. I, 224.



way with the process of recognition.”<sup>43</sup> And then, “For in the science of philosophy the concept of being is not satisfied by the phenomenon until it has absorbed all its history.”<sup>44</sup> The result was what Benjamin called a monad that was an idea that revealed the image of the world—the internal logic manifest in appearance.<sup>45</sup> Aura then pointed to that place of origins and art provided the symbols, the Ariadnean threads. The symbol was the great key:

*For language is in every case not only communication of the communicable but also, at the same time, a symbol for the noncommunicable. This symbolic side of language is connected to its relation to signs, but extends more widely—for example, in certain respects to name and judgment. These have not only a communication function, but most probably also a closely connected symbolic function, to which at least explicitly no reference has here been made.*<sup>46</sup>

That symbolic function I believe was the mimetic function that had been either limited or transformed. Benjamin was hard pressed to consistently say. He mourned the apparent demise of the storyteller where truth and meaning was reduced to information and where mystery was denied: mystery inhabits the nature of the word as symbol.<sup>47</sup> In “On Some Motifs to Baudelaire,” he noted:

*It is not the object of the story to convey a happening per se, which is the purpose of information; rather it embeds it in the life of the storyteller in order to pass it on as experience to those listening. It thus bears the marks of the storyteller much as the earthen vessel bears the marks of the potter’s hand.*<sup>48</sup>

The object of Benjamin was to tell a story of mystery that was aura.

Art in the Technological Society

Benjamin committed suicide on the Franco-Spanish border on September 27, 1940. His body was likely dumped into a mass grave. He had been working on “On the Concept of History,” from February until May. It contained his views on the task of the historical materialist who must stay above and yet within the class struggle. He wrote:

*The true image of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image that flashes up at the moment of its recognizability, and is never seen again. “The truth will not run away from us”: this statement by Gottfried Keller indicates exactly that point in historicism’s image of history where the images is pierced by historical materialism. For it is an irretrievable image of the past which threatens to disappear in any present that does not recognize itself as intended in that image.*<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Trans. John Osborne with an Introduction by George Steiner (London: NLB, 1977), 46.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>46</sup> *SW.*, vol I, 74.

<sup>47</sup> “Riddle and Mystery,” *Ibid.*, 267-268.

<sup>48</sup> *Illuminations.*, 159.

<sup>49</sup> *SW.*, vol. IV, 391.

Sometimes Benjamin wrote as if art should serve no master but at other times he thought it should serve politics.<sup>50</sup> He viewed art as making and thus saw it as similar in principle to technology although he viewed the making of words on a higher order. He had hoped that art would be able to jump start the people's revolution but was never clear how such a consciousness could be raised, awash in the ephemeral and the phantasmagoric, which Benjamin could decipher but history would indicate he was alone. Nonetheless he plumbed the depth of aura, the mystery beneath and yet informing the commonplace.

He had hoped that the artist's heroism could allow for an auratic return, but for which aura?

Warhol, the modern artist, too, was concerned with aura. In *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* he wrote:

*I think "aura" is something that only somebody else can see, and they only see as much of it as they want to. It's all in the other person's eyes . . . . When you just see somebody on the street, they can really have an aura. But then when they open their mouth, there goes the aura. "Aura" must be until you open your mouth.*<sup>51</sup>

Warhol stood Benjamin's notion of aura on its head. "Aura" was reduced to the look, to the viewer's intention, to an object that did not look back. Aura was relative and ephemeral, not likely the beautiful semblance. Most importantly the viewer lost all control while seeming to be in control, the worst form of enslavement.

Many of Warhol's images were machine images and his words glorified the process. In 1963 he wrote:

*That's probably one reason I'm using silkscreens now. I think somebody should be able to do all my paintings for me. I haven't been able to make every image clear and simple and the same as the first one. I think it would be great if more people took up silkscreens so that no one would know whether my picture was mine or somebody else's.*<sup>52</sup>

Reproducibility became a virtue while canceling the meaning of reproduce, which demanded some sense of an original. Was Warhol fooling with us? Were his words ironic? What would irony even mean in this context: saying what you don't mean and meaning it?

For the appearance of an answer, consider critic and biographer Rainer Crone, who wrote:

*Warhol, on the other hand, uses the silkscreen, to the exclusion of all other methods, to transfer photographs to canvas, thus adapting as far as possible, to the technical limitations of the easel painting, which is at best outdated communications medium. Through a morally based self-negation, he has suppressed his individuality to such an extent that he has attained a qualitatively new understanding of self and behavior, which*

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<sup>50</sup> See "The Author as Producer," *Reflections*, 220-238

<sup>51</sup> (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 77.

<sup>52</sup> As quoted in Rainer Crone, *Andy Warhol* (New York and Washington: Praeger Books, 1970), 10.

*is political, or at least, politically relevant. He has transmuted quantity (namely, the exclusive use of one technique) into quality. Warhol's use of silkscreen represents the most rational way of reproducing a photograph on a scale too large for phototechnical means alone. Reproduction robs the artwork of its uniqueness and authority, imparting significance instead to the image reproduced. In this way, the painting becomes a document—like the photograph—and its political effectiveness increases accordingly: this is "documentary realism" which is subject to other aesthetic criteria than those relevant in the development of easel painting.*<sup>53</sup>

Crone's assumptions are of great importance for the mission of Warhol's art: New mediums are better than older mediums; the mediums of art should be rational and sacrifice originality for reproducibility in which quantity becomes quality. Uniqueness and authority are enemies and not politically relevant. Art should deal with the now as it became then, its documentary feature. It is moral to suppress one's individuality and selfhood. This, on the one hand, seems totally absurd and certainly outside the pale of art traditionally conceived, but on the other hand it would seem a vindication of Benjamin's notion of power to the collective. This is unfair to Benjamin who likely would not have been in favor if self-negation or the reduction of meaning to being-there; the important historical dimension would be left out. Nonetheless, from Crone's perspective, the art object assumed secondary importance in a process that was primary. Warhol's art objects became technological objects, finding theoretical sanction. The object became a concept and a theory.

Consider Lawrence Weiner's typed instructions that appeared in the April, 1970 edition of *Arts Magazine* as a work of art:

1. *The artist may construct the piece*
2. *The piece may be fabricated*
3. *The piece need not be built*

*Each being equal and consistent with the intent of the artist the decision as to the condition rests with the receiver upon the occasion of receivership.*<sup>54</sup>

Now the artist, like the viewer, need not construct. Only a theoretical intention was needed. Weiner's work was in the words that are not words, words that signaled sheer thereness. Weiner's "words" were procedures and abstract counterfactuals, commands of expertise and legalese.

Tom Wolfe in *The Painted Word* remarked on the unique flatness of modern art, citing Frank Stella as a paradigm example. Stella claimed: "My painting is based on the fact that only what can be seen there *is* there. It really is an object . . . what you see is what you see."<sup>55</sup> The canvas was the object and the painting was that specific presence— sheer thereness. To ask what it was beyond that it was there would be to not understand it. Wolfe also noticed that it was the tendency of modern art since cubism

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> As quoted in Tom Wolfe's *The Painted Word* (New York: Bantam Books, 1976), 108.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

to leave the realm of the representation of natural or cultural objects to laboratories of theory. The viewer, not a professional or a critic, stands before the line drawn on a museum floor and asks what it means. The museum-goer thus needs a guide and instructions, the expertise of an authority. In this sense the modern art object is not clearly a part of the viewer's bodily or cultural domain. And yet this "seeming" was not exactly being. A new examination of technology and its role in culture would be needed.

#### Art and the Empire of Non-sense

French critic Jacques Ellul understood that art completely reflected the technological life world that embraced images and symbols that did not transcend that world, which was the result of technology becoming a mentality. Thus art could not redeem culture, the worker, or the human condition, all of which had become technological. The technical world was/is a world of wall-to-wall media, charts and graphs, power points, blather, and all manner of visual configurations. Technological means—the manipulation of images—had become the ends. As we saw above, modern art extruded semblances with width but no depth. He wrote:

*It is obvious that painting traditionally has been spatial, but it has also undergone a modification, rejection all optical illusion, so as to become only "something that is there." The painting is nothing more than itself—the real space it occupies. The discovery of space by painters and sculptors has been endlessly stressed for good reasons: the objects produced or reproduced matter less than the space between them, the meaning, the concentration of forces, the distribution of the space. The play of light and color serves only to heighten the value of the space.*<sup>56</sup>

An image portending depth in the technological society bordered on the insignificant. These images meant other images but not other things, objects with independent meaning. The meaning of an advertisement was another advertisement or a command to buy. The image was the object's transformation and to some degree denigration. Benjamin understood this sense of image as an object robbed of aura, over which he troubled but did not explore like Ellul. Benjamin suffered what Ellul would call the political illusion that held that politics was anything other than appearance. Ellul had claimed that *le politique* had become *la politique*, that the techniques of politics had eclipsed the goals and values that had concerned politics with debates over the meaning of the good life.<sup>57</sup> Art, as all elements of culture, suffered similar change. This change in attitude was reflected or participated in a symbolic language, in words beyond images. A technical mentality denuded language, the symbol, and the corresponding mentality. The image replaced the object by the concept, an appearance with no history, certainly no aura, and no symbolic or dialectical content. Above all else the image was "disembodied" in a process of objectifying concepts.

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<sup>56</sup> *The Humiliation of the Word*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985), 223, hereinafter cited as *Humiliation*.

<sup>57</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Political Illusion*, trans. Konrad Kellen (New York: Knopf, 1972), n. 4.

Warhol had sensed that art had become style, that aura had disappeared with an open mouth, perhaps with the word. Style was more like consumption than creation. As we saw above, an art object need not be made to have art. Apparently, only viewing was important, what I have called looking without seeing. Warhol's words remind us that the traditional art object was subsumed by a technical and rational process that, as Ellul observed in *L'Empire du non-sense*, moved the art object closer to life.<sup>58</sup> With style, life became art. The rule for this style was "*n'importe quoi*, or whatever."<sup>59</sup>

Considering the origins of the word "style," the *Oxford English Dictionary* indicates that style is likely a "meaningless variant" of "stile," in Latin meaning stake, pale, or pointed instrument in writing, or a style of speaking or writing. "Stilus" was likely also confused with the Greek word for "column." Thus, "style," perhaps appearing in error and/or caprice, points in two directions—toward an object, appearing as an image, and toward a word. As early as the fourteenth century, style referred to a writing instrument and to a rod or pin, to a fixed point, in any case. From the fourteenth century to the present it referred to a mode of action, to technique in art, in dress, in architecture, and in life. Austen, Dickens, and Ruskin were all recommended as great observers of "style of life." Warhol's "style" became an image, a flattened concept or cliché, as the history of the word revealed. In Benjamin's sense it was a sensuous semblance that illuminated a non-sensuous dimension. Seen from the right angle words suggested the aura beneath and to a sense that returned the gaze that forced the viewer to look back. "Style" was both an image of an object and a word in contest from the beginning. Perhaps it even appeared by happenstance. "Style" was a unity in opposition and hence not a concept but a metaphor, a writing instrument and architectural column, perhaps granting meaning to life. The life of the word however devolved to fashion and to one more manifestation of life. The metaphor revealed a narrative that still applied however much narrative was denied. The word "cliché" according to the *OED* appeared in 1832 and referred to a stereotype block, a printer's cast or "dab." It began in a visual dimension, but the word was also a variant of *cliquer*, meaning "to click," likely referring to the sound of the lead pieces as they were struck. This auditory dimension is lost in its modern sense, which is no longer the metaphor that was suggested. A worn out expression was left.

Ellul understood that in the human world apart from the technical dimension there was a play between two domains—the domain of sight and sound, the image and the word, an understanding that would have appealed to Benjamin in his quest for aura. The visual domain was essentially perspectival where the viewer was situated over and against an object, a here and now and where a landscape was established. The visual was before the viewer as a kind of certainty, an immediate presence, a fundamental awareness, a kind of totality, but a limited one.<sup>60</sup> The certainty ceased as I turned

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<sup>58</sup> *L'Empire du non-sense: L'Art et la société technicienne* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1980), 34, hereinafter cited as *L'Empire*.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 59

<sup>60</sup> *L'Empire*, 59.

my head, as my attention wandered, as the light changed, or as it moved away. Its uncertainty arose from the embodied condition. My condition of embodiment, once made aware, framed the object, separating my ideas and feelings from it.

The word, on the other hand, points away from the certain, although it seeks a location. It is always mine. A sound requires with a peculiar necessity a turn of the head, a gaze directed. A strange sound is always accompanied by anxious eyes.<sup>61</sup> Sound is as ambiguous as sight is certain, and the word shares this characteristic, even though the printed word seems to question this. Sound, and by implication, the word provides an all-around being and not a being—there, the province of sight. The sound and the word are naturally transcendental, as Benjamin also knew, when he claimed that human language represented knowledge and judgment unlike Divine knowledge that produced the true. Ellul, too, claimed that the reel, *le Reel*, of the world of Babel, babble, shadowed the true, *le Vrai*.<sup>62</sup>

Sound, because of its uncertainty was dialectical in Ellul's sense, while sight was non-dialectical, merely logical.

*Thus visual reality is clearly non-contradictory. You can say that a piece of paper is both red and blue. But you cannot see it as both red and blue at the same time. It is either one or the other. The famous principle of non-contradiction is based on the visual experience of the world, just as the principle of identity is. Declaring that two opinions cannot both be true, when one denies what the other affirms, has to do with vision, which involves instantaneousness. But language involves duration. Consequently what is visual cannot be dialectical. Knowledge based on sight is of necessity linear and logical. Only thought based on language can be dialectical, taking into account contradictory aspects of reality, which are possible because they are located in time.*<sup>63</sup>

The rational was the linear that inevitably moved to the image or something image-like, to the level of the concept. The word, the sense of a beyond in time and space, a sense of history with a hint of aura, challenged the primacy of the image. What is before me is what is now and not then. "Then" takes me back to the search for an original. Origins abided in language and history, in the domains of both sights and sounds. In the technological world sound collapsed into sight, the word into the image, and all of these into a rational process. Critics would complete art and artists would become critics, and all of which would become as meaningful as one more moment of technological life. The sense of art from Plato to the Renaissance that the art object had been a harbinger of the True and the Good was either lost or denied. Ironically "rationality" from Plato forward helped to bring on this transformation, although I would deny that Plato's sense of rationality would now apply.

In *La Technique ou l'enjeu du siècle (The Technological Society)* Ellul claimed that technical mentality involved a game, a wager.<sup>64</sup> This notion of *l'enjeu* echoed

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<sup>61</sup> *Humiliation*, 36.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-26. See my discussions of this in *TDS.*, 49-68.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-16.

<sup>64</sup> (Paris: Armand Colin, 1954); English trans: *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkenson

Pascal's famous wager that takes place with the realization that, although he cannot rationally prove God's existence, he must, nonetheless, choose between the infinity of the natural world or God's infinity, between a false and a true infinity; he chose God. Ellul found himself in a similar bind: either choose the false infinities of technique or the true infinity of God. Technique had moved beyond industrialization and beyond the Marxist critique that Ellul knew well and for a time acknowledged. Ellul defined technique as the totality of means rationally determined and seeking absolute efficiency in all areas.<sup>65</sup> His notion of technological rationality was crucial in this regard. In the following quote I add in brackets a clause that was left out in Wilkenson's translation:

*In technique, whatever its aspect of the domain in which it is applied, a rational process is present which tends to bring mechanics to bear on all that is spontaneous or irrational. This rationality, best exemplified in systematization, division of labor, creation of standards, production norms, and the like, involves two distinct phases: first, the use of "discourse" in every operation [under the two aspects this term can take (on the one hand, the intervention of intentional reflection, and, on the other hand, the intervention of means from one term to the other.)]; this excludes spontaneity and personal creativity. Second, there is the reduction of method to its logical dimension alone. Every intervention of technique is, in effect, a reduction of facts, forces, phenomena, means, and instruments to the schema of logic.*<sup>66</sup>

Rationality then referred to the application of a method employing the principles of logic—something was what it was and was not not what it was. Identity ruled. All was to be *thought and expressed* in a propositional language where something either was or was not. Thinking and language were to produce concepts and then to produce technical phenomena. Concepts were identities created by eschewing differences. From the standpoint of photosynthesis, two plants are identical regardless of leaf shape or number. All manner of concepts leave the differences in objects behind, as is clearly noticed in opinion surveys. As will be clear, in this regard concepts are not symbols, notably metaphors, where differences count. From the barometer and thermometer readings T. S. Eliot's sky "like an etherized patient" will never appear, whereas what does appear in human feelings and imagination registers deeply with Eliot. Homer's winedark sea was possibly like no other; now modern readers tire of the refrain, perhaps a metaphor that became a cliché. Cliches now pass for metaphors in the technological mind; they are the symptoms of the loss of the symbol.<sup>67</sup>

Industrialization was the mirror of what took place between words and images discussed above. Rational concepts methodically applied transformed technical operations, the use of tools, by technical consciousness. Tools extended from the body;

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(New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), hereinafter cited *TS*.

<sup>65</sup> *TS*, XXV.

<sup>66</sup> *TS*, 78-79; *La Technique*, 73-73.

<sup>67</sup> See ch. 6 of *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 1991) for a full discussion of the cliché for technical consciousness.

technical phenomena extended from *d'une intention* technique, from a technical intention.<sup>68</sup> For instance, traditionally, the painter ground pigment in oil each day before painting. Painters had to apprentice to learn the art of making paint, clearly inefficient by modern standards. By the nineteenth century painters could buy oils in metal tubes that altered painting forever by allowing uniform colors, ease of storage, and convenience on all levels. Rembrandt had made his own paint, and his canvases were unique from the first stroke; his genius, imagination, and perspective added the rest. Modern painters have to struggle with mass production before applying a brush. This is one mere detail that cannot begin to catalogue the incursions of various techniques entering the realm of painting; one can paint now in pixels without lifting a brush. Metal tubes, of course, revealed the continual applied conceptual advances of mathematics and all levels of science. Perhaps not noticed as operations became phenomena, the body was co-opted in the processes. Grinding pigment, traveling to find a master to whom one would apprentice, etc. all appeared in the metal tube, just as the chainsaw reifies the actions of chopping wood with an axe. The technical phenomenon subsumes bodily relations, direct or indirect, to objects. In the process of reification beyond Marxist critique was the transformation of things into processes. Mathematics and science from the nineteenth century on left no operations behind.<sup>69</sup> The goal of technical consciousness was to produce identical workers who were efficient in making identical products that were good by being a part of the system by being identical to it. Otherness was not welcomed. The Otherness of spontaneity was permitted as long as it did not disrupt the "one best way." Appearance of differences were allowed—the appearance of free choice—and even encouraged: the hundreds of labels for soap in the grocery store hide the fact that emulsifiers are emulsifiers. American jazz musicians in the 1950s were routinely harassed or abandoned by college music departments until it was discovered that improvisation could be taught. Currently all manner of apparent spontaneity is tolerated in academic halls as long as course numbers can be found.

The system is the result of a technical consciousness in which the machine is only one aspect. All that was technique was machine-like Ellul would say. The system proceeded from technical rationality when the object as Other was co-opted by the technical phenomenon which produced other technical phenomena artificially, automatically, monistically, universally, and autonomously. What could be done would be done, regardless of religious, artistic, or philosophical criticism, which became the justifications of technique and only, *n'importe quoi*, anything goes applied. Technique took place regardless of any cultural differences. In this summation of Ellul's discussion of the characteristics of technique of note was the self-augmenting character such that one advance yielded a geometrical progression that in principle was unpredictable. Who could have foreseen that metal paint tubes together with train travel would produce impressionist painting that would yield digital photography, and yet all elements, Ellul

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<sup>68</sup> *La Technique*, 44.

<sup>69</sup> See *TDC*, ch. 3.



would contend, were inextricably bound.<sup>70</sup> The final stage of technical advance was autonomy where technique provided the new sacred. Here the object fully collapsed into the subject. What the technical mind produced was what it no longer knew, becoming knowledge itself divorced from the process of knowing. Technology proceeded with no sense of its own history, which became irrelevant, with no need of a transcendent religion, what with the objects of imminent worship and with no truths beyond the laws of identity, contradiction, and exclusion. A profound sense of forgetting, what Ellul called *Lethotechny*, settled in.<sup>71</sup> The sacred of technique was not the true holy of the Wholly Other, the goal of the word, in the Word of the Wholly Other. Thus, technical consciousness is confronted with an irony: No manner of ordering can exist without some form of absolute, a notion of infinity in some measure. All is technique is such an example, emphasizing the ALL. For technique, however, nothing stands outside of it, thus making the problem of meaning problematic. If the meaningful is just one element of entities ordered, meaning collapses into one more element. And, importantly the laws of logic determining the rationality of technique are not logically justifiable. A sidetrack into Hegel is useful.

In considering the problem of an infinite series or the idea of infinity itself Hegel offered profound advice. One sense of an infinity was derived by moving from one particular, and then another, and then another, and saying that infinity was not this particular, or not this one, or, again, not this one, *ad infinitum*. Thus an infinity was defined simply in terms of the next particular which the infinite wasn't, which illustrated Ellul's understanding of technological self-augmentation. Absolute efficiency was merely the next moment, by definition, why technical production was endless in the sense of Warhol's drinks and of soap in the grocery store or in Benjamin's notion of the *ever-same*. And the other sense of the infinite was in the claim that infinity was not the totality of what was finite. The infinite was the Nothing of the finite. On this view the infinite was an empty class, a sense of a whole that in the past suggested God, the True, the Beautiful. These notions either become endless strings of finitudes or merely an empty class concept, another version of *n'importe quoi*.<sup>72</sup>

In *L'Empire* Ellul concluded that formalism or neoformalism and "art with a message," were the hot and cold taps of the technological society from which flowed the above spurious infinities.<sup>73</sup> "Art for Art's sake" encouraged "anti-art," artistic expressions with no object or subject; art had died but in its death throes produced more art objects and/or concepts in the object's denial. Propaganda of all kinds was met with a denial of art's political nature. The more complex or formalistic the art the more challenges embracing "*Kitsch*" arose. Narcissism in all forms reigned. And thus the principle of *unicite* was followed: what could be done would be done employing

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<sup>70</sup> See *TS.*, ch. II and *TDC.*, ch.5.

<sup>71</sup> *Living Faith: Belief and Doubt in a Perilous World*, trans. Peter Heinegg (San Francisco: Aarper and Row, 1983, 277.

<sup>72</sup> See my *TDC*, 98-105.

<sup>73</sup> *L'Empire*, 50.

technique or some other manner of rational ordering, no matter how chaotic or passionate. Unreason fueled reason beyond measure. Art was what artists did and all had become artists. And yet there is still a word for art, however strangely employed. If all was art, why would there be a word for it? Perhaps there was no longer a word for it.

Ellul noted the claim that art had become a game, *un jeu*, and that it no longer had to be taken seriously, which he understood as a serious claim. He wrote: [Modern] Art opts for illusion over reality and gives reality to the illusory.<sup>74</sup> The symbolic world of which art is a part requires imagination and otherness. He further stated:

*In the technological system, there is no more possibility of symbolizing First of all, this*

*possibility is not present because the reality is produced by man, who does not feel mystery and strangeness. He still claims to be the direct master. Furthermore, it is not present because, if symbolizing is a process of distancing, then the whole technological process is, on the contrary, a mechanism for integrating man; and finally, because now, it is no longer man who symbolizes nature, but technology which symbolizes itself. The mechanism of symbolization is technology, the means of this symbolization are the mass media of communication. The object to be consumed is an offered symbol.<sup>75</sup>*

The dialectic link between the individual and the world and between that subjectivity and what is expressed enables this “other world” to be achieved; it is both the condition of symbolic consciousness and its result. The problem of technical consciousness is that it is nondialogical and nonsymbolic and thus not a viable form of consciousness. It is a form of non-sense. We require the symbol and language to inhabit the world as best we can and need the symbol to navigate what is an essential mystery. Ellul wrote:

*The most explicit and best-explained word still brings me inevitably back to mystery. This mystery has to do with the other person, whom I cannot fathom, and whose word provides me with an echo of his person, but only an echo. I perceive this echo, knowing that there is something more. This is the mystery I feel as I recognize spontaneously that I do not understand well or completely what the other person says. There is a mystery for me in my own lack of comprehension, as I become aware of it. How am I going to react? How can I respond? I sense a whole area of mystery in the fact that I am not very sure I understand correctly. I am not very sure about answering. I am not sure what I am saying.<sup>76</sup>*

We communicate and understand in symbols in which we say what we mean and do not mean, in signs that mean and do not mean, and in these gaps meaning takes place; this is not a nonsensuous meaning but a meaning that makes sense of sense. The echo of the word shatters Narcissism, as it did on Ovid’s account. We have art so that we do not die without truth, to invert Nietzsche, but we have a truth that anticipates and

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<sup>74</sup> My translation, *L’Empire*, 274.

<sup>75</sup> *The Technological System*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Continuum, 1980), 177.

<sup>76</sup> *Humiliation*, 25.

responds to whatever reality we can imagine in what ever sense of aura we can express. Benjamin's aura became the conceptualized and disembodied object bereft of otherness from Ellul's perspective. Meaning and symbol require the otherness that appears in a word's history, its circumstance, its possibility, and limitation. The play and tension between image and word "infold" in the work of memory and the imagination but which are co-opted in what passes for art in the technological society.

Hereinafter referred to as *TDC*

## Technique and the Collapse of Symbolic Thought

by Samir Younes

NAMEABLE OBJECT 5

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"Art has become one of the major functions used to integrate humankind into the technicist complex."<sup>77</sup>

Jacques Ellul.

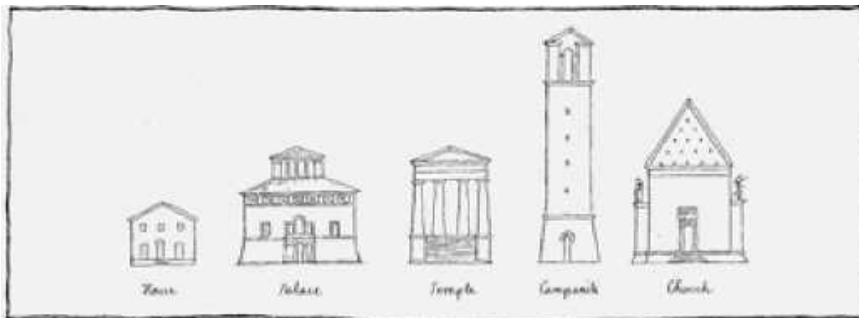
The drawing is by Leon Krier, titled Nameable Objects.

In a poignant analogy Jacques Ellul once remarked that if one were travelling on a train then one could not see the direction that the train is taking. One must disembark from the train of *technique* in order to gain a perspective on its direction, and affect decisions from outside its empire. Such a task is truly formidable considering that *technique* as a system (*le systeme technicien*) plays a determining role inside society, a role that participates in steering the major forces of this society toward a technological direction, a direction that always appears inevitable to the technologically-formed mind.<sup>78</sup> One of the salient characteristics of J. Ellul's *L'empire du non sens* (*The Empire of No Sense*) is that his critique of modernist art was based more on the texts that justified modernism and less on modernist art itself. He is less concerned with the clusters of positions elaborated by several artistic and architectural movements that include Constructivism, Futurism, Cubism, De Stijl, Expressionism, the Bauhaus, Functionalism, the International Style, or the declarations of C.I.A.M. congresses, and more with the fact that they were all informed by *technique*, and that they in turn validated the technological milieu. In keeping to his train analogy, he engages modernist art from the 'outside', using his concept of *technique* as a focusing lens. And while he

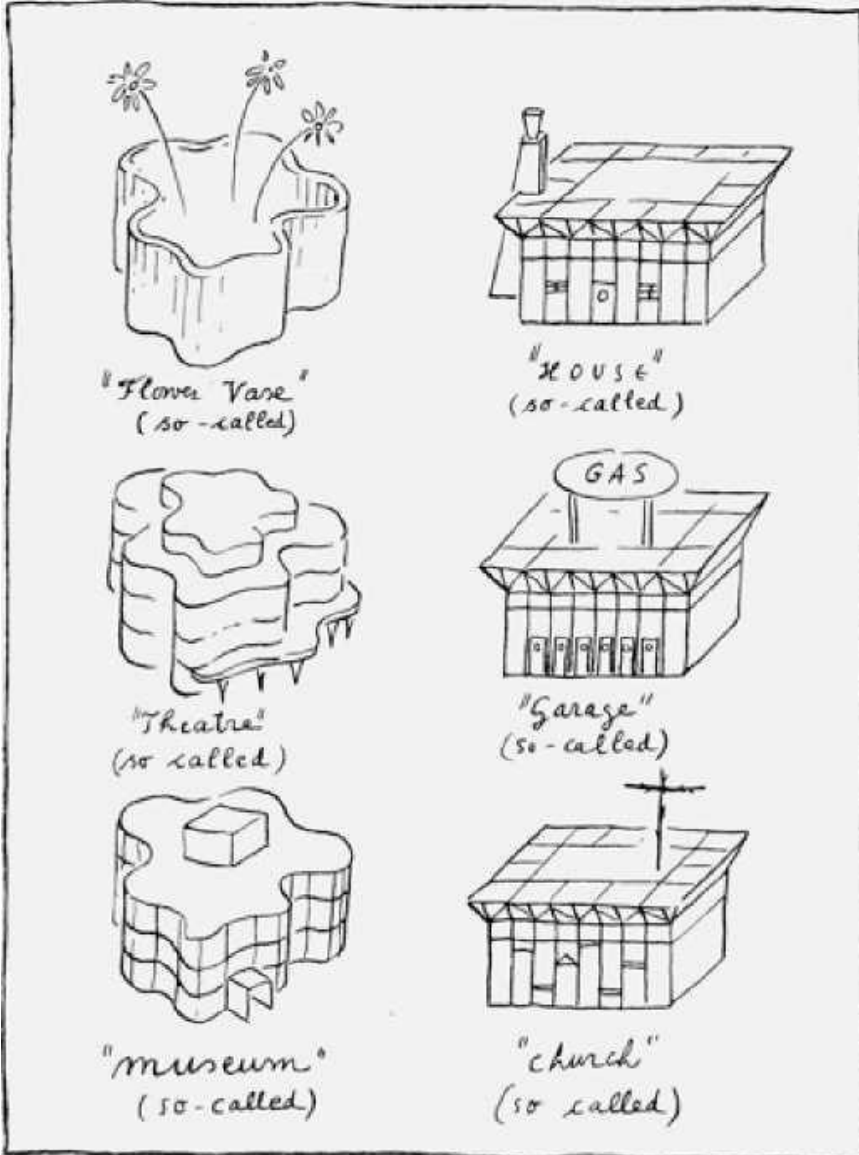
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<sup>77</sup> "L'art est devenu l'une des fonctions majeures integratrices de l'homme dans le complexe technicien." *L'empire du non sens*, Jacques Ellul, Presses Universitaires de France, 1980, pp. 277. My translation.

<sup>78</sup> For Ellul's discussion of the technological system as an autonomous and totalizing system qualified by an absence of finality see his *Le systeme technicien*, Calmann-Levy, 1977.



FORM versus UNIFORM



SO~CALLED "OBJECTS"

also offers a genuine critique of modernist art, he is unwavering in his judgment that modernist art and its theory are justifications for the integration of “humankind into the technicist complex”. This characteristic sets him apart from others who opposed modernism from the ‘inside’, that is, on the grounds of art theory and architectural theory. Opponents of modernism usually assailed its fundamental bases in historicism, in the cult of the *zeitgeist*, in industrialized mass production, abstraction and its remoteness, or the profound alienation felt in urban contexts where modernism dominates. Appropriate though these oppositions are, they could find further justification by incorporating Ellul’s concept of *technique*. But unfortunately, Ellul’s work is almost unknown among artists and architects in general, and *L’empire du non sens*, which has yet to be translated into English, is virtually unknown even among French-speaking artists and architects.

Artists, architects, and their critics, apprehend and make the world imagistically, and they apprehend and make modernity imagistically. Put differently, their understanding of the world is strongly mediated by images -the images that inhabit the world and the images that inhabit their minds. Ellul, by contrast, is a man of the word whose sensibilities are more inclined toward symbolic content, to the meaning that should underlie artistic form and justify it. Much of his understanding of the world is mediated by the word, and less so by the image. In fact Ellul was quite alarmed by the invasive proliferation of images in the technological society. His strong Protestant aesthetics played a significant role in this distress which he expressed as a religious conflict between the image and the word<sup>79</sup>. But Ellul is not an indiscriminate enemy of visual culture. He was most concerned about a particular kind of image, a triumphalist image whose empire humiliated the word, namely: the technicist image that frames the minds of citizens in the consumer society. Citizens of the technological society were consumers of technicist images, images that were justified by an ideology that glorified presentness as the leading edge of modernity. “With the ideology of instantaneity in art, with immediacy, with spontaneous creativity (the happening, etc..), we are in the presence of a pure assimilation into the technological processes, and a total negation of all that has been considered art since the beginning.”<sup>80</sup> Space and visuality in modernist art, architecture, and also music, were expressions of technological operations.

Artists and architects, we said, apprehended the world with images and made the world with images. This, however, is not to say that artists and architects are not concerned with meaning or with symbolism. Indeed they are acutely concerned with meaning. Only, as makers of visual culture they place a higher value on the image, the form. Artists and architects desire form differently than others. They desire form from their standpoint as makers of forms, and these forms have a dialectical meaning that takes multiple directions. Artistic work is aimed toward society and society returns meaning toward the artist. This condition obtains especially in a traditional society

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<sup>79</sup> See his *La parole humilée*, Seuil, 1981, pp. 202-224.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 249-250. My translation.

before *technique* became a system. Yet, in a predominantly modernist culture, the overriding purpose for which artists and architects produce forms has more to do with self-expression than a contribution to the public realm, the sense-in-common, or the general good. This phenomenon takes particular importance with respect to the idea of meaning in art and architecture because modernism inherited and amplified the Romantic belief in the artist or architect as a solitary genius who walks in no one's shadow and who produces forms that have not been seen before. The modernist rupture and transgression, in Ellul's terms, of previous traditions assured a tabula rasa where artists and architects can begin anew, while at the same time exponentially exalting their personae by putting at their disposal all the massive means of technology. The theoretical justification of modernism shifted the artistic intent of elaborating a tradition -ever a collective endeavor-toward a deepening interest in the artist's personal life which itself became an object of art. Here we have a replacement of art by the artist, as the artist became a sacralized figure whose genius must always be valued and whose decisions are almost beyond judgment. Even the empty canvas became an object of art -itself a mute comment on a painting that could have been.

And yet, the act of withholding a painting from manifesting came to be endowed with the aura of art, as if its intensely private meaning was precisely the reason why it should matter for culture at large -a condition of no sense. This gesture must have given its author a certain emotional pleasure for having achieved something new by the very absence of artistic gesture. In exasperation Ellul protested that "To apply exactly the mentality of Epicurus is no aesthetic creation."<sup>81</sup> With positions such a these, the frenetic pursuit to distinguish oneself, especially when undertaken by a considerable number of artists and architects over several decades, amounted to an exclusion of the sense-in-common in favor of the self-referential sign. Sense-in-common here is distinguished from common-sense because common-sense could be applied by simple habit. By contrast, sense-in-common designates sets of artistic conventions whose justification derives from the continual reflection, agreement and disagreement between many free minds contemplating the same artistic concerns, and enriched by the wisdom of experience. This condition has been violently reversed in modernism, particularly among architects who frequently put self-expression over an above the idea that architecture as a public art is called to serve the City, the *res publica*.

Ellul was little affected by the sophistries of modernist art theory because he saw modernist art forms as technological forms situated within and explained by a society that is meant to be technologically determined in the first place. Modernist art and architecture and their theory sought to form and conform the mind in a technological direction -literally a technological *weltanschauung*. This theory claimed to be the only form of modernity possible. Indeed, it claimed to be the only reality possible for art and architecture as they were given the task to mold the physical forms of society accordingly. Previous forms and traditions that have been painstakingly elaborated

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<sup>81</sup> *Empire*, pp.34. My translation.

and layered over centuries within a cultural sense-in-common could therefore be iconoclastically discarded. Modernism had become a monistic force that was justified by art and architectural historians and critics as if it were a historical necessity, a panacea toward which all previous artistic production was unalterably led and from which it definitely separated. Classicism's old belief in an unsurpassable past artistic ideal was replaced with the belief in a future ideal that will somehow arise from a historical contingency determined by *technique*. Apologists of modernism ardently argued for this belief, and some of them, like several Futurists, argued with shocking violence. In so doing, they produced conflation with far-reaching consequences, among which is the conflation of teleology with progress, as various historians of art and architecture wrote this conflation into their narratives.<sup>82</sup>

Progress differs from teleology in the sense that teleology does not necessarily imply improvement. A *telos* (Greek: goal, end) might very well lead a chain of events toward undesirable conclusions. Such, for instance, is the difference between promise and progress. In their good aspirations early modernists in art and architecture sought to wed their preferred artistic and architectural forms to progressive social ideals and their beliefs in the redemptive role of technology with the full expectation that historical events will gradually unfold in the direction of their goals. Yet, the decades that followed showed that modernist art and architecture became a tool of daily market forces having little to do with earlier stated ideals, while the unrestrained belief in technology led to catastrophic environmental consequences and a long-standing unwillingness to admit these consequences. Progress is a particular way to represent historical time that differs from the simple notion of development in that progress advances toward a certain finality. Progress implies that history moves according to a unified direction, and that historical periods constitute the various steps of that progress in which a principle gradually realizes itself and justifies all the changes. For Jacques-Benigne Bossuet, this principle is God governing history; for Voltaire and Nicolas de Condorcet it is Reason accompanying history; whereas for Hegel, Reason systematically justifies the progressive movement of historical periods on their way the realization of the Concept. Historical events or periods gain their significance depending on the place they occupy within a unified and progressive chronological development. Consequently, progress implies the merging of meaning with direction.

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<sup>82</sup> For example the work of historians: Emil Kaufmann, *Von Ledoux bis Le Corbusier*, (1934), (French translation 1994). Sigfried Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command*, (Oxford University Press, 1948); *The Eternal Present: a contribution on constancy and change*, (1962), (Princeton University Press, 1981); Nikolaus Pevsner, *An Outline of European Architecture*, (1948), (Penguin Books, 1968); *Pioneers of Modern Design: from William Morris to Walter Gropius*, (1949), (Yale University Press, 2005); *The Sources of Modern Architecture and Design*, (Oxford University Press, 1968); Henry-Russell Hitchcock *Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, (Penguin, 1958); Leonardo Benevolo, *The Origins of Modern Town Planning*, (Routledge & K. Paul, 1967); *History of Modern Architecture*, (Routledge & K. Paul 1971); *The History of the City*, (MIT Press, 1980); Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co, *Modern Architecture*, (1976), (Harry Abrams, N.Y., 1979); Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: a critical history*, (1980), (Thames & Hudson, 2007).

Yet, progress for artists, and especially architects, has been deeply entangled in means, and when the technological means proliferated, Ellul reminds, the ends for which the means were developed disappeared from sight. But the post-modernist self-conscious reaction against the modernist justification of progress was not embraced in all cultural spheres. In fact, progress has now become such a routine belief that it passes unreflectively for a historical given. Yet, when some thinkers saw the weakening of the Enlightenment certainty regarding the progressive direction of history, they concluded that this was the dissolution of history itself.<sup>83</sup> Others went further, arguing that the acceleration of events has proceeded so exponentially that it is now beyond our capacity to see them as history. Others still, went as far as to propose that the immense network of self-referential signs within the consumer society makes it such that we can no longer distinguish historical reality from the myriad consumer images that occupy the reality of experience.<sup>84</sup> The multitude of images that now inhabit the technological consumer society have the power to condition contemporary understanding to such a point that they already frame the intellectual assessment within this society becoming a kind of lens through which historians look both at the past and the present. Accordingly, the mind is strongly affected if its grasp of the present-as-history is enclosed within this context. Paradoxically, although modernists championed their work as a decisive rupture from historical precedents, they nonetheless cherished the idea that they were carried by inexorable historical forces to the point they presently wish to occupy. For reasons such as these, many artists and architects rebelled after decades of proscriptive modernist control on artistic forms, on their history and their explanation. One of the first rebellions, since the late 1970s, rose to oppose modernist determinism by calling for a cultural milieu that accepted plural artistic expressions, a milieu that was characterized by its openness to the lessons of previous artistic traditions, a milieu that is generally known as postmodernism.

It is no surprise that *L'empire du non sens* was not well received in societies where modernism reigns supreme as a monistic force that outweighs, encircles, and invades all other cultural forces. It is difficult for the mind that has been formed inside the technological system to evaluate modernity separately from *technique*. It is also difficult for this same mind to differentiate between modernity as a reference to time and modernism as an artistic ideology. It is even more difficult for this mind to understand some of the most enduring paradigms that influenced artistic production in the past such as the idea of imitation, or rather, the inseparable couple: imitation and invention. The enduring concept of imitation allowed artists and architects to imitate nature and imitate established traditions. Imitating nature concerned Nature understood in her laws (*natura naturans*), and nature understood in her products (*natura naturata*). Art and architecture could imitate Nature in her laws by transposing ideas of order, of unity through variety, symmetry, harmony, solidity, and so forth, into work of human

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<sup>83</sup> See Gianni Vattimo, *La fine della modernità*, Garzanti, Milano, 1985.

<sup>84</sup> See Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacres et simulations*, Galilée, 1981.



making -the Greek *poiesis*: to make. Art could imitate nature in her products as in landscape painting or in sculpting the human body. Contrary to art, however, architecture does not have a *direct* model in nature, with the exception of the cave as an original shelter, or the forest as an origin to hypostyle columns (e.g. the hypostyle as a forest of columns as in the Temple of Karnak in Egypt, the Porticus Margaritaria in Rome, the Great Mosque of Cordoba in Spain, or the mediaeval tradition of the Italian broletto market hall with a city hall on the upper floor). As great theorists like Marc-Antoine Laugier (1713-1769) and Antoine Chrysostome Quatremere de Quincy (1755-1849) lucidly clarified, architecture had to invent paradigms that could be

considered as “natural” models, as for example the idea of the primitive wooden hut that could be considered an origin to both the house and the temple. Imitation in art and in architecture provided the intellectual discipline, the theoretical foundations that enabled the painter, sculptor, or architect, to judiciously select and unify the best aspects of precedents from traditions with the expressions of personal invention.

Central to Quatremere de Quincy’s thought is that imitation produces the resemblance of an object in another object that becomes its image. The imitation reveals one object within another. This imitative representation implies a distance between a general type and a particular object or building. It affords us the kind of intellectual pleasure that precisely derives from recognizing and understanding this distance. Examples from sculpture are Antonio Canova’s statue of Napoleon Bonaparte as Mars, and his George Washington as Caesar. An example from architecture is Thomas Jefferson’s indebtedness in the Virginia Capitol at Richmond to the Roman temple known as the Maison Carree in Nimes. The imitation is a resemblance, but it is an incomplete resemblance. It is rather a choice of qualities inherent to one object to be transposed and into another object. Transposition is also transformation where the qualities of one object are recognized within another object. Transposition and transformation operate on the notion of the fictive which serves another kind of truth: artistic truth. Between the artistically true and the artistically factual stands the artistically fictive. Thus Washington could be analogically assimilated to a Caesar, and a state Capitol could be analogically expressed through a temple. Such an imitation is categorically distinguished from the copy which repeats the reality of an object. The copy implies repetition, sameness, counterfeit; it is an object’s double. In a very influential essay *De l’imitation*, Quatremere elaborated on the vital distinction between the copy and the imitation, between “similarity by means of identity” and “resemblance by means of an image.”<sup>85</sup> The copy, Quatremere concluded, applied to the mechanical arts, while imitation applied to the fine arts. This prescient distinction, made at a time when industrialization was beginning to displace objects of art, was to obtain in full force with the industrial production in series, with the collapse of types into the standard, and finally with the collapse of the imitation into the copy. That is why, having rejected imitation, modernist theorists speak of simulacra. But there is always the persistent

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<sup>85</sup> *De l’imitation*, (1823), Archives d’architecture moderne, Bruxelles, 1980, pp. 21-28.

belief that art reflects society -a distant and enfeebled echo of the idea of art imitating cultural paradigms that in turn serve as external justifications of art. In many pages of *L'empire du non sens*, Ellul displays impatience with overused and banal justifications of art as a reflection of the society in which it exists.<sup>86</sup> This banality, one must add, is erroneously used as a justification of art whereas in reality it is only describing the conditions for this art's emergence in a particular societal context.

Prior to modernism, imitation meant that objects are made out of combinations of other objects, cities and buildings out of combinations of other cities and buildings, while invention sought to improve the rational choice made from exemplary precedents. Whereas skepticism regarding the practice of imitation as part of a historical continuity began to be voiced in the eighteenth century, it is important to note that imitation and invention, in general, were considered as two facets of the same coin well into the nineteenth century and increasingly again since the nineteen eighties on the part of modern traditional artists and architects. With modernism, however, invention became an end in itself. The different facets of the same coin: imitation and invention, now became two identical facets: invention and invention. This separation was given currency and legitimacy by modernist art historians who wrote histories of art as histories of ruptures. The sequential passage from Mediaeval to Renaissance, to Baroque, to Neo-classical art, to Eclecticism, to Modernism, was assured by rupture, and invention was the cause of this rupture. Thus, the coupling of rupture with invention came at the expense of uncoupling imitation and invention. Moreover, rupture and invention in the arts and architecture came to be associated with the conflated idea of progress that we mentioned above. Artistic and architectural production was now considered to be *all invention* at the same time that imitation and invention came to be understood as antagonistic rather than complementary concepts. To be inventive meant that artists and architects were to practice *creatio ex nihilo*, the making of objects out of nothing, following their individualistic expressionism. Only, artists and architects do not create in the elementary sense of creation from nothing as their forms are invariably based on older forms even if they are the inversions or abstractions of previous forms. Instead modernist forms have been made, situated, evaluated, and judged with respect to *technique* as the value of all values. The big contradiction resided in the modernist claims to freeing the imagination and invention while wholeheartedly accepting technological determinism. Moreover, despite their fervent wish to be unique and produce the previously unseen, and despite their determination to separate imitation from invention, modernist artists and architects still learned, appropriated, and practiced their preferred forms through undeniable imitative acts for two important reasons. First, any collective construction of artistic or architectural qualities and forms and their transmission over several generations means that a tradition is being elaborated. Second, artistic and personal identities are inextricably connected to those of other architects who share the same world-view. For these reasons modernism itself became a tradition.

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<sup>86</sup> For example, pp.9.

At one point, even a renewed avant-gardist urge toward continual change passes from being a transitory phenomenon to becoming an established practice, even if only for the duration of a few decades. Those who denied tradition themselves developed into a tradition.

The idea of technologically remaking the world, the complex sets of phenomena that Ellul called *la technique*, was conflated by modernist architects with the uncertain belief in architecture as a scientific discipline. This idea operated on the assumption that science (understood as technology), architecture and art, were linked by the *same* idea of progress. Whether it is cities, buildings, ocean liners, automobiles, aircraft, furniture, or kitchen utensils, the technological society was to be made with technological products and be represented by these same products. Every product must be qualified by a technological character. This unassailable belief exerted some far-reaching influences on symbolic thought, on artistic expression, on architectural character, and on the art-language and architecture-language analogy. Because technology was both the symbol and the product, the true and the real, the signifier and the signified, the artistic idea and its representation converged or rather collapsed into each other. If imitation and invention implied a certain transparency between an exemplar and a work of art, *technique* as a mentality presented an opacity to meanings outside of itself. Because meaning was internal to *technique*, it becomes enclosed within a self-organizing and self-referential system that accepts no external feedback. It becomes non-dialectical, a presentational immanence -a spurious infinity as David Lovekin affirms in his use of the Hegelian expression.<sup>87</sup> In the technological system that permeates society, the idea of making always resembles itself and replicates itself. It became its own ends. For this reason *technique* became monistic. It also eclipsed the symbolic ends, forms, meanings, and cultural conventions that previously allowed architecture to express a civic character or a private one. And yet, although modernist architects enthusiastically embraced the non-dialectical modes of the technological system, they still wished their forms to symbolically represent the technological order because they still retained the traditional idea that any object acquires a symbolic function simply because it was made. They justified their architecture as a *reference* to technology, while in reality *it was* technology. So the problem was not that there was a lack of correspondence between “image and substance“, as Robert Venturi suggested,<sup>88</sup> but rather that the image and content were equal. Thus, what is usually considered to be one of modernism’s strongest points, that is, the view that art and architecture symbolized the technological society and its informing zeitgeist, is actually its weakest. A symbol that recoils onto itself is a vicious circularity. A symbol that symbolizes itself is a condition of no sense.

The symbolic function received another setback with modernism’s attempts to eliminate the difference between the imitation and the copy while producing numerous iden-

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<sup>87</sup> See Lovekin’s *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness*, Lehigh University Press, 1991, pp.98-105

<sup>88</sup> Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, Steven Izenour,

tical repetitions of technological buildings and products in every continent irrespective of the character of place. The exorbitantly anti-ecological glass and steel skyscrapers that dot the planet as one of the sacred images of modernist progress bear little belonging to any place. They are built in every continent while belonging nowhere. Eliminating the difference between imitation and the copy also meant eradicating the distinction between the type and the model. Architectural types collapsed into technological standards, e.g. the skeletal structure of the *maison domino* was meant to be the standard underlying the very idea of every modern building. Because any architectural character can be attached to this skeletal structure, structural form can be dissociated from architectural character and meaning which in turn become removable attributes. In such a way artistic truth is displaced. If any architectural character can be attached to a mute skeletal structure then the result is kitsch -one of the most abundant phenomena of the technological society as Leon Krier has tirelessly repeated for several decades.<sup>89</sup> This phenomenon is most evident in the confusion of genres that abound in the technological society where a warehouse with a cross on its roof conveys that it is a church, where an amorphous and sinusoidal vase might also be the shape of a theatre, a library, or a museum. Thus, when ordinary citizens engage in caricatural naming of buildings, architects ought to listen because naming calls forth an object's nature, its character. Naming lays bare a object's artistic truth. Thus, designating the Centre Pompidou in Beaubourg in Paris as an "oil refinery", or the new museum for the Ara Pacis in Rome as a "petrol station" shows an indelible sense of what architectural character "ought" to be even if the general public may not necessarily know the exact form this character may take. When artistic shapes and architectural shapes are exchanged and dissolved inside a technologically determined reality a crisis of meaning is precipitated -a condition of no sense.

*L'empire du non sens* can be considered *un cri de peur* on the part of a man who laid bare his fears and disquieted concerns about a society so utterly permeated by *technique* and so docilely accepting of this invasion. Artistic creativity, or invention, were not only "radically and totally integrated into the technicist system"<sup>90</sup>, but this integration passes almost unnoticed because modernist art affirms and confirms *technique*, and because the compensation for the problems caused by *technique* are themselves technologically mediated. In many ways the empire of *technique*, an empire of means, exploded the limits or boundaries between the arts. Architecture could become sculpture and vice versa, while architects transformed cubist paintings into the plans, sections, and elevations of buildings following the example of modernist prophets such as Le Corbusier. The keyboard of an electric organ produces the sound of drums and cymbals. An artist who produces 'art work' through a collage of unrelated photocopied images with varied colors is evaluated on the same level as the painter who composes and proportions a painting with the painstakingly judicious use of the brush following

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<sup>89</sup> See Leon Krier, *The Architecture of Community*, Island Press, 2010.

<sup>90</sup> *Empire*, pp.30. My translation.

years of assiduous training and introspection. To a technician mind, the photocopier and the brush are both means that are equally received irrespective of artistic skill; and the technician mind, Ellul reminds, considers the proliferation of means to be a necessary condition of artistic freedom. Only, with this triumph of means any combination of forms becomes possible irrespective of the natural boundaries between the arts, of artistic genres, or established modes of composition. All considered obstacles in the emancipatory role seductively offered by *technique*. Yet, contrary to prevalent belief, *technique* did not necessarily facilitate the expansion of artistic freedom, nor the quality of art. If the manifestation of artistic form previously depended on a symbolic thought that instantiated expression and representation through manual skill, this manifestation has now been replaced by technical processes and operations and the near elimination of what has hitherto been known as symbolism, whether it is art imitating nature, or symbolizing religious themes, or social mores. It is important to note that the *augmentation* of technical means has been accompanied with a diminution in symbolic form and meaning. It is important to note that the *proliferation* of technical means has brushed aside symbolic form and meaning with an intolerant sleight of hand. Thus the distinction between an object of art wrought with skill and the multiplication of technological processes and products has been blurred. Here we encounter one of the greatest paradoxes of the technological society: on the one hand, the proliferation of objects imply the triumph of the object, on the other, this very proliferation also means the obsolescence of the object -a condition of no sense.

*L'empire du non sens* was published in 1980, and although opposition to modernism in art and architecture was beginning to be expressed in the 1970s, Ellul could not therefore account for the solid alternatives to modernism that developed since then. Even if the teaching and the practice of art and architecture today remains predominantly influenced by modernistic forms (the technician image) there are glimmers of hope that one discerns in academies and in professions. Several art schools and ateliers around the world (e.g. The Florence Academy of Art, and the Angel Academy of Art, also in Florence) have now emerged where the study of nature, the human figure, beauty and proportions, landscape painting, historical subjects, realism, form the core of their curriculum. A handful of architectural schools and private institutions dedicated to traditional architecture (e.g. the University of Notre Dame, The University of Miami, The Prince of Wales' Foundation, the Institute for Classical Architecture) are now established. They teach traditional architecture and urbanism in view of constructing an enduring world where nature is seen as the enclosure, where the city is built inside of nature, and where architecture is built inside the city, in that hierarchical order. Paralleling these academic developments, painters, sculptors, architects, musicians, poets, are now practicing the humane art of dwelling wisely on this planet based on the successful lessons of past experience and on the avoidance of past disasters. Both art and architecture are ontologically linked to the human character, but the architecture of the city forms the very milieu where we all move and have our being, and traditional architecture across cultures has provided enduring examples of how to

build wisely with nature. This is not to say that all traditional cities have achieved a successful balance with nature, only to affirm that successful solutions that have been achieved in the past have a direct instrumentality in our use. It would be irrational to discard them, especially based on so unstable and fleeting a concept as modernity and its conflation with modernism. But the word tradition needs to be qualified. The soundness of tradition derives from the soundness of reason -the sense-in-common that we defined as a continual reflection on the part of many free minds enriched by the wisdom of experience. Continuity is judiciously approved where architectural production has rationally been proven successful, and change is carefully approved where and when there is a rational need to depart from a practice that has failed. Such is the rationality of tradition as a modern practice. Following the hard-earned lessons since the Enlightenment, the practice of tradition will benefit by avoiding a blind faith in an unsurpassable and idealized past, and a blind faith in an unknown idealized future that will somehow emerge from a technologically determined reality. As Ellul himself acknowledged, there is much in human nature that refuses to be integrated into a technological system that frames the true, the factual, and the possible.

*Learning from Las Vegas*, (MIT Press, 1972), pp. 137.

# In Review

## ***Our War on Ourselves: Rethinking Science, Technology, and Economic Growth***

by Willem Vanderburg  
University of Toronto Press, 2011  
Reviewed by Richard Stivers

*Richard Stivers has authored a number of books on technology, including his latest, *The Illusion of Freedom and Equality*.*

In *The Growth of Minds and Cultures* (1985), Bill Vanderburg articulated what some of us (including Jacques Ellul) regard as the best extant theory of culture. In *Our War on Ourselves*, Vanderburg applies this theory to the technological life-milieu. This book is required reading for students of Ellul and everyone who is seriously concerned about the decline of meaning in modern societies.

In applying his theory of culture to the technological society, he extends and refines a number of Ellul's insights, some of which were not developed in detail:

1. Technique supplants practical knowledge derived from experience; consequently, more and more activities have to be learned as technique.
2. Technique destroys the need for tradition (shared symbolic experience of the past).
3. Technique destroys "true" meaning and creates "false" meaning in its stead.
4. Humans do not perceive the need to symbolize their technological life-milieu because it is their own creation. Until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, nature and society were understood to have an independent existence.

As a result culture lacks a symbolic unity and becomes fragmented. In its place, the technological system creates a logical external unity by coordinating the knowledge and practices of the various specialized techniques. Desymbolization—the loss of metaconscious knowledge and meaning—follows from scientific and technological specialization.

No one has made a better analysis of specialization than Vanderburg. He brilliantly explains how specialization has destroyed the meaning (desymbolization) embedded in our institutions and practices. He discusses in great detail the global economy, law, management, engineering, and education to reveal how devoid of meaning they have become. Finally, he suggests how we might begin to resymbolize these same institutions and practices.

Perhaps there are no more readily-contested concepts than those of meaning and symbol. Vanderburg avoids turning his book into a belabored rehash of the literature on the subjects of meaning and symbol. He assumes we have an intuitive sense of these concepts.

Meaning possesses “weak” and “strong” senses. The latter refers to the meaning of life, the meaning of time, absolute or final meaning. The weak sense of meaning has to do with the meaning of all words, events, activities, and objects that are only indirectly related to final meaning. The sacred (central myth in his terminology) provides the anchor points of a culture by creating a hierarchy of values. The central myths of a traditional society allow societal members to understand at a metaconscious level the meaning of their past and present experiences. The most important myths are creation myths, which provide a theory of the perfection that we can return to or reach in the future.

In traditional societies, practical knowledge was organized by the metaconscious, which provided a context for the individual and community to both differentiate and integrate their experiences and perceptions. Consequently, experience, and the knowledge embedded in it, was holistic. By contrast, experience and knowledge in technological societies becomes atomistic and specialized. The metaconscious is reduced to activities in everyday life and in work that are not fully technicized. Practical knowledge still exists, but is shrinking. This is why so many of us complain about people lacking common sense.

As Vanderburg observes, a technological culture reduces truth to reality. The genius of language, according to Ellul, is to express our search for truth, meaning, and value, which can never be reduced to empirical reality. The sacred or central myth of a technological civilization concerns technique (the most powerful means of manipulating reality). Meaning and value thereby are reduced to power and consumption, which is false meaning, because power and consumption are insufficient to provide individuals with an answer to the hopelessness of inevitable suffering and death. Hence, we have turned power into a value and do not experience an urgency to symbolize our technological lifemilieu and thus provide it with true meaning.

In chapter 5, Vanderburg suggests ways in which we can begin to resymbolize our technological life-milieu, but this of course means not only developing a holistic perspective on the biosphere, but also reintroducing values other than those of power and efficiency.

All who are critical of our technological civilization should use *Our War on Ourselves* as the basis for clarifying their experiences and thinking through the first steps of resistance.



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*The Ellul Forum* has been published twice per year, in the Spring and Fall, from 1988 - 2012. Its purpose is to analyze and apply Jacques Ellul's thought to our technological civilization and carry forward both his sociological and theological analyses in new directions.

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## **From the Editor**

Two thousand twelve (2012) is the centenary year of Ellul’s birth (6 January 1912) and by chance also the 25<sup>th</sup> year of publication of *The Ellul Forum* (1988 - 2012).

Darrell Fasching, just now retired from the faculty of the University of South Florida, brought together a small team of writers and reviewers, including many of us still involved, and launched the publication in 1988 and pretty much single-handedly kept it going for the first 25 issues (12-1/2 years). I agreed to succeed Darrell in 2000 and have served as its Editor for issues #26 - #50. At the time of that editorial changeover, David Gill was organizing the International Jacques Ellul Society which (who!) became the publisher and enabled us to expand and improve our journal. The three of us have been a team for 25 years and want to express our deep gratitude to all of our contributing editors, writers, reviewers, subscribers, and donors.

To mark the centenary of Jacques Ellul and the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *The Ellul Forum* we managed to persuade seventeen veteran Ellul scholars and writers to reflect on Ellul, his legacy, and their personal interaction with him and his ideas. The good thinkers represented here show us the stunning range and depth of Ellul’s influence. Several have written doctoral dissertations on him, many teach courses on technology that are primarily Ellulian, and everyone attests to essays or books of Ellul as an

intellectual turning point. Those involved in public service are inspired for a lifetime by Ellul's thinking and activities, and celebrate his teamwork with Charbonneau and other activists, on environmental protection, youth delinquency prevention, and educational reform.

Ellul's own faith commitment was transparent, but he is unusual in his appeal across the religious spectrum. The prophetic character of his ideas attracted the secular mind because they rang true and were grounded in prodigious scholarship. But the reminiscences that follow from religious thinkers carry a double appreciation, with their faith renewed and deepened by him while their mind was enriched. Ellul's biblical and theological repertoire are an extraordinary achievement for a historian and sociologist of institutions, and several writers call for this generation and the next to pay explicit attention to them.

Gabriel Vahanian of the University of Strasbourg passed away as this issue was being born. A personal remembrance by Darrell Fasching, on behalf of the IJES, begins on p. 20. Vahanian was a Contributing Editor to the *Forum*, a member of the IJES, and an active contributor to the Centenary Celebration of Jacques Ellul at Wheaton College in July. His friendship and debates with Ellul sharpened them both.

IJES President David Gill provides some perspective looking back and looking forward on p. 23.

Clifford G. Christians, Editor

## Ellul Challenges & Illuminates

Mark Baker

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I lived in Honduras in the early 1980's. During a visit to a refugee camp in August 1982 El Salvadorans told me stories of civilian massacres, suffering and destruction. I came face to face with the horror of war. At a gut level I became a pacifist, but in my head I had questions: how could I expect a nation to not, at times, use force? I thought it was necessary to affirm one side as better, but I felt both wrong. Previously I would have shown no interest in Ellul's book *Violence: Reflections from a Christian Perspective*. A few days out of the refugee camp the title grabbed my attention and I eagerly borrowed the book. My experience of war-torn El Salvador had converted my "guts;" Ellul's *Violence* converted my head and challenged my life.

A year later I participated in the Oregon Extension study program. Doug Frank gave a lecture, based on Ellul and Peter Berger, contrasting religion and faith. He described religion as a human construction, a nest of security, and faith as a condition of restlessness. It rang true, and shook me to the core. It also excited me with new possibilities. I left the lecture consumed by the question, what does this mean for ministry, for doing church?



I read Berger and devoured the Ellul book Frank referred to, *Living Faith*. Excited, challenged and grasping to understand I also read *Perspectives on Our Age* and *In Season, Out of Season*. I wrote a paper on the topic, but I had only begun to answer my question. Ellul and the contrast between enslaving religiosity and the liberating gospel of Jesus was a central element in my doctoral dissertation in theology at Duke University (1996). It was published in 1999 as *Religious No More: Building Communities of Grace and Freedom*. I continue to ponder the question, write and teach about it.

I first brought specific questions to Ellul, but as I read those few Ellul books in the fall of 1983 the tables turned. Ellul started asking me questions, and on a wide variety of things. A few years earlier I would have either not understood or dismissed his dialectical approach, but the complexity of life in impoverished and war-torn Central America left my linear thinking and neatly packaged answers in a shambles.

Ellul's dialectic not only helped me make sense of the world, it also helped me live in the midst of these complexities. I began reading any Ellul book I could get my hands on. My interest in Ellul led me and my wife to become students at New College Berkeley in 1987. It was a rich time of reading and discussing Ellul with Prof. David Gill and other students, and taking road trips to southern California to discuss Ellul with Vernard Eller.

Some Ellul books were long and dense. Yet I continued reading Ellul because at some point in every book, and often more than once, he would grab me and shake me up in a way that demanded reorientation, a different way of living or led me to experience God's grace afresh in a deeper way. Ellul has stimulated me intellectually, but what I value most is the way his writing has interacted with my daily life.

Ellul was part of the discussion as I reflected on how to do evangelism through a campus ministry at Syracuse University or begin an alcoholic rehab program in Honduras. Ellul influenced how I did fund raising as a missionary, and continues to influence how I use and relate to money. I could list many more. Perhaps most significant today is in relation to the theme of technique and efficiency. Introducing students to Ellul's work on this theme leads me, with the students, to evaluate the pervasive role of technique in our lives, and not just to evaluate, but take steps of resistance.

Although the context has changed and many of the examples in Ellul's books are dated, the themes that grabbed me are still pertinent today: violence, religiosity, an ethics of freedom, Mammon, the political illusion, and technique. Ellul continues to illuminate and challenge.

## Encountering Ellul

Stephanie Bennett

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The first time the name Jacques Ellul came into my view was as a small footnote in one of Neil Postman's books while working on my master's thesis at Monmouth University. Postman's mention was so compelling that it pushed me to dig deeper into Ellul's corpus. As I did, I realized that his critique of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century mass-mediated culture confirmed my own concerns about the way digital media were beginning to shape the communication landscape of the new century.

The following year I attended an NCA convention and heard a presentation about Ellul's work. The speaker was Clifford Christians; I was hooked. Dr. Christians graciously directed my attention to the Ellulian texts that might best advance my thinking. For the next two years I carried a paperback copy of *The Technological Society* in my oversized purse, reading and re-reading it several times. Concurrently, I imbibed *The Humiliation of the Word* and *The Subversion of Christianity*, both of which helped me see a parallel between the forces that drive the church and other societal institutions.

When I came upon *The Presence of the Kingdom*, it was the clincher. Never before had I read a treatment of the place of the church in society that comported so well with Biblical accounts of its first century roots. Ellul presented an alternative approach, one that attended to the ways that communication culture helps shape the perception and practice of one's faith and values.

For students newly embarking on Ellulian study, one of the most significant areas of encounter with him is likely to involve his ideas about the unforeseen consequences associated with technology. When viewed through the prism of history the many unforeseen consequences linked to technological advance typically do not become evident until after a major shift in societal norms has already taken place. By then, it is usually too late to reel back the line and make necessary adjustments for the good of humanity.

Ellul teaches that media include a built-in bias, independent of content. Over time, these media of communication engender as much (or more) influence on the way society is structured than what they make possible by way of convenience, comfort, or other immediate benefits. That is, the technological changes do much more than add something new to our lives; they become part of the ecological framework of society. Ellul deftly points this out through historical and critical analysis, providing fodder for reflection and hope for those seeking to preserve those cultural goods that are worth preserving - community, family, dialogue, and so forth..

Delving more deeply into Ellul during my dissertation, I applied his ideas concerning technique to the emergence and proliferation of mobile media. Instead of enriching the art of conversation, the continuous tethering of one person to another through a digital devices works to shape the way conversation, hence, relationship is perceived and valued.

One example of this is that mere talk is no longer a precursor to deep conversation, but has in many ways become a substitute for it through social media and texting.

Another example is the current thinking about online education. Whereas distance education has been with us for centuries in different forms, the rhetoric surrounding online education today promotes it as a necessity. In fact, if educators are not thinking about online education or practicing it, they are considered anachronistic and out of touch.

Part of Ellul's richness is that he offers no easy answers but pose important questions - questions that few are asking. My hope is that today's generation will discover Ellul anew and apply his thinking to the quandaries and challenges faced by living in a world where unprecedented speed and acquiescence of technological progress easily usurp human values and ethics. My dream is to one day teach a course on the history and philosophy of Jacques Ellul, helping students investigate more thoroughly the ramifications and ethics of dialogue. My joy is to live at such a time as this, when there yet remains an opportunity to preserve some of the precious human behaviors and values that have long made civilization possible.

## Reading & Re-reading Ellul

Arthur Boers

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As a nerdy young man, I never paid attention to the cover of *Rolling Stone*. But *Sojourners*? Ah, that was another matter; my early theological education mostly came from that periodical. When it featured unfamiliar Jacques Ellul in 1977, I took notice. I went to the university bookstore, bought a copy of *The Presence of the Kingdom* for \$2.50, and was electrified by it. (I am unsure how many times I've read it since then - now battered, highlighted, marked up throughout). In following years, other authors that influenced me - Will Campbell, William Stringfellow - also noted their indebtedness to Ellul.

I have read and re-read Ellul all my adult life - as a social activist, pastor in inner-city and rural settings, seminary professor. He is always significant, whatever my context or situation. Three themes in particular are never far from my mind and ministry.

First, Ellul demonstrated that Paul's notion of powers and principalities is not abstract and spooky. The demonic is related to so-called mundane realities, including money, *technic*, government, the city, and so forth. Ellul helps us understand the intransigence and intractability of many issues and problems. It prevents us from putting too much faith in technological solutions or indeed any solutions at all. Even electing people of character and virtue offers little hope of substantial change.

These implications tempered anger and frustration when I worked as an activist and ministered as a pastor, witnessing few results and the elusiveness of progress. Or saw good initiatives that went awry. Or marveled at how tightly people cling to priorities that caused great pain or damage. Or wondered why "Christian" institutions

employ unchristian means and serve unchristian ends. Or seen that every organization ultimately serves its own survival and promulgation, no matter the cost to others. The powers are always active in the world and we can only resist what we know how to name. But they are always beyond our reach or control. Thus prayer and worship are crucial to the Christian life because ultimately, as Paul says, we struggle “against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

Second, Ellul convinced me that *technic* is our age’s prevailing principality. As the decades have passed the conviction grows deeper, reinforced by what I saw around me as a pastor and professor. My latest book, *Living into Focus: Choosing What Matters in an Age of Distractions* (Brazos, 2012), makes an Ellul-influenced move: I want to help people explore the obvious ways that our interaction with technology harms us. Something’s not working. “Labor saving” devices make us busier. The faster computers go, the more time we give to them. As highways and cars improve, we drive farther and vehicles become increasingly expensive. Email speeds

communications but eats up greater amounts of time.

Even as we learn about environmental issues, our destructive ecological impact mounts. With the ongoing invention of “essential” devices (even energy efficient ones), our homes consume growing quantities of power. When I teach along these lines, many people automatically react and say that I must be “against technology” and thus suspiciously “Amish” or a “Luddite.” People are baffled by questions about such givens as the effects of TV, cars, or smart phones. It is hard to conceive of doing things differently. *Technic* is our principality, idol, sacred cow.

Third, Ellul argued that reading reality is eminently hopeful not pessimistic. Knowing and naming truth frees us to act. He bolsters our courage to speak truth - even to and about the powers. Here I am also somewhat ambivalent about him. His writing was often too dense, complex, and, at first glance dark, to share with others, even graduate students. As a pastor, I found congregants incapable of taking in his devastating critiques and analyses. Ellul informs my thinking, but I often keep him in the background.

I doubt he would mind. He did not set out to start a movement or have his ideas institutionalized. Still, it was good to meet him on that magazine cover all these decades ago.

## My Encounters with Jacques Ellul

Daniel Cerezuelle

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Becoming an “Ellulian” happened to me more by fate than by choice. It is the consequence of a family story. My father Henri Cerezuelle had befriended Ellul since 1936 and had participated in most of the camps which Ellul and Charbonneau organized from the late thirties to the sixties.

During the Second World War my aunt Edith Cerezuelle had participated with Ellul in a resistance network which helped save the lives of many Jews. Ellul was one of the rare men whose authority my mother would not challenge. And I remember very clearly, I was then fourteen or fifteen, when Jacques Ellul, his wife Yvette and their daughter Dominique came for lunch to our home one Sunday. He explained to my mother which part of a leg of mutton should be cut lengthwise or sidewise, and how to do it properly. I was very impressed.

Later, during the summer 1966, I was then 17 years old, I read *La technique ou l'enjeu du siecle* (ET: *The Technological Society*) which was on my parents' bookshelves, since Ellul used to send them an author's copy of most of his books. Reading this book was a turning point in my intellectual life. It helped me put into words my uneasiness with many aspects of the world I was discovering. During those years I would often ride my bike to Pessac in order to attend the informal “cineclub” which Ellul ran for the youngsters of his parish. His skills for interpreting a movie were so overwhelming that often further discussion with him seemed pointless.

By that time I had decided to study philosophy at Bordeaux University, and I would often visit Ellul's home, and very often I would return home with books which he let me borrow from his library. In 1970 I did my master's dissertation on the philosophy of technology, and I followed at the Institute of Political Sciences Ellul's courses on technology in contemporary society and on the history of political ideas. We had many discussions and he introduced me to the works of the French philosopher Jean Brun, whom he appreciated very much.

Then I decided that the issue of modern technology was too neglected by young French philosophers and that I should do my PhD dissertation on this topic. Jean Brun, who was teaching at Dijon University, agreed to be my advisor. Since this issue was not considered as legitimate in French departments of philosophy it was difficult to get the necessary financial support, and I was advised to do my research in the United States. Ellul suggested that I should get in touch with a young American philosopher, Carl Mitcham. Carl gave me valuable advice and we became friends. In 1972 I obtained a Fulbright grant which allowed me to spend two years in New York to study at the New School for Social research under Hans Jonas. When I returned from the States, Ellul hired me as his teaching assistant, and he was on the jury when I defended my PhD dissertation at Dijon University.

In 1973, Charbonneau and Ellul had created the Comite de Defense de la Cote Aquitaine for opposing at the local level the French State's policy of large scale touristic development. Charbonneau was the first president and my father was the secretary of this Comite which met for several years in our house, rue Saint Joseph, where I live today. A few years later Ellul became president and I took over the role of secretary.

At that time, the regional “establishment” was in favor of the policy carried by the French administration, and opposing it required courage and determination. I could see that Ellul and Charbonneau had plenty of both and took very seriously action at the grass roots level. A few years later, Charbonneau and Ellul launched the Groupe du Chene, an unsuccessful attempt at creating a think tank for the French ecological movement. Again, I served for several years as secretary of this group and had many occasions to collaborate with Ellul and Charbonneau.

Since the eighties, I have tried to develop Ellul’s legacy in two directions. In the field of social studies, Ellul had been very much concerned with the problem of deviant youth in the new urban environment. I have spend a lot of time studying how new forms of poverty and cultural disorganization result from the technologization of life. (See Daniel Cerezuelle, *Pour un autre developpement social* (Paris: Editions Desclee, 1996) and Daniel Cerezuelle & Guy Roustang, *L’autoproduction accompagnee, un levier de changement* (Toulouse: Edition Eres, 2010)).

In the philosophy of technology I have especially focused my research on the subjective dimensions of the autonomisation of technique and the study of the “technological spirit” which underlies technological acceleration (See Daniel Cerezuelle, *La technique et la chair, essais de philosophie de l technique* (Lyon: Editions Parangon , 2011).

## Ellul from 1973 to the Future

Patrick Troude-Chastenet

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Like many things in life, my meeting with Jacques Ellul owes much to chance. Living in La Rochelle, I wanted to be a journalist and I had been advised to first study political science in Bordeaux. That was in 1973, and at the time, I figured I would only remain in that city for three years. I knew nothing of the author of *La Technique ou l’enjeu du siecle*, published in France in 1954, when I first saw, making their appearance in the hallways of the Institut d’etudes politiques, the American students who had come all this way just to be able to hear him. This made me think that, if his fame had reached the universities of California and Colorado, surely this professor must have had something special going for him, which the others lacked.

I had to wait until the following year to attend his courses, and from the first one, “The Philosophy and Thought of Karl Marx”, I was not disappointed. At the same time, I had registered at the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences and I had discovered the first volumes of his monumental *Histoire des institutions*. Shortly after getting my degree, the director of the IEP asked me to do the orals for the students who followed Ellul’s courses and to also be his tutor (*repetiteur*) for the American students. Which I

did for several years, and did the same for another three courses of his: “Propaganda”, “Technological Society”, “Successors of Marx”.

I believe I read *Trahison de l'Occident* in 1976 and the reissue of *L'Illusion politique* in 1977. But it was only after I completed my doctorate in 1981 that I started systematically reading his work, writing reviews of it and doing interviews with Ellul, some of which would be published in the national press before they were gathered in a book that came out a few months after his death. I had the good fortune of living less than 10 kilometers from him and he was happy to receive me. He had written me a very flattering letter after the publication of a long interview that had made the first page of the Sunday supplement of *Le Monde*: “Jacques Ellul: avec Dieu sans maître” (13/9/1981), for which he gave me all the credit, explaining that the quality of the answers was due to the judiciousness of the questions. According to his wife, he wrote me, it was his best interview.

It was at that time that I made Ellul's thought my new research topic. I had devoted my thesis to a neo-Poujadist movement whose discourse would be called populist today, being reminiscent of that of the Tea Party. Ellul then became, for better or for worse, an essential part of my life. For better, inasmuch as I could use him as a reference in my teaching and he provided me with a fantastic interpretive framework that allows me to this day to make sense of the contemporary world. For worse, since he—inadvertently—harmed my academic career, given the fact that French political scientists can be divided into two categories: the first one, more numerous, does not even know he exists, or is pretending not to, while the second has a very bad opinion of him as a person or of his work, when not of both.

He has no doubt also contributed to a pessimism that did not come naturally to me and that is more a function of what I would call frustrated optimism. These two aspects can be found in my action within associations. My old friend Sylvain Dujancourt and I wanted to launch a review of Ellul studies. David Gill came to Bordeaux and he was able to convince us to begin by organizing together twin associations: IJES and AIJE. Our collaboration since 2000 has been most fruitful and we have both fulfilled our mission of spreading Ellul's thought among our respective publics. As for the *Cahiers Jacques-Ellul*, they were born in 2003 and are still available in bookstores. Since 2007, the University of Bordeaux has allowed me to devote an entire course to Ellul's thought, to organize a big international conference in June 2012, and to go abroad for courses or conferences about Ellul.

I hope that, in an era characterized by the sacralization of technique and fascination for the latest technological gadgets, there will always be a fringe of people who resist this potentially totalitarian hold. Ellul has underscored the basic ambivalence of technique. His discourse cannot be reduced to that of Luddites. Young generations should therefore avoid the two dead ends of technophilia and technophobia.

Secondly, while he did denounce *the political illusion*, he did not call on us to desert the public square, but to think globally in order to act locally. Although he is not the author of this formula, he has embodied it all his life and I am glad to see it being

taken up here and there in today's world. With the exception of future apparatchiks, young people no longer expect much from traditional parties. Ellul's thought is making its way among the alterglobalist, ecological, degrowth movements and is unfortunately even recuperated by the *Nouvelle Droite*. If I still have a soft spot for *Anarchie et christianisme*, it seems to me that current generations have more to fear from "liberal" globalization, from the uncontrolled power of banks and agencies, of multinational corporations, than from the State that was his main target. (*Translated by Christian Roy*)

*Translator's note:* The *Nouvelle Droit* is not to be confused with the populist, xenophobic National Front party nonFrench readers may be more familiar with, the *Nouvelle Droite* Patrick Chastenet has in mind is an intellectual movement centered on Alain de Benoist's GRECE that arose in the 1970s, and whose eclectic antiliberal critique of Western modernity gravitates around a rejection of Judaeo-Christian heritage and a celebration of every culture's pagan roots. This French New Right, emulated throughout Europe, has also been in close dialogue with the American New Left review *Telos*.

## Jacques Ellul on the Campus

Clifford Christians

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During my doctoral study at the University of Illinois, one of my professors in Communications introduced me to Jacques Ellul. He assigned *Propaganda* and it captured my attention immediately. At that point in the Ph.D. program, Ellul was the only Christian scholar to be assigned—the only one considered intellectually strong enough to be indispensable to the curriculum. From those days until now, I have not been a literary critic of Ellul's work exclusively. Here was a Christian academic with a worldwide reputation who had not cheapened his faith commitment. His career as a professor at a secular university has served for me as a model of Christian scholarship to emulate.

Of the Old Testament prophets, Amos fascinated me particularly, called away as he was from farming to preach against the wealth and indifference of Israel. However, it has never been obvious in my mind how these examples can be translated into the modern university setting. Ellul opened the prophetic door for me through his own Amos-like ministry to contemporary culture. Given my interests in media technology, I had longed to see the Christian mind dominate the discussion about technology today in the same manner Karl Marx dominated the 19<sup>th</sup> century agenda over industrialism.

From *Propaganda* to *The Technological Society*, and then *Humiliation of the Word* and *The Technological Bluff* Ellul unfolded for me a prophetic statement on communication technology that could dominate my field's agenda. In the face of novel and



dangerous circumstances of unprecedented magnitude, Ellul's prophetic witness encouraged me to believe that we need not stand by immobilized. He stretches us beyond religious homilies to a bold vision coextensive with technology's abundant power.

For those of us in an academic world, Ellul makes it clear that the important battles are fought over content. Certainly a life of integrity is critical. Keeping one's promises, honesty with the data, respect for students, and other such virtues are necessary givens for a Christian teacher and researcher. Certainly active involvement in social causes, and freedom from the demons of careerism are *sine qua non*. Christian institutions warrant support also, as Ellul showed with his support of Reformed seminaries in France; time devoted to them sometimes indicates that the university does not own my soul. But Ellul made it clear to me that all these are insufficient.

The issue in the secular arena is whether a biblical foundation makes any difference in the way we think or shape our disciplines. If, in other words, scholars of faith and the non-religious end up with the same conclusions on crucial issues, and if economic and political beliefs seem finally to carry the greatest weight, then, Ellul showed me, Christianity is unnecessary baggage. He proved to me that on issues that matter, Christianity is a paradigm that warrants allegiance in higher education.

Ellul brought the revolutionary idea up from a footnote for me, developing as he did an approach that is radical enough to make major transformations in the status quo. Ellul made the urgency of revolt and resistance compelling, not just a final chapter or an afterthought after all the other intellectual work has been accounted for. He is too uncritically Barthian at this point for my own taste, presuming Barth's dualism between *Historie* and *Geschichte* and its dialectic between secular and sacred histories. On this view, the latter culminates in an eschatological climax at the final judgment. And given this construct, the apocalyptic end-time moment anchors both freedom and revelation for Ellul.

However, despite the limitations of this formulation, Ellul challenged me with an analysis that confronts our technological era without a hint of compromise, while simultaneously protecting the clear otherness of the solution. His achievement was to eradicate all middle-level compromises within the historical process. He eschewed clinical appeals to reason, demonstrating for me a relentless yearning for justice and meaning that has marked prophetic agents over the centuries. Ellul continues to show the world of scholarship that our thinking about the technological era can be freed from its anti-normative direction.

## From Jacques Ellul to Global Ethics

Darrell J. Fasching

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A little over a decade after publishing a version of my doctoral dissertation on Jacques Ellul under the title *The Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Mellen Press, 1981), I published my two-volume work on ethics and public policy after Auschwitz and Hiroshima: *Narrative Theology After Auschwitz: From Alienation to Ethics* (Fortress Press, 1992), and *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia?* (SUNY, 1993). Then, in 2001, I published the first edition of *Comparative Religious Ethics: A Narrative Approach to Global Ethics* (2nd edition, 2011). These texts form the core of my life's work and grow directly out of my work on Ellul, and my attempt to resolve the dispute between Jacques Ellul and Gabriel Vahanian on the significance of the rhetoric of "apocalypse" and "utopia" in a technological civilization.

*The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia?* was my most ambitious work. The first chapter analyzes the dialectics of the Janus-faced myth of apocalypse and utopia in a technological civilization, in which the very promise of utopia seems to lead to Auschwitz, Hiroshima and nuclear "MADness" (Mutually Assured Destruction). All three volumes have a common core –the analysis and critique of the role of religion (East and West) in encouraging unquestioning obedience to higher authority, and how this role fed into the techno-bureaucratic moralities that led to Auschwitz and Hiroshima.

This unquestioning obedience is interpreted through Ellul's understanding of the sacred and is contrasted with his characterization of the experience of the holy as requiring the questioning of the sacred. Ellul enables us to understand how "religion" can function both to promote demonic ruptures like Auschwitz and Hiroshima, as well as undermine such trajectories toward the demonic by having the *audacity* to call into question the sacred patterns of techno-bureaucratic rationality.

The basis of an ethics of audacity is the experience of the holy (that which can neither be named or imaged) as it can be found in a number of religious traditions around the globe. An ethical coalition for a global ethic can form (and has formed) among those traditions that emphasize hospitality to the stranger. Important biblical traditions of the encounter with the Holy One insist that when we welcome the stranger we welcome God or God's messiah.

To do so is to recognize the humanity of the one who is not "like us" in race, culture or religion. "Human dignity" is a modern name for the experience of the holy, expressed through the mystical language of the *via negativa*. We cannot say what dignity is any more than we can define the holy. We can only say what it is not. We say that our dignity is what we have in common despite all our differences. Dignity does not reside in our gender, or race or social status, or economic status, etc.

These things do not define our humanity. Rather, what we all have in common is our "undefinability." All violations of human dignity begin by defining the other and confining them to that definition (as part of the sacred order of society). That is the basis of all sexism, racism, religious prejudice, etc. But what we all have in common is being created in the image of a God without image, or as Buddhists would say –all selves are empty.

For me, my life's work was set when Gabriel Vahanian convinced me to write my doctoral dissertation on Jacques Ellul instead of Lewis Mumford. Ellul's book, *The New Demons*, is for me the single most important book he wrote, for it opened up a functionalist model for recognizing the work of the holy across religions and cultures, in the lives of figures like Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. Their work represents the audacity and hospitality that Ellul associates with the work of the holy—its power to desacralize the sacred orders of societies and their various ethics of obedience in order to protect human dignity.

## Ellul as a Model of Christian Scholarship

Geri Forsberg

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I was introduced to the work of Jacques Ellul as a doctoral student in the media ecology program at New York University in the late 1980s. As a student, studying under Neil Postman, I was asked to read *The Technological Society* and *Propaganda*. I found Ellul's thinking to be profoundly deep and complex. I admired his ability to analyze the affects of the technological milieu and I was curious about this author. After some hunting, I came across his book, *Perspectives on our Age: Jacques Ellul Speaks on His Life and Work*. As I read it, I excitedly discovered that Ellul was a believer in Jesus. As a Christian student, knowing that Ellul was a scholar who believed encouraged me all the more to consider how faith relates to media studies.

Ellul's work provided a foundational perspective for my doctoral dissertation—*Critical Thinking in an Image World*. His book, *The Humiliation of the Word*, gave me insight into the significance and qualities of critical thinking. Ellul believed that critical thinking in our technological culture was immensely important, though taking a critical stance in our image-dominated culture is very difficult.

According to Ellul, the world of images: advertising, photographs, video, television, film, move us toward an emotional stage of thinking. Reasoning, logic, analysis, critique, requires words. But, words, Ellul explained, are taking a back seat role to images. In his analysis, there are two irreconcilable modes of thinking—word-based thought and image-based thought. Ellul makes a plea for us to uphold language which enables abstract critical thought and reasoning. He believed that only language could help us communicate the Word—Jesus Christ.

Communicating the Word was very important to Ellul. As a protestant lay theologian, as well as a sociologist, Ellul wanted more than anything else to honor Jesus Christ with his life and scholarship. I believe today's generation of Christian students and professors are looking for help in understanding how to critique, research, write, and live from a faith perspective. Christian professors are asking such questions as:

How does faith relate to scholarship? How can one synthesize, or integrate, Biblical perspectives with academic studies? How can one critique prevailing theories from a Biblical worldview? How can we communicate the Word in our, sometimes hostile, academic environments?

Ellul, I believe, provides us with an outstanding role model. His cultural critiques have influenced the thinking of intellectuals around the world. However, many scholars who are aware of his sociological analyses are totally unfamiliar with his Biblical works. Unfortunately, many Christian professors and students are completely unaware of Ellul and his writings.

It is my hope that we can make Ellul's writings known to 21<sup>st</sup> century professors and students. Currently, I am working on an article to introduce Ellul to English education. I would also like to introduce him to Christian professors and students. I would encourage Christians who have never read Ellul to start with *The Presence of the Kingdom*. This book is a wonderful introduction to Ellul. It is here he discusses the role of the Christian in the world; the need for revolutionary Christianity; the main problems associated with our technological society; and, the need for a distinctly Christian way of life.

I would also suggest that Christian professors and students read Ellul's *Perspectives on our Age*. In this book, Ellul shares how he came to know Jesus. He shows that if we are going to be "salt and light" in contemporary culture, we must understand the times in which we live. He believed that our hope is ultimately in Jesus. Jesus allows us to critique our technological system from a unique vantage point outside the system. This, in turn, allows us freedom from enslavement to our technological environment.

Finally, I would recommend his book, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*. Some scholars discount Ellul because they think he is a technological determinist who pessimistically believes technology governs everything. Ellul, however, is most optimistic. He ultimately believes there is freedom, hope, and purpose for our lives in the midst of a technological society.

## The Best Kind of Mentor

David W. Gill

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I have often referred to Jacques Ellul as "my mentor" –which can be defined as "a wise and trusted, usually senior, teacher, counselor, supporter, and guide." Certainly he was, and in many ways still is, the person who has most fully played those roles in my career for the past forty-plus years. My father and three or four others were also

wonderful mentors but in terms of my thought and action, the trajectory of my life and work, Ellul has first place.

As a Berkeley undergraduate in the late Sixties I had heard of Jacques Ellul but it was in Fall 1971 that the journey really began when I reviewed *Meaning of the City* for a small Berkeley radical Christian tabloid. The next summer I published a piece on politics that drew deeply on *Political Illusion*, *Politics of God* *Politics of Man*, *Presence of the Kingdom*, and *False Presence of the Kingdom*. I was totally hooked and rapidly acquired and devoured everything I could find by Ellul.

In fall 1972 I decided on a whim to send my reviews and essays to “Prof. Jacques Ellul, University of Bordeaux, France.” Two months later I was shocked to get a handwritten, encouraging letter from Ellul himself. From 1972 to 1982 I exchanged numerous letters with him, read everything I could find, learned to read French, and wrote a PhD dissertation on *The Word of God in the Ethics of Jacques Ellul* at the University of Southern California. What fascinated me was his dialectic of sociological criticism and theological-ethical reflection. Life between the two has been my passion and calling ever since.

In summer 1982 I made my first visit to Bordeaux and published my interviews with him. He welcomed me back for a whole sabbatical year in 1984 - 85 when I finally got my French to a serviceable level and met with him at his home for a couple hours at least twice a month. I returned for periods of two to four weeks during several subsequent summers. On the day he died, May 19, 1994, I truly felt the ache of losing a father in my life.

There is almost nothing I have taught or written over the past forty years that is not influenced by Ellul. My biblical studies, such as *Peter the Rock: Extraordinary Insights from an Ordinary Man* (1986; Ellul read my manuscript and gave me encouraging feedback in 1985 while I was meeting with him), are in my view “Ellul-style” commentaries. His ethical works such as *To Will and To Do* and *The Ethics of Freedom* have, of course, been huge influences. My *Becoming Good: Building Moral Character* (2000) interacts a good deal with Ellul on faith and hope.

The reality is that I disagree(d) regularly with Ellul -for example, concerning work and vocation, Satan and the Devil, ethics and morality, and kingdom of God and kingdom of heaven. But this is where he stands out as a mentor: he welcomed disagreement so long as it was thoughtful. He loved stimulating his students to renewed thinking, to pushing farther down the line. He often said that he didn’t want (mindless) acolytes and followers. He welcomed difference and healthy intellectual combat. He was the most learned, brilliant person I have ever known, always with layers of knowledge deeper than I had visited—but he humbly, gently, joyfully welcomed disagreement and argument.

There is not one book that Ellul wrote that didn’t challenge me and push me to think better and research more deeply the matter at hand. To me, that is one of his greatest legacies. This is why I can’t identify just one book or idea to preserve and pass on: we need it all.

And, secondly, I love the diversity we have in our community of Ellul scholars. It is a tribute to Ellul himself that we consist of atheists alongside believers, anarchists alongside socialists, all ages, races, both genders, all nations, academics, craftsmen, artists, and laborers. At our recent colloquia in both Bordeaux and Wheaton both the radical diversity and the mutual respect and even love were palpable. Like Ellul we want to be fearlessly committed to the search for truth and reality, for hope and freedom in a world closing in on itself. And we want to respect and enjoy each other along the journey.

## Ellul in Text & Textbook

Jeffrey P. Greenman

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During seminary one of my professors suggested that some of us taking a course on “Christ and Culture” might be interested in reading Jacques Ellul’s *The Presence of the Kingdom*. I am not sure if many of my classmates took his advice, but I am grateful that I did. I had never even heard of Ellul before. That book became a deeply formative influence which continues to inform my work as a theologian and Christian ethicist. I consider it a minor classic of 20<sup>th</sup> century theology, eminently worthy of being read and re-read. The opening chapter, “The Christian in the World” captivated me then and still inspires me today. In particular, I have been shaped by Ellul’s central conviction in that chapter that Christians have a distinctive mission which expresses their divinely appointed “function” as God’s representatives, which inevitably involves “living in tension” with the world. His description of an “agonistic” way of life struck a nerve as a fresh and powerful description of the biblical call to discipleship.

He articulated how and why mission is at the heart of the Christian life, an insight that has become a fundamental conviction for me. *The Presence of the Kingdom* set me on a lifelong engagement with the question of the role of lay people in the church and in society, a core question of ecclesiology. Ellul’s ability to express a theological vision for the centrality of the laity in God’s purposes has strongly influenced my teaching and writing as an educator.. It was from Ellul that I first understood that the Church is the whole people of God, sent by the Holy Spirit into the world on behalf of Christ and his Kingdom. Later readings in Hendrik Kraemer, Lesslie Newbigin, David Bosch and Karl Barth confirmed and deepened the insights that I had first discovered in Ellul.

During my doctoral studies I encountered more of Ellul’s writings, especially his theological and ethical works, most notably *The Ethics of Freedom*, which I consider one of the most significant Protestant texts ever written on the subject. Next I worked through his books of biblical interpretation, and then studied his sociological

works. This is pretty certainly not the sequence of most Ellul readers, especially most non-Christian readers. But encountering Ellul via his theology prevented me from ever thinking that Ellul was just some sort of a grumpy, pessimistic philosopher of technology. No, I always knew that he was a deeply Christian and seriously biblical thinker, working out the implications of his fundamental confidence that Jesus Christ is God's Son, the Lord and Savior of the world.

I never had considered teaching a course on Ellul until a delightful conversation in a pub on Martha's Vineyard on a relaxed summer evening. There with my colleague at Wheaton College, Noah Toly, we discovered our common interest in, and great (though qualified) appreciation for, Ellul's thought. We joined up with another colleague, Read Schuchardt, to offer a multidisciplinary, team-taught course on Ellul, which we described in *The Ellul Form* (issue 45). While teaching that course, we realized that there was no suitable textbook to introduce Ellul's thought, and so we decided to write it, not realizing just how tricky it could be to present his ideas fairly and concisely to those with no previous exposure to his thought. Our book, *Understanding Jacques Ellul*, appears in 2012, published by Cascade Books. It serves as a companion to that publisher's valuable reprints of Ellul's works, and their new translations of his works. We hope that our book serves to make Ellul accessible and appealing to a new readership and helps Ellul to be represented well in college and seminary classrooms.

One area where the next generation of students, pastors and scholars would benefit is by taking seriously Ellul's work as a biblical interpreter. This dimension of his thought has been almost totally neglected. In my view, by far his best biblical work is *Reason for Being*, his "meditation" on Ecclesiastes, which was the book of Scripture that most deeply shaped his entire outlook. I would venture to say that no one can understand Ellul's corpus without reading Ecclesiastes, and without reading what Ellul says about Ecclesiastes.

After discovering this work, I thought, "Ah! Now I see why he thinks the way he does. I wish I'd read this earlier." Ellul's voice should be welcomed into the conversation about recovering what is being called the "theological interpretation" of Scripture. His critique of the rationalism and reductionism of much contemporary biblical scholarship is incisive if sometimes overstated, but his positive vision of a humble, Christocentric reading of the entire Bible as one cohesive book is an approach that can only help equip to the church for its "agonistic" life as God's people in the world.

## Jacques Ellul Today

Joyce Hanks

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Having read several books by Jacques Ellul, sometime in the 1960's or 1970's, I began to collect whatever I could find that he had written, including his published articles. His ideas seemed terribly important to me, as indeed they still do. At the time, I was teaching French in Costa Rica, and working on a dissertation in sixteenth-century French poetry. Eventually, I decided to spend all the time I could spare working on Ellul bibliography and translation. The relevance of his thought for contemporary society and for Christian thinking made my other academic work seem insignificant.

Ellul graciously accepted my proposal for a series of in-person interviews to take place during the 1981-82 academic year, at his home outside Bordeaux. He had recently retired, and spent most of his time writing. He welcomed me regularly, answering my bibliographical and theological questions with considerable patience, and enabling me to track down many of his articles published in poorly-circulated journals. His kindness extended to inviting my family to dinner at his house, frequent tea breaks with him and his wife, and the suggestion that I attend the Bible study sessions he led in the church he had established, next door to his house.

Although he clearly found it tedious to do so, Ellul continued to respond faithfully to my bibliographical inquiries after my return to Costa Rica. His filling in the blanks enabled me to publish in 1984 the first of several Ellul bibliographies. Once I began translating his books, he also answered my letters requesting clarification of his meaning here and there. Usually I traveled to France annually for the purpose of questioning him at length about translation and bibliography issues. After his death, I sorely missed this regular contact with him, including the opportunity to hear him interpret his writings and share new areas of his thinking.

Encountering Ellul has forced me to think more broadly than I naturally do, considering far-reaching consequences. His views on matters like money and my generation's headlong rush into technology have challenged my personal practice at many points, and have factored into my decisions. His personal concern for students and colleagues offered me a model that I have attempted to emulate. Almost daily, I note an idea or a comment in my reading that connects with Ellul's thinking in some way, often responding directly to his published thought. I feel truly privileged to have had meaningful contact over the years with such a seminal thinker.

As we go forward, I trust that we will apply and adapt Ellul's thought rigorously and sharply, without watering down his principles in order to gain ready acceptance. Ellul did not seek so much to find agreement as to stimulate thinking and consequent bold action. We emulate him best when we think beyond our narrow field of specialization and far from our comfort zone. Like him, we can risk exposing our thoughts to those who think differently from us, and then do our best to understand them and to build something new together.

In our era of increasing specialization and polarization, I believe Ellul's views on violence have special relevance. He wrote that we have unusual opportunities to learn from those who differ widely from us as we have contact with them, especially in the church. In that atmosphere, Ellul believed that we can listen carefully to each other,



because what unites us matters so much more than what would divide us. Ideally, he could imagine ecclesiastical contexts—and presumably other contexts—where wildly differing points of view had their proponents not just rubbing shoulders, but talking with each other about their differences, working together in spite of important disagreements.

Ellul believed that, particularly in the church, we have the opportunity to consider difficult situations with utter realism, refusing to kid ourselves or tone down any disaster our world may seem headed for. Then, realizing that we do not know everything and cannot accurately predict the future, he encourages us to abandon despair and forge ahead in hope. We honor Ellul best when we do this with courage.

## My First Encounter with Ellul

David Lovekin

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I came to Ellul (or perhaps he came to me) in the late sixties, when all was in revolutionary bloom. I had majored in Philosophy and Literature at Northern Illinois University as an undergraduate. My early training in philosophy was in the grim and humorless wrangling of analytic philosophy, with a few lighthearted moments allowed for “puzzling.” I was lured from this miasma by the study of Whitehead, Bergson, Ernst Cassirer, and Hegel. My master’s thesis, also at NIU, was entitled: “Ernst Cassirer’s Concept of Man,” directed by Donald Phillip Verene. I specifically recall one afternoon when Verene asked me if I had read Jacques Ellul’s *The Technological Society*. I hadn’t, and he suggested I should. I did, and my intellectual life changed.

John Wilkinson’s introduction likened Ellul’s study to Plato’s *Republic* and Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Mind*. I proceeded to read *The Technological Society* as the examination of the technological mind that was *writ large* in the state by the end of the nineteenth century. I had understood Hegel’s phenomenology to be inherently dualistic with a synthesis between subject and object only as apparent and provisional, not the usual read. The Absolute was manifest along the way as appearance, which connected with Ellul’s notion that the technical mind attempts to overcome difference (e.g. the gap between my awareness and the object of that awareness) with the “technical phenomenon,” a concept virtually embodied in the technical system devoid of true embodiment.

The technical phenomenon became the false absolute, the false sacred—certainly not the Wholly Other. Technical intention was Cartesian and rationalistic in this regard. This abided with Cassirer’s use of Hegel’s phenomenology as a mapping of spiritual energy as it created symbols in the tensions between subject and object. The symbols of myth, language, and science were just such attempts; the Absolute appeared as

Jove in the Greek epics before a science they anticipated. The gods allowed the first appearances of cause in narratives of fortune and fate.

Cassirer had indicated the possibility of technology as a symbolic form, but beyond a brief essay—*Form und Technik*—did not advance the project. I believed that with Ellul's help, with his high regard for the symbol, a project was possible that would bring Hegel and Cassirer along. I later added Giambattista Vico to the mix with his study of the imagination in its cultural work as literature and law, also of interest to Ellul. Vico had anticipated the technical phenomenon with his notion of the "intelligible universal."

My first article for *Man and World* (1978), "Jacques Ellul and the Logic of Technology," and was followed by essays applying this logic to matters like mystery, science fiction, homelessness, the sacred, etc. My connection of Ellul to Vico was in *Man and World* (1982), "Giambattista Vico and Jacques Ellul: The Intelligible Universal and the Technical Phenomenon," a paper that was also read in Venice at the international Vico/Venezia conference (1978).

My book *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul*, Lehigh University Press, 1981, pulled together much of this research and ended with an emphasis on the notion of the cliché as the latest manifestation of the technical phenomenon. Here I also argue the importance of reading Ellul philosophically without concluding that he was a philosopher, at least as the term is usually taken. I believe he is a part of the critique of culture that needs greater elaboration and serious speculation above the current blather of deconstructionism and post-modernism, which at present takes the place of such a critique and is instead a manifestation of the problem.

I am currently working through the problem of Ellul's aesthetics, translating *L'Empire du non-sens*. Aspects of this appear in my recent "Looking and Seeing" for the *Ellul Forum*, Spring 2012 which is being reprinted with corrections and additions in the *Bulletin of Science, Technology, and Society*, vol X, Fall 2012.

We are surrounded by clichés, blather, and bullshit that deafens all meaningful discourse and further humiliations of the word that Ellul challenged, and in his memory we should continue the good fight.

## Ellul on Truth & Propaganda

Randal Marlin

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A philosophy graduate student first drew my attention to Jacques Ellul's *The Technological Society* some time in the early 1970s, when I was teaching in the philosophy department at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada. I saw Ellul's ideas as fitting

well with concerns about preserving individual autonomy in the modern world, something I explored in a course on phenomenology and existentialism. Ellul brought the added dimension of how human technique compounds the problems. I first instituted a new course, "Society, Value and Technology," using Ellul's book as the main text.

After a few years of teaching this I became sensitized to the question of propaganda. I was attracted to Ellul's *Propaganda* and became more and more interested in developing my thoughts in this area. As an undergraduate I had spent a lot of time on the Princeton student newspaper and I saw how people's words could be twisted and manipulated.

Upon graduation I worked for a metropolitan newspaper in Montreal while pursuing an M.A. degree focused on the philosophy of language. At Oxford I came across work by H.L.A. Hart and P.J. Fitzgerald and developed a new interest in the philosophy of law, later doing a Ph.D. in that area at the University of Toronto. With this background I conceived the idea of a course on Truth and Propaganda, in which I would look at historical, analytical, ethical and jurisprudential aspects of propaganda, but I saw a need to develop more expertise in the historical and factual dimensions of the subject.

Then came a strange opportunity. With a sabbatical coming up, I cast around for ways of supplementing a half-salary to enable me to study abroad. I saw that the Department of Defence advertised yearly Fellowships, one of them very substantial. I hit on the idea of competing for the big one so that I could work with Jacques Ellul in France.

The competition for this Fellowship would be fierce, and the idea that a philosopher might get it seemed very remote. I read Carl von Clausewitz and saw that his emphasis on morale in winning or losing wars gave me what I needed to impress the military with the need for attending to propaganda. Ellul posed the problem starkly when he said that democracies had to engage in propaganda or risk defeat from external enemies or subversion from within.

But Ellul noted that if they engaged in propaganda they would become the reverse of a democracy. I proposed in my submission that the way out of the dilemma would be by educating people to see through propaganda, thus undermining its power. I would give a course, "Truth and Propaganda" on my return, after getting a first hand view of Ellul's thinking and his reaction to possible solutions of his dilemma.

To my delight I won the Fellowship. In the course of interviewing Ellul during the Fellowship year, he kindly gave me an addendum he had intended to include in a second edition of *Propaganda* that never came to pass. He gave me permission to publish a translation of this, which I did. I also summarized some important ideas from the lectures I attended and had them published, with his permission, in *Futures Research Quarterly*.

I am constantly learning new things from Ellul's writings, more recently his theological studies, and have noticed how features of his writing fit in with a broader communicative purpose. Sometimes his writings are fiercely dogmatic in tone. But

his meaning is clear and usually founded on an impressive study of relevant factual material. What they certainly don't lack is the ability to stimulate.

Ellul resembles Kierkegaard in keeping in proper perspective not only the need to communicate objective truth, but also to gauge the ability of an audience at a particular time and in particular circumstances to receive such truth in the right way, with the right effect. I have been delighted to discover that my own involvement in civic affairs has its counterpart in Ellul's, and I look forward to reading more about his activity with Bernard Charbonneau.

## Connecting With Ellul: An Episodic Engagement

Carl P. Mitcham

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Getting to know the work and life of Jacques Ellul was a significant part of my intellectual formation. The 1960s were a chaotic time. After finding analytic philosophy wanting and dropping out from Stanford University in Spring 1962 (which was to become the year of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* and the Cuban Missile Crisis), I crashed in Big Sur for a while, then worked vegetables with a short-handled hoe alongside migrant laborers in the fields around Salinas, California. From there I floated back to the University of Colorado, where I'd been enrolled before Stanford, and became involved with early-stage 1960s student activism. Then dropped out again, hitch-hiked and road rails across the United States, winding up back in San Francisco sometime in early 1964. The Vietnam War was growing larger, and I refused draft induction, expecting to go to jail — but then was not arrested (until five years later, another story). Got married in 1965 and was offered a job as a forest ranger in the Sequoia National Forest.

It was in the context of this typical 1960s itinerary that, wandering through the San Francisco Public Library in 1965, I stumbled on Ellul's *The Technological Society*. After standing and reading only a few pages, I decided I had to have the book and stole it (years later sending the library money to pay for my theft). I took it to the summer mountains of southern California, where I read it by kerosene light in a forest ranger cabin 50 miles from the nearest highway. When the snows came that fall I was still reading and re-reading. It was among the first things that began to make sense of the complex and confusing world in which I was struggling to find myself.

Two years later in appreciation, I reviewed *Propaganda* (1965) for the liberal Catholic quarterly *Cross Currents*, and then in the next decade my first serious scholarly publication — “Jacques Ellul and the Technological Society” (*Philosophy Today*, Summer 1971) — was an analysis of Ellul's argument, especially in relation

to the thought of Max Weber and the challenge of instrumental rationality. The effort in this regard also involved trying to understand connections between Ellul, classical political philosophy (as mediated by the work of Leo Strauss), and medieval philosophy (as mediated by Etienne Gilson).

Somewhere along the line the seminal analyses of Jose Ortega y Gasset and Martin Heidegger also got thrown into the mix. And in an effort to justify my philosophical interest in technology when the American philosophical scene strongly rejected technology as of any philosophically interesting importance, I discovered a tradition of engineering philosophical discourse that arose most prominently in Germany during the first third of the 20th century.

The dialectical tensions between Ellul, Strauss, Gilson, Ortega, Heidegger, and each of their traditions, drove me to read more of Ellul, whose voluminous if sometimes inaccurate footnotes introduced a wealth of literature on technology that influenced both the edited collection, *Philosophy and Technology: Readings in the Philosophical Problems of Technology* (1972), and *Bibliography of the Philosophy of Technology* (1973). (I should add that all of these initial three publications were undertaken with Robert Mackey, a philosophical colleague from Stanford, who remains a dialectical foil from the realm of analytic philosophy.)

Early in the 1970s, when teaching at Berea College, Kentucky (where, after eventually being arrested for draft resistance, I had been sentenced to alternative service), I met Jim Holloway, cofounder of the Committee of Southern Churchmen. As editor of the radical Christian journal *Katallagete: Be Reconciled* (1965-1991), Jim tutored me in Ellul's Barthian theology. In appreciation I did another review for *Cross Currents*, this time of Holloway's *Introducing Jacques Ellul* (1970). The two *Cross Currents* reviews led to guest editing a special theme issue of the journal on "Jacques Ellul" (Spring 1985), although not before also working (with Kassie Temple, Catholic Worker transplant from Canada who had done a dissertation directed by George Grant on Ellul) to translate and publish some of Ellul's work in *Research in Philosophy and Technology* (1980 and 1984) and in another co-edited volume (with Jim Grote) on *Theology and Technology: Essays in Christian Analysis and Exegesis* (1984).

It was Holloway, who encouraged me to write Ellul, which led to the translating and publishing in English some of his more philosophical work. And in the mid-1970s Ellul introduced me to his student, Daniel Cerezuelle, who has become a life-long colleague and friend. I helped Daniel arrange to study with Hans Jonas at the New School for Social Research, and Daniel, with his wife, Anita, visited me and my wife and family where, again partly through the instigation of Jim Holloway, I had become involved in a small intentional family religious community loosely associated with the Abby of Gethsemani in Kentucky. (Holloway had known Thomas Merton, Gethsemani's famous monk, who also found The Technological Society worthy of notice.) It was Daniel who organized the June 1989 biannual meeting of the Society for Philosophy and Technology to take place in Bordeaux, with Ellul as a plenary speaker.

Since the late 1990s my attention has shifted away from Ellul. He was one of my original entrees into the philosophy of technology and a stimulus for reflection on opportunities for Christian alternatives to the technological way of being in the world. But as I have progressively come to see Christian theology responsible for technology and violence, and not just in Lynn White's form as a dual-use historical stimulus or through Illich's "corruption of Christianity," my own religious affiliation has departed Catholicism and gravitated toward Pure Land Buddhism. Ellul's approach to the world has become increasingly foreign. Yet, in what is probably a final homage to his work and influence, at the invitation of colleagues Helena Jeronimo and Jose Lms Garcia in Portugal, I helped organize a reflection that has resulted in a book on Jacques Ellul and the Technological Society in the 21st Century as a contribution to celebrating the 100th anniversary of Ellul's birth.

## From Ellul to Charbonneau

Christian Roy

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Around 1985, I became engrossed in the thought of Canadian philosopher George Grant, whose critique of Technique draws from Jacques Ellul's; that is when I read *The Technological Society*, during my graduate work on the origins of French Personalism. Days before flying to Europe to research my history dissertation, Jean-Louis Loubet del Bayle, the authority on such pre-war "non-conformist" movements in France, pointed out to me that Ellul came from that scene. Delighted to learn of this direct connection between my Grantian concerns and French research interests, I resolved to include Ellul among the Personalist veterans I would interview.

That single meeting in Pessac on July 6, 1988 proved a turning point in my life, as Ellul told me how to make my way off the grid and the beaten path to the Beam barnhouse of his friend Bernard Charbonneau, whose own work I had just discovered as that of the great unknown prophet of our time —unassuming as he turned out to be in person. I came unannounced, but we instantly became close.

His papers and memories allowed me to reconstruct how, with Ellul's assistance, he invented political ecology as a distinct revolutionary orientation in Southwestern France from the 1930s onward. I first made that case in an environment-themed issue of a Montreal magazine with which I was involved ("Nature et liberte. Le Combat solitaire de Bernard Charbonneau", *Vice Versa*, No. 30, Sept.-Oct. 1990, pp. 12-14), and to which Charbonneau would contribute several original articles at my entreaty, while I

also published excerpts of my interview with Ellul (No. 33, May-July 1991, available online at [www.viceversamag.com/jacques-ellul-a-propos-de-leducation-transmission-de-la-culture-ou-bluff-technologique](http://www.viceversamag.com/jacques-ellul-a-propos-de-leducation-transmission-de-la-culture-ou-bluff-technologique)).

Making the case for Charbonneau and Ellul as the true pioneers of Green activism has been a scholarly priority of mine since its fullest, now canonical statement won the Best Essay by a Graduate Student Award for 1991 in the *Canadian Journal of History* (XXVII, April 1992, pp. 67-100): "Aux sources de l'ecologie politique: le personnalisme 'gascon' de Bernard Charbonneau et Jacques Ellul." I gave the paper "Entre pensee et nature: le personnalisme gascon" at the first conference on Bernard Charbonneau at the University of Toulouse weeks after his death in 1996 (Jacques Prades, ed. *Bernard Charbonneau: une vie entiere a denoncer la grande imposture*. Eres, 1997, pp. 35-49), and "Ecological Personalism: The Bordeaux School of Bernard Charbonneau and Jacques Ellul", appeared in *Ethical Perspectives* (Vol. VI, No. 1, April 1999, pp. 33-44); it was summarized as document no. 698481 in Vol. 36 (2003) of *The Philosopher's Index*, and is

downloadable at [www.ethical-perspectives.be](http://www.ethical-perspectives.be). I wrote the entries on Charbonneau and Ellul in the *Enciclopedia della persona nel XX secolo (Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane)*, (2008), and more recently, online texts on Charbonneau in *Global Media Journal*, *PhaenEx*, and [agora.qc.ca](http://agora.qc.ca).

Following a conference at EHESS in Paris in 2011 on dissident voices amidst the long-assumed post-war consensus on France's modernization, a mainstream book on this topic in the works (Bonneuil, Pessis & Topgu, eds.) for La Decouverte that will include my account of Charbonneau and Ellul from 1945 to their part in the fledgling ecological movement of the 1970s. My paper for the Ellul centenary conference at the University of Bordeaux covered some of the same material, while the one I gave at its counterpart in Wheaton College presented Charbonneau and Ellul as a tandem of activists and thinkers I like to call the Bordeaux School.

The point I wanted to put across to Ellul's Englishspeaking admirers on both occasions was that their hero's intellectual mentor can no longer be left in relative obscurity; Charbonneau represents a vast continent of closely related, even more original thought waiting to be discovered in Ellulian circles and well beyond them, as Ellul himself always hoped. As a result, discussions are underway that could lead to my translating Charbonneau as well as Ellul in English.

## Ellul's Books and Mine

Richard Stivers

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In a graduate sociology program in the late 1960s, I followed up on a reference to *The Technological Society*. I subsequently read *Propaganda* and *The Political Illusion*. I was then convinced that Ellul's sociological analysis was more or less correct, despite the fact that my teachers seemed oblivious to his work.

One day in the library's card catalogue, I discovered under *Ellul, Jacques* books with surprising (to me) titles such as *The Presence of the Kingdom* and *Prayer and Modern Man*. As a lapsed Catholic I read his Christian books with interest but puzzlement and began to rethink my understanding of Christianity. Ellul's writings on Christianity became the motivation for me to attempt to become a Christian.

Like Kierkegaard Ellul gave the reader an existential kick in the butt: knowledge without practice is

worthless. So Ellul had wormed his way into two parts of my life: as a fledgling Christian and a young sociologist. I was taken by his view that Christian intellectuals had an obligation to expose the ideologies and myths that leave us culturally enslaved.

I decided to follow his advice by concentrating on sociological topics that Ellul had not studied in great detail. Ellul discussed technological morality in *To Will and To Do* and elsewhere, but never devoted a book to the topic.

In *The Culture of Cynicism* (1994), I analyzed how the new "lived morality" was an ersatz morality comprised of technical and bureaucratic rules, public opinion, and visual images in the media. I used Ellul's terms the "necessary" and the "ephemeral" to relate technical rules on the one hand to public opinion and to images on the other hand.

In *Technology as Magic* (1999), I attempted to resolve a conundrum about technique. In *The Technological Society*, Ellul mentioned that nonmaterial technique depended on the subjective factor (belief) to be effective, whereas material techniques functioned whether we believed in them or not. I argued that non-material technique works as magic, that is, as placebo or self-fulfilling prophecy. I concluded that we have magical expectations for material technology and have created imitation technologies (non-material) that are based on magic. In this way, as Ellul observes, everything becomes an imitation of technology or a compensation for its impact.

*Shades of Loneliness* (2004) is a study of the psychological impact of technique. The book includes a theory of the technological personality. In the second half of the book I demonstrate how various neuroses and psychosis (schizophrenia) reflect the contradictions of a technological society. For instance, obsessive-compulsive and impulsive disorders reflect the contradiction between the rational and irrational. The more rational society becomes, the greater the need for irrational release (ch. 5, *The Technological Society*).

*The Illusion of Freedom and Equality* (2008) looks at the transformation of meaning in freedom and equality from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present. Today freedom is ideologically defined as consumer choice, individual right, and technological possibility; equality as plural equality and cultural and communicative equality. The reality of each of these ideological images is the exact reverse. The reality of freedom is forced



consumerism, legal process, and technological necessity; the reality of equality is group conformity and competition on the one hand and uniformity on the other. Ideology, as Marx argued, transforms reality into its opposite.

Ellul argued that from the perspective of freedom, propaganda was the worst technique. This technique destroys awareness of our servitude to the technological system and magically transforms servitude into freedom (consumerism). Over the years my students liked *Propaganda* better than any of Ellul's other books. I surmise that it resonates with their experiences and that there still remains a small part of each of us that has not been convinced of our unlimited freedom. Everything we do to allow society to be livable and to minimize harm to the environment depends on our rejection of propaganda.

## Our Civilization's Wager on Technique

Willem H. Vanderburg

*Willem H. Vanderburg is Director, Centre for Technology and Social Development, Department of Civil Engineering, University of Toronto bill.vanderburg@utoronto.ca*

When completing a doctorate in Mechanical Engineering during the early 1970s, I came to the conclusion that the world did not need another "regular" engineering professor, but someone who understood how our professional practice contributed to the "production" of our social and environmental crises and who could apply this understanding to make urgently required modifications.

In 1973, I was looking for a postdoctoral mentor; and after reading one and a half chapters of Jacques Ellul's *The Technological Society*, I knew I had found him. Implicit in his description of technique was a completely accurate characterization of how my mindset worked. I needed to work out this intuition with him. Ellul accepted me on the promise that I would not ask for more than eight hours of his time per year. By 1978, I had completed what would later be published as *The Growth of Minds and Cultures*, to which he wrote the Foreword. Together we decided that my description of culture was implicit in his work as the way human beings made sense of the world and lived in it prior to technique.

Since much of a culture is implicitly transmitted from one generation to the next, I now had a tool to examine the values, beliefs and myths embedded in "engineering culture" and how this is transmitted through professional education. My research showed that future engineers learn almost nothing about how technology influences human life, society and the biosphere and even less about how to use this understanding to adjust their design and decisionmaking to achieve the desired results but simultaneously prevent or significantly reduce harmful effects. I had identified the need to transform technique by introducing some negative feedback into it. This led to what I call preventive approaches, set out in my book *The Labyrinth of Technology*.

I also tackled the task of understanding how human lives and societies greatly reduced their reliance on culture as a consequence of the emergence of technique. This was published in *Living in the Labyrinth of Technology*.

Most recently, I explained how the principal characteristics of technique, as well as the brilliant successes of our civilization and its equally spectacular failures, can largely be attributed to the fact that our knowing and doing are organized on the basis of disciplines. It amounts to a fundamental desymbolization of human life and society raising what I believe constitutes the “wager of the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (Jacques Ellul called technique the wager of the 20<sup>th</sup> century). How far can this desymbolization proceed, since it progressively weakens what has made us human until now? The findings were published in *Our War on Ourselves*, which also includes a prescription of how to resymbolize technique in order to loosen its grip on the modern university.

I would place Jacques Ellul among a handful of the most important Christian thinkers of all times. During a critical mutation in humanity’s journey, he discerned the implications, and his predictions have come true with a greater speed than I ever believed possible. Secular myths and the accompanying new religious forms continue to steer humanity in a direction of self-destruction, with one important difference.

The massive desymbolization under the pressure of technique raises the question of whether this will be the century when human life as we have known it thus far will come to an end and an entirely new kind of “existence” of our species will begin.

Worse, the Christian community is so deeply committed to the idols of our time that it has largely been unable to hear Jacques Ellul’s warnings. Will faith endure or will it all be turned into religion? Here also, the voice of Jacques Ellul may well turn out to be critically important for the continuation of a faithful remnant.

This brings me to the last component of my work. The year before he died, Ellul gave me permission to publish his Bible studies. The first volume, entitled *On Freedom, Love and Power*, will soon be joined by a second, *On Being Rich and Poor*.

## **Gabriel Vahanian: 1927-2012**

A Personal Remembrance

by

Darrell J. Fasching, Vice President, IJES

The International Jacques Ellul Society

I first found out that my teacher, mentor and friend, Gabriel Vahanian, had died when David Gill, President of the International Jacques Ellul Society, emailed me a few days ago. Knowing Gabriel Vahanian’s age, I knew this day would come, and yet the news stuns me. I want to share a few thoughts on this great scholar and dear friend.

Gabriel Vahanian was born and educated in France and received his baccalaureate from the *Lycee de Valence*. He then came to the United States in 1948 on a fellowship to Princeton Theological Seminary where he earned his M.A. and then completed his

Ph.D. in 1958. In that year he joined the religion faculty at Syracuse University. Gabriel Vahanian's rising star was lit when, in 1965, *Time* magazine published an issue on *The Death of God*. The article featured his book by that title, published in 1961, and offered it as a prime example of a new theological movement that included others like William Hamilton and Thomas Altizer. When *The Death of God* first came out, the great New Testament scholar, Rudolf Bultmann, compared it to Karl Barth's *Commentary on Romans* in its revolutionary significance for contemporary theology. It was a masterful cultural analysis of what Vahanian described as "the cultural incapacity for God of our post-Christian era." It led him to suggest that we *Wait Without Idols* (1964) and have *No Other God* (1966) until we could find an authentic language with which to speak of God again.

Gabriel Vahanian began to explore such a new language in his 1976 book *Dieu et L'Utopie* translated in 1977 as *God and Utopia, The Church in a Technological Civilization*. It launched his experiment in a new poetics of the word that was continued in *L'utopie Chretienne* and *Dieu Anonyme*; also his Kierkegaardian meditations *La foi, une fois pour toutes* and his book on *Tillich and the New Religious Paradigm*. Most recently, in 2008, *Praise of the Secular* appeared. Moreover, there is at least one more book to be released with the working title: *Figures of Christ: From Incarnation to Cloning*.

In addition to being a prolific author who lectured throughout Europe, Asia and America, Gabriel Vahanian was a member of the founding board of the American Academy of Religion (1964). The Academy inaugurated the promotion and professionalization of the academic study of religion in private secular and public state universities in the United States. Then in 1968 he became the founding Director of Graduate Studies in the Department of Religion at Syracuse University in Syracuse, New York. During his tenure at Syracuse University (1958-1983), he held the Eliphalet Remington Chair and then the Jeanette KittridgeWatson Chair. In 1983 he accepted an invitation from the Protestant faculty of the University of Strasbourg and returned to France for the remainder of his career.

Rudolf Bultmann, who so glowingly praised *The Death of God*, was no doubt a major influence in persuading Gabriel Vahanian of the need for such a book. For in *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (1958) Bultmann argued that the Gospel had become irrelevant to modern persons because it was couched in a three-storied mythological worldview that had no relation to a world in which one lighted one's dwelling by flipping the switch on an electric light bulb. Hence, he said, the Gospel needs to be demythologized by being translated into a more contemporary language. Bultmann chose existentialism as that language and argued the Gospel called us to a new self-understanding. The argument was persuasive to many, but it succeeded at the cost of shrinking the cosmic-societal dimensions of the Gospel down to the individual transformation of consciousness. There was the potential for an almost Gnostic disengagement from the larger world in which the human drama is lived out.

Between the publication of *The Death of God* in 1961 and *God and Utopia* in 1976/77, there occurred a major incubation period which gave birth to Gabriel Vahanian's utopian poetics of faith. This poetics addressed the Bultmannian call for a new language of faith, but in a way that was more adequate to the cosmic-societal dimension of human life than existentialism.

I came to Syracuse University in 1969, the second year of its new graduate program and witnessed that poetics being formed in the seminars I took with Gabriel Vahanian over the next few years. In that period I saw Vahanian's interest in Bultmann's reflections about light bulbs and faith transformed into a poetics of technique as the linguistic essence of a technological society. In his seminars on technology and theology, especially, it became clear that Jacques Ellul's sociology and theology of the technological society were becoming a major influence on Gabriel Vahanian's thinking. Following Ellul, he came to see the language of technique as creating a new, all-encompassing environment that replaced the ancient world's language and poetics of nature. Technique as the linguistic expression of our capacity to imagine and create new worlds offers a new and more adequate selfunderstanding, one that could take one beyond the limits of existentialism into the biblical-eschatological language of new creation –a language that embraces societal and cosmic transformation.

For Vahanian, if the ideological language of the technological civilization was utopian, as Ellul argued, this was so only because of the Gospel's transformation of Western civilization through an eschatological poetics of new creation –a "worlding of the word" as Vahanian later called it. Existentialism still suggested the dilemma of the classical world in which nature is one's fate. Each person is a "useless passion" in rebellion against his or her natural facticity. Jacques Ellul came to understand technological society as our "new nature" promising us liberation from the classical understanding nature as the realm of fate. Yet this "new nature" too became our fate, he argued, imposing efficiency as a necessity upon us. In Ellul's view, it was the utopian promise of technological society to fulfill all our desires through the use of efficient techniques (in all areas of human endeavor) that induced us to treat technology with a sacred awe, and so surrender to the necessity of efficiency.

Gabriel Vahanian agreed with this analysis, but argued that this utopian ideology was itself possible only because of the eschatological poetics of new creation unleashed by the Gospel. For the Stoics, nature was man's fate but for Paul, all of creation is groaning and giving birth to a new creation, the transformative body of Christ in the world. In Vahanian's view, Ellul saw the negative side of utopianism as ideology but he failed to see, at first, that desacralizing this ideological utopianism was the equivalent of releasing the Gospel's genuine utopianism of new creation.

A post-Christian civilization, Vahanian argued, is closer to the Gospel than classical civilization ever was. Utopian hope is possible because a technological civilization is no longer shaped by classic presuppositions of nature as our fate but by the eschatological utopianism of the Gospel. The poetics of the Gospel can redeem the language of utopia and the utopianism of language. The poetics of the holy can redeem the poetics of the

sacred to create a world that is rendered secular by the iconoclastic ecclesiology of the church as the body of Christ; a church whose task of continuing desacralization or secularization makes the continual renewal of the world possible. The Gospel is not about changing worlds but about changing the world, utopia is not a destination but an "eschatic" source of continuing renewal. For Gabriel Vahanian, the Gospel is not about taking us out of the world but taking us into the world to be its "salt." It is significant that Vahanian's book, *Anonymous God*, is dedicated to Rudolph Bultmann and devoted to a trinitarian reflection on God and the utopian iconoclasm of language.

Although Vahanian and Ellul were known for their occasional theological sparring, I know from my conversations with both that they were very good friends. Both subscribed to Ellul's distinction of the sacred and the holy. In most of Ellul's work, he tended to see utopianism as an expression of the sacred, an ideology that justifies the world as it is –making it impossible to change it. In most of Vahanian's work, he tended to see apocalyptic language as an expression of the sacred, inviting escape from this world rather than commitment to changing it. But both of these terms, "apocalypse" and "utopia," can be desecralized and so understood alternatively as expressions of the holy, and when they are, the two terms - "apocalypse" and "utopia" - converge. Ellul's book *Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation*, for instance, turns out not to be about changing worlds but changing the world. Ellul views the language of the *Book of Revelation* as a poetic mirror reflecting on the present situation, calling the church to introduce an apocalyptic

transformation into this time and place. In his book, *Ideology and Utopia* (1929, revised in 1936) Karl Mannheim argued that apocalyptic language can be either ideological or utopian. In the first case, it justifies the *status quo*, in the second case it initiates a social

transformation of society by breaking with the conventional view of society. It is the second where Ellul and Vahanian's views converge and apocalypse becomes utopian.

#### *A Personal Reflection*

Gabriel Vahanian entered my life in 1967 when I was on the student undergraduate committee that invited him to speak on "The Death of God" at the University of Minnesota. I was so taken with him as a person and a scholar that I ended up entering the Syracuse University Department of Religion graduate program in the Fall of 1969. Over the next several years I eagerly took every one of his seminars, struggling at first to understand what he was doing and then when the light finally came on, I was astonished and exhilarated. Those lectures were a dazzling, transforming experience. As my doctoral advisor, he became the midwife of my doctoral dissertation on Jacques Ellul which I defended in 1978 (later published as *The Thought of Jacques Ellul*, 1981). Gabriel Vahanian convinced me to do my dissertation on Jacques Ellul, by telling me that in doing so I would be standing on the shoulders of a giant. Ellul laughed when I told him this (being not much over five feet tall) and said "a small giant." Gabriel Vahanian was about the same height. By the time I published my book on Ellul, I

realized I was standing on the shoulders of two giants. That book opened doors for me and in 1982 I accepted an offer to join the Religious Studies Faculty at The University of South Florida in Tampa. A decade later, I dedicated my most ambitious work to Gabriel Vahanian –*The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia?*(1993) –saying in the Preface that my book was possible because ”I learned that which can only be absorbed by studying with a master. I learned to think theologically.”

The bond I formed with Gabriel Vahanian while I was writing my doctoral dissertation under his direction turned into a lifelong friendship. I had Gaby speak at the University of South Florida many times and he who would usually come to visit me and my wife a couple of times a year in Tampa, only an hour and a half from Winter Haven, Florida, where he had a second home he used when he flew in from France. Indeed, I just had a visit from him this Spring and we talked of seeing each other again at the Ellul Centennial Conference in Weaton Illinois this July. In the intervening time I was hospitalized in intensive care for internal bleeding that almost led to my own demise. Upon release, I ended up emailing him that death was stalking me and was making me too weak to travel. We never had that ”last” planned meeting. The unfolding events since then remind me that death stalks us all.

Typically, when Gaby came for a visit he would make it a point to arrive on a Thursday in order to be able to join ”the breakfast club” for discussion on Friday morning. The club is a group of five –scholars, ministers, even a lawyer. We meet every Friday to discuss the events of the week, the events of our lives, and, yes, even theology. Gaby loved this forum and reveled in the discussion. He always looked forward to it when he came. He had astonishing energy and would keep me up until midnight on Thursday discussing theology and then be fresh to begin again in the morning. By the time he left to return to Winter Haven on Friday afternoon, I would be both exhilarated and exhausted. He was 17 years my senior and I couldn’t keep up with him. I will miss his visits but he will always be a presence in my life.

A Meditation on Language, Time and Eternity from *The Confessions* of Augustine:  
*Suppose, I am about to recite a psalm which I know. Before I begin my expectation ... is extended over the whole psalm. But once I have begun, whatever I pluck off from it and let fall into the past enters the province of my memory*

*As I proceed further and further with my recitation, so the expectation grows shorter and the memory grows longer, until all the expectation is finished at the point when the whole of this action is over and has passed into memory. And what is true of the whole psalm is also true of every part of the psalm and of every syllable in it. The same holds good for any longer action, of which the psalm may be only a part. It is true also of the whole of a man’s life, of which all of his actions are parts. And it is true of the whole of the history of humanity, of which the lives of all men are parts. (The Confessions of Augustine, XI,28,282, Rex Warner translation, New American Library, 1963)*

May God remember his faithful servant, Gabriel

Vahanian, whose life is whole and complete.

Four Final Notes

1. Gabriel Vahanian is survived by his wife Barbara, his son Paul Michel and his daughter Noelle. Noelle Vahanian, holds a Ph.D. from Syracuse University and teaches at Lebanon Valley College, 101 N. College Ave., Annville, PA 17003-1400. Her email is:

Vahanian@lvc.edu

2. An extensive bibliography of Gabriel Vahanian's work can be found at:  
<http://gabrielvahanian.blogspot.com/p/ouvrages-de-gabriel-vahanian.html>

3. Those wishing to donate to honor Gabriel Vahanian's memory might consider a donation to the *Gabriel Vahanian Endowed Graduate Support Fund*, Department of Religion, Syracuse University, Syracuse New York, 13244

4. A memorial service was held for Gabriel Vahanian on Friday, September 7, 2012 at Saint Paul's Reformed Church in Strasbourg.

## **Advert: International Jacques Ellul Society**

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The IJES (with its francophone sister-society, L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul) links together scholars and friends of various specializations, vocations, backgrounds, and nations, who share a common interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), long time professor at the University of Bordeaux. Our objectives are (1) to preserve and disseminate his literary and intellectual heritage, (2) to extend his social critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) to extend his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

### **Membership**

Anyone who supports the objectives of the IJES is invited to join the society for an annual dues payment of US\$20.00.

The IJES office can accept payments only in US dollars because of the huge collection fees otherwise charged by US banks.

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## IJES Ellul Forum Transition Time

David Gill, IJES President

For many of us on the masthead of *The Ellul Forum* this has been a forty-year (plus or minus) journey with Jacques Ellul —and a thirty-year (plus or minus) journey with each other. We old-timers are very grateful for the younger scholars and activists who are stepping up toward leadership in the Ellul studies guild.

After years of discussion and study of the alternatives, we have decided to cease the *regular, twice-yearly* publication of the *Ellul Forum* with this Issue #50. We still prefer reading print material ourselves —but the growing costs of print and postage and the labor involved, alongside the far greater population coming to our [www.ellul.org](http://www.ellul.org) web site, have made it clear that we need to build a truer “Ellul Forum” on line.

Online we can post articles without worrying about length. We don’t need to exclude good articles for lack of space in our 24-page journal; everything fits online. We don’t have to wait six months to publish; we can post articles as soon as they are ready. And online our readers can add their comments and perspectives to the document and interact with the author —a true “forum.”

Online we can build up a truly valuable storehouse of information and material from and about Jacques Ellul. We hope to become a better clearinghouse for Ellul-related ideas, projects, meetings, research projects, and study/teaching resources.

We have a distribution list of about 350 for online IJES newsletters and announcements. Please register yourself at [www.ellul.org](http://www.ellul.org)— or send your preferred e-address to [IJES@ellul.org](mailto:IJES@ellul.org). Please note that *we will not be maintaining a traditional mailing list* any longer. You must access our material on your computer —or use one at your public library or school —or ask a friend to connect you. Worst case: ask a friend to print out anything of interest and give or mail it to you. The good news it is now all free! And all accessible to a huge potential audience that never saw our print material.

Now hear this: we are still and forever pushing hard to get more of Ellul’s books translated and published or reprinted. Ted Lewis and Wipf & Stock Publishers have done an

amazing job on this with many Ellul works now in print for the first time. Visit their online catalog at [www.wipfandstock.com](http://www.wipfandstock.com)— where you will find at least *seventeen* Ellul titles with more on the way.

We dream of publishing an “Ellul Forum Annual” volume of the best of our online articles. These projects depend more on leadership and personnel than anything else. But do not give up on “Ellul in print.”

\* \* \* \*

In June in Bordeaux about 150 scholars and friends gathered for a three day colloquium on Ellul’s legacy for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. AIJE President Patrick Chastenet did an

extraordinary job organizing and leading this meeting. Since 2000 Patrick has led the remarkable development of our sister fellowship L’Association Internationale Jacques



Ellul. You must visit their great web site at [www.jacques-ellul.org](http://www.jacques-ellul.org). Patrick's leadership along with his multiple books about Ellul have made him the unrivaled world expert on Ellul. We are so grateful for his ceaseless labors.

Daniel Cerezuelle, also of Bordeaux, has also done extraordinary work to make available and understandable the works of Ellul's intellectual partner, Bernard Charbonneau. Other developments: some of Ellul's old friends and students are in process of turning his Bible study lecture tapes into books (sounds similar to what Bill Vanderburg is doing in Toronto). We have to tip our hat to Dominique Ellul (daughter of Jacques & Yvette) for her efforts to get Ellul's works reprinted in France. And now to grandson Jerome (son of Jean Ellul) for his efforts to create photography and film related to his grandfather.

\* \* \* \*

In July in Wheaton, just west of Chicago, about 75 scholars and friends gathered for a three-day centenary colloquium on Ellul. Gabriel Vahanian and Daniel Cerezuelle came over from France. It was a great reunion for us old-timers and a first-time in-the-flesh encounter for many others. The papers and discussions were lively.

Many of the attendees insisted it was "the best conference" they ever attended. I couldn't disagree! Jacques Ellul continues to draw together the most amazing, diverse, creative, community of scholars and activists imaginable. I am bold to think the world, the academy, and the church, badly need a merry and rambunctious band like this. Let's keep it going on line - and meet again (in five years?).

## Resources for Ellul Studies

[www.ellul.org](http://www.ellul.org) & [www.jacques-ellul.org](http://www.jacques-ellul.org)

The IJES web site at [www.ellul.org](http://www.ellul.org) contains (1) a brief and accurate biography of Jacques Ellul, (2) a complete bibliography of Ellul's books in French and English, (3) a complete index of the contents of all *Ellul Forum* back issues; and (4) links and information on other resources for students of Jacques Ellul. The French AIJE web site at [www.jacques-ellul.org](http://www.jacques-ellul.org) is also a superb resource.

### **Cahiers Jacques Ellul**

*Pour Une Critique de la Societe Technicienne*

An essential annual journal for students of Ellul is *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*, edited by Patrick Chastenet, published by Editions L'Esprit du Temps, and distributed by Presses Universitaires de France Send orders to Editions L'Esprit du Temps, BP 107, 33491 Le Bouscat Cedex, France. Postage and shipping is 5 euros for the first volume

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**Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works** by Joyce Main Hanks. Research in Philosophy and Technology. Supplement 5. Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 2000. xiii., 206 pages. This is the essential guide for anyone doing research in Jacques Ellul’s writings. An excellent brief biography is followed by a 140-page annotated bibliography of Ellul’s fifty books and thousand-plus articles and a thirty-page subject index. Hank’s work is comprehensive, accurate, and invariably helpful. Visit [www.elsevier.com](http://www.elsevier.com) for ordering information.

**The Reception of Jacques Ellul’s Critique of Technology: An Annotated Bibliography of Writings on His Life and Thought** by Joyce Main Hanks (Edwin Mellen Press, 2007). 546 pp. This volume is an amazing, indispensable resource for studying Jacques Ellul. All the books, articles, reviews, and published symposia on Ellul’s ideas and writings are here.

### **Living the Word, Resisting the World: The Life and THought of Jacques Ellul**

by Andrew Goddard. (Paternoster Press, 2002). 378 pp. Ten years after being published, Professor Goddard’s study remains the best English language introduction to Ellul’s life and thought.

### **Ellul on DVD/Video**

French film maker Serge Steyer’s film “Jacques Ellul: L’homme entier” (52 minutes) is available for 25 euros at the web site [www.meromedia.com](http://www.meromedia.com). Ellul is himself interviewed as are several commentators on Ellul’s ideas.

Another hour-length film/video that is focused entirely on Ellul’s commentary on technique in our society, “The Treachery of Technology,” was produced by Dutch film maker Jan van Boekel for ReRun Produkties (mail to: Postbox 93021, 1090 BA Amsterdam).

If you try to purchase either of these excellent films, be sure to check on compatibility with your system and on whether English subtitles are provided, if that is desired.

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## The Sense of Incarnation in Ellul and Charbonneau

by Daniel Cerezuelle

*Abstract:* Bernard Charbonneau, a friend and an acknowledged inspiration of the Christian Jacques Ellul, was an agnostic, but they shared some fundamental values. Their understanding of freedom as incarnation was the common ground of their lifelong companionship in the criticism of technological society and in environmental activism.

*Bio:* Daniel Cerezuelle studied philosophy and the social sciences. As a philosopher, he has taught the philosophy of technology in France and the United States and, since 1991, served on the board of the *Societe pour la Philosophie de la Technique*. As a sociologist he is investigating the social importance of the non-monetary economy in modern society. He is currently scientific director of the *Programme Autoproduction et Developpement Social* (PADES).

In this essay I shall try to clarify the common existential and spiritual background of Ellul's and Charbonneau's critique of technological society. They met very young, became friends in their twenties, and their intellectual companionship lasted throughout their life. Ellul, as most of you already know, kept saying that he had an important intellectual debt towards Charbonneau. Although he was not a Christian, I think it is useful to take into account Charbonneau's thought, because it sheds some light on the orientations of Ellul's thought. The agnostic Charbonneau and the Christian Ellul had in common a same understanding of human freedom as incarnation. Ellul wrote for example that already in the 1930s they "insisted on the unity of the human being, on the incarnation, on one's commitment according to a personal decision."<sup>1</sup> Their common dissent with the evolution of modern society is rooted in this common spiritual experience. When they were young they had long discussions on this issue and understanding what one says about this issue helps understand what the other has to say.

On this fundamental issue of freedom as incarnation, the social writings of Ellul say very little. True, we can get some hints from his theological writings. But those hints are not always very explicit. For example in *Presence of the kingdom* he makes a connection between the issue of incarnation and the criticism of modern technology and of the modern State, but this connection is not very explicit.

I shall try here to make it more explicit and in order to do so, I must begin with a few remarks on the Judeo-Christian roots of incarnation.

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Ellul, « Introduction a la pensee de Bernard Charbonneau », in *Ouvertures, Cahiers du Sud-Ouest*, n° 7 (1985), p. 41.

## I. Two Models of Perfection.

Free like a bird: In most religions, perfection or sanctity can be achieved through a process of disincarnation: achieving immortality, getting rid of the individual body and its carnal needs, liberating the soul from gravity, flying, and so forth. Most mysticism aims at liberating the self from its condition captive to a living body. This self-deification by means of disincarnation is also the goal of many speculative philosophies. Thanks to the power of the concept, man's mind can liberate him from his finitude, which he experiences in his body. (The *soma = sema* theme of the ancient Gnostics exemplifies this trend). This longing for the post-human, or the trans-human, is also one of the powerful motives of the technological adventure.

Reaching a perfect state, obtaining freedom, is overcoming the bonds which attach the human mind to the laws of corporeal nature. Hence, the importance of ascensional symbolisms and of transparency in representations of human perfection.

This state of mind may encourage a fascination with technological power and an interpretation of all growth of human power over nature as one more step toward the ultimate liberation of the human mind from the constraints of a corporeal mode of existence which is experienced as an obstacle.

On earth as in heaven: Judeo-Christian revelation breaks with this aspiration towards a disincarnate perfection. To mankind obsessed with the desire for escape from its condition ("you will be like gods..."), the God of the Bible gives the example of an unheard of and scandalous perfection by means of his incarnation in the world. "The word (or 'verb') became flesh" says the Bible.

This *ensarkosis logou*, incarnation of the word, lends itself to various interpretations. A sacrificial one would say that the sufferings which Jesus endured in his flesh are the price for the salvation of mankind. Another one would say that this incarnation does not amount to a diminishing of God but to the manifestation of a supreme perfection. Becoming sentient flesh, individual incarnated existence, active in space and time, the verb incarnate gives mankind the model of a *perfection in this world*. Before Christ, humans could believe that perfection, which realizes all the aspirations of the spirit, could exist only *beyond the natural world*. Now, Jesus, as God-made-human, gives the example of the full realization of the spirit in this world.

The example of Christ tells us that sanctity is no longer to be found in a flight from this world or in a rejection of our carnal condition, but in the act of incarnation. This is the new model for human freedom. And since this imperative of incarnation knows no limits, it is no longer during some special moments of their spiritual life that humans should realize this incarnation. From now on, invested with the "freedom of God's children," they must try to translate or put into practice their spiritual values in all the dimensions of their daily life, which thereby becomes sanctified. Therefore the value of human works should be evaluated and judged by taking into account the experience of all dimensions, including the carnal ones, of this daily life.

## II. Technique and Incarnation in Jacques Ellul.

In his *Presence of the Kingdom*, Ellul explains what should be a Christian ethics in a world dominated by technology. And right at the beginning of this book he raises the issue of incarnation: “God has been incarnated, and we should not disincarnate him.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore, it is important for each believer not to separate his material (carnal) condition from his spiritual condition. Our responsibility is to incarnate our spiritual values in this world “from which we should escape.”<sup>3</sup> According to this imperative of incarnation, we should build “a civilization at human scale.” But our technological civilization is not adapted to “carnal man” (*l’homme de chair*).

The accelerated growth of our technical, economic, and scientific means is grounded in a process of abstraction which neglects real man and considers only an ideal man. “Thus, living and real man is subordinated to the means which should guarantee the happiness of an abstract man. The man of philosophers and politicians, which does not exist, is the only goal of this prodigious adventure which results in the misery of the man of flesh and blood, and transforms it everywhere into a means.”<sup>4</sup> If we seriously pay attention to the real condition of the man of flesh, we should not accept this dissociation. The incarnation of the verb in Christ gives mankind a model: in order to be good, an action must incorporate its end not only in its effects but also in the agent and the means he uses.

An efficient action realized by someone who does not know what he does and why, who is reduced to the status of mere irresponsible means, cannot be good. “What is important is not our tools and institutions, but ourselves.”<sup>5</sup> Only a process of disincarnation can allow us to imagine that an action could be justified by its end. All our actions, and all their effects should embody our values.

Others have held similar ideas but what is original with Ellul is his willingness (and ability) to take seriously and radically these principles for identifying and evaluating the instances of depersonalization of daily life. This is the basis for his criticism of modern state and of technical civilization. He shows us how the real workings of the technical and institutional equipment of mankind tend towards autonomy, which is contradictory with the principle of the unity of means and ends associated with incarnation.

Thus, the emphasis on incarnation in Christ as well as in the life of a real individual man, which is at the core of Christianity, requires us to submit our techniques and our institutions to an evaluation (*jugement*) which determines their place in our lives as well as their limits.

Ellul insists on *three consequences* of this imperative of incarnation:

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<sup>2</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Presence au monde moderne* (Geneve: Roulet, 1948), p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> *Presence*, p.19.

<sup>4</sup> *Presence*, p.83.

<sup>5</sup> *Presence*, p.105.

First: this imperative of incarnation should be obeyed in all the dimensions of our lives. For example, concerning power relationships, we should pay attention not only to politically institutionalized forms of domination, but to non-political forms of domination. This requires that we pay a careful attention to the structures of daily life in order to identify hidden power relationships.

Second: personal autonomy is both the condition and the realization of freedom. Only through the responsible action of each one of us can the word of God incarnate itself in the world. Everyone, each of us, is called to act and to decide personally in a world which depersonalizes action. Everything which reduces our personal control on our daily life is bad.

Third: our spiritual and moral orientations must be put into action first in our daily life and express themselves through our way of life (*style de vie*). For changing the world, private life is as important as public and political action.

### III. Freedom and Incarnation in Bernard Charbonneau

Throughout his entire life, Charbonneau was motivated by the idea that industrial civilization cannot answer two basic human needs: the need for nature and the need for personal action, or –said otherwise - the need for freedom. Hence, his works can be read as an invitation to invent a new civilization which could respond to these needs for nature and freedom. Because incarnation is a central feature of the human condition, the incapacity of our civilization to respond to these needs results in the depersonalizing of existence. In one of his books he writes that “uncontrolled development threatens this man whose mind is incarnated in a body.”<sup>6</sup>

So why does Charbonneau think that incarnation is a central dimension of human existence? For him, to be free is to accept –and not to reject –the tension between a spiritual imperative and the difficulties to incarnate it in nature as well as in society. Only an individual can realize this incarnation in his life. “Between heaven and earth, between the ideal and the real, a mediator is necessary, and there is none for that, but a man; in order to achieve its incarnation, the spirit never used another device.”<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, the dream of a total freedom is meaningless, since freedom cannot be a permanent mode of existing; it consists in an *effort for liberation* which succeeds more or less.

Charbonneau said again and again that a thought which is not put into practice in daily life is worthless, and - as a consequence - that every dimension of the individual’s experience is important, since every circumstance of daily life is an occasion for putting our values into practice.

Besides, Charbonneau is convinced that thought has a vital need of expressing itself through an action which gives it in return material reality and ontological weight. Since

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<sup>6</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Le système et le chaos* (Paris: Economica, 1990), p.128.

<sup>7</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Je Fus* (Bordeaux: Opales, 2000), p.21.

he is especially aware of the global completeness of the person, he is reluctant to give more importance to certain material dimensions of life than to others.

For example, in order to evaluate the productive equipment of a society, we should take into account not only the level of consumption but also the sensuous (or sensorial) conditions of daily life. Whether we consider the progress of institutional organization or the progress of technological and industrial performance, beyond a certain threshold the growth of our tools may deprive all individuals of the possibility of incarnating their values through actual actions. Meditating about the fantastic increase of the power of mankind's tools, and especially of the state, he says "From my own thinking to this reality, the distance is such that I am condemned to a disincarnated thought, when thinking the state can be animated by an all-powerful imperative of incarnation."<sup>8</sup>

#### United by a Common Thought

This is the title of an article which Charbonneau wrote for an environmentalist journal after Ellul's death. Reflecting on their personalist youth and their split with the Esprit Movement of Emmanuel Mounier, Charbonneau wrote that, unlike Mounier, "we were not interested in saying 'amen' to progress, but in understanding the threat which it posed to nature and freedom . . . Where for Mounier it was necessary to adapt to a society in transformation, for us it was necessary to judge it according to our values of democracy and freedom in order to change it."<sup>9</sup>

In the *personalist manifesto* written in 1937 by both Ellul and Charbonneau, they criticize the depersonalization of action which, in modern society, results from the normal working of administrative, economic, and technical institutions.<sup>10</sup> They call for an evaluation of institutions and technologies not from the point of view of efficiency but rather according to their consequences for each of our mastery of our own daily lives. What place remains in the technological society for our own decisions? For them the reduction of our control over our daily life is evil.

Reflecting on their early common commitments, Jacques Ellul wrote: "we felt the necessity of proclaiming certain values and of incarnating certain forces." But "when the personal problem consisted in examining if we could incarnate the necessity which we felt inside of us," in our normal social life, the question was no longer "to live according to one's thinking" but simply "to think and nothing else and to make a living and nothing else."<sup>11</sup>

Thus, it is their understanding of incarnation which led these two young thinkers to undertake a radical critique of a civilization which creates such a dramatic split between the spiritual and material dimensions of life.

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<sup>8</sup> Charbonneau, *Je Fus*, p.10.

<sup>9</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, « Unis par une pensée commune » in *Combat-Nature* n°107 (nov. 1994).

<sup>10</sup> Bernard Charbonneau et Jacques Ellul, *Directives pour un manifeste personaliste*. Journal interieur des groupes personalistes du Sud Ouest, 1935 ou 1936. Patrick Troude-Chastenot en a publié une édition annotée dans le *Revue française d'histoire des idées politiques*, n° 9 (Paris,1999). pp.159-177.

<sup>11</sup> Jacques Ellul, « Introduction à la pensée de Bernard Charbonneau » p. 41.



# The Problem of Health Care as Technique

by Raymond Downing

Abstract: Healthcare is a consummate example of the technological system that Ellul described. Yet popular commentary dwells on the problems that healthcare has - particularly financing in the USA - far more than the problem that it is. Through examining the Hebrew story of the Bronze Serpent, and considering the contemporary focus within healthcare of risk analysis, I will propose that modern healthcare as technique is a problem.

Bio: Raymond Downing (MD, New York) has spent about 1/3 of his professional career as a medical doctor in the USA and 2/3 in several countries in Africa, currently in the Department of Family Medicine at Moi University in Eldoret, Kenya. His fifth book on healthcare, *Biohealth*, was published in mid-2011.

## The Bronze Serpent

Rustom Roy, co-founding editor with Jacques Ellul of *The Bulletin of Science, Technology, and Society*, said about healthcare that it was “the world’s most pervasive technology problem.”<sup>12</sup> What is it about this healthy sector of our economies, this enterprise dedicated to healing, that makes it a problem? Is it that healthcare *has* problems, or that healthcare *is* a problem? Thirty-five years ago Ivan Illich declared that it *was* a problem: “The medical establishment has become a major threat to health” was the opening sentence in *Medical Nemesis*. Since then, most analysts have assumed only that it *had* problems. Ellul undoubtedly would have agreed with his disciple Illich.

So what is the problem with healthcare? Consider first the story of Moses and the bronze serpent, a very old story of healthcare, with tentacles that reach all the way to the Gospels.

The story itself is short and simple: the Israelites were suddenly confronted in their travels by a population of poisonous snakes. Enough people were bitten, envenomated, and died to warrant classification as a public health problem needing intervention from the government. Moses made a bronze model of one of the snakes and put it up on a pole. Those who had been bitten were instructed to look at the bronze serpent, and when they did, they survived.

The setting of this story is rich with epidemics. When the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt, it was a series of Ten Plagues that eventually convinced the Egyptians to free them. However, when the Israelites started traveling on foot through the desert and began complaining about the trek, the tables were turned and they began to experience deadly epidemics: fire, a couple of unnamed plagues, an earthquake - and the snakes. In each case the epidemic was a direct consequence of their complaining or rebellion or

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<sup>12</sup> Roy, Rustom, “Introduction: The ‘Alternative’ Approach to Health: The Only Solution to the World’s Most Pervasive Technology Problem”, *Bulletin of Science Technology & Society* (2002) 22: 333.

greed or debauchery. These were not random plagues or meaningless slaughters. When people began corporately complaining about or ignoring the plan God had laid out for them (and in the process acting against their own interests), there were consequences to their own health. God had spelled it out right after they left Egypt (Ex 15:26): following God's plan would prevent all the diseases the Egyptians had experienced, because health is God's business.

In this serpent story we are considering, the people were again complaining - at least for the eighth recorded time since leaving Egypt. Most of the previous epidemics had been consequences of these public complaints. But the consequence this time was different. Now God sent "fiery serpents" - the word is *saraph*, the same word that is translated "seraphim" in Isaiah 6. Both meanings come from a root word meaning "to burn," and in fact the seraphim in Isaiah touched Isaiah's mouth with a burning coal to take his iniquity away. The Israelites, however, may not have gotten this connection between an angelic being and a deadly snake, and they asked Moses to do something to remove the snakes (*nachash* - an entirely different word; the one used for the Satan-snake in Genesis 2). So Moses prayed, and God told him to make a *saraph* and put it on a pole for all to see. Moses then made a snake (*nachash*) out of bronze (*nechosheth*), two words that are related to each other - more on this shortly. And it came about that all who had been bitten, if they looked at the bronze serpent, they lived.

This redemptive event apparently had a more profound effect on the people than the few sentences in Numbers 21 betray, for there are no more recorded episodes of *complaining* until after they entered Canaan. They did have a major run-in with debauchery and idolatry later at Peor resulting in their largest yet epidemic - 24,000 dead from a plague. But the problem of complaining, which had dogged them from the beginning of their wilderness trek, did not recur. They accepted Moses as their leader, and the next time they were without water they dug a well instead of complaining. Then they asked permission to pass through the land of the Amorites, but instead of being given permission, they were attacked. They fought back, won, and settled for a while in Amorite land. When they moved on again they had the same experience with the people of Bashan: Bashan attacked Israel, Israel fought back, and won. By this time their reputation had grown, and the next people in line, the Moabites, were worried. Their king Balak hired the prophet Balam to curse Israel, and he tried. Four times he tried, but each time the only thing that came out of his mouth were blessings.

We don't know if the Israelites attributed this string of successes (prior to Peor) to the healing power of God during the snakebite outbreak. But we do know that they at least respected the bronze serpent because they saved it - for 500 years! And during that time they apparently did what any of us do with an object or method that in one situation was so remarkably effective: they began honoring the thing instead of what it represented. Maybe they even kept trying to use it for healing. They named it - Nechushtan, not Saraph - and offered sacrifices to it. One of the first things King Hezekiah did in his reforms was to smash it, just as he smashed the sacred pillars and

poles that honored other gods, because the people were treating Nechushtan the same way.

Once again, the words used in the brief narrative in Numbers 21 tell an interesting story. God simply told Moses to “make” a snake on a pole, and the word for “make” is a very common word, the one used in Genesis 1 for all that God created. It was the same word used when Adam and Eve made loincloths for themselves out of fig leaves, and when Noah made the ark. God is the creator, and we too make things: *homo faber*. And we often use metal to make these things.

Moses decided to make the snake out of bronze (*nechosheth*), a metal first mentioned in connection with Tubal-cain, only 7 generations down from Adam. The word is used frequently in the Pentateuch, and always refers there simply to the metal itself. However, beginning with the bronze chains that bound Samson after his hair was cut, there are several uses in the Old Testament where *nechosheth* is translated as chains or fetters. The connotation of the word had begun to change from the material (a common metal used for the furnishings of the tabernacle in Ex 25) to one of its apparently increasing uses: fetters. Eventually, in Ezekiel 16:36, there is a use of the same Hebrew word *nechosheth*, but by now the meaning is clearly different; no longer bronze itself, but idolatry (presumably another of the uses of bronze) and filth or harlotry. Could this hint at the link between *nachash* (which came to mean practicing divination as well as serpent) and *nechosheth* (bronze, which became idolatry)?

Perhaps it was this Ezekiel use of *nechosheth* that Hezekiah saw in the way the people were treating Nechushtan. But he could not smash what Nechushtan originally represented. Over 700 years later John raised that serpent again - or rather Jesus did - but this time more as Saraph than Nechushtan. Jesus was explaining to Nicodemus that the Son of Man who had *come down* from Heaven would be *lifted up* in the same way that Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness. And the purpose was the same: so that everyone who saw and believed would live - eternally. It is interesting to speculate how Nicodemus - who surely knew the story of the bronze serpent, and knew of its destruction by Hezekiah - would have understood what Jesus just told him. It is even more poignant to wonder what Nicodemus was thinking as he and Joseph *lifted* Jesus *down* from the cross.

We too may be left with some questions, especially if we work backwards and ask the story of Jesus to throw light on the story of the bronze serpent. Why would people bitten by deadly snakes be asked to gaze at a model of one of those snakes in order to live? Why not focus their attention on something beautiful, or something more powerful than a snake? How could the word for fiery serpent be the same word for an angel? All these questions are related to the fundamental one: What could it mean that those who believe in a dying man end up with eternal life? These are indeed paradoxes, ones we are meant to wrestle with.

The Gospels are full of this sort of paradox, and we have even become used to them: the last shall be first, the one who loses life will find it, etc. We on some level understand that spiritual life is larger than physical life, and that losing or renouncing

some of the latter may enhance the former. It is that same grasp of paradox which allows us to glimpse the broader view of healing in the story of the bronze serpent. The snake epidemic, remember, was a consequence of the people's corporate behavior. God sent fiery serpents of the very same sort that he sent to Isaiah, *saraphs* to burn away iniquity. Isaiah saw his iniquity in the context of the holiness and glory of God: to him the *saraphs* were angels. The Israelites saw no glory or holiness, and only saw snakes.

But God did not leave them in their ignorance; he offered them, not a healing flower or eagles to eat the snakes, but a snake that did heal. The solution to the epidemic was not in battling it and eliminating the snakes, but in seeing and accepting where they came from. God had sent snakes that really were angels, snakes that did not need to kill. Embedded in the consequence of their complaining was a fiery bite that could burn away their iniquity. And more: the death-dealing snake, when transformed by Moses and raised on a standard, became the life-giving snake. It was, as in the Catholic mass, consecrated the way common bread and wine are consecrated "to become for us the body and blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ." Indeed, the "violent" serpent-like Son of Man who came to bring not peace but a sword that would separate people, was lifted up to save the world. The same way, says John, that Moses lifted up the death-dealing snake to become a life-giving healer.

The essence of healing in this story, then, is in accepting the snake-angels that God sent, and in recognizing the deliverance from their fatal bite that God provided.<sup>13</sup> The essence is emphatically not in making visual contact with a bronze snake - yet it was precisely this contact that facilitated the healing. There was, in other words, a source of healing (God), and a technique to access that healing (looking at the bronze snake on the pole). The difference was clear to Hezekiah, but apparently not to the people: they had focused on the technique instead of the source.

This difference between technique and its source or goal provides us with an opportunity to review some of Jacques Ellul's fundamental assertions about technique, and then apply them to contemporary medicine. The first is the difference between technique ("the totality of methods...having absolute efficiency"<sup>14</sup>) and technology (the study or discourse of technique). His 3 major studies have the word "technology" in the English titles, but the first 2 are really about technique (*La Technique ou L'enjeu du Siecle* in 1954 and *La Systeme Technicien* in 1977) and only the third (*Le Bluff Tech-*

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<sup>13</sup> Ellul develops a concept like this in "Positions bibliques sur la medicine" in *Les deux cites: Cahiers des associations professionnelles protestantes*, vol. 4 (1947). For example, "the physical only seems like a sign of that which is spiritual"; "health isn't a combination of remedies, but a way of living according to the laws that God willed for our life. My medicine will be therefore above all hygiene, but not naturalistic: a hygiene of which the first act is repentance from sin—and conversion"; "To cure illness without the forgiveness of sins is only an adjournment, a whitewash, a fleeting crack of the whip: it isn't health. This deliverance from illness isn't of value in itself: it could mean being better only temporarily."

<sup>14</sup> Ellul, Jacques, *The Technological Society*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), "Note to the Reader" p.xxv.

nologique in 1988) is specifically about technology. In this last one he makes clear the difference. There is no technical bluff, he says; techniques deliver what they promise. However, there is a “gigantic technological bluff in which discourse on techniques envelops us, making us believe anything and, far worse, changing our whole attitude towards techniques.”<sup>15</sup> The importance of this distinction will become clear shortly.

The second major assertion - not just about technique, but recurring throughout his writings - is the difference between means and ends. He made this clear in *The Presence of the Kingdom*: “everything has become ‘means’; there is no longer an ‘end’.”<sup>16</sup> All techniques are means; the technological bluff is the proclamation that techniques are all that matter anymore. Now the bronze serpent was a technique, a means; a very effective means to deal with a snakebite epidemic. But the ‘end’, the purpose for both the snake angels and the bronze snake, was to confront the people with their iniquity, burn it away, and heal them. The entire means-and-end process, we saw, was quite effective.

However, the people saved the ‘means’, the bronze serpent, for 500 years - but without the ‘end’, the purpose or meaning, it became an idol. On the other hand, 1200 years after the bronze serpent incident, Jesus returned not to the technique (the means) but to the meaning (the end), and said that as Moses lifted up the serpent for the healing of his people, so the Son of Man must be lifted up for the healing of the world.

These fundamentals, together with the story of the bronze serpent, provide us with some tools to examine modern biomedical healthcare, and to approach the question of what is the problem with healthcare as technique. Ellul listed many other characteristics of technical systems - autonomy, selfaugmentation, universality, totalization, the lack of feedback - and all of these apply exactly to biomedical healthcare. But for this story, the ends-means point is sufficient to start us off making some observations. And to avoid too much abstraction, let us choose an example.

There is a group of non-communicable chronic diseases - especially cancer, diabetes, heart disease/ stroke, and chronic lung diseases - which are now quite common worldwide, and used to be called “diseases of civilization”, though diseases of industrialization or technology is more accurate<sup>17</sup>. They are the “leading cause of death and disability in both the developed and developing world”<sup>18</sup>, and account for 87% of the disease

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<sup>15</sup> Ellul, Jacques, *The Technological Bluff*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), pp. xv-xvi.

<sup>16</sup> Ellul, Jacques, *The Presence of the Kingdom* (New York: Seabury Press, 1967), p.63.

<sup>17</sup> Oppenheimer, GM, “Profiling risk: the emergence of coronary heart disease epidemiology in the United States (1947-70)” *International Journal of Epidemiology* (2006) 35:720-730: “Heart disease could be perceived as... a discordance between a modern, industrialized way of life and a human body that evolved under very different conditions”. p723. Trowell HC & Burkitt DP, *Western Diseases: Their Emergence and Prevention* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981) “These diseases are those which are characteristic of modern affluent Western technological communities” p xiii.

<sup>18</sup> “WMA Statement on the Global Burden of Chronic Disease” Adopted by the 62<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly, Montevideo, Uruguay, (October 2011).

burden in high income countries<sup>19</sup> like the US. That they have become the leading causes of death on almost all continents might be seen as an indicator of how widely industrialization - or more specifically the technological society - has spread.

Now the “risk factors” for these most common chronic conditions are well known and often interrelated: tobacco use, unhealthy diets, harmful use of alcohol, and physical inactivity.<sup>20</sup> Note that this is the way these diseases are discussed: not as consequences of technology or industrialization, but occurring more often in certain groups of people, those subject to the “risk factors” listed. This biomedical formula for discussing diseases - locating them in the context of risk factors - is a very effective way to highlight the immediate causes and indicate interventions. It is equally effective in masking the more proximal reasons for these risk factors. Inactivity and eating processed foods may be behaviors that lead to several of these diseases, and they are modifiable. But why do so many people eat processed foods? Why is so much processed food manufactured? Why are so many people inactive? Why do so many people use tobacco and alcohol? It is in asking these deeper questions that we begin to see the link between “risk factors” and the larger technological system that Ellul described so well.

Our technological system does things for us, things that throughout the rest of history we have had to do for ourselves. It prepares our food and propels us, both using complex machines that apparently get the job done better - *or at least more efficiently* - than when we cook and walk. But something is lost when we don't prepare our own food and use our own energy to go places. Furthermore, a system devoted to machine and task efficiency such as ours creates a great deal of stress for the people who live in that system; that stress is also unhealthy, whether on its own<sup>21</sup> or leading to the other two “risk factors”: increased use of tobacco and alcohol.

So, we approach this “chronic disease” epidemic - even though it is caused ultimately by the technological system - with products of that same technological system: drugs and surgical procedures. And they do work to ameliorate the diseases. In addition, we make clear the need for people, each individual person, to take responsibility for changing how they eat and move. But we “preach” this in a society designed for automatic movement and processed food. We have a bronze snake that permits access to bio-medical curative power, but no snake-angel to burn away our corporate nutritional and transport “iniquity”. We chip away at our epidemics, piece by piece, but peace - *shalom* - eludes us.

Shalom, besides meaning peace, also means completeness and soundness, and includes “health” - a word related to both “whole” and “holy”. This in fact is the ‘end’ we are missing when we focus only on means. We cannot attain partial health (partial wholeness?); disease elimination is not enough: In the story of the bronze snake, Moses

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<sup>19</sup> Lopez AD et al, *Global Burden of Disease and Risk Factors* (World Bank and Oxford University Press, 2006), Table 1.1, p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> “NCD Alliance analysis of the draft Political Declaration, 12 August 2011”

<sup>21</sup> Stivers, Richard, *Shades of Loneliness* (Rowan & Littlefield, 2004), Ch. 2 “Technology and Stress”. [11] “Uncertainty” is Ellul’s subtitle for Part 1 of *The Technological Bluff*.

forms the healing snake *after* the killing snakes become active. The killing snakes from God are angels, literally messengers to tell people of their iniquity and burn it away. They are part of, and must precede, the healing snake. The true healing, the return to shalom, was not just because people looked at the bronze snake. It was because their iniquity had been burned by snake-angels, burned enough so that if they had no bronze serpent to gaze at, they would die. The Israelites remembered this link in Hosea's time (6:1): "Come let us return to the Lord, for He has torn us, but He will heal us; He has wounded us, but He will bandage us." Their repentance then may have been short-lived and shallow, but they did understand on some level the link between God's wounding and God's healing.

Let us recapitulate:

1. The Bronze Serpent story demonstrates a continuum between the root cause, the symptoms, the consequence, the treatment, and the prevention. *This is a natural system at work.*

2. The contemporary chronic diseases epidemic demonstrates the rupturing of this continuum. The technological society is the root cause, which we ignore. We consider the "risk factors" to be the cause, and put the responsibility to avoid them on the patient, a form of victim-blaming. But when that patient does experience symptoms, we employ the methods and products of the same technological society to manage the symptoms. *This is an artificial system at work - the technological system that Ellul described.*

3. Focusing on health (as a healthcare system must) will never produce health, because ill health does not arise from lack of healthcare, but rather (in the case of the modern chronic diseases epidemic) from the technological society.

4. Yet since medical techniques are very effective in ameliorating symptoms and even halting some diseases, we maintain the illusion that we are dealing with the epidemic.

5. Thus healthcare, as a subsystem of the larger technological system, shares all of its characteristics. It is not only a microcosm of the larger system, it also provides a window into how that larger system deceives us by its very successes. Technique is the means by which modern empire maintains its power.

## **The Problem of Risk as Technique**

Come back for a moment to *shalom*. *Shalom* could be our "end" for which medical techniques would be our "means". However, *shalom* is not our end. In fact, we do not have an overall end. Instead we have many small 'ends', ends derived directly from the means we have available to accomplish them: We have painkillers, so we reduce pain; we have antibiotics, so we eliminate some infections; we have drugs to lower blood pressure and blood sugar, so we lower them; we can perform surgery, so we remove tumors.

In this world of multitudinous means - or options, as they might be called today - but without an overarching end, we face a great deal of uncertainty<sup>22</sup>: which means do we use? how well do they work? for which goals? While there is a natural tendency to use all available means, we would still welcome guiding principles to help us make sense of them all. But the uncertainty is profound. We don't know fully why, or even how, some diseases happen, and we certainly don't know which individuals will get them. These uncertainties bother us, because we *want* to know how diseases happen, how to stop them - and even more, who will get them so we can intervene early and prevent them.

Nevertheless we are flooded with techniques, with means. And since many are quite effective, we end up acting as if our overall end was to predict and eliminate all disease and death. But the gap between that unstated end and what common sense tells us illustrates, and deepens, our uncertainty. We want to do what is impossible: eliminate death; we want to know what is unknowable: the future. Our techniques, our means, have led us to the brink of a chasm we cannot cross.

But we do not try to cross that chasm, at least not directly. Our profound uncertainty does not paralyze us. We confront the uncertainty head-on - we measure it. Measuring this uncertainty then becomes another technique, another means, a very attractive one. In fact it begins to have a unifying effect on all our means. We use this technique to help us develop and evaluate all our other biomedical techniques: this is called biostatistics, the principal tool of risk analysis.

Come back to the group of non-communicable diseases to illustrate this. With some of these diseases we have a very clear understanding of causes: essentially everyone who smokes two packs of cigarettes a day for 30 years will get some emphysema; everyone who drinks a bottle of whiskey a day for 30 years will get liver damage. Alcohol and tobacco in these situations are not *risks*, they are hazards. But what about a half a pack of cigarettes a day from age 15 to 21? What about three glasses of wine every night for only the last 10 years? We have entered uncertainty.

Likewise with heart disease and many cancers: as shown above, we know the "risk factors" people are exposed to, but we cannot predict with certainty which person will get which disease when, nor which exposed people will *not* get any of the diseases. So we move into the realm of probability: we determine relative and absolute *risk* for getting the diseases, we speak of *confidence intervals*, we calculate *likelihood* ratios and *odds* ratios, and then we perform cost-benefit analyses of the diagnostic processes.

Then we do the same with the treatments we develop. None of the treatments actually eliminate these diseases, but each has some small effect - on *some* of the affected people. So we are back to probability: we speak of the effectiveness of the treatments with likelihood and odds ratios, with calculations of the *Number Needed to Treat*: the number of patients we need to treat in order to prevent a single disease outcome in a population. These numbers can be quite high, sometimes over 100 - which

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<sup>22</sup> Note: this is not technical bluff; the NNT is not a lie. This is technological bluff.



means that 99 of the 100 people we treat do not benefit, yet we cannot predict the one that will.<sup>23</sup> And then, again, we do cost-benefit analyses, unabashedly assigning a monetary value to human life.

Now these statistical tools, and this whole concept of risk, have been particularly useful for these noncommunicable chronic diseases: trying to pin down exactly where they come from, what causes them, how to treat them, and how to prevent them. These diseases are more complicated than, for example, a simple pneumonia caused by a bacteria we can eliminate, or a ruptured appendix we can remove surgically. We are now confronting diseases that often do not kill immediately, but also do not go away despite our treatments; diseases that gradually destroy vital organs. Yet our treatments keep these people alive. We have created a whole new category of illness: people alive, but dependent on the medical system to stay alive.

We confront a different conundrum on travelling upstream to try to uncover where these diseases came from. We had become used to “the germ theory of disease”, an approach to disease causation that looked for a single agent - germ, gene, toxin, injury, etc. - that caused a disease. But these single agents were very elusive in the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s group of chronic diseases. Industrialization (the technological society) may have been the ultimate cause, but it did not kill immediately, like the Black Plague, and there was no single agent or toxin responsible. We had to conclude that many of these diseases had causes that were “multifactorial” - so we began looking for these multiple factors.

Initially, scientists still treated these many factors as part of a single “mass phenomenon, the result of a shift in ‘ways of life’” - that is, the exponential growth of industrialization and the technological society. Consequently “individual responsibility or blame was almost entirely absent from their discussion of risk factors during the 1950s and 1960s.”<sup>24</sup> To the epidemiologists then, it was obvious that some of these diseases grew out of that “mass phenomenon”, and not from irresponsible individual choices.

However, as we fine-tuned our search, we began to forget about - or was it ignore? - this “mass phenomenon”. By around 1980 we had entered a fundamentally new era. Socialism was dying, unfettered capitalism reigned - and our views toward the public’s health began to follow suite. There was now a “New Public Health” which, among other things, focused on these chronic diseases and their prevention. In previous epochs, public health addressed community health problems such as sanitation and vector control with collective action. But now even public health was becoming individualized, seduced by the drive to identify and eliminate individual risk factors. Despite the “mass phenomenon” behind the chronic conditions which made up 87% of our disease burden,

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<sup>23</sup> Oppenheimer, “Profiling risk” p. 725.

<sup>24</sup> Peterson A and Lupton D, *The New Public Health: Health and Self in the Age of Risk* (London: Sage Publications, 1996), p. ix.

our health had become our own responsibility<sup>25</sup>. Risk had become our pilot; life had become a crapshoot.

We still haven't pinned down exactly how these diseases come about, and we still can't cure most of them. We still live with profound uncertainty. It becomes very clear why we have chosen risk and statistical analyses as our orienting science. There is no technical bluff here. Biostatistics do exactly what they claim - measure probability - and they do it well. Bit by bit (or byte by byte) they help us make incremental changes uncovering the details of how these diseases develop, and how we can live a little bit longer with them.

But is this shalom?

## ***Generations Ellul: Soixante heritiers de la pensee de Jacques Ellul* by Frederic Rognon**

Geneva: Editions Labor et Fides, 2012, 390 pp.

Reviewed by Michel Hourcade

Michel Hourcade worked for the French government until his recent retirement

Translated by Joyce Hanks

Frederic Rognon is a professor of philosophy of religion in the Protestant Faculty of Theology at the University of Strasbourg. He authored an earlier book about Ellul (*Jacques Ellul: Une pensee en dialogue* [Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2007]). In this new work, published during the anniversary year of Ellul's birth, Rognon has given voice to those he calls the "heirs" of Ellul's thought: intellectuals who have previously spoken of their debt to Ellul. Rognon asked the same question of each one: "How has Jacques Ellul's thought affected your own intellectual journey and any actions you may have undertaken?"

Rognon's sixty interviewees have widely different intellectual interests (theology, philosophy, history, economics) and professions (teaching, the pastorate, social activism, etc.) But were the criteria for choosing these "heirs" perhaps too limited or even arbitrary? Rather than avoiding this question, Rognon compares in his introduction the wide variety of responses he has assembled. These responses constitute testimonies that enable us to focus on a question that concerns all of us: how does one become an "Ellulian"? Herein lies, I believe, the originality of this book.

Each time the author offers a microphone to someone, it triggers the memory of a chance encounter, of something read, or something learned. Some interviewees' intellectual or professional journeys involved unexpected forks in the road. In some cases, agreement with Ellul's thought was instantaneous and long-lasting; in others, more

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<sup>25</sup> I am paraphrasing Ellul's note to the American reader in *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), XXV, hereinafter cited as *TS*.

gradual. After their initial acceptance, some subsequently distanced themselves from Ellul's ideas, and then found at a later time that they believed something different. Such dialectical thinking would surely have pleased Ellul. The frequent spontaneous association of Bernard Charbonneau's name with his would have given him additional pleasure.

Some of Rognon's interviewees' names will be readily recognized by *Ellul Forum* readers. Although most of the "heirs" (presented in alphabetical order) are French, the author has taken care to include North Americans and South Koreans, as well as "heirs" from other countries. Rognon has given a voice to men and women (only a few of these latter, however), both well-known and little-known, but all committed citizens, and all embodying in their own way the thought of Ellul. Their witness offers a concrete new perspective on the often unpredictable expansion of his work. In this way, Ellul's thought demonstrates its vitality and fecundity, as it comes to the surface in unexpected places.

## ***Generations Ellul: Soixante heritiers de la pensee de Jacques Ellul* by Frederic Rognon**

Geneva: Editions Labor et Fides, 2012, 390 pp.

Reviews by Randal Marlin

Adjunct Professor of Philosophy, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada

I stand in awe of the amazing dedication, labor and insight that Frederic Rognon has brought to bear in the production of this hugely valuable study of contemporary scholarship relating to the work of Jacques Ellul. When I purchased my copy at the Librarie Mollat in Bordeaux at the conference organized by Patrick Troude-Chastenef in June, 2012, I found it of immediate service in identifying and backgrounding the work of participants. But it is much more than a cast of characters: it works toward an area-by-area synthesis of the different positions taken by scholars and others regarding the work of Ellul, followed by a thoughtful appraisal of those positions. By "others" I mean to include those whose vocation in life has led them away from the world of academic scholarship either to some kind of active involvement in the affairs of the world, or to such things as church-based activities (including prayer) where the focus is on getting a right relation with God rather than sorting out the right relation of a text to other texts or the world that the text supposedly describes or implies. My reference to "such things as .." is meant to allow room for the atheist who pursues a kind of secular spirituality, no less concerned to get a right relation with one's self and the world, but unsatisfied with the historical baggage attached to the proper noun "God."

Rognon, professor of philosophy of religion in the Faculty of Theology at the University of Strasbourg, has already established his credentials as a leading Ellul scholar

with his book *Jacques Ellul, Un penseur en dialogue* (Labor et Fides, 2007). Perhaps only one with an established reputation could afford the vast commitment of time and energy that he has invested in this project. In any case, the world of Ellulian scholarship owes Rognon a great debt for this achievement.

Rognon traces the work of sixty selected writers, thinkers, activists and others who have clearly been inspired by, or have reacted against, the work of Jacques Ellul. He seems to have made a special effort to include some of the youngest enthusiasts, so that his studies are indeed cross-generational as the title would suggest. With each of his subjects there is a bibliography, often very extensive. Given the hundreds of items, including theses, to which he refers, he shows a remarkable grasp of details of their content, evidence of the assiduity of his enterprise. In the case of the majority he supplements his account of their work with direct interviews, giving the dates and locations where these took place. His questions are poignant, and the answers nearly always illuminating in a very special way. Among the things we find out are first, what attracted a given subject to Ellul; secondly, what the points of agreement and disagreement are; and thirdly, how Ellul has affected the subjects' lives and careers.

What this work shows, splendidly, is the variegated nature of Ellul's work, activity and influence. Along the way it shows that Ellul's legacy is in good hands, that the day is past when "no prophet is recognized in his own country" applied to Ellul. Rognon gives some credit to Jean-Luc Porquet for a "powerful" contribution to revival of interest in Ellul's work with his study *Jacques Ellul. L'homme qui a (presque) tout prévu* (Paris: Le Cherche Midi (coll. Documents) 2003, 2012), The reference in the title is to Ellul's foreseeing very contemporary problems such as Mad Cow disease, GMOs, nuclear catastrophes, propaganda, terrorism and the like.

We learn that more than a few academics have hidden their Ellulian light under a bushel simply because the name "Ellul" lacked, and perhaps still lacks, weight in academia (though I suspect to a decreasing extent as his work becomes better known through the current revival of interest). Reasons or causes for the neglect of Ellul's work are readily apparent in Rognon's study. One is the politicization of disciplines, and the difficulty for the acceptance of Ellul in either Left or Right political circles, when his commitment to morally right thought and action has him constantly challenging the fundamental unquestioned tenets of both.

Rognon's study is the opposite of hagiographical. He has the courage and honesty to combine a full measure of appreciation of Ellul's enormous influence as a thinker, guide and inspiration, with revelation of the stumbling blocks that have stood in the way of full acceptance of his ideas by those who acknowledge a great indebtedness to him.

Space allows for just one illustration of such a stumbling block. In my own experience, interviewing Ellul in 1979-80 on the subject of propaganda, I found that he was uninterested when I broached the matter of South African propaganda in defense of Apartheid. The selection on Daniel Compagnon claims (page 93) that he was misinformed about the overall situation there. Ellul has been especially concerned to defend

Israel, to the point of ignoring some of its own, what seems to me, deceptive propaganda. And he has been unusually uncompromising in his treatment of the Muslim religion as a threat to human freedom.

One of the most revealing statements in the whole book is reported by Jean-Claude Guillebaud on page 175. Guillebaud, responsible for publishing many of Ellul's books as Literary Editor of the publishing house Seuil, asked Ellul whether he did not think that his (Ellul's) uncompromising support of Israel served the Israeli Right and Israeli excesses at the time of the Yom Kippur war, and thereby did a disservice to Israel. Agreeing with Guillebaud's criticism Ellul's response was nevertheless that "We Christians have two thousand years of anti-Jewishness to expiate. Besides, every thinker necessarily has a point of incoherence, and that (uncompromising support for Israel) will be mine, which will be assumed." (I have translated from the French.)

I see this as an example of Ellul's Kierkegaardian frame of mind, which always takes into account the circumstances in which one says or does anything. Not just the objective truth of what one says, but the likely impact of what one says in a particular context must be taken into account for ethical communication. It is not incoherent to maintain that attempts to right one set of wrongs may be compromised when there is historical and sociological evidence that attention to such wrongs will provide fuel for even greater wrongs. While Ellul is poles apart from Sartre on many things, there is a curious parallel between the view expressed by Ellul's commitment to Israel and Sartre's commitment to the proletariat with the advice that the "true intellectual" (in the essay "A Plea for Intellectuals") should automatically side with the working person, whatever the given issue.

There are many other stumbling blocks, over such things as technological determinism, the relationship between Ellul's sociological, political, and theological writings. There is a real feast of different viewpoints nicely assembled and evaluated by Rognon's commentaries. There are also wonderful testimonies to his willingness to come to the aid of others in need, testifying on behalf of dissidents for example, his bible classes, his friendships, his activism with Bernard Charbonneau on ecological matters. The book shows in so many ways why Ellul will continue to be relevant and inspirational for many decades yet to come. Rognon concludes with a thematic overview classifying the materials into the typography of Ellul's reception, the paradoxes relating to that reception, and the existential dimension of his work. No sharp division can be drawn, because many of Ellul's followers or those influenced-and-inspired but yet non-followers fit more than one category.

The book is probably best treated as a reference work, linking the interested person very quickly to those with matching concerns. Rognon has organized the book very well for that purpose. It is not easy to read straight through, because of the difficulty of recalling the right names and associating them with the right ideas. But there is nothing comparable for getting a worldwide overview of Ellulian scholarship, whether in South Korea, North America, or Europe.

# Technology and the Further Humiliation of the Word

by David Lovekin

Abstract: I continue to read Ellul philosophically without worrying about whether he is a philosopher or not. As David Gill has mentioned to me, he is what a philosopher should be. I continue to track his attack on the symbol by technique, which claims to be rational and all-encompassing. Technique is indeed a form of rationality in denial of what makes rationality possible—the imagination and the capacity to make and to learn from the symbol—the word and the Word—out of the encounter with otherness. Technique is a denial of otherness in a bad infinity that is clearly observed in the proliferation of clichés and in an advanced form of disregard for the true or the real in a discourse rooted in nothing but itself, in what Henry Frankfurt has termed “bullshit.”

Bio: David Lovekin ( PhD, University of Texas at Dallas) recently retired as Professor of Philosophy and Chair of Religion and Philosophy at Hastings College in Nebraska. He is the author of *Technique, Discourse and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 1991) and co-editor of *Essay in Humanity and Technology*. He has published numerous essays on Ellul and Vico and problems in the Philosophy of Culture. He has currently completed a translation of Ellul’s *The Empire of Nonsense* to appear in the Papadakis Press.

The question of technology as the accumulation of gadgets and tools perhaps considered as the outgrowth of science and as culminating in the machines of the industrial revolution, avoids a serious question: how did tools and machines and the societies that used them become obsessed with absolute efficiency and with the reduction of means to a mathematics-like exactness?<sup>26</sup> Technology currently determines scientific advance; machines—use itself—are made regardless of the usefulness that became independent of cultural values. Cultural values, instead, seem determined by the advances of technique. Jacques Ellul, in his 1954 *La Technique ou l’enjeu du siècle* broke with the tradition of seeing technology as present in every culture in any historical moment, in conflating it merely with material advance, and understood it as a specific mentality culminating around 1750, as a technical intention (*une intention technique*).<sup>27</sup> His social and theological analyses came together with the understanding that this intention privileged the image over the word, the concept over the process, and a reconfigured profane that became the new sacred; technique, in Ellul’s sense, issued a return to a mythical dimension that belied technology’s origins in reason and conceptual analysis. The technological order signaled a return to a sacred order. This return raises an essential mystery, which I do not pretend to solve but only to authenticate.

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<sup>26</sup> *La Technique ou l’enjeu du siècle* (Paris:Armand Colin, 1954), 44. Also note “La conscience technique,” 49 and “l’état d’esprit,” 31.

<sup>27</sup> (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2004), 225.

The mystery is confounded by the marvelous enlightenment claims of reason and the understanding that would enable progress and peace. We may invoke Spinoza's sensibility: do not hate or despise but understand. For him geometrical truths provided the most proximate relation to God's mind and body of which our minds and bodies were expressions. Thus, the otherness between ourselves and the Other disappeared in Spinoza's rational faith but reappeared as reason proved insufficient. Reason could © 2013 IJES www.ellul.org Ellul Forum #52 July 2013 Lovekin balance equations but also produce weapons of mass destruction to effect a *jihad* or a preemptive military strike. Flying planes into the twin towers, burning Jews, and bombing abortion clinics, technologically planned and executed, were, nonetheless, faith-based initiatives.

Nonetheless, the enlightenment faith in reason continues, typically finding fault with the non-scientific. In a *New York Times* best seller, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*, Sam Harris applies philosophical and neuroscientific skills to the problems of faith operating without the leash of reason. He claims, "Nothing is more sacred than the facts."<sup>28</sup> To his credit, he is no naive realist who believes in the truly objective not subjectively known. Knowing involves consciousness, which mostly takes place with the duality of subject standing in relation to its object, although the "I" is never purely found; but he adds, ". . . it actually disappears when looked for in a rigorous way."<sup>29</sup> He does not explain for whom this disappearance would take place. Again undeterred, the self struggles with the various objects and contexts to discover and quantify the true, although the work would be hard. With this work, faith is brought to task. He states, "Where we have reasons for what we believe, we have no need of faith; where we have no reasons, we have lost our connections to the world and to one another."<sup>30</sup> Reason occupies a privileged place, which should raise questions. Are facts the new Sacred? Would this be held *a priori*? Is it a fact that facts are sacred? Would reason be able to deter the suicide bomber? If so, we should drop copies of *The Critique of Pure Reason* instead of smart bombs. Kant, however, required a qualified reason, tied to the categories and to the sensuous forms of intuition. Understanding forms of consciousness, I contend, involves more than an examination of reason, with which consciousness is often conflated.

A critique of reason requires a critique of culture. Since Descartes it has become the pattern to identify being with thinking and thinking with reason and rational reflection. Staying to this path would have excluded Descartes' own powerful personae, the Mauvais Genie, or the Evil Genius, which enabled Descartes to imagine the possibility that nothing made sense, which, in turn, led to his first clear and distinct idea—that the I appeared every time he thought/doubted. The I, however, did more than doubt as the history of philosophy after Descartes attempted to explain. The Cartesian philosophy as method was everywhere applied, as Ellul noted, going beyond philosophical

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>30</sup> *TS.*, 43.

bounds, showing that technique was and is indeed a mentality, a Cartesian mentality infinitely applied and mandated.<sup>31</sup>

In his discussion of the historical and sociological dimensions of technique, Ellul does more than history and sociology.<sup>32</sup> Techniques appeared in primitive societies as magic in which, prior to technique, “Everything is of a piece . . . nothing can be meddled with [or] . . . modified without threat to the whole structure of beliefs and activities.”<sup>33</sup> The world of the primitive was not without logic and understanding although it was devoid of the assumptions required for technique. Following anthropologist Leroi-Gourhan, “... technique is a cloak for man, a kind of cosmic vestment. In his conflict with matter, in his struggle to survive, man interposes an intermediary agency between himself and his environment . . .”<sup>34</sup> With this agency humanity has protection and defense but also the ability to assimilate and transform.

Ellul offers similar words about the nature of the symbol: “Without mediating symbols, [humanity] . . . would invariably be destroyed by raw physical contact alone. The ‘other’ is always the enemy, the menace. The ‘other’ represents an invasion of the personal world, unless, or until, the relationship is normalized through symbolization. (. . .) to speak the same language is to recognize the ‘other’ has © 2013 IJES www.ellul.org Ellul Forum #52 July 2013 Lovekin entered into the common interpretive universe . . .”<sup>35</sup> With this separation of subject and object in an imaginative act an “other world” is created.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, otherness and the imagination jump start this creation which takes place in and with language that is at first magical and religious, simultaneously. The wholeness of the world and its transcendent powers that kept technique in check were challenged. Greek rationality, Roman Law, and Christianity were further weights and balances placed on technique that had to be transformed<sup>37</sup> The world and the transcendent were still “Others.” Tools and incantations extended human desire and understanding but Truth, Beauty, Goodness, Justice, and God’s Word kept them in place. A long period of technical development, a growing population, the invention of economy—money became the medium of exchange and hence a world ordering symbol—and an apparent leveling of traditional social hierarchies helped technical intention and rationality to flower.<sup>38</sup> Technical mentality was more than mental and required otherness to work against to produce the technical phenomenon.

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<sup>31</sup> *TS.*, 23. He clearly states that the full history of technique was yet to be written.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-5.

<sup>34</sup> Jacques Ellul, “Symbolic Function, Technology, and Society,” *Journal of Social and Biological Structures* 3 (July 1978) 210.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>36</sup> *TS.*, 27-38.

<sup>37</sup> Ellul sums the sociological components of the 1750 breakout of technique, which, together with technical intention in *TS.*, 38-60.

<sup>38</sup> *TS.*, 21. The discussion of the technical operation and the technical phenomenon is found in *TS.*,



Human history is littered with technical operations that were means to accomplish ends, often characterized by tools extending from the body and the cultures from which they are variously adapted and that were equated with the techniques produced by reason. With the advent of technical consciousness, Ellul insists, “It is no longer the best relative means which counts. The choice is less and less a subject one among several means ..... It is really a question of finding the best means in the absolute sense, on the basis of numerical calculation.”<sup>39</sup> The product was the technical phenomenon, the embodiments of technical consciousness initially appearing as symbolic expressions. The otherness of the body and the world upon which and in which it operated was transformed by consciousness and framed conceptually. Technological culture could then be understood as concepts objectified as natural objects were conceptualized. Qualitative otherness becomes quantitative.

Ellul’s notion of technological rationality is crucial in identifying technology in its social order as an altered symbolism. In the following quote I add in brackets a clause that was left out in Wilkinson’s translation:

In technique, whatever its aspect of the domain in which it is applied, a rational process is present which tends to bring mechanics to bear on all that is spontaneous or irrational. This rationality, best exemplified in systematization, division of labor, creation of standards, production norms, and the like, involves two distinct phases: first, the use of “discourse” in every operation [under the two aspects this term can take (on the one hand, the intervention of intentional reflection, and, on the other hand, the intervention of means from one term to the other.)]; this excludes spontaneity and personal creativity. Second, there is the reduction of method to its logical dimension alone. Every intervention of technique is, in effect, a reduction of facts, forces, phenomena, means, and instruments to the schema of logic.<sup>40</sup>

Technical reason requires discourse and method reduced to the schemas of logic. Logic would demand adherence to the principle of identity and non-contradiction. For something to be it must be what it is and not what it is not.

Bodies and other natural objects are often what they are not without the rational gaze. Descartes’ burning candle, both gaseous and solid, both liquid and fire, became “extension” with his second clear and distinct idea; extension was what all physical bodies were in essence as a fact for science, although extension was © 2013 IJES www.ellul.org Ellul Forum #52 July 2013 Lovekin an abstraction for other eyes, for those trying to read from it. Extension is the object in concept, an identity eschewing difference. It has meaning in scientific and technical discourse. This concept is an identity eschewing all difference.

The logic of technique as Ellul explains in his characterology is to reduce all objects and processes to these essentials, with the resulting irony that this perfection is never

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<sup>39</sup> See my analysis of this in *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 1991), 83-89, hereinafter cited as *TDC*.

<sup>40</sup> *TS.*, 78-79; *La Technique*, 73-73.

fully achieved, by definition. Soap is never fully soap, why grocery aisles are crammed with it; the object is never beautiful enough, useful enough, efficient enough. Absolute efficiency is the goal of the process perpetually unfulfilled. This is the opposite of the physicists' "efficiency" where a minimum of effort produces a maximum of effect. The result is what I have termed a series of bad infinities—the efficient becomes either not this one or not any of them; the former is an endless finitude, while the latter is an empty class. Here, the label or the image becomes the real thing in an attempt to cancel endless finitude or a bloodless category.<sup>41</sup> Recall that "Coke," not the drink, is the real thing. A consciousness examines each process, each object, seeking absolute efficiency it makes the technical phenomenon automatically in a geometric rather than arithmetic growth. No limitations are allowed; what can be done will be done, a mantra known to all cultures, a true universal. Oddly this process becomes unconscious; the object made is no longer known as made. The distinction between the subject and object collapses. Few remember that whipped cream used to come from cows. From Latin we can learn that "fact" comes from "factum," which means "made," something done or performed. We have forgotten this meaning and have reduced facts to truth, to a sacred. Like technical phenomena, they seem to pop directly from Zeus's head. The subject collapses into the object and technical autonomy reigns. Reason has disappeared, with no otherness to confront and to mediate, and so has the symbol.<sup>42</sup>

The language of the ancients, the language of myth, biblical language, comes alive in the symbol and metaphor; myths, for Ellul, are not false stories but instead aim at the true: "When I use the word (myth) I mean this: the addition of the theological significance to a fact which in itself . . . has no such obvious meaning. Its role is therefore to make a fact "meaningful," to show it up as bearing the revelation of God"<sup>43</sup> God as the Wholly Other resists a mere presence in an image but appears only in the word that suggests his Word. Further, "myth is born of the revealed Word of God, but because it is figurative, it has no visible image. As the highest expression of the word, it reaches the edge and very limit of the expressible, the ineffable, and the unspeakable"<sup>44</sup> For example, Ellul notes: "The city is *'iyr* or else *'iyr re'em*. Now this word has several meanings. It is not only the city, but also the Watching Angel, the Vengeance and Terror. A strange association of ideas."<sup>45</sup> In

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<sup>41</sup> See my discussion of this in *TDC*, 98-105.

<sup>42</sup> I have summarized Ch. II of *TS*. For my extended discussion of this "characterology" see my , *TDC*, ch. 5.

<sup>43</sup> *The Meaning of the City*, trans. Dennis Pardee (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), 18, n. 3, hereinafter cited as *City*. Also note: "God speaks. Myth is born from this word, but rarely is it heard directly and never conveyed just as it is received, because humans cannot speak God's words. Myth is the analogy that enables us to grasp the meaning of what God has said. As discourse constructed to paraphrase the revelation, it is a metaphor that should lead the listener beyond what he has heard." See *Humiliation*, 106.

<sup>44</sup> *The Humiliation of the Word*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 106, hereinafter cited as *Humiliation*.

<sup>45</sup> *City*, 9.

the figurative identities are created with important differences, opposed meanings that are meaningful when they are put together. The city had not only material power but spiritual power, which was apprehended in this metaphorical grasp of the imagination in the face of the other.

Ellul reminds: “We forget all too easily that imagination is the basic characteristic of intelligence, so that a society in which people lose their capacity to conjure up symbols also loses its inventiveness and its ability to act.”<sup>46</sup> The imagination is embodied speech, he notes, from which I conclude that as the body disappears in technique so it disappears in its bodily expression in metaphors and symbols. One could say that reason as language has its birth in myth and in the force of the imagination where the meaningful first appears as an image or presence that is at the same time more than it appears; in this way the image provides a path for the fact to become the sacred that give birth to religion, art, philosophy, and science, but which must also be transcended in meaning that goes beyond the moment. When technique becomes the sacred the other forms of knowing have no power. This presence of the technical sacred produces a loss of meaning, which may be why myth and primitive religions gain cultural weight. Ellul insists in this respect that true Christianity is not a religion but is an opposition to meanings that claim to be imminently absolute—a condition held only by God.

Ellul states that two forms of language exist in every state: the language of hearing and the language of seeing.<sup>47</sup> Language begins in the act of pointing to, or seeing what is in the space of the present, in the certainty of the image that inhabits the realm of the real (*le Reel*).<sup>48</sup> This image is certain. It bears no contradiction. It is what it is.<sup>49</sup> The word, a puff of wind at least, is the domain that surrounds. A strange sound produces anxious eyes.<sup>50</sup> The word is ambiguous, a moment of mystery and intrigue and reaches for the True (*le Vrai*).<sup>51</sup> “The image is nonparadoxical, since it is always in conformity with the *doxa* (opinion). [. . .] Only the word troubles the water.”<sup>52</sup> And further, “Thus visual reality is noncontradictory. You can *say* that a piece of paper is both red and blue. But you cannot *see* it as both red and blue at the same time.”<sup>53</sup> The philosophical laws of thought, Ellul notes, are visually based;<sup>54</sup> Plato’s *eide* related to *eidelon* are cases in point, but as Plato insisted, their ordinary ties to the visual had to be broken. The *Eide* were seen only in a *noetic* reach that was not allowed by technical reason. Reason is confined strictly to the image that loses its purchase, ironically, as its presence as image dissipates.

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<sup>46</sup> *Humiliation*, 257.

<sup>47</sup> *Humiliation*, 43.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-47.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-26.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 11, n. 3.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

In the absence of the word and the symbol cliches abound. The cliché is the machine in its new suit. The word inhabits history and place; the image does not. The history of the word cliché is forgotten. According to the OED cliché appeared in 1832 and referred to a stereotype block, a printer's cast or "dab." It began in a visual dimension, but the word was also a variant of *cliquer*, meaning "to click," likely referring to the sound of the lead pieces as they were struck. This auditory dimension is lost in its modern sense, which is no longer the metaphor that was suggested. A worn out expression was left and the truth behind the word abandoned. The cliché appears to be the language of politics and the media and so it is, the fuel of propaganda, but the bad news is not over.

Henry Frankfurt in *On Bullshit* claims that lying and misrepresentation are out of fashion.<sup>55</sup> Politicians and pundits may in fact lie but the lie is not the issue. Truth or falsity are no longer concerns. Lying or telling the truth are both permitted as long as a favorable impression is achieved. The bullshitter wants to be believed and those susceptible want to believe regardless of the actual truth. Recently Rick Santorum claimed that the elderly in Holland had to wear bracelets to keep from being euthanized. Of course, there were no facts to back this up, and I doubt there was any concern for the truth of the statement. Romney made a statement that was challenged, and he allowed that he didn't recall what he said, but he was sure he would stand by it. I am certain that bullshit transcends party line. Nonetheless, Ellul was close to this with his view of current aesthetics where "*n'importe quor*" held sway. Whatever! The appeals sometimes made to facts may in fact be bullshit.

Ellul would conclude that life cannot be conducted in the realm of the image that has no history, no place. Truth requires both, which in turn require memory and the imagination. Cliches and bullshit have neither, and I believe this is a fact. Place no longer has place. This is why Ellul finds the commonplace of the common place so important, why the notion of a true that surrounds is worth the reach; even reason comes to a halt in views that have no need or use for argument.

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<sup>55</sup> (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

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## The Enduring Importance of Jacques Ellul for Business Ethics

by David W. Gill

*Abstract:* From at least three perspectives, Jacques Ellul's thought addresses today's business world and its ethics in a profound and essential way. First, he challenges the sacralization and worship of money which have come to dominate the thought and practice of today's business leaders. Second, he challenges us to critical thought and a rediscovery of the individual and the human in a domain enthusiastically and willingly enslaved to technique at every level. Third, he challenges in the name of freedom and vocation the necessity and meaninglessness which dominate today's workplace.

*Bio:* David Gill earned his PhD at the University of Southern California with a dissertation on "The Word of God in the Ethics of Jacques Ellul," subsequently published as the first of his seven books on theological or business ethics. He spent several summers and a full sabbatical year (1984-85; later also a six-month sabbatical in 2000) in Bordeaux, meeting with Ellul and many Ellul scholars (notably Patrick Chastenet, Daniel Cerezuelle, Jean-Francois Medard) , the Ellul family and friends. He is currently Mockler-Phillips Professor of Workplace Theology & Business Ethics and Director of the Mockler Center at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Boston. He is the founding president of the International Jacques Ellul Society ([www.ellul.org](http://www.ellul.org)) and (with President Patrick Chastenet) a founder of the Association Internationale Jacques Ellul. He has served many small and medium-sized enterprises as organizational ethics consultant and trainer ([www.ethixbiz.com](http://www.ethixbiz.com)).

The first image of Jacques Ellul that comes to mind is not that of someone sitting in the board room of some skyscraper advising the corporate chieftains of our day. No, our Ellul is the little man in his beret emerging from behind his desk in his home study to greet a friend—or the professor entering the lecture hall to read his latest notes on the successors of Marx.

But it is my contention that our teacher Jacques Ellul is very precisely a voice to which those corporate chieftains would do well to pay attention these days. While he thought and wrote in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, his message is only *more* appropriate and necessary in the first half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As a long-time teacher of ethics to business students and ethics consultant to actual business organizations, it is my conviction that there are three particular aspects to the enduring importance of Jacques Ellul for business ethics.

For the most part, business ethics, at least in the USA, is a toothless, dull, and irrelevant enterprise. If I may use one of Professor Ellul's images it is little more than "the colorful feather in the cap" of a tyrant who marches onward unimpeded. As cur-

rently practiced, business ethics is either wedded to the hopeless detached, rationalism of Modernity and the moral philosophy of Kant, Mill, and their kind—or it is drifting at sea in the Post-modern Nietzschean subjectivism of “everyone does what is right in his own eyes.” Often giving up on both Modernity and Postmodernity today’s business ethics attaches itself to the bureaucratic state and is reduced to little more than legal compliance. Contemporary business ethics communication and training methods typically place employees in front of personal computer screens and thus habituate their viewers to artificially simple scenarios with clear solutions, to be discovered by individuals interacting alone with their screens. To the extent that real problems are engaged from time to time, this approach amounts to little more than “damage control” of legal, financial, and reputational matters. The causes and conditions that initially give rise to such damage are never addressed. The process of mutual discernment and response goes unattempted.

Today’s business ethics is, for the most part, a mess, a waste of time, and an illusion. As I see it, Jacques Ellul’s work provides a critical warning and challenge to business ethics at three points: (1) the reduction of business purpose and mission to nothing but a worshipful, addictive quest for *money*; (2) the total subordination of business organization and practice to the ironclad rule of *technique* and (3) the resignation of business personnel to the *necessity* of work and the consequent absence of freedom and vocation. If business ethics would seriously consider these three points, it could re-acquire a critical and then constructive role in our era.

#### The Worship of Money

There is a strain of thought that argues that all business is ultimately and primarily motivated by a quest for profit in the form of money. Business is not charity; business is a *for-profit* commercial and economic activity. If you don’t make a profit, or at least break even financially, you will go out of business. Actually this is true of non-profit charitable institutions as well—though they can be salvaged by donors rather than customers or investors. In any case, there is an essential and important financial, monetary aspect to running a business. It cannot be ignored. And no doubt the fear of financial failure as well as the dream of great success and wealth are highly motivating factors in business.

So a business is interested in acquiring your money but (in distinction from theft and begging) it must deliver some service or product in return for which customers are willing to pay it money. A successful business in a competitive economic environment (as opposed to a non-competitive monopoly environment, an unacknowledged reality in many industries and markets today) must keep its focus on delivering that product or service not only efficiently (minimizing waste of time, resources, etc.) but excellently. If the enterprise turns its primary attention to the monetary return, and loses focus on the excellence of the product or service, the money itself may well disappear. This is the simplified commonsense argument for money being very important—but not *all-important*—in business.

But in two decisive steps, money has swamped other considerations and become dominant in business purposes and focus today. First, the neo-capitalist “market fundamentalists” of recent decades have boldly proposed that “greed is good,” in the famous words of the fictional Gordon Gecko in the American film “Wall Street” (1987). This philosophy is no longer the cartoonish extreme of a movie but the conventional wisdom of the business world: it is good for you, good for the economy, good for the world, for each of us to pursue as aggressively as possible our own self-interest, understood in terms of financial profit and wealth. Well before the movie popularized the notion, Milton Friedman, the Nobel laureate economist of the University of Chicago, famously wrote: “The social responsibility of business is to increase its profits.”<sup>56</sup> Period. Today’s business leadership seems determined to eliminate all regulation and all restraint on the naked, predatory pursuit of money. Of course there are important exceptions but the dominating spirit is the “love of money for me.” The fact that in the 2012 presidential election financial tycoon Mitt Romney could win the support of almost half the American electorate, despite publically dismissing the interests of the poor and the middle class, indicates the extent to which the “winner-take-all” mentality has captured the masses.

Perhaps a business does deliver excellence in its service or product; perhaps they do treat their employees well; but for today’s neo-capitalists such commitments and practices are strictly utilitarian and pragmatic. Excellence, quality, and fairness *only* matter if they can be shown to increase profits. And at the other end of the spectrum, marketing deception, product testing flaws, exploitive wages, dangerous working conditions, harm to the environment, negative social impacts —these all may be justified as part of the market’s “invisible hand” as it eventually brings its bounty to those who deserve it. For business leaders (or workers), it’s all about money . . . money-for-me. Now.

The second step in this development is the rise of the financial services industry. The titans of business and industry today are no longer those who create and sell products or services of one kind or another. No, today’s richest rewards go to bankers and investment fund managers who speculate on interest rates, debt, risk, investments, and insurance. In today’s business world, manipulating piles of money is considered so important that it entitles one to reap vast personal profits, skimming off large portions of peoples’ investments and savings. Even when banks and investment firms fail, as they have so miserably in the past several years, their leaders are considered so rare and so important, it seems, that no retention bonus or salary increase is too high to hand over to them. No doubt there is a legitimate role for bankers and investment managers. But many of today’s most famous leaders in these fields seem very little more than thieves in well-tailored suits. Money has become everything.

Jacques Ellul’s *L’Homme et l’Argent* was first published in 1954. Even then Ellul was predicting the triumph of money, east and west:

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<sup>56</sup> *New York Time Magazine*, September 13, 1970.



Beginning in the Middle Ages . . . capitalism has progressively subordinated all of life –individual and collective—to money. One of the results of capitalism that we see developing throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century is the subservience of being to having.... It is the inevitable consequence of capitalism, for there is no other possibility when making money becomes the purpose of life.<sup>57</sup>

Ellul goes on to argue that the differences between capitalism and socialism are shrinking and less and less consequential. Certainly it is hard to see any significant differences in attitude and behavior toward money in China by comparison to the USA or France.

Ellul points out that Jesus warned that money could function as the god “Mammon” in peoples’ lives, receiving their awe, deference, and worship, occupying the center of their attention and desire, serving as the source of their meaning and value. Money acts as a spiritual “power” (*exousion*). Ellul points out that Mammon can play this central role for the poor, the “have-nots,” as well as for the rich, the “haves.” But beyond the “spiritual” problem and personal bondage, Mammon does certain things to its devotees.

This power of money establishes in the world a certain type of human relationship and a specific human behavior. It creates what could be broadly called a buying-selling relationship.

Everything in this world is paid for one way or another. Likewise, everything can, one way or another, be bought. The world sees this behavior as normal. . . A related example of the way money corrupts the inner person is betrayal for money. It is not insignificant that Judas’s act is represented as a purchased act.<sup>58</sup>

The point is that when “the love of money” (for my bosses and owners or for myself) drives business and careers it is a “root of all sorts of evil,” to cite the famous statement of St. Paul (I Timothy 6:10). Monetizing and commoditizing all things, all relationships, and all transactions necessarily dehumanizes all concerned and blinds us to values and realities that simply cannot be measured by money. “Money reduces man to an abstraction. It reduces man himself to something quantitative.”<sup>59</sup> It is a short and logical step to prostitution and even slavery as economic practices. Moreover, the single-minded quest for money leads to profound betrayal in relationships. Loyalty and betrayal are simply about a cost/benefit calculation, nothing more or less.

The question is about the larger purpose of work and business. Do we yield to the propaganda of the Mammon-worshippers? or do we resist and make our own work decisions and our business management decisions in light of other criteria, other purposes? Of course, we do not always or fully get to choose the *telos* and purpose of our company or even of our career or our daily work. It may be that much of the time, for most of the people, simple survival forces us to play the work and business game

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<sup>57</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Money & Power* (ET InterVarsity Press 1984), p. 20. *Reason for Being* (ET: Eerdmans, 1990), pp. 86-93, has a further discussion by Ellul of the significance and vanity of money.

<sup>58</sup> *Money & Power*, pp. 78-79. See also Robert Kuttner, *Everything for Sale: The Virtues and Limits of Markets* (Alfred Knopf, 1997) which demonstrates this impact in great detail.

<sup>59</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Ethics of Freedom* (ET Eerdmans, 1976), p. 24.

within the community and culture of Mammon worship. Our individual decisions and acts may appear utterly useless in the larger perspective.

But to the extent that we can find room to resist and to pursue another way, what might we propose? Remember how Ellul in *The New Demons* warns that casting out one demon may make room for seven demons worse than that first one!<sup>60</sup> My own approach in working with companies is to focus the mission on innovation, i.e., on creating and inventing products and services that are useful and reliable for people, and even beautiful if that is possible. Or as a second business purpose I suggest the mission to help the hurting, heal the sick, protect the vulnerable, and repair the broken. This sounds terribly obvious: create something good or fix something bad. But I am convinced that it is precisely those two themes that capture the imagination and passion of the worker. Rather than serving Mammon, or still less the Nation, or Race, my recommendation is to serve our neighbors and friends by creating and redeeming the basic, important things in their lives. And by making these the driving purposes of business, money can return to its proper, subordinate place.

So the voice of Jacques Ellul on money is critical for our era. His assessment of its sociological functioning is important. But the fact that his viewpoint is couched in biblical and theological language and in the prophetic warnings again the worship of Mammon means that there may be some leverage to liberate some of today's deluded Religious Right cheerleaders for market fundamentalism to the detriment of all else. Money is an unworthy and savage god. The value system that spins out of a choice to make money our sole mission is not a pretty sight.

#### The Submission to Technique

There is secondly, an almost complete insensitivity in the business world to the actual role of technique and technology.<sup>61</sup> The standard viewpoint in business is that technology is a set of neutral tools serving our purposes and practices as we determine. Who better than Ellul to remind us of the dominance of technique: "the totality of methods, rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency for a given stage of development ..."<sup>62</sup> Technique and technology are in no way merely a set of tools serving business. The tools have coalesced into an ensemble that actually runs today's business practices. Ellul explains that technology is "not merely an instrument, a means. It is a criterion of good and evil. It gives meaning to life. It brings promise. It is a reason for acting and it demands a commitment."<sup>63</sup>

For best-selling authors such as Nicholas Negroponte (*Being Digital* (Vintage, 1996)), Michael Hammer (*Reengineering the Corporation* (HarperBusiness, 1993)), and Don Tapscott (*Paradigm Shift* (1993), *Digital Capital* (2000), *Wikinomics* (2006)),

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<sup>60</sup> Cf. Jesus' parable in Matthew 12:43-45; Luke 11:24-26.

<sup>61</sup> I will use "technique" and "technology" almost interchangeably here. But I mean submission to a way of thinking and acting —as well as to the machines and structures created and sustained by that spirit.

<sup>62</sup> *Technological Society*, (ET Alfred Knopf, 1964).

<sup>63</sup> *To Will & To Do: An Ethical Research for Christians* (ET Pilgrim, 1969), pp. 190-91.

the embrace of technology by business should be complete and unreserved. They are among the countless cheerleaders for an unqualified subordination of business to the latest technology, to the maximum extent possible. In their world, technology is on the throne, not in the toolbox, of business. The pressure is irresistible: more technology, all the time, everywhere, no matter what the cost. We must keep up with our competitors and with technological change and innovation. Adopt, support, and upgrade, all the time. Jim Collins's best-selling management book *Good to Great* argues for a more qualified stance—that truly great companies use technology as an accelerator rather than as a primary driver or steering wheel.<sup>64</sup> But even in Collins's approach, the deep subordination of business to technology is not fully recognized.

Ellul has shown at great length how technique/technology is not a simple “add-on” to business and other human domains. Rather, it constitutes an environment and a milieu; it is self-augmenting and universalizing in its constant growth, extending everywhere and into everything. One technological problem leads to another problem which requires further technological interventions and solutions. The scale and scope of technology in business is remarkable in its own right. There seems to be nothing in the name of which the encroachment of technique should be resisted or refused. Everything, every operation, every person, every moment should be subjugated to technique (much as in the previous section it is monetized).

But beyond this challenge of scope and scale, Ellul calls our attention to the values that are embedded in technology.<sup>65</sup> Where technology dominates, its values dominate. Many companies articulate a list of “core values” to which they aspire. All too rarely do these organizations evaluate these lists or the degree to which their company cultures actually reflect these aspirations. The *actual* working values of any organization dominated by technique/technology were discussed in Ellul's chapter on “Technological Morality” in his introduction to ethics, *To Will and To Do*. What are the basic characteristics of this technological value system? Since technology is precise, exacting, and efficient—it demands of people that they be *efficient, precise* and *prepared*. It is a morality of *behavior, not of intentions*—it is solely interested in *external conduct* (older moralities often addressed intentions and attitudes as well). It is a morality that excludes questioning and rigorously commands the *one best way of acting* (older moralities countenanced the agony of moral quandaries and questioning).

What are the ethical values embedded in technology?

- *Normality*. We are not called upon to act *well* (as in other moralities) but to act *normally*, to be adjusted. To be maladjusted is a vice today. “The chief purpose of instruction and education today is to bring along a younger generation that is *adjusted* to this society” (192).

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<sup>64</sup> Jim Collins, *Good to Great* (HarperBusiness, 2001), Ch. 7.

<sup>65</sup> Ellul's chapter on “Technological Morality” in his *To Will and To Do*, pp. 185-198, is a brilliant account of technological values. My discussion here follows closely my recent article “Jacques Ellul and Technology's Trade-Off” in *Comment Magazine* (Toronto, Spring 2012), pp. 102-109.

- *Success.* "In the last analysis," Ellul says, "good and evil are synonyms for success and failure"

(193). Morality is based on success; the successful champion is the moral exemplar of the good; if crime is bad it is so because "it doesn't pay," i.e., it is unsuccessful.

- *Work.* With the overvaluation of work come self-control, loyalty and sacrifice to one's

occupation, and trustworthiness in one's work. The older virtues having to do with family, good fellowship, humor, and play are gradually suppressed unless they can be reinterpreted to serve the good of technique (e.g., rest and play are good if, and because, they prepare you for more effective, successful work).

- *Boundless growth* —in the sense of continuous, unlimited, quantifiable expansion. "More" is thus a term of positive value and moral approval, as are the "gigantic," the "biggest." "In the conviction that technology leads to the good" there is no time or purpose for saying "No" or for recognizing any limits or for impeding the forward advance of technology (197-98).
- *Artificiality* is valued over the natural; nature has only instrumental value. We do not hesitate to invade and manipulate nature—whether that is the space program, deforestation and industrial development, animal farming, water resource "management," genetic experimentation, or whatever. We have little respect for the givenness of nature in comparison to our valuing of the artificial.
- *Quantification and measurement.* Despite Einstein's nice comment that "everything that can be counted doesn't count and everything that counts cannot be counted" our technological society insists on quantifying and measuring intelligence (IQ), success (church attendance, salary levels), personality traits (Meyers-Briggs, etc.).
- *Effectiveness and efficiency.* The measurably ineffective or inefficient are replaced or despised. Frederick Taylor and scientific management.
- *Power and speed.* Weakness and slowness are only valued by eccentrics. In today's absolutely frantic society, it is hard to dispute that this has become a virtue and value.
- *Standardization and replicability* Technology demands that people adapt to machines. The universal impulse of technology privileges platforms that link the parts together. The eccentric is only of interest in a museum.

Technological moral values, in general, are instrumental rather than intrinsic. These values become our criteria for decision and action (replacing such maxims as "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," "Love your neighbor as yourself," and "Treat others always as ends, never as means"). They become our virtues of character so that the good person is one who is a normal, adjusted, hard-working, successful creator and manager of the artificial (replacing the "just, wise, courageous, and temperate" classical ideal and the "faithful, hopeful, loving" Christian ideal).

Without doubt, in many business operations and practices these technological values can have an important place. But when they are allowed in without a self-conscious and critical awareness, without any limits, their reign can become one of terror. What happens to the value of the eccentric, the mystery, the paradox, the immeasurable? How do we deal with the long-term and the subtle, the inefficient but beloved? What happens to wild creativity that thrives on openness, risk, conflict, and the lessons only failure can teach? Wisdom loses to knowledge, knowledge to information, information to data. People lose to systems and numbers.

So Ellul's powerful voice is needed more than ever to awaken business folk from their uncritical slumber in the face of technological imperialism. A legitimate human ethics must be asserted over technique, not coopted and tamed by it. The first duty is that of "awareness" Ellul argues.<sup>66</sup> If we proceed blindly in denial of the impact of technique/technology on our corporate culture and values we can and will do nothing to resist it. This awareness of the technological values embedded in all business practices today is a gift to business ethics that Ellul can make, better than almost anyone else.

#### Dominated by Necessity

The third area in which Ellul has a critical and enduring importance for business ethics is in consideration of the meaninglessness and necessity of work. Historically and sociologically, Ellul argues, work is a matter of toil and necessity for survival. For the vast majority of people through history and even today, it is survival and necessity that dictate whether one finds adequate work, what kind of work one finds, and the generally negative character it then has. It is historically false to view work as a means to freedom or self-expression and fulfillment. It is simply necessary. Ellul rejects the ideological glorification of work by both Marxists and capitalists as simply a tool to reinforce our conformity, subservience, and integration into an economic or political movement. Of course, just because work is necessary does not mean it should be despised or made worse than it is. We should accept our necessity to work and then do it well.<sup>67</sup>

Sociologically, Ellul has often argued that work is a matter of necessity rather than freedom. For the vast majority of the world's people work is about survival, not high meaning and freedom. But even for those privileged to choose their work, the phe-

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<sup>66</sup> *Presence of the Kingdom* (ET Seabury, 1967), pp. 118 ff.

<sup>67</sup> Ellul discusses the concept of "necessity" in *Ethics of Freedom*, pp. 37-50, and *To Will and To Do*, pp. 59-72. In *Presence of the Kingdom* he urges that ordinary work and life must be done well pp. 16-19.

nomenon remains locked into necessity. “Work is an everyday affair. It is banal. It is done without hope. It is neither a value nor is it creative.”<sup>68</sup>

Theologically, Ellul has an explanation for this based on his reading of the biblical creation story. He argues at some length that human work is rooted not in creation but in the fall.<sup>69</sup> Ellul will have no truck with theologians who want to ground the meaning of work in our being created in the image of God or commissioned to serve as co-creators with God. The commission to Adam and Eve to name the animals, till the garden, and be fruitful and multiply was nothing like what we call work, Ellul maintains, because it was an exercise of freedom before God in an unbroken, unified, perfected world. Human work is what is required in a broken world of alienation from God, from the earth, and from other people. Work is fundamentally toil. It is of “the order of necessity.” So “calling” and “vocation” in biblical theology are not to be confused with work but are something very separate.

Here is how he explains it:

It is a very classical idea that work existed in the creation, but it was work in a very different sense there. That is, the work in Genesis 1 and 2 was non-utilitarian. All the trees gave their fruit spontaneously, and although Adam was commissioned to watch over the garden there were not any enemies there. Thus it was good work, a job, but one that was not in the domain of necessity. That is the great difference for me . . .

I don’t think you can say that for God the creation was a job or work. The Greeks and Babylonians always considered creation an effort. But the Bible says that it was the *word* of creation rather than a *work*. It was something more simple. I agree with you that God’s act was creative and that what responds in us is word and work. There is a work command but Adam and Eve were then in the presence of God rather than having merely a work or vocation. The idea of work and vocation is always confusing, but I believe that vocation or calling is always, and only, service of God.<sup>70</sup>

For Ellul the challenge is to find a *vocation* that is a kind of dialectical counterpart to our *work*. “We obviously have to discover a form of activity which will express our Christian vocation and thus will be an incarnation of our faith.” This vocation is “free and an expression of grace” and yet it “is an equivalent of work.” Ellul suggests that his own career as author and university professor was a species of work in the order of necessity. His *vocation*, on the other hand, was his volunteer activity working with the “Prevention Club” for street kids and juvenile delinquents. Ellul acknowledges that “To

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<sup>68</sup> *Ethics of Freedom*, p. 506.

<sup>69</sup> Ellul, “Work and Calling,” *Katallagete IV* (Fall/Winter 1972): 8 - 16; reprinted in James Holloway & Will Campbell, eds., *Callings* (Paulist, 1974), pp. 18-44. See also “Freedom and Vocation” in Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom*, pp. 495-510, Ellul, “Technique and the Opening Chapters of Genesis,” in Carl Mitcham and Jim Grote, eds., *Theology and Technology* (University Press of America, 1984), and the section on work in Ellul’s commentary on Ecclesiastes *Reason for Being* (ET: Eerdmans, 1990), pp.93106.

<sup>70</sup> Interview of Jacques Ellul conducted by David Gill in July 1982 at Ellul’s home in Pessac with the assistance of Joyce Hanks; subsequently translated by Lucia Gill and published as “Jacques Ellul on Vocation & the Ethics of the Workplace” in *Radix Magazine* 22.4 (Summer 1994), pp. 12-13.

direct an enterprise of this kind . . . is real work. Yet it forms no part of the necessary work provided by society. It presupposes autonomy, inventiveness, and free choice.”<sup>71</sup>

It is at this point that I have to take issue with Ellul’s biblical interpretation and application - and his analysis of our actual work experience. In terms of our experience, in *both* the domain of ordinary work *and* that of volunteer vocational service, the experience of necessity, technique, toil, and trouble regularly appear. This is just as true in a church or environmental movement or volunteer youth athletic team as it is in a conventional business. And on the other hand, the opportunity for human kindness and care, for creativity, for meaning and even redemptive impact on others can present itself in business organizations, not just in the volunteer sector. Not all businesses, all the time, crush out human freedom, relationship, and creativity. In fact the best businesses promote such things. It is just not an either/or situation where work is all crushing necessity and external vocation is all freedom and meaning.

And theologically, I would argue that despite his brilliant insights, Ellul’s interpretation of the biblical story is unconvincing. His rejection of any notion of work being rooted in creation, and of any survival of creational goodness and freedom after the fall, is unpersuasive. To stipulate that God’s own creational activity was not work is unnecessary. To stipulate that the commission to Adam to name the animals and till and keep the garden were not work in any sense is also unnecessary. One reason not to follow Ellul here is The Decalogue —which is given in two forms. In the Deuteronomy (chapter 5) version both work and Sabbath are grounded, Ellul-style, in liberation from work as slavery in Egypt. But in the Exodus (chapter 20) version, Sabbath and work are grounded in God’s example of both in creation. So taken as a whole, work and rest are *both* viewed within a dialectic of good creative work and fallen necessary work. Think also: the Hebrew word *avodah* is used for *both* work and worship, suggesting an affinity Ellul overlooks. Paul challenges Christians not just to carry out their worship and vocations to the glory of God but “whatever you do in word or deed” do it all in the name and to the glory of God. Of course, Jesus Christ called his disciples away from their work —just as he called them away from their family ties. But then he sent them back, though with a new set of priorities.

So the way Ellul draws the theological and sociological lines on this topic of necessity and freedom in work is unconvincing. But where Ellul is convincing beyond doubt is in his challenge that humans need freedom, meaning and significance and the workplace rarely provides these things. My conclusion is that we should not just acquiesce in this workplace necessity but carry the fight for freedom and dignity directly into the workplace. For me the challenge from Ellul for business ethics is to go beyond where he ends up and fight for reforms in the workplace so that work is meaningful and not alienated, so that there are opportunities for growth and creativity, so that non-technical values are affirmed, so that human relationships can occur in healthy ways.

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<sup>71</sup> *Ethics of Freedom*, pp. 507-508.

The reality is that some businesses do succeed more than others in pursuing and achieving these values (e.g., Southwest Airlines, Costco).

We must not let businesses and managers off the hook by saying that mindless and meaningless work is a simple necessity. No, managers must be challenged to provide space for meaning, for good communication, for creativity at work. Nothing will ever be perfect, but that must not prevent us from trying. All of Ellul's challenges to risk and contradiction, to freedom and vocation, should be initiated within the workplace as much as alongside of it.

The enduring importance of Ellul on the question of work, in my opinion, is first of all, to remain ruthlessly realistic and critical regarding the actual experience of work. He does describe the lot of most of the world's workers, most of the time, and we must have no illusions. But secondly, his challenge implies a confrontation of freedom and necessity, an introduction of the Wholly Other into the mundane world of work. Despite his own pessimism about the possibilities within the workplace, Ellul suggests that we should make efforts toward de-institutionalization, de-structuralization and "so acting in the sphere of work that this becomes a setting for human encounter."<sup>72</sup> Moreover, Ellul grants that "When human work produces joy or what seems to be outside the everyday, we have to realize that this is an exceptional event, a grace, a gift of God for which we must give thanks."<sup>73</sup>

So it is, after all, possible for grace to break into our work. And despite his apparent theory of an unbridgeable divide, Ellul himself actually promoted this integrative quest. In the 1982 interview I conducted with Ellul, he described his efforts to help Christians integrate their faith and work:

My friend Jean Bosc and I started the Associations of Protestant Professionals. We discussed professional problems, concretely, just as they are in life. The theologians would simply describe what the Bible says, without spelling out what the professional should do. That way they were challenged to figure out what to do, what sort of solution to bring to those problems. We had some very different experiences. It was easier for doctors and nurses than for business people. The groups that never went along very well were those composed of bankers and insurance agents.. Most of the associations lasted six years, from 1947 to 1953. Problems were

submitted by the participants. We tried to get them to reflect on practical problems. There were congresses, study courses, and consultations. A businessman, for example, might submit a business venture for study and discussion by the group. Two groups, doctors and teachers, continue on to the present day, but the others ended.<sup>74</sup>

Forward in Hope

In the end, it is a matter of hope and freedom. In *Hope in Time of Abandonment* Ellul wrote that authentic hope only begins when all seems lost, the walls are sealed

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<sup>72</sup> *Ethics of Freedom*, p. 481.

<sup>73</sup> *Ethics of Freedom*, p. 506.

<sup>74</sup> Gill Interview of Jacques Ellul (July 1982), pp. 11, 28.



off and there is no way out. So it is that in work and business, necessity seems to rule, technique determines our action, and money is the object of worship. But precisely at each of those points we must resist. In the end this resistance may be against “business as usual” —but it is for “business as it could be,” an enterprise in which human freedom can be expressed, human values respected, and all pretender gods and idols dethroned.

## **On the Lookout for the Unexpected: Ellul as Combative Contemplative by Sue Fisher Wentworth**

Abstract: In his analysis of *la technique*, Jacques Ellul brilliantly names what is going on in our world. His refusal to be prescriptive at the end of this analysis is well known; he does, however, urge his readers to create a new style of life. In the service of this creativity, this essay explores the character and contours of this life as he describes it: as the gift of the Holy; as rooted in prayer, the Spirit’s own life within us, which calls for our absolute attentiveness; and as involving the willingness to wait in real darkness. It is a way of life offering an essential counterpoint to technological society’s drive for autonomy and self-sufficiency, its absorption in frantic activity, and its demeaning alternatives of despair or false hope. It is also a way of life consonant with what the larger Christian tradition has long referred to as the “contemplative” way; the essay draws on this tradition to shed light on Ellul’s thought, and explores the light he brings, as a modern man, Protestant, intellectual, and rabble rouser. Ellul invites us to be “on the lookout for the unexpected,” open to the Wholly Other, for the end of human life is the mystery of presence: God’s hidden presence (“I AM”), presence before God, presence in the world as leaven, salt, light.

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In his analysis of *la technique*, Jacques Ellul brilliantly names what is going on in our world. When we look to him for guidance on how to move forward, however, we are thwarted. As he says, “At the end of my books, readers are called to take action and make their own decisions, and they surely say to themselves, “This is very annoying. I don’t see which action I can take.” They would prefer a last chapter in which someone would tell them, “Here is what you must think and do.” This last chapter I will never write.” (*In Season, Out of Season*, 197)

For many, it is just this refusal to be prescriptive which discredits Ellul. Yet it is exactly here - at the border of what may be called Ellul’s silence - that our real

engagement may most fruitfully begin.<sup>75</sup> Ellul wants us to stand on Holy Ground, where real freedom and real change alone emerge. His silence is an invitation into Silence, into Real Presence. It is *presence* that is definitive, the “effectual, immediate presence of the Living One, of the Wholly Other, of the Transcendent (with all the reservations which those words call for when applied to the One whom nothing can define)” (*Prayer*, 148). *Presence* matters more than action or thought; it is the source of both.

Ellul *will* urge us to the creation of a new style of life, a new presence, a new way of being in the world. In his seminal book, *Presence au Monde Moderne* (which appeared in English as *The Presence of the Kingdom*), Ellul specifically addresses Christians who would act faithfully, lovingly, and hopefully in the world: “In order that Christianity today may have a point of contact with the world, it is less important to have theories about economic and political questions, or even to take up a definite political and economic position, than it is to create a new style of life. This problem of the style of life is absolutely central” (*Presence* 119-121). For “true action . . . is the testimony of a profound life. What matters is to *live*, and not to act” (76).

The purpose of this paper is to attend to the contours and character of this profound life to which Ellul bears witness. As we shall see, it is a way of life that contrasts at every point with the way of life pressed upon us by technological society. First, this life is the gift of the Holy; it is a flowing life of exchange and generosity, the life of the Holy Spirit within, in a relationship which establishes selfhood and enables real freedom. Where technological civilization is founded on the drive to self-sufficiency, mastery, and control, this life emerges from the Wholly Other’s refusal to be self-sufficient, self-contained, “in control.”

Secondly, this life is rooted in prayer, but not prayer as we reflexively think of it. What is prayer for Ellul? What is it not? *This* prayer is powerful enough to be “the exact counterpoint of the rigorous mechanism of the technological society” (*Prayer* 174).

And finally, in a world captivated by a “will to death, a will to suicide,” this life is capacious enough, trusting enough, to acknowledge, allow, and endure real darkness without veering off into any form of despair (*Presence*, 19). Only here can authentic Hope emerge.

Throughout this essay a theme is constant, that this way of life to which Ellul bears witness - which is our primary concern - is also what the larger Christian tradition has long referred to as the “contemplative” way. To make this association does not make this way manageable; it is not a way subject to domestication. It is illuminating to acknowledge, however, that it is an ancient way of the Body of Christ: the style of life we are creating, which remains ever new, has a long and rich history. What light does

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<sup>75</sup> Silence is not something usually associated with Ellul, a prodigiously productive writer and an ardent conversationalist. It is worth noting, however, that his poetry, in which he was conscious of having “bared his soul,” as he said, and which he gave permission to publish only a few months before his death, was published in a little volume called *Silences*.

Ellul bring as a modern man, a Protestant, an intellectual, a rabble rouser? What light does the larger tradition itself shed on Ellul? Our culture, whether Christian culture or popular culture, has difficulties aplenty with the notion of “contemplation” – misunderstandings, prejudices, resistances. As we shall see, Ellul shared in these. At the same time, we find him urging in *Autopsy of Revolution*, “If you would be genuinely revolutionary *in our society* . . ., be contemplative: that is the source of individual strength to break the system” (286).<sup>76</sup> He will not tell us what to think or do, but he will tell us what to *be*: “Be contemplative.”

Ellul was not a “pious” man. He was not a “religious” man. He was a man willing to be before One Who Is, and he invites us to venture the same.

## I.

”Ground of being, and granite of it; past all/ Grasp God”

-Gerard Manley Hopkins

It was August 1930, in Blanquefort, France, not far from Bordeaux. The young man, 18 years old, was on summer holiday, having just finished his secondary school exams. He was alone in a friend’s house, busy translating Faust. Some seventy years later Ellul reluctantly described to an interviewer what happened next: “. . . [S]uddenly, and I have not doubts on this at all, I knew myself to be In the presence of a something so astounding, so overwhelming that had entered me to the very center of my being. That’s all I can tell you. I was so moved that I left the room in a stunned state. In the courtyard there was a bicycle lying around. I jumped on it and fled. I have no idea whatsoever how many dozens of kilometers I must have covered. Afterwards I thought to myself: ‘You have been in the presence of God.’ And there you are” (Chastenet, 52).

Ellul refers to this event in another context and says that he doesn’t wish to relate it, except to mention the violence of the encounter, and his response: he “realized that God had spoken,” but because he didn’t want God to have him, like Jonah, and multiple individuals before and since, he fled (*In Season* 14). This dramatic experience was for Ellul the self-revelation of the Holy –totally unexpected, completely unsought, utterly commanding. It was encounter with the Wholly Other. Ellul’s reticence in speaking about this personal experience is fitting, a testimony to its authenticity. We stand at the border of Silence.

As Karth Barth frequently said, “God acts first.” This “acting first” - whether it is experienced suddenly, dramatically, and violently, as with Ellul at his initial conversion, and/or over a lifetime of divine faithfulness - is the gift of the Holy. This is the Revelation: this incomprehensible Reality we call “God” wants to pour God’s own life into us, not simply to command us to live in a certain way. The life to which we are called, we are given. Our life is I-Thou life, and we are not the “I” in the relation.

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<sup>76</sup> My thanks to Arthur Boers for first calling my attention to this text.

This encounter with Holiness is a “wild adventure”; it cannot be secured beforehand or possessed after, but only received (*Presence* 109).

*Life*, for Ellul, begins here for each one of us, with God’s self-gift. It is not as if we are alive first, and then meet God, or not. Life is located *here*, in this very meeting, whether we are aware of it or not. We are because God is. Human aliveness is not mere physical aliveness, a beating heart and the fact of respiration; it is not identified with physical health or youth or beauty. Being alive is “above all a fact of spiritual life” (Ibid. 76). “To be alive means the total situation of man as he is confronted by God. . .” (Ibid., my emphasis). It is “presence,” “*pre*” + “*esse*,” literally “being before,” “being in front of”: it is “being found” and living together with God in vital relation, being God-breathed.

This I-Thou relationality turns our normal self-centered, self-generated world upside down and inside out. In the work of God, as Ellul observes, the end and the means are “identical”: the work of God manifests “a unity of end and means” (Ibid. 64-5). Jesus brought the Kingdom by *being* the presence of the Kingdom. According to Ellul, the “first consequence” of this identity for us is this: “that what actually matters, in practice, is ‘to be’ and not ‘to act’” (PK 74).<sup>77</sup> It is for us

. . . to manifest the gift which has been given us, the gift of grace and of peace, of love and of the Holy Spirit: that is the very end pursued by God and miraculously present within us. Henceforth our human idea of means is absolutely overturned; its root of pride and of power has been cut away. The means is no longer called to ‘achieve’ anything. It is delivered from its uncertainty about the way to follow, and the success to be expected... [W]e must learn that it is not our

possibilities which control our action, but it is God’s end, present within us” (67, my emphasis).

For Ellul, this creative Life, the Holy Spirit, “can transform our intelligence, in such a way that it will not be swallowed up by our systems, and that it will be sufficiently penetrating” (*Presence* 103). The Spirit “alone can give meaning, truth, and effectiveness to language” (Ibid.) It “alone can establish the link with one’s neighbor” (Ibid. 106). It is the mystery of this divine life, alive in the person, that gives human work “its meaning, its value, its effectiveness, its weight, its truth, its justice - its life . . .” (Ibid. 97).

God acts first, always and everywhere. It is striking, in this context, to hear Jesus’ words to his disciples in the Gospel of John:

Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

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<sup>77</sup> We “do not have to strive and struggle in order that righteousness may reign upon the earth. We have to be ‘just’ or ‘righteous’ ourselves, bearers of righteousness ... Likewise.. we have not to force ourselves, with great effort and intelligence, to bring peace upon the earth - we have ourselves to *be* peaceful” (Ibid. 66-76).

As one commentator observes, “[T]he parable of the True Vine is, above all, a contemplative parable....

The verb *remain* is a verb of *being* ... It is used twice as many times as the verb *bear fruit*” (Cavalletti,

54). The same “sap,” the same life, flows through the whole plant. This was the pattern and essence of Jesus’ own relation with the one he called “Father”: “Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on my own. The Father who dwells in me is doing his works” (John 14: 10).

We hear echoes from the larger Christian contemplative tradition. “God is the center of my soul,” writes St. John of the Cross. Jean Pierre de Caussade says, “Divine activity floods the universe; it penetrates all creatures; it flows over them. Wherever they are, it is there; it precedes, accompanies and follows them. We have only to allow ourselves to be carried forward on the crest of its waves” (quoted in Squire, 217). Thomas Kelly, a more recent witness, writes in *A Testament of Devotion*:

Deep within us all there is an amazing inner sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a Divine Center, a speaking Voice, to which we may continuously return. Eternity is at our hearts, pressing upon our time-torn lives, warming us with intimations of an astounding destiny, calling us home unto Itself. . . It is a dynamic center, a creative Life that presses to birth within us. Here is the slumbering Christ, stirring to be awakened, to become the soul we clothe in earthly form and action. And He is within us all. (3).

The new style of life to which Ellul calls us originates in a Life deeper than our powers of selfdetermination. It flows from the Creator Spirit; it is the gift of the Holy, capable of enlivening dust and resurrecting the dead.

## II.

”True love and prayer are learned in the moment when prayer has become impossible and the heart has turned to stone.”

- Thomas Merton

What is our relation to this Gift? We can affirm it; we can reject it. We can, like Ellul for a decade, flee from it, refuse it. In any case, we must decide. If we assent to the Gift, what then? For Ellul, the fruit of the Spirit’s presence is *prayer*. This is a second dimension of the new style of life which Ellul sees must be discovered. “Prayer comes before all the rest in the life in Christ” (*Prayer* 116). It is “the sole necessary and sufficient action and practice, in a society that has lost its way” (Ibid. 175). The church “can only have recourse to God in prayer. . .” (*Presence* 126). “It is, above all, in prayer and meditation that intellectuals will rediscover the sources of an intelligent life rooted in the concrete” (Ibid. 112). “Prayer is the power which exorcises demons, by the Holy Spirit, and is thus the weapon of faith” (Ibid. 16). In the battle against

“death and nothingness,” it is “the eschatological act of prayer” which enables us “to pick up once again the thread of life” (*Prayer*, 178). “The act of prayer . . . resolves both the problematics of faith and all the impossibilities of human hope” (*Hope* 274).

This “prayer,” however, is not what we reflexively assume. For Ellul, true prayer is not only neglected in the church today; it is indeed impossible: *L’impossible Priere* is the title of the French original of the English *Prayer and Modern Man*. Impossible from without, for us as modern people, for whom there is no spiritual dimension, nor is there time or space, but only distraction, being pulled from one thing to another - and impossible from within, for Christians in Christendom, who labor under “a whole set of misunderstandings, of obsolete images, of spurious identifications, [which] rob prayer of all further justification and being, except as a counterfeit” (*Prayer* 64). “It is prayer which should be decisive, but we no longer have any confidence in the extraordinary power of prayer” (*Presence* 16). And then, bluntly, “for man in our society prayer cannot be what it is” (*Prayer* 64).

What does Ellul mean by prayer? We can begin with what he doesn’t mean, since the substitutes are legion. We come to prayer with hands bearing “offerings, presents, vows, good deeds,” instead of our lives and ourselves (*Ibid.* 6-7). We want to deal with “the pleasant, the consoling, the sweet, the banal, the ordinary” in our prayer, instead of actually encountering God (*Ibid.* 8).<sup>78</sup> We approach prayer as a duty; our prayers are rote, or simply emotive. We pray, “Thy will be done” to disown the reality of our own will, not to seek alignment of that very real will with God’s. Prayer for us is deformed by a false posture of servility and a false affect of piety.

Most fundamentally, Ellul argues that we labor under the false notion –one “undisputed, widespread, and habitual in all the churches” –that prayer consists of us talking to God, that it is a discourse, “a sort of pious language addressed to God” (*Ibid.* 63). If we think of what happens when someone says, “Let us pray,” we see the truth in this: most of us bow our heads, close our eyes, and expect someone to start talking. Generally when we speak of prayer we assume that we will be the ones starting the conversation; that it will consist of words (we “say” our prayers), and that we will be the ones using them; that God is a long way off and must be hailed.

What is true prayer? True prayer is also “impossible,” albeit in a more salutary sense of being outside the realm of the merely humanly possible. True prayer, for Ellul, is a gift of the Holy Spirit. It is a “profound reality,” “an “extraordinary explosive force,” “outrageous, astonishing,” a “miracle” (*Prayer*, 63, *Presence* 77, *Prayer* 26, 9). In this

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<sup>78</sup> As Thomas Merton says, in what could be a mini-version of *Prayer and Modern Man*: . . . [C]ontemplation will not be given to those who willfully remain at a distance from God, who confine their interior life to a few routine exercises of piety and a few external acts of worship and service performed as a matter of duty. Such people are careful to avoid sin. They respect God as a Master. But their heart does not belong to him. They are not really interested in Him, except in order to insure themselves against losing heaven and going to hell. In actual practice, their minds and hearts are taken up with their own ambitions and troubles and comforts and pleasures and all their worldly interests and anxieties and fears. God is only invited to enter this charmed circle to smooth out difficulties and to dispense rewards. (12)

prayer God teaches us God's way, a way "truly impossible to find unless God reveals it, truly impossible to follow with our human power alone" (*Presence* 126). This prayer is first of all the prayer of Christ, the prayer of the Holy Spirit. *That* prayer is *our* life. It is wholly gift: "We are forced to the conclusion that prayer is a gift from God, and its reality depends upon him alone" (*Prayer* 62). This gift establishes relationship, IS relationship with God. It is "living with God," a "form of life, the life with God"; it is "the life which I receive from him, and which unfolds in a story with Him" (49, 60, 61). It is "real encounter with God"; it "rests on the lived and living contact with the Lord" (Ibid. 119, 100-101). "In prayer God invites us to live with him," as Karl Barth says and Ellul references (Ibid. 48). What matters is life with God.

Here again we note the resonance with the Christian contemplative tradition. As Thomas Merton says, "In prayer we discover what we already have Everything has been given to us in Christ. All we need is to experience what we already possess Let Jesus pray. Thank God Jesus is praying. Forget

yourself. Enter into the prayer of Jesus. Let him pray in you" (quoted in Pennington, 49-50). Dom John Main O.S.B. writes, "in the light of Christ, prayer is not talking-to but being-with" (*Essential Writings*, 67). "We are praying when we are awakening to the presence of the Spirit in our heart. If this is so, there can be no forms or methods of prayer. There is one prayer, the stream of love between the Spirit of the risen Christ and his Father, in which we are incorporated" (Ibid. 88). Brother Roger of Taize says, ". . .[I]n the depths of our being Christ is praying, far more than we imagine. Compared to the immensity of that hidden prayer of Christ in us, our explicit praying dwindles to almost nothing. That is why silence is so essential in discovering the heart of prayer" (*Songs and Prayers from Taize*, 17).

We do not know how to pray, but the Spirit does, interceding "with inexpressible groanings" (Romans 8:26b).<sup>79</sup> Our inability is the opening into the power of God. Prayer is never originally "ours." The content of prayer is given by God, in an encounter "which transcends all language," "an encounter between the living God and the living person" which "overflow[s]" into human speech as its "secondary expression" (*Prayer*, 60). Prayer does not begin with us; in prayer we are addressed by God. Ellul quotes Kierkegaard at length here:

The immediate person thinks and imagines that when he prays, the important thing, the thing he must concentrate upon, is that *God should hear what HE is praying for*. And yet in the true, eternal sense it is just the reverse: the true relation in prayer is not when God hears what is prayed for, but when *the person praying* continues to pray until he is *the one who hears*, who hears what God wills. The immediate person, therefore, uses many words and, therefore, makes demands in his prayer; the true man of prayer only *attends* (Ibid. 111).

This prayer is the presence of God, of God with us, "the only vital miracle" (*Jonah* 64). It frees us from a locked-up world. It is this presence, this being with, which Jonah

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<sup>79</sup> It was in reading Romans 8 that Ellul experienced what he called his "second conversion" (*In*

finally understood, according to Ellul, in the belly of the whale. It is God's "staying with man in death and hell (all forms of hell, including those we know on earth)," this fullness of love, which is the very heart of prayer (Ibid. 65).

As Ellul says, "So when prayer seems impossible that is no reason for panic or despair, for making a great effort, for attempting devices or techniques, for awaiting some mysterious and sovereign urge. It is enough to fall back on the most simple and childlike obedience asked of us, that of hearing the word" (*Prayer* 110-111). This is obedience (*obedire*), hearing (*audire*) —"a pure obedience without an end in sight" (*Hope* 274). It is for us to become hearers, to allow our deepest selves to become listening selves. We must renounce "human means," renounce "the possibilities of my own strength and initiative," renounce the use of power (*Prayer* 30, 6). Prayer for us is "a stripping bare, the abandonment of all human apparatus in order to place myself, without arms or equipment, into the hands of the Lord, who decides and fulfills" (Ibid. 30). We renounce thinking that we either must or even can act first.

Hearing the word, we both get out of the way and become able to respond. This primal attentiveness, I would suggest, is what Ellul means when he writes, in *Autopsy of Revolution*, that we are to "be contemplative." Here is the pertinent text in its entirety:

It would represent a vital breach in the technological society, a truly revolutionary attitude, if contemplation could replace frantic activity. Contemplation fills the void of our society of lonely men. 'The art of contemplation produces objects that it regards as signs instead of things - signs leading to the discovery of a different reality .... I write to discover,' Octavio Paz says,

'because contemplation is the art of discovering things that science and technology cannot reveal. Contemplation restores to man the spiritual breadth of which technology divests him, to objects their significance, and to work its functional presence. Contemplation is the key to individual survival today; an attitude of profound contemplation allows actions to redeem their significance and to be guided by something other than systems and objects.' That is the way man can recover himself *today*. If you would be genuinely revolutionary *in our society* (I repeat that I am not disclosing a permanent value or an eternal truth), be contemplative: that is the source of individual strength to break the system (285-6).

Fullness of presence, instead of "frantic activity"; depth and communion, instead of loneliness; signs instead of things; the discovery of spiritual breadth instead of the mere mapping of materiality; profundity; otherness. Contemplation involves openness to a depth dimension, a quieting, stopping, attending to, wondering at - everything technical civilization finds threatening and wishes to distract and hurry us away from. The contemplative makes space and takes time. Time and space —the very media which technological civilization seeks to annihilate —are the human media, after all.

Yet as many misunderstandings cluster around the word "contemplation" as around the word "prayer," as evidenced in Ellul's own treatment in *Prayer and Modern Man*.



Early in that book he urges the reader interested in a theology of prayer to have recourse to “Augustine or Teresa of Avila, to Luther or Pascal, to John of the Cross or to Barth, to Kierkegaard or to Calvin,” many of whom are classically considered “contemplatives” (vii). Yet when he treats of “the experience of the great mystics” he speaks in the voice of a modern man (himself) who associates “mysticism” with extraordinary experiences, speaking in tongues, “a knowledge of inexpressible awarenesses, presences, truths,” comparing these to what “the youth of today seek in drugs” (9-10). This is “encounter with God” which is “fusion with the great All,” “the way of the dark night of the soul of John of the Cross, or of the ineffable presence disclosed to Teresa of Avila” (10). And he says, “But in the meeting with God, or in the fusion, there no longer is any prayer properly so called, since nothing in the realm of knowledge or cogency can any longer be said,” a “tendency [that] is very foreign to the Protestant mentality, which is always more or less rational” (Ibid.) Later he refers to “the prayer of the mystics, the plunge into the vast silence, into the ineffable, into the incommunicable” (97). Clearly these are a source of discomfort.

He continues: “The mystic experience frightens us. We feel embarrassed to recognize it. We distrust it.” “And yet,” he says,

If prayer is indeed a speaking with God face to face, how could we remain the forlorn inmates of the commonplace? Why does not this presence of God work a transformation within us? I am not saying, of course, that the mystical experience is the test of a truly profound prayer, but rather, that our prayer, which assuredly never takes us that far, is the test of an absence of prayer! (10)

He then rejects St. John of Damascus’ description of prayer as a lifting of the mind to God, saying this transgresses what only God can accomplish, and he “dispose[s] of the mystical experience of prayer.” But the disposal is not complete, for he concludes with this simple and touching observation: “*Perhaps* in that case we are missing a profound truth” (11). He had signaled his ambivalence from the beginning: “Confusedly, but movingly, the experience of the great mystics still attracts us” (9).

This combination of confusion and attraction is something we moderns know well. “Mysticism” seems strange, otherworldly, and “contemplation,” rarefied, meant only for special people, “reserved for a small class of almost unnatural beings and prohibited to everyone else” (Merton 7). It suggests withdrawal, removal from the “real world,” and is easy to dismiss as deluded or simply irrelevant. Perhaps we agree with Ellul when he flatly writes, “[T]he present-day world is not meant for contemplation,” although he also acknowledges that insofar as that assumes silence, peace, and tranquility, neither was the Middle Ages (*Prayer* 171)! At the same time he expresses deep regret that “[t]he intelligence of modern man is no longer nourished at the source of contemplation, of awareness of reality. . .” (*Presence* 92).

Ellul makes a significant contribution here with his refusal to allow contemplation to fade into “tranquility,” simply a state of being unruffled - a state which the larger

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*Season*, 15).

tradition has also registered, and dismissed, as “pernicious peace,” “lethal sleep,” “holy floating” (Main, 88). No one can mistake Ellul for a proponent of escapism. The contemplative life is at once attentive to the depths and alert, energized, *combative*. Ellul surveys the battlefield and delineates where the battle is joined: combat against the self, against “religion,” against falsehood, against evil, with God, against death and nothingness. “Je combattrai, je combattrai ” (*Silences* 15). It is disciplined, not dissipated. The revolution which is

served by contemplation needs “every spark of defiance and self-assertion we can muster” (Autopsy, 300).

Ellul reminds us that “being contemplative” is dialectical, dynamic, vital. It is at once impossible and essential. It involves us fundamentally with “a presence. . . whose margins are our margins; that calls us out over our own fathoms” (R. S. Thomas, quoted in Laird, 6).

### III

”Wait without hope, for you are not ready for hope. . .” - T. S. Eliot

Being called out over our own fathoms can be terrifying. And when it is not terrifying, it is radically challenging in other ways to a self, an ego, accustomed to the “stability” of being its own center. In this context, Ellul urges us to “l’esperance oubliee,” hope that is forgotten: the willingness to wait in real darkness, the willingness to stay present to the felt absence of God. Just as the Holy One acts first to love the world, forever liberating us from our projections of “God”; just as the Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness in prayer, enfolding us into the Divine Life; so we do not “possess” that for which we hope. “Now hope that sees for itself is not hope. For who hopes for what one sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait with endurance” (Romans 8: 24-25).

Ellul sees “waiting” joined with “prayer” and “realism” in realizing the “effective fundamental attitude” (*Hope*, 258). This “waiting” is active, completely engaging, a decision made again and again; the “person of waiting” –“stubborn, firm, unassuming” –“rushes into the dark of God’s silence and of the abandonment” (*Hope* 261). This waiting is her or his “field of battle”; it is totally focused on “the moment when all will have become possible again” (*Ibid.*). Here again we see two decisive energies of prayer –renunciation and combat - at work. The person of faith perseveres, remaining steadfast and constant in the face of absence, failure, contradiction, dullness, boredom. The renunciation of human means, referenced above, extends to a renunciation of attachment to experience. “We must not build on what happens to us personally” - whether positive or negative, consoling or depressing:

”We can indeed regard certain things in our lives as signs, miracles, God’s particular and personal action on us. But we are then to move on to what is signified by them. We must not cling to the sign itself, even though it be the most beautiful mystical

experience [!]. We must leave behind what belongs to the past... [I]t is God who counts and not our experiences" (*Jonah* 85).

We must "leave [our] subjectivity" and "find [our] true and total center in the permanence and faithfulness of the love of God" (*Ibid.* 86).

Here again Ellul and the larger contemplative tradition shed light on each other, particularly in their shared witness to the spiritual reality of darkness. What Ellul calls "abandonment" others perhaps more trenchantly call "dark night," "desolation," "impasse." Constance Fitzgerald, a Carmelite sister and student of St. John of the Cross, describes "impasse" as the experience of no way out, of no escape; the person is immured in "disappointment, disenchantment, hopelessness, and loss of meaning" ("Impasse," 94). Thomas Merton speaks of "a terrible interior revolution":

Gone is the sweetness of prayer. Meditation becomes impossible, even hateful. Liturgical functions seem to be an insupportable burden. The mind cannot think. The will seems unable to love. The interior life is filled with darkness and dryness and pain. The soul is tempted to think that all is over and that, in punishment for its infidelities, all spiritual life has come to an end" (42).

What is needed now is endurance, perseverance, "revolutionary patience" (Soelle, quoted by Fitzgerald, "Impasse," 114). Only as this experience is faced, acknowledged, allowed, and mourned—"if the ego does not demand understanding in the name of control and predictability but is willing to admit the mystery of its own being and surrender itself to this mystery"—can the soul emerge into the wholeness which God alone can give (*Ibid.* 96-97). It is only out of this suffering, this dying, that authentic, Godgiven hope can emerge.

The soul one day begins to realize, in a manner completely unexpected and surprising, that in this darkness it has found the living God. It is overwhelmed with the sense that He is there and that His love is surrounding and absorbing it on all sides. At that instant, there is no other important reality but God, infinite Love. Nothing else matters. The darkness remains as dark as ever and yet, somehow, it seems to have become brighter than the brightest day. The soul has entered a new world (*Merton*, 52-3)

Ellul refers to a time in his own life of a "severe trial in which everything was once again called into question," which "involved not only my deepest personal attachments, and the significance of whatever I might undertake to do, but also that which constituted the very center of my person, or at least which I believe constitutes the center of my person. All was called into question" (*Hope* v). It was only after this experience of the loss of everything that hope was born; before that, although he had written about hope, he "didn't know what he was saying" (*Ibid.* vi).

This awareness of the reality of the dark night and the hope which can emerge, "in a manner completely unexpected and surprising," is essential encouragement in our own dark night, whether experienced personally or societally. As Fitzgerald suggests, it would perhaps be helpful to understand our own time as a time of genuine impasse, instead of seeing the only alternatives as the denial of darkness or the succumbing to

it. "We are citizens of a dominant nation, and I think that as a nation we have come to an experience of deep impasse and profound limitation. On the other side of all our technology, we have come to poverty and to dark night. We can find no escape from the world we have built . . ." ("Impasse," 105). It is just this impasse which must be brought to prayer. The larger contemplative tradition, with Ellul, bears witness to the radical new life which can emerge, unexpectedly, miraculously, from out of this darkness, for those "willing to be stretched beyond [them]selves toward a new epiphany of the Holy, incomprehensible Mystery" (Fitzgerald, "From Impasse to Prophetic Hope," 42).

#### IV.

Life with God is not complicated. A child can do it. It is we adults, in a technological society, who have become overburdened with our own capabilities, our own need for validation, our own powers. But the Holy knows no self-sufficiency, and will not leave us to ours. We find we have been given everything, and have nothing to hold on to; we are "out over 20,000 fathoms" (Kierkegaard). Art McGill calls it "receiving without having," "an open poverty that is always waiting to receive" (61, 56). Ellul describes it as "bewilderment":

In the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit we receive the answer to this work of God, and we are bewildered because we are no longer very sure about the way forward, which no longer depends upon us. The end, as well as the means, has been taken away from us, and we hesitate as we look at this way which lies open before us, whose end we cannot see: we have only one certainty, and that is the promise which has been made to us of a certain order, which God guarantees: 'Seek ye first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all things shall be added unto you' (Matt. 6:33). (*Presence* 78)

Here is the "breach which cannot be closed, [the] 'undermining' which cannot be avoided" (97), the "rupture." We do not "have" faith, in the sense of yet one more possession. We lean, instead, into a radicality of trust, of interior poverty, of being dispossessed. We - the I-Thou - slowly and convulsively discover what it means to *live*.

Ellul is a modern man, post-religious, post-Christian, bearing witness to the Gift of the Holy. He is a Protestant, standing firm with the largely Catholic contemplative tradition to protest any attempt to encompass and "unify" this Gift which can only unify us. He is an intellectual committed to questioning the prevailing assumptions about the meaning and end of human life and the meaning of human activity.

He is a rabble rouser riveted by the depths of Silence. To "be contemplative" is not to be serene and unruffled, but to be engaged, attentive to the depths, willing to wait. Each of us, with the community, must discover the "how" of this life, as the Holy lays hold of us in our practical situation (*Presence*, 115).

This way of life to which Ellul bears witness offers an essential counterpoint to the way of the world. Instead of the autonomy and self-sufficiency of technical man, bent on the control of the material world, it bears witness to the mystery of a living relationship between a loving God and a beloved creation. Instead of noise, distraction, hurry, multi-tasking - the drive to fill every space - it bears witness to the primacy of listening, of attentiveness. Instead of glittering despair, it chooses trust in the darkness.

Ellul invites us to be open to the Wholly Other, for the end of human life is the mystery of presence: God's hidden presence ("I AM"), presence before God, presence in the world as leaven, salt, light.

The time is ripe for the renewal and rediscovery of contemplative prayer, this presence, this hearing of the word for which we are made. It is ripe personally, communally, ecumenically. We are gifted with an incredibly rich tradition of witness to the power and presence of the Spirit. Let us learn from it.

The time is ripe among faith traditions. Christians are not alone in being encountered by God. There are genuinely contemplative dimensions in Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and other faith traditions. What can we learn from each other? In the being of prayer we become able to rediscover the other, to make space for the reality of the other. How can life with God be anything other than a school of humility? Those who genuinely bear witness to God are not self-righteous or self-justifying. We learn from Jonah that "the man chosen by God is far from having plumbed the full depths of God's mysteries.... The man

filled with the Holy Spirit knows only a small part of the mysteries and even of the action of God. The adventure of Jonah inclines us at every point to humility" (*Jonah*, 84).

When we read Ellul, unexpectedly, we find a contemplative, who invites us to a present life hidden with God, and enlivens and deepens our sense of what that might mean in today's world. This way of life is "on the lookout for the unexpected," much as Ellul and his childhood friend Pierre Farbos were as they roamed the quays of Bordeaux, willing to trust that Life is already there, about to unfold (Ellul and Chastenet, 45). It is a way of life rooted in absolute attention to the Mystery of God. "[T]he person who retires to his room to pray is the true radical. Everything will flow from that" (Ibid. 174).

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## The Lure of *Technic* in Current “Leadership” Fascinations

by Arthur Boers

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Contemporary leadership discussions are everywhere. During a Toronto sanitation workers’ strike, media complained about the mayor’s missing leadership. Some years ago, nasty political ads suggested that our prime minister did not look like a leader because of a facial defect. When things go awry in congregations there is frequently talk about “failure of leadership.”

Leadership obsesses us. Degree-oriented leadership programs are on the rise.<sup>80</sup> Barbara Kellerman, at Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government, writes of “the burgeoning of the leadership industry with its countless centers, institutes, programs, courses, seminars, workshops, experiences, teachers, trainers, books, blogs, articles, websites, webinars, videos, conferences, consultants and coaches, which all claim to teach people how to lead ... .”<sup>81</sup>

There are usually leadership books on best-seller lists. Such literature often dwells on corporations, sports, and the military, mostly reinforcing status quo perspectives.<sup>82</sup> Many are the glowing accounts of Disney, Southwest, Shell. There is vastly more emphasis on methods, programs, and “best practices” than on moral formation or spiritual practices; seldom is character discussed.<sup>83</sup> Much literature emphasizes achievement, e.g. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Even Christian books use such terminology: *Effective Church Leadership*.<sup>84</sup> Yet Sarah Coakley cautions:

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<sup>80</sup> Dennis C. Roberts, *Deeper Learning in Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 16ff, 30ff. Scholars abroad tell me that leadership as an academic subject is a North American preoccupation.

<sup>81</sup> Barbara Kellerman, “Leadership: Learning to Lead the Old-Fashioned Way,” *Strategy and Business*, Winter 2011, Issue 65, 71.

<sup>82</sup> Stephen Preskill and Stephen D. Brookfield, *Learning as a Way of Leading* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 2

<sup>83</sup> Two recent books offer a counterbalance but are anomalies. Michel Villette and Catherine Vuillermot, *From Predators to Icons: Exposing the Myth of the Business Hero*, trans. George Holoch (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009). Nassir Ghaemi, *A First-Rate Madness: Uncovering the Links Between Leadership and Mental Illness* (New York: Penguin, 2011).

<sup>84</sup> Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989). Kennon L. Callahan, *Effective Church Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990).



business models . are usually presented in a packaged, pragmatic form that can be very efficacious. But there is little analysis of the secular presumptions that animated them. We should ask critically, and maybe also appreciatively, what vision of power, persons and community lies behind whatever business model we consider using.<sup>85</sup>

Evangelical Christians are preoccupied with leadership, even describing winning conversions as “*leading* people to Christ.” Numerous parachurch ministries are named after founders. Books boast specific sure fire steps to success: *9 Things You Simply Must Do to Succeed in Love or Life* or *Practicing Greatness: 7 Disciplines of Extraordinary Spiritual Leaders*. The most famous is *21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*.<sup>86</sup> Yet one is reminded of Jacques Ellul’s sober assertion “that the different methods of forecasting meet with almost constant failure.”<sup>87</sup>

It is human nature to admire the famous and the powerful, to look for heroes and adulate “stars” up front and in the know, those who wield power.<sup>88</sup> Yet questions must be raised. It appears oddly difficult, for example, to settle on a leadership definition. Joseph Rost argues that most literature does not define the term.<sup>89</sup> Warren Bennis encountered 350 definitions!<sup>90</sup> When I took on an endowed chair in *leadership*, I interviewed key people who dreamed up the position. I asked for a definition and heard: taking responsibility; facilitating the fulfillment of the purposes of persons, groups, or organizations; helping people see reality and inspiring them to move to possibility; discerning one’s time and context; suggesting or setting a vision and moving a group to long term results and satisfaction; exercising authority in managing resources to accomplish common good; influencing people to do what is needed; stewarding influence.

These ideas posed by thoughtful, intelligent Christians did not indicate anything explicitly *Christian* but describe *any* commendable leadership. No one offered a Christian perspective without prompting. When I pressed subjects on what is uniquely *Christian* about leadership or whether there is a distinctive Christian form, there was hesitation. One person noted that we lead as Christ led. Another that Christian leaders “serve the

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<sup>85</sup> Jason Byassee, “Sarah Coakley: Living prayer and leadership,” *Faith and Leadership*, 18 August 2009, [www.faithandleadership.com](http://www.faithandleadership.com).

<sup>86</sup> Henry Cloud, *9 Things You Simply Must Do to Succeed in Love or Life* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007); Reggie McNeal, *Practicing Greatness: 7 Disciplines of Extraordinary Spiritual Leaders* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006); John C. Maxwell, *21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership: Follow Them and People Will Follow You* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998).

<sup>87</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 80.

<sup>88</sup> See Mark Van Vugt and Anjana Ahuja. *Naturally Selected: The Evolutionary Science of Leadership* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 2011) and Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

<sup>89</sup> Joseph C. Rost, *Leadership for the Twenty-First Century* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), 7.

<sup>90</sup> Cited by Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, *Leadership from Inside Out* (New York: Crossroad, 2004), 128.

purposes of God for his people in time.”<sup>91</sup> Do these ideas go deep enough, especially when leadership is so faddish?

#### Biblical Perspectives on Leadership

Scripturally speaking, there are problems in unduly emphasizing leaders. Luke recounts Jesus’ birth and names leading luminaries of the day - Augustus, Herod, Quirinius. These are newsmakers, the ones in charge. But marginal folks - Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph - are God’s unexpected channels, the *real* sphere of God’s transformation, where *good news* is discerned, found, embodied. Ellul observes: “God chooses some men among others... Not the most qualified, the most informed, the most worthy, the most alert.”<sup>92</sup>

When we adulate leaders, Ellul warns that in the Bible “good and faithful kings were regularly defeated and . glorious monarchs” acted wickedly.<sup>93</sup> Power, victory, effectiveness, are not the fruit of faithfulness. After all, the cross exemplifies not “a *powerful* political leader,” but rather the weakness and humility of God.

Throughout the Old Testament we see God choosing what is weak and humble to represent him (the stammering Moses, the infant Samuel, Saul from an insignificant family, David confronting Goliath, etc.). Paul tells us that God chooses the weak things of the world to confound the mighty.<sup>94</sup>

God’s reign prioritizes “humility, poverty, freely giving” not authority, spectacular conversions, breakthrough works, a strong organization of the church, miracles, or anything of this kind. The kingdom of heaven knows no efficient means, as we have seen in the parables. The kingdom grows differently from any power in the world, and certainly not by the way of efficiency<sup>95</sup>

Positive *leader* terminology is scant in the scriptures. Few office holders are regarded favorably. Official rulers usually look out for interests contrary to God’s purposes; their characters are deficient. Good rulers are exceptions. When asked whether God intervenes in history, Ellul notes that God did so through faithful individuals but “not necessarily ... through political action. It can also be done through the preaching of the word of God.”<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> I define Christian leadership as: Inspiring, challenging, or empowering people and groups to join God’s mission of redemption and healing.

<sup>92</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, trans. and ed. By Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 62.

<sup>93</sup> *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 140. See also Jacques Ellul, *Anarchism and Christianity*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 50.

<sup>94</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 123.

<sup>95</sup> Jacques Ellul, *On Freedom, Love, and Power*, ed. and trans. Willem H. Vanderburg (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 205-6.

<sup>96</sup> Jacques Ellul, *In Season Out of Season*, trans. Lani K. Niles (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 92-3.

Scriptural leadership references are predominantly negative. Jesus' warns about "blind leaders" (Mt. 15.14, *KJV*) and disparages Gentile "rulers" (Mk. 9.42).<sup>97</sup> Old and New Testament counsel against wanting or emulating leaders "like other nations" (1 Sam. 8.5) or Gentile authorities who "lord it over" others (Mt. 20.25). Christian leadership programs aiming to be biblical, then, would focus proportionately more on avoiding leadership deformations, pitfalls, dangers, and temptations rather than on glorifying the possibilities and potentials of leadership.<sup>98</sup>

Jesus certainly had different priorities than having us *lead*. "Follow" comes up often in the gospel. Discipleship is about *following*. Never telling us all to be leaders Jesus says we are all to be servants.<sup>99</sup> Sarah Coakley cautions against blithely accepting leadership presumptions: "What Jesus has to say about authorities and power, and what he demonstrates in his own acts of witness and in his passion, are absolutely crucial."<sup>100</sup>

#### Reading Ellul to Interpret Leadership

Ellul's notion of *technic* is relevant to pondering leadership. Technic refers "to efficient methods applicable in all areas (monetary, economic, athletic, etc.);" its characteristics include "precision, rapidity, certainty, continuity, universality."<sup>101</sup> It prioritizes "immediate needs," shows "obsession with change" and "the myth of progress," and promotes "growth at all costs."<sup>102</sup> James Holloway notes that technic is evident in "the proliferation of *administration* in education, church, science, government, business, industry, etc., . so that administration is now *an end* itself."<sup>103</sup> Technics is "the determining element in the creation of . value."<sup>104</sup> Not that technic is evil yet it is deeply problematic when technic becomes "the *mediator of everything ...*."<sup>105</sup> I often hear complaints about how the CEO is now a primary model for pastors.

Leadership connection to technics is reflected in titles: Peter Drucker's *The Effective Executive* and *The Effective Executive in Action* and evangelical author Leith Ander-

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<sup>97</sup> Unless otherwise noted, scripture references are from the *New Revised Standard Version*.

<sup>98</sup> Narcissism and leadership are often intertwined. Thomas E Cronin and Michael A. Genovese, *Leadership Matters* (Boulder CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2012), 55-6, 137, 138, 170-1, 173, 263.

<sup>99</sup> Siang-Yang Tan, "The Primacy of Servanthood," in *The Three Tasks of Leadership*, ed. Eric O. Jacobsen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 78.

<sup>100</sup> "Sarah Coakley: Living prayer and leadership," [www.faithandleadership.com](http://www.faithandleadership.com).

<sup>101</sup> Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom*, 109. There are extensive debates about how to translate Ellul's French term: *technic*, *technique*, or *technology*. I opt for the unfamiliar, "technic." The usual English meanings of "technology" and "technique" are hard to overcome; the unfamiliarity of "technic" gives the reader pause and helps one remember Ellul's distinct emphasis.

<sup>102</sup> *The Technological Bluff*, 69, 223, 224.

<sup>103</sup> James Y. Holloway, "West of Eden," in *Introducing Jacques Ellul*, ed. James Y. Holloway (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 24. Italicization is Holloway's.

<sup>104</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Perspectives on Our Age: Jacques Ellul Speaks on His Life and Work*, ed. William H. Vanderburg (Toronto: Anansi, 1981), 33.

<sup>105</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1990), 92.

son's *Leadership that Works*.<sup>106</sup> We prioritize leaders as technicians.<sup>107</sup> With the right mayor there would be no strike; with a leaderly looking prime minister our nation would be affluent; with a good pastor there would be no church fights. Christians too fall for such longings.

Ellul counsels reticent humility about claiming to effect God's purposes: "man does not recognize in advance whether or not he is entering into God's plan."<sup>108</sup> He warns against predicting consequences of actions and against naive optimism about what humans can achieve. "There is no progress that is ever definitive, no progress that is only progress, no progress without a shadow."<sup>109</sup> We cannot effectively attain or achieve God's kingdom.<sup>110</sup>

When I ask seminarians to define leadership two terms consistently come up: *influence* and *followers*. (Think of the self-help classic, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*.) Students hope to learn "hard skills" of running the show: manage people ("human resources"<sup>111</sup>), coordinate teams, oversee budgets, deal with conflict, lead change, build collaboration, raise funds. These obviously important tasks are all practically oriented and in the spirit of our times.

In reality, we are obsessed ... by the views of our age and century and technology. Everything has to serve some purpose. If it does not, it is not worth doing. And when we talk in this way we are not governed by a desire to serve but by visions of what is great and powerful and effective. We are driven by the utility of the world and the importance of results. What counts is what may be seen, achievement, victory, whether it be over hunger or a political foe or what have you. What matters is that it be useful.<sup>112</sup>

Ellul hopes rather that we be prophets. A prophet "announces and can bend or provoke, but there is no necessity or determination."<sup>113</sup> Effective influence is not assured. Prophets are often marginalized and isolated. Some are not heard until long after they die; some never at all.

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<sup>106</sup> Peter F. Drucker, *The Effective Executive* (New York: HarperBusiness, 2007); Drucker and Joseph A. Maciariello, *The Effective Executive in Action* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006); Leith Anderson, *Leadership that Works* (Grand Rapids: Bethany House Publishers, 2001).

<sup>107</sup> Ellul writes that "technocrats" now "constitute a new ruling class, and we are actually living under an aristocratic regime. Technocrats are the *aristoi*, the best people." These "*aristoi* have the greatest technical competence ... ." *The Technological Bluff*, 25.

<sup>108</sup> *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 19.

<sup>109</sup> *The Technological Bluff*, 71.

<sup>110</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom*, trans. Olive Wyon (New York: Seabury, 1967), 48.

<sup>111</sup> Marguerite Shuster writes: "the very category 'human resources' gets it exactly wrong .. It places people made in the image of God right alongside two-by-fours, power generators, and textbooks as material needed to get the job done: human beings become more or less useful instruments in service of reaching a particular end. Their worth is not intrinsic but relative to the goal at hand." "Leadership as Interpreting Reality," in *The Three Tasks of Leadership*, ed. Eric O. Jacobsen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 19.

<sup>112</sup> *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 197.

<sup>113</sup> *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 21.

A leader, in many students' opinions, influences others and wins followers. Yet I begin each class by reading a brief account of an exemplary Christian from history and offering a prayer in that person's memory. More often than not, that person was not famous in his or her day, had no followers, was rejected, or was martyred. His or her influence was negligible.

As the world sees it, action which is faithful to God will always fail, just as Jesus Christ necessarily went to the cross. Such action always leads to a dead end. It is always a fiasco from the standpoint of worldly power. But this should not worry us. It does not mean that our action is in truth ineffectual. Efficacy measured in terms of faithfulness cannot be compared at any point with efficacy measured in terms of success.<sup>114</sup>

Christian faith gives a counter-witness to believing that "Everything that succeeds is good, everything that fails is bad."<sup>115</sup> Ellul sounds much like Martin Buber who wrote: "The Bible knows nothing of this intrinsic value of success." Buber demonstrates that key Old Testament leaders had lives consisting "of one failure after another .," referring especially to Moses and David. This is, in short a "glorification of failure [that] culminates in the long line of prophets whose existence is failure through and through. They live in failure . . ."<sup>116</sup>

One modern failure was Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He never completed his most important book, led a brief fledgling seminary, did not persuade many Christians to reject Nazism, was part of an unsuccessful assassination attempt on Hitler's, and was wastefully executed shortly before the war's end. In his lifetime, he had little influence and few followers. He was not surprised. He was clear that the Christian (like Jesus) does not just suffer and endure the cross, but experiences rejection, the opposite of influence just "Jesus is the Christ who was rejected in his suffering." When the "circle of disciples" try to "hinder" this rejection their hindrance was "satanic." Yet the church itself from the earliest of days also avoided this "kind of Lord."<sup>117</sup> In other words, even in the church Christ does not necessarily have influence! Was Bonhoeffer a leader? Does the answer matter? As I. F. Stone used to say: "If you expect to see the final results of your work, you have not asked a big enough question."<sup>118</sup> Ellul wrote a prayer that counsels against thinking too highly or confidently about our influence or our effective accomplishments:

All the acts which I have done expressly to serve thee, and also all the acts which I believe to be neutral and purely human, and also all the acts which I know to be disobedience and sin, I put in thy hands, O God, my Lord and Savior; take them now that they are finished; prove them thyself to see which enter into thy work and which

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<sup>114</sup> *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 140.

<sup>115</sup> *The Presence of the Kingdom*, 70.

<sup>116</sup> Martin Buber, "Biblical Leadership" in *Biblical Humanism*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (), 142-3.

<sup>117</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, eds. Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey, trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 85.

<sup>118</sup> Cited in Jeff Gates, *Democracy At Risk* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 241.

deserve only judgment and death: use, cut, trim, reset, readjust, now that it is no longer I who can decide or know, now that what is done is done, what I have written I have written. It is thou that canst make a line true by taking it up into thy truth. It is thou that canst make an action right by using it to accomplish thy design, which is mysterious as I write now but bright in the eternity which thou has revealed to me in thy Son. Amen.<sup>119</sup>

Christ's power and sovereignty are "not of the order of means that are effective."<sup>120</sup> We act in hope and on the basis of God's promise but have no guaranteed outcomes or results. Ellul would make short shrift of the claim that the obligation to be responsible entails proper techniques.

The freedom of God finds expression also in the choice of the means he employs. Samaria will be saved, but to accomplish this God neither uses nor relies on the courage of the soldiers, the skill of the generals, the politics of the king, or the return of all the people to virtue and morality. God will save Samaria by ... the most ridiculous, empty, and illusory miracle, by a noise, a wind, an echo, by an illusion which makes a victorious army flee. This is an illustration of the fact that God chooses "things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are" (1 Corinthians 1:28). But it also shows how much noise and how little weight or worth or significance there is in what man does. I think that we who take our politics and bombs and elections so seriously should take this<sup>121</sup> seriously too.

Most famously, Ellul cautions against worshipping efficacy:

that which has its own high degree of efficiency should not become legitimate in our eyes for that reason. It is not enough that a means be effective for us to employ it. We must not subordinate the choice of means to intrinsic or specific efficacy.<sup>122</sup>

Scriptures caution against relying on technics. "How many times has God told and retold his people by the prophets that they should not rely on human means."<sup>123</sup> Ellul cites examples: manna which was not to be saved, rejecting large armies or strong weapons, Gideon's troop reduction, David battling Goliath without usual weapons, a widow relinquishing dwindling food. "In spite of every secular argument to justify money and the state and science and technology, to show that we are right to use these things, it is quite unbiblical to appeal to these agents of political power. To do so is defiance of God *par excellence*."<sup>124</sup>

Yet "man is much more controlled by . means than . ends. He is much more involved in a causal process."<sup>125</sup> We desire means that are "important, demanding and effica-

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<sup>119</sup> *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 72.

<sup>120</sup> *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 137.

<sup>121</sup> *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 61.

<sup>122</sup> *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 134.

<sup>123</sup> *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 147.

<sup>124</sup> *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 147.

<sup>125</sup> *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 135.

cious.”<sup>126</sup> Our one end, however, must be “the coming kingdom of God” and all means subordinate to that priority.<sup>127</sup> Ellul laments the “penetration of Christianity by technology . . .”<sup>128</sup> This is not to dismiss appropriate means, but to make sure that they are in their proper place, not ends in themselves. He is not contending for incompetency.

If the efficacy of the man of God comes to a halt, all is lost. Jeroboam ruined the kingdom of David. If Apollos had not watered, what Paul had planted would never have grown. Every Christian, then, is strictly accountable... When a Christian quits, he annuls ... all that preceding Christians have been able to do. Efficacy is written in the history of the church as well as the world. It implies that everyone play his part in the life of the church and be prepared to carry on whether or not there is any tangible proof of results.<sup>129</sup>

None of this justifies inaction. “When we say ‘since God does everything, he has no use for my puny efforts and my tiny works; so I will do nothing,’ we show our hypocrisy and cowardice. The Bible never validates such an attitude, teaching rather that although God does everything, he chooses human beings to accomplish it!”<sup>130</sup>

Critiquing Institutional and Organizational Implications of Leadership and Technics

I frequently encounter a bias toward leadership understood primarily as running institutions. Ellul anticipated that technics would inform organizational administration.

Research on rational efficient methods . covers and has gradually come to encompass all human activities.

By this, I meant that there is now a precise knowledge of how a group or a society is constituted, evolves, and how one can organize to achieve a certain result. Sociology and psychology supply us with means to obtain the best returns from a work team, to “place” individuals in a given spot at a meeting in order to increase or decrease their influence, . and so on. These are simple examples of . the technologies of organization in a society. They have been widely applied in human relations, public relations, and the army.<sup>131</sup>

He claims: “A genuine revolution is called for today against increased and improved organization.”<sup>132</sup> He warns and worries: “Once a movement becomes an institution, it is lost.”<sup>133</sup> He is concerned when the church prioritizes “developing and strengthening itself institutionally” as if “Without administration, nothing works.”<sup>134</sup> Christians are

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<sup>126</sup> *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 136.

<sup>127</sup> *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 136.

<sup>128</sup> *Perspectives On Our Age: Jacques Ellul Speaks on His Life and Work*, 99.

<sup>129</sup> *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 139.

<sup>130</sup> *Reason for Being*, 136.

<sup>131</sup> *Perspectives on Our Age*, 37. See also Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Continuum, 1980), 176

<sup>132</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Autopsy of Revolution*, trans. Patricia Wolf (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), 273. While writing here about the nation state, the dynamics are just as true for other organizations, including corporations and churches.

<sup>133</sup> *Perspectives on Our Age*, 24.

<sup>134</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985),

now unduly interested in “worldly matters” such as “administration.”<sup>135</sup> Institutions cannot offer ultimate security, protection, predictability, preservation; such aspirations are perilous and idolatrous.<sup>136</sup>

Ellul has little hope for reforming organizations.<sup>137</sup> Influenced by Ellul, Will Campbell used to say: “All institutions are after our souls” and “Institutions institute inhumanity.”<sup>138</sup> Ellul cautions against embracing the “perversity of power.”<sup>139</sup> He goes so far as to say that more dangerous than the nation state is the “omnipotence and omnipresence of administration.”<sup>140</sup> Lest we not get the implication: “it is impossible for . an institution to be Christian.”<sup>141</sup>

Ellul objects theologically whenever we “put . confidence elsewhere than in the Lord.”<sup>142</sup> He is concerned when the church embraces “forms of security offered by human wisdom against the security of faith.”<sup>143</sup> As for the hope of “improving the world,” he dismisses this as purely “illusion” and “confusion.”<sup>144</sup> This is not how the gospel advances.

The kingdom of heaven knows no efficient means, as we have seen in the parables. This kingdom grows differently from any power in the world, and certainly not by the way of efficiency. The only means to the kingdom of the poor in spirit and of those who are persecuted for justice is their lives as lived in communion with Jesus Christ.<sup>145</sup>

He approves Ecclesiastes’ assertion that “*all* power is vanity, oppression, and foolishness - without reservation or shading!” He shares “Qohelet’s utter pessimism concerning power.”<sup>146</sup>

Agenda for Christians who would be Leaders

Our existence is more than technics. Edwin Luttwak says: “everything that we value in human life is within the realm of inefficiency - love, family, attachment, community,

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<sup>135</sup> *The Subversion of Christianity*, 21.

<sup>136</sup> “Cain will spend his life trying to find security, struggling against hostile forces, . taking guarantees that are within his reach, guarantees that *appear* to him to be genuine, but which in fact protect him from nothing.” Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, trans. Dennis Pardee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970).

<sup>137</sup> *The Presence of the Kingdom*, 71-2.

<sup>138</sup> Cited in Arthur Boers, “Will Campbell: In the Great Company of God’s *Grace*, *The Other Side*, September, 1987, 43, 40.

<sup>139</sup> *Anarchism and Christianity*, 13 footnote 3. “What I really want to point out ... is not that Jesus was an enemy of power but that he treated it with disdain and did not accord it any authority. In every form he challenged it radically.” *Anarchism and Christianity*, 56.

<sup>140</sup> *Anarchism and Christianity*, 16.

<sup>141</sup> *Anarchism and Christianity*, 28.

<sup>142</sup> *The Meaning of the City*, 32.

<sup>143</sup> *The Meaning of the City*, 34.

<sup>144</sup> *The Meaning of the City*, 37.

<sup>145</sup> *On Freedom, Love, and Power*, 206.

<sup>146</sup> *Reason for Being*, 84.



culture, old habits, comfortable old shoes.”<sup>147</sup> Some leadership authors acknowledge this. Ronald Heifetz warns against the “myth of measurement” because: “Meaning cannot be measured.” While useful, measurement “cannot tell us what makes life worth living.” He cautions religious organizations that weigh success by “reaching more people,’ as if souls were a measurable commodity.”<sup>148</sup>

We have rarely met a human being who, after years of professional life, has not bought into the myth of measurement and been debilitated by it. After all, there is powerful pressure in our culture to measure the fruits of our labors, and we feel enormous pride as we take on “greater” responsibility and gain “greater” authority, wealth, and prestige. ... You cannot measure the good that you do.<sup>149</sup>

Ellul agrees that human life is more than technics. “It has room for activities that are not rationally or systematically ordered.” Such priorities are threatened; “the collision between spontaneous activities and technique is catastrophic for the spontaneous activities.”<sup>150</sup>

Wallace Stegner wrote about losses that developed from damming a remote canyon river for accessible recreation: “In gaining the lovely and the usable, we have given up the incomparable.”<sup>151</sup> Such tragic trade-offs echo Ellul’s concerns that nothing “lovely” is gained in prioritizing technics: “everywhere technique creates ugliness.”<sup>152</sup> The ugliness includes erosion of traditional societies.<sup>153</sup> “Technological activity . waters down all serious things. .”<sup>154</sup> It suppresses and “destroys values and meaning”<sup>155</sup> and anything else viewed as “useless.”<sup>156</sup>

Technic priorities become their own magical cult. “Facts” have a quasi-religious authority that cannot be questioned.<sup>157</sup> Yet Christian practices are relegated to irrelevance. Prayer is ridiculed and downplayed as unreliable, non-efficacious, unpredictable, ineffective.<sup>158</sup> (Allegedly effective prayer is celebrated; remember the best-seller, *The Prayer of Jabez*.)

[W]e can supply no demonstration of the necessity for prayer, or even of its usefulness. It is futile to pretend that prayer is indispensable to man. Today he gets along

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<sup>147</sup> Cited in Janice Gross Stein, *The Cult of Efficiency*, (Toronto: House of Anansi, 2001), 1.

<sup>148</sup> Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), 212.

<sup>149</sup> Heifetz and Linsky, 213-4.

<sup>150</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 82-3.

<sup>151</sup> Wallace Stegner, “Glen Canyon Submersus,” in *Nature Writing*, eds. Robert Finch and John Elder (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2002), 509.

<sup>152</sup> *The Technological Bluff*, 40.

<sup>153</sup> *Perspectives on Our Age*, 44-45.

<sup>154</sup> *The Technological System*, 10.

<sup>155</sup> *Perspectives on Our Age*, 50.

<sup>156</sup> *The Presence of the Kingdom*, 65.

<sup>157</sup> *The Presence of the Kingdom*, 38. Janice Gross Stein makes a similar point in her Massey Lectures, *The Cult of Efficiency* (Toronto: Anansi, 2001), 3-4.

<sup>158</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Prayer and Modern Man*, trans. C. Edward Hopkin (New York: Seabury, 1970), 76-79.

very well without it. When he does not pray he lacks nothing, and when he prays it looks to him like a superfluous action reminiscent of former superstitions. He can live perfectly well without prayer. . No one can demonstrate to him that he really needs it although not realizing it, nor that he would be so much better off if he prayed. There is no reason, no proof, no motive to be invoked.<sup>159</sup>

By the relentless criteria of technic, prayer is downgraded even dismissed. Ellul hopes to redirect attention to “the meaning of life.”<sup>160</sup> This is key agenda for Christian leadership.

According to Aldo Leopold’s land ethic: “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”<sup>161</sup> While “biotic” refers to the living parts of an ecosystem, this discerning principle could apply to other networks and communities too, not just biological ones. And Ellul would surely approve.

The most important things Christians do - worship, prayer, theology, service - are “useless,” serving “no purpose.” Yet they are “testimonies to grace and ... an expression of freedom.”<sup>162</sup> They are promising and hopeful.

I cannot help thinking of the enormous number of useful actions that push us closer and closer to disaster. Then I remember those other gestures (made by hippies and nonpolitical pacifists, for example) which are considered futile: prayers and “useless” solitary self-sacrifice. These acts enable our world to survive.<sup>163</sup>

We must insist on God-given practices with no measurable worth. Prayer is “a renunciation of human means.”<sup>164</sup> It reveals radical reliance on God and helps us escape our technic-dominated milieu; it gives other perspectives.<sup>165</sup> It promises deep change; it is a

radical break, a more fundamental protest.. All further radicalism, of behavior, of style of life and of action, can only have the prior rupture of prayer as its source. Precisely because . technological society is given over entirely to action, the person who retires to his room to pray is the true radical.<sup>166</sup>

In our age of “frantic activity,” contemplation is “a truly revolutionary attitude . . .”<sup>167</sup> He continues: “If you would be genuinely revolutionary *in our society* ., be contemplative: that is the source of individual strength to break the system.”<sup>168</sup>

Ellul worries about Christian leaders who prioritize technics; “the Church’s responsible people (pastors, etc.), feel very much debased in a world of technique since they

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<sup>159</sup> *Prayer and Modern Man*, 99.

<sup>160</sup> *The Technological Bluff*, 358.

<sup>161</sup> Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (New York: Oxford, 1989), 224-5.

<sup>162</sup> *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 197.

<sup>163</sup> *Reason for Being*, 191.

<sup>164</sup> *Prayer and Modern Man*, 30.

<sup>165</sup> *Prayer and Modern Man*, 172.

<sup>166</sup> *Prayer and Modern Man*, 174.

<sup>167</sup> *Autopsy of Revolution*, 285.

<sup>168</sup> *Autopsy of Revolution*, 286.

are not themselves specialists, and especially not technicians.” Consequently, “embarrassed pastors also want to become technicians. They therefore practice psychoanalysis, group dynamics, social psychology, information theory, etc.” Ellul insists on aspects of pastoring that are now often downplayed: “To obey a calling and then to preach, to direct a congregation, to take time for soul-searching - all this seems frivolous in a world of engineers and producers.”<sup>169</sup>

Frivolous perhaps. But not as vain as all too many contemporary leadership emphases.

## ***Theology and Economics: The Hermeneutical Case of Calvin Today* by Roelf Haan**

Wellington So. Africa: Bible Media, 2012. 181 pp; [www.bybelmedia.co.za](http://www.bybelmedia.co.za)

ISBN: 978-0-86487-702-4; E-book: 978-0-86487-612-6;

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John Calvin, argues Roelf Haan, has been wrongly blamed (or credited) with modern capitalism. In part because of Max Weber (*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Calvinism*, 1905) and R. H. Tawney (*Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, 1926) it has been assumed by many that modern capitalism has its roots in Calvin. Drawing on both the work of Calvin expert Andre Bieler, *The Social Humanism of John Calvin*, and on Calvin’s own writings, Haan makes clear that contemporary capitalism has little or nothing in common with Calvin’s economic thought. What we actually need is more of the real John Calvin’s thought to counter the dysfunctions of our era.

We do, of course, have a hermeneutical challenge in reading Calvin five centuries later, in a very different context than his Geneva. Still there are some key contributions Calvin makes to economics. Here are some of the points Haan brings out of Calvin (with many quotations!):

1. Economics is not about personal gain or profits but about the common good
2. Markets are not “self-regulating” but need to be subordinated to the Word of God
3. History is dynamic not static and the Christian ethic gets worked out in life more than in theory

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<sup>169</sup> Jacques Ellul, “Work and Calling,” trans. James S. Albritton, in *Callings!*, eds. James Y. Holloway

4. The natural environment must be cared for as God's stewards, not abused and exploited

5. Wealth is a blessing from God if it does not harm others or become idolatry for those who have it  
6. Property is not a purely individual thing; all property belongs to God and should be stewarded responsibly

7. The poor should be cared for, not rejected or scorned

8. Work is or ought to be participation in the work of God in the world; the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 is a good example

9. Work is not determined or legitimized by having an income attached to it

10. Trade is good but must resist fraud, robbery, and deceit.

Haan devotes a whole chapter to Calvin's approach to usury (charging interest on loans) with comments on how mortgage practices and international debt plague our world today. There is, Haan argues, ample reason to return to this ancient debate. In short, Calvin does not suggest that all interest should be banned but that justice must prevail and no exploitation of the poor should be tolerated. It is a very different thing for the well off to borrow and pay interest for their investments or luxuries.

Haan reflects on the evolution of Reformed economic thought and practice over the succeeding centuries with figures like Abraham Kuyper, Herman Dooyeweerd, and Jacques Ellul appearing in his pages.

Ellul's chronicle and assessment of the technological revolution is largely affirmed by Haan. Haan closes with some comments on what theology (and Calvin) can bring to today's economics. He quotes Einstein's famous saying that the thinking that created a problem is unlikely to be able to solve it. Economics needs the input of theology.

*Theology and Economics* could have benefited from a copy editor and designer to get chapter and page numbers in place, eliminate Roman numerals in footnotes, etc.. But this is a welcome contribution from a fine thinker, well experienced in the trenches of economics and extremely literate in history and theology. This book is a much needed corrective to the mythology of today's Christian capitalists and a great companion piece to Ellul's writings on money and economics..

## Jacques Ellul: L'esperance d'abord

by Stephane Lavignotte

Lyon: Editions Olivetan, 2012. 105 pp. pb. [www.editions-olivetan.com](http://www.editions-olivetan.com)

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and Will D. Campbell, (Toronto: Paulist Press, 1974), 32.

a journalist on radio, television, and in print. He has been especially concerned and active in caring for the environment and assisting undocumented folk in Paris. This little volume subtitled “First of all, hope!” is not available in English—but just maybe it should and will be some day. It is part of a series of books “Figures protestantes” which includes Bonhoeffer, Calvin, Luther, Zinzendorf . . . pretty famous company!

Lavignotte locates Ellul’s work in its historical, biographical, ecclesiastical, and social/cultural context. He does a good job distilling down Ellul’s thought into chapters on Technique/technology, Money/mammon, Propaganda/information, Hope/contradiction, and Ethics/life-style. Lavignotte probes and interacts with about twenty of Ellul’s books and several articles and some important secondary sources by Jean-Luc Porquet and Patrick Chastenet. I did wish for some reference to Ellul’s work on politics and his important books on the *Humiliation of the Word* and *The Ethics of Freedom* but otherwise this is a very nice introduction within the 100 page space limitation.

Lavignotte is deeply appreciative of Ellul’s thought and sees him as a prophet and an iconoclast, challenging us to dethrone all idols and break with the closure of this technological world. What I also valued from Lavignotte was his refusal to elevate Ellul to untouchable sainthood but rather to question and disagree where he felt it necessary. Two examples of this were homosexuality and Islam. Lavignotte scolds Ellul for some rash comments about AIDS as the penalty for an obsession with sex by gays. So too, Ellul suggested the expulsion from France of immigrants promoting Islam (pp. 17, 73-74). These brief comments don’t do full justice to Lavignotte’s discussions. But I certainly agree with him that Ellul sometimes wrote too harshly and perhaps was not consistent in the application of his views. What we have here is an engaging, thoughtful introduction to Jacques Ellul by a caring friend.

## **21<sup>st</sup> Century Propaganda: Thoughts from an Ellulian Perspective**

by **Randal Marlin**

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December, 2010. His “Propaganda and the Ethics of WikiLeaks” appeared in the 2011 issue of *Global Media Journal - Australian Edition*, Vol 5 No 3. He continues to be active locally in community affairs and civil liberties issues.

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Just as Jacques Ellul presented himself in many different guises to the public, so also there are many different ways to be “Ellulian” in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. One could do the work of a sociologist, theologian, historian, political scientist, newspaper columnist, local activist, and in each case adopt recognizable patterns of thought and action that hearken back to Ellul’s own work and thought. “Ellulians” are attracted to his thought for different reasons. For some of us it is the breadth and scope of his vision of the world, integrating science with religion, law with morality, teaching with social work, while always preserving a concern for the individual, caught up in so many modern systems with their dizzying demands on our daily lives, snuffing out our spontaneity in the process.

There is no one thing identifiable as “Ellulian” unless it is, paradoxically, a resistance to any form of cookie-cutter identity, including that of slavishly conforming one’s activity to some supposed model of behaviour or thinking identified with Ellul.<sup>170</sup> He has certainly provided us inspiration for the new century, and many of the problems he observed in his own time and predicted for the future are with us now, some of them more urgently than ever before. There are many different perceptions as to how one might be “Ellulian,” but it would be a great mistake to think that one could reasonably regard oneself as “Ellulian” simply because one agrees with his diagnosis of what is wrong with the modern world. There is the further question of how to act, about which he had very definite things to say.

Take for example the case of Ted Kaczynski, the so-called “Unabomber,” who killed people by letter bombs starting in 1978. Unquestionably, he echoed some of the ideas of Ellul concerning the technological society and he specifically mentions having read *The Technological Society*.<sup>171</sup> Had Kaczynski also read Ellul’s *Violence*, he would have seen how, despite a large measure of agreement about how the technological imperative has shaped our modern consciousness and turned us into willing slaves, sending letter bombs to kill or maim those taking part in that imperative was not an appropriate response.<sup>172</sup> The main and simple reason is the Christian premise underlying all of Ellul’s thought. But there was also Ellul the sociological and political analyst, who saw that such acts, far from damaging the technological system, only strengthen its worst aspects. Just as with the events of 9/11, the result is to induce fear and create

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<sup>170</sup> The paradox I refer to has been commented on many times, recently by Frederic Rognon, “Jacques Ellul: Une pensee en dialogue,”(Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2007) 19.

<sup>171</sup> From *The Atlantic online*, June, 2000: “After he graduated from Harvard, Kaczynski encountered a book by the French philosopher Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (1954) ...” Kaczynski recalled: “Here is someone who is saying what I have already been thinking.”

<sup>172</sup> Perhaps he did read “Violence” but disagreed with it. I have no knowledge, one way or the other.

support for new security initiatives, new technological devices to further reduce the scope of human freedom.

So we have one very clear idea of how *not* to be Ellulian in the 21<sup>st</sup> C. Kaczynski, though a brilliant mathematician, appears to have been short on sociological and moral perception. His killings were supposed to awaken a public consciousness that would turn against modernity and view favourably his own back-to-nature vision of how to live. But his actions showed little empathy for his victims, suggesting a defective moral awareness, and his aim of transforming society was not achieved. To the extent he thought his actions would succeed he demonstrated inadequate sociological understanding.

To be a true Ellulian, then, requires not just an understanding of his diagnosis of what is wrong with the world. It also demands at least a minimal respect for the constraints he places on morally acceptable action. Based on the teachings in *On Violence*, there is no justification for killing people as Kaczynski did. Where is the love shown to the victims of Kaczynski's bombings?

Whether one chooses to identify with institutionalized religion or not, the message of love, so central to Christianity, is essential to the message that Ellul has tried to impart, both through his writings and the example of his civic engagements. To be an Ellulian means to involve oneself in social action in a way appropriate to one's abilities, guided by a realistic assessment of the problems of one's time and the likely chances of succeeding with this or that well thought-out response. But this has to be combined with a love even for the perpetrators of the evils one sees around us. The American cartoonist Walt Kelly famously had one of his Pogo characters say "we have met the enemy and he is us," and it is true that in the course of raising a battle-cry against the perceived social villains of our time we may be contributing to the very evils that we see around us. We may decry the producers of waste products and climate warming gases, but if our habit-formed needs provide a market for such services we share the blame.

My own interest is primarily in Ellul's insights into the phenomenon of propaganda, and I will pursue here three themes. The first is how propaganda in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century shows few signs of slackening in kind or quantity compared with the previous century. The second is that despite all the tools available for combating corporate and political propaganda there is evidence of age-old human weaknesses working against the successful use of these tools for bringing about a better and more just world. The third is a question: how should a conscientious person act to counter harmful propaganda? Is it sufficient to educate people, to let them know about the forms of manipulation so they can resist their influence? What are some of the pitfalls that prevent or undermine effective social action?

# I

The word “propaganda” needs first to be defined. I use the term here in somewhat negative sense to refer to communications by an organized group designed to influence the thought, actions and attitudes of others in ways that suppress or bypass their ability to view what is conveyed from an adequately critical, rational standpoint. As a matter of usage, the word “propaganda” has a neutral as well as the somewhat pejorative meaning in the definition I have just given. In the neutral sense one simply talks about propaganda as getting messages across and influencing the public with nothing to suggest any kind of deception. But the word has come to take on sinister connotations, and I want to provide a definition that accounts for the negative perception of the word. Ellul captured an important strand of negativity by linking the word to communications aimed at gaining or maintaining power over others. This definition has its own valuable insights, but I want to emphasize the aspect of dupery as distinct from control, even though the two may go hand in hand.

The use of propaganda is no less evident in today’s world than it was in the last century. Governments and corporations have numerous advisers to help with marketing of products and policies. The electoral appeal of a political candidate, party or policy is measured carefully by widespread use of polling techniques. All that Ellul noted in the way of government by imagery is no less true today. Currently in Canada there is outrage over the use of “robocalling” (automated telephone messages) to influence and in some cases suppress votes for given candidates on election day. Voter suppression works by determining which voters are likely to vote for a rival party, and then pretending to be calling from the rival party’s headquarters with an insulting and annoying message, perhaps deliberately waking up the targeted person at night. It is a way of disaffecting such voters and getting them to decide not to vote for that rival party and perhaps not to vote at all. Another tactic is to pretend to be an elections officer informing all voters in a given area that the polling station has changed its location.

Analogous techniques were used to get Richard Nixon elected in the previous century, as Republican “dirty tricks” operatives such as Donald Segretti would discredit rival candidate Edward Muskie by sending out slanderous messages purporting to come from his office, so that he was viewed as the author of the slanders.

In today’s world the computer-assisted knowledge about people’s tastes and proclivities, derived from search engines and robotic recording of the sites visited through the use of a given computer allow for sophisticated profiling where a person and a given computer can be matched. Use of Facebook, Twitter and the like provide those with the appropriate technical knowledge the opportunity to build profiles of individuals that can be used for targeting them with messages designed to appeal to their profile for commercial or political purposes.

In 1980 Ellul lectured about the coming recording of human deeds and misdeeds in a way that would never be effaced, and how this might affect human behaviour. He saw a time coming when “happy forgetfulness” would be a thing of the past. Today



already some Facebook users have reason to worry about how some earlier indiscretions, recorded for amusement among friends, might be used by hostile groups to discredit them later should they seek political office. Politicians have had reason to regret some of their Twitter messages that later became public. Hostile propaganda can be expected to seize upon anything that will discredit individuals seen as a threat to powerful interests. Eventually the effect of such propaganda will be to reduce our ability to communicate spontaneously with our friends, especially so as the post 9/11 mood has allowed governments to practice unprecedented surveillance on ordinary citizens.

Not only governments, but unscrupulous private hacking of telephones and computers has given media owners great power to destroy the reputations of politicians or other individuals when they see it as in their interest to do so. The unfolding saga of Rupert Murdoch's power through his huge worldwide media holdings is providing insight into this, as the scandals associated with *News of the World* have come to light and an embarrassed Murdoch directed the paper to cease to exist.

There are other areas where age-old propaganda techniques reappear in a way adapted to the latest technology in the current century. Product placement, the practice of including products in a movie or television production so that viewers will unconsciously link the product to the setting, and presumably become favourably disposed to it, is widespread in North America today. The practice of government or corporations making videos that have the appearance of independently produced news reports but are actually tilted to favour the government department or corporation in question is another example of a surreptitious way of influencing the public. The Tea Party movement in the United States, very conservative-libertarian, may have the appearance of a spontaneous, grass-roots movement, but behind it is funding by the Koch brothers, David and Charles, who have energy and other interests that they would like to see protected from adverse government regulation or taxation. The general practice of using other organizations as a front for one's own interests began already in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, but as the public relations industry has grown and prospered, so has the practice of disguising sources of information and persuasion.

The flip side of positive propaganda is the negative one of curtailing information that might adversely affect a corporation's fortunes or a government's ability to rule in ways that it sees fit. Currently in Canada the federal Conservative government led by Prime Minister Stephen Harper has clamped down on access of journalists to government scientists - so much so that recently it came to light that "minders" would be assigned to them when they attended conferences and the like where they might be interviewed by media. One may recall how during the Cold War I.F. Stone thwarted government attempts to persuade the U.S. public that a test ban treaty with the USSR couldn't work because too many listening posts would be required to detect an underground test. Stone interviewed a government seismologist who showed how one such test was in fact picked up by their own listening posts at over a thousand miles distance, completely discrediting the official story.

The force and techniques of propaganda are still around and evidently increasing since the last century, as many other examples could show. But so also are techniques for combating this propaganda. The question, to which we now turn, is whether the latter can and will be effectively employed. Once again, Ellul has some sobering thoughts to bear upon his question.

## II

In the 20<sup>th</sup> C. much effort was expended among progressive groups to counter the trend toward monopoly or oligopoly of the major news media. These efforts largely failed and Rupert Murdoch has gained enormous influence in Britain and the United States with ownership of the high-end *Times* of London and the *Wall Street Journal*, as well as the low-brow but mass appeal media that include the *Sun* and the *News of the World* in Britain and Fox News in the U.S.

The arrival of the Internet has given a widespread opportunity for voices dissenting from mainstream media to be heard. Some impressive work has been done on sites like Truthout, Altnet, Consortium News, TomDispatch and by individual bloggers to counteract the pictures of reality supplied by the dominant media. As an example, one regularly sees in the mainstream press discussion of a pre-emptive Israeli attack on Iran, without serious questioning of the assumption that Iran is seeking to build a nuclear bomb. The assumption deserves to be questioned, as the International Atomic Energy Agency report of

November, 2011, stops well short of such a conclusion. The translation or mistranslation of one of Ahmadjinedad's statements, that Israel was destined to be "wiped off the map," is likewise misleading in sounding like a call to arms rather than a prediction of what fate has in store.

The hold of the major media on younger people of university age has decreased over the decades, as social media take up more of their attention. The power of independent communication methods made itself felt with the Occupy Wall Street movement that began in September 2011. Major media ignored the movement until sheer numbers and police arrests forced them to cover the actions. Protests were directed against an array of injustices, among them a system where banks and the investment community can get bailouts when they are financially over-extended as a result of gambling with fancy packages of mixed risk mortgage-backed securities. Ordinary investors were misled about the degree of risk, and pension funds suffered losses, whereas the financial industry in some cases profited from the collapse of poisonous mortgage securities by engaging in bets against them through a device known as "credit default swaps."

The problem, well recognized by Ellul, is in sustaining people's attention. The injustices of the financial system have been described but as Ellul noted in *The Political Illusion* the pure fact has no power on its own. It has to be "elaborated with symbols before it can emerge and be recognized as public opinion." As Ellul observed "Only

propaganda can make a fact arouse public opinion, only propaganda can force the crowd's wandering attention to stop and become fixed on some event...<sup>173</sup>

Back in 1980, Ellul drew attention in his IEP lectures to the difficulty of sustaining the momentum of environmental concerns. As he pointed out public opinion comes and goes in waves, like fashion, and the petroleum shortage scare in the early 1970's did not prevent the arrival of gas-guzzling SUV's in the 1980s and 1990s.

It seems then that Ellul's diagnosis and prognosis of social action to bring about a more just and sustainable society has to involve the kind of image-making and dupery that those who profit from socially dysfunctional activities engage in. This conclusion is unwelcome, because it suggests an end-justifying-the-means approach that is ethically unsatisfactory. Several things need to be said about this:

1. Not all image-making is unacceptably and misleadingly simplistic. The Occupy movement's attention to the apparently different rules for the 1% as against the 99% is an effective attention retainer that has a reasonable basis in reality.

2. Abandonment of the high ground in the unequal battle by seekers of justice against exploiters is tactically inadvisable, because the privileged class will seize upon any moral deviousness and compromises to discredit the reformers. Sure, they may be much more devious themselves but who will tell the people about this? You may reach a few with your message, but your opponents will reach many more. The example of Julian Assange has shown how the messages of the WikiLeaks that he created can be drowned out in the media by attention to his own reported improprieties or worse in his private life. The ability of the dominant powers to repackage imagery of a given kind in ways that have an opposite impact should not be underestimated. The WikiLeaks revelations allegedly made by PFC Bradley Manning, dealing with U.S. actions in Iraq and Afghanistan gave viewers a glimpse of the sordid side of

such actions, as video footage (later dubbed "Collateral Murder") from an Apache helicopter showed the shooting and killing of civilians, including news reporters, a woman and two children, one of whom was to survive. The WikiLeaks commentary accompanying the sequence has been faulted on the ground that it did not give adequate attention to background context and to an exchange of gunfire that had taken place earlier and not far from the shown shootings. In this way the footage can be claimed, with some justification, to be propaganda (in not telling the full story). WikiLeaks has also been blamed for revealing the names of people working in secret to bring democracy in Zimbabwe, thereby putting their lives at risk and setting back the chances for democracy in that country. Manning and anyone following in his footsteps has then to face the branding of himself as a traitor to his country. Curiously, the public appears able to accept Daniel Ellsberg as a hero for leaking the Pentagon Papers revealing the deceptions about the prospects for victory in Vietnam, whereas that possibility for Manning and his similar revelations about Afghanistan and Iraq seems to have been thoroughly suppressed in mainstream media discussions.

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<sup>173</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Political Illusion*, (New York: Random House Vintage Edition V-812, 1972),

3. There are alternative, clearly ethical strategies for combating unethical propaganda. One of these is education. Informing young people especially about the different ways in which people are duped and enslaved by the well-developed techniques of propaganda is an important step towards liberation. Propaganda unmasked is to a large extent propaganda that has been neutralized. A lot can be accomplished through education, but the educators will have to be alive to the latest techniques and strategies employed by the propagandists, and this will involve time and effort.

Another ethical strategy is the formation of educational groups. One person is less effective than a group at analyzing propaganda and communicating the results to wide audiences. Jacques Ellul and Bernard Charbonneau are good role models for this kind of organization as well as for their teachings and writings. The opportunities in today's world for communication through social media are enormous, and a perceptible change has taken place in the information and propaganda environment as a result. What the mainstream media may choose to ignore can be archived and re-accessed on one of the alternative Web sites.

But as people enter into a world of mass communication through their own networks it is important for them to learn some principles of ethical communication if their influence is to have lasting value. Ellul has very interesting things to say about this, couched in the language of what a good Christian should do, but non-believers should have little difficulty in adapting his insights to fit their own religious faith or lack of such.

### III

Some remarks Ellul makes in *False Presence of the Kingdom*<sup>174</sup> are interesting for their bearing on ethics in propaganda wars. A central principle of persuasive rhetoric is to provide a credible source in support of one's claims. For this reason it has become fairly common practice for pharmaceutical companies, to take one example, to seek some reputable scientist sign his or her name to a scientific study endorsing a new drug, even though the scientist may have had minimal involvement in the study. Hence the rather scandalous reference to "author to be determined" in the case of some studies.<sup>175</sup> Naturally, anyone who can plausibly show that God endorses some plan or policy will have a lot of persuasive power among believers in God. Yet Ellul emphatically denounces the practice of bringing religion into politics in this way.

There are too many ways in which reasonable and good people can differ in their judgments about the best principles or policies to apply in governing a country. To present religion in a way that makes it seem to provide unequivocal support for one

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<sup>174</sup> Jacques Ellul, *False Presence of the Kingdom*, trans. C. Edward Hopkin (New York: The Seabury Press, 1972).

<sup>175</sup> A Carleton University philosophy colleague, Rebecca Kukla, brought this issue to my attention in her 2007 Marston LaFrance lecture at Carleton.

and only one of a contested set of political choices would be to falsify religion. As Ellul remarks, “The Church, and Christians generally, have clearly no competence in economic and political problems properly so called.”<sup>176</sup> The strategic move of enlisting Church authority may achieve some success at gaining followers for a cause, but it mixes up the proper roles of both religion and politics when this is done. Policies are disputable, but a commitment to the basic premises of a given faith is all or nothing. The effect of treating politics as one would religion is to demonize those with whom one disagrees. This prevents proper dialogue from taking place. How do you reason with the devil? Similarly, treating religion as one would politics turns the religious so-called commitment into something less than full commitment. It is of course important to have a dialogue about religion as well. But it is not the kind of thing that lends itself to continual reassessment in the light of changing fortunes, as we may infer from the case of Job.

A central passage where Ellul sets out his teaching on Christian duty in connection with the use of agitative propaganda for advancing a cause is the following:

The appeal to public opinion looks like a good tactic. As a matter of fact, it always results in the frightful entangling of political situations, for when public opinion is aroused by means which are nothing more than propaganda it is no longer capable of rendering political judgment. All it can do is follow the leaders.<sup>177</sup>

It is normal, he writes, for those who see the “struggle of interests and classes not only as a fact but as something to be desired, as something favourable, as an instrument of war” to want to stir up public opinion. But “for those who are exercising on earth the ministry of reconciliation [this tactic] is inadmissible.”<sup>178</sup>

These are strong words, telling the Christian that propagandistic methods to advance a cause about which he or she may be passionate are not permissible. Ellul realizes that by denying his Christian audience the path of propaganda he will be interpreted as a defender of the status quo. His defence against such a charge is that there are other avenues for bringing about liberating political changes, or as he puts it “another mode of entry for Christians.” Here it is important to recall the context of his writing, which was in the immediate aftermath of the bloody Algerian war of independence, in 1963. The passions set in motion by unrestrained propaganda by the different factions supporting or opposing French domination there became an obstacle to finding a solution with hope of a lasting peace. In that light the passion of his following statement becomes understandable: “That is where we should apply *all* the thought, all the charity, all the creativity, all the insight of which Christians are capable.”<sup>179</sup>

As I understand Ellul, he is not saying that the Christian should eschew effective rhetoric for awakening public opinion to injustices. On the contrary, it is important

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<sup>176</sup> Ellul, *False Presence of the Kingdom*, 184.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 194-5.

to speak out against trends that may have disastrous outcomes, to warn people when they ignore dangerous looming threats to future wellbeing. All of this is a matter of enlightenment. The problem comes at the point where the public has become engaged and passions are taking over on a given issue. At that point the role of the Christian (and, I would say, decent people whether or not they happen to embrace the Christian faith) should be to preserve the openness and respect toward those one judges to be “the enemy” on a given social issue, with a view to ensuring that a full dialogue is preserved and an opponent’s position is not misconstrued.<sup>180</sup>

The foregoing remarks are of a general nature, and it will be helpful to illustrate some of the problems of engaging in ethical persuasion, as against unethical propaganda, with reference to a particular example. I choose that of bottled water, a matter of considerable environmental concern, because of the difficulties posed by empty plastic bottles accumulating in landfill, producing chemicals than can leach into and contaminate a water supply. There are also costs of collection, transportation, and in the case of recycling the costs of transforming the plastic into the same or some other usable product. While there may well be occasions for legitimate need for bottled water, in most industrialized countries the water can be more efficiently delivered, and in a more environmentally friendly way, by a system of pipes from water source to treatment centre and from there to homes, schools, office buildings, etc.

With this very brief background, I want to turn to a recent exchange in a magazine and widely circulating newspaper in Canada in which the Roman Catholic faith and its post-2007 teachings were brought into play in controversy regarding the purchase of bottled water. It started with the perception by a philosophy professor at a British Columbia Catholic college that those opposed to the use of bottled water provided by private companies for profit were demonizing those who make and consume these products, and that this was not appropriate charitable behaviour for a Christian. Treating water consumption from plastic bottles as heinous and sinful as distinct from an unsound ecological choice was excessive, in his view. This seems like a good Ellulian move, but he took the further step of making some tendentious interpretations (to my mind, at least) of a passage in scripture to support his case. His argument was picked up by an executive in a water bottling company, Nestle Waters, in Toronto, where attempts were being made to ban bottled water from Catholic schools. He used those arguments in a letter to the Toronto *Globe and Mail* with the evident intention of promoting a more favourable view of his company’s products. I then reacted to what I saw as propaganda supporting an environmentally unsound activity and had my own letter published the next day. This led to a direct response by the executive to me, in a letter delivered by snail mail, with a copy sent to the publisher of the *Globe and Mail*. I responded by e-mail to the executive and the newspaper publisher, citing

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<sup>180</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup> Century cleric and philosopher Richard Whately had similar views about the ethical conduct of controversial discourse. I describe his ideas in *Propaganda and the Ethics of Persuasion*, (Peterborough: Broadview, 2002), 164 ff.

information about the harms of plastic bottles in landfill, costs of recycling etc. The executive has promised information about how recycling in Canada is superior to that in other places, and I await that information before saying anything more about the substantial, underlying issue.

I use the example to illustrate Ellul's point that while strong moral suasion might be important and justifiable in a case such as this, the enlisting of the religious language of sin to demonize opponents crosses a line that should not be crossed as long as the issue is sufficiently confused in people's minds that they are unsure about the facts and rightly see their individual action as affecting the public good only in a very minor way. Quite apart from the matter of charity and simply from a practical point of view, one is likely to be a more effective persuader if one treats an opponent as a good, decent person who happens to be informationally challenged on a particular issue than if one treats the person as evil and sinful.

The passage from scripture that the professor, C.S. Morrissey, chose to cite was about Jesus accepting water from a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (Jn. 4-5, 15). He was breaking a Jewish taboo in doing this but in Morrissey's view if Jesus's request has any political implication, "it would be that Jesus respects private property."<sup>181</sup> In the same way that Jesus broke the taboo of his time, Morrissey says, "we should not endorse the bottled-water crusaders' misguided notion that to drink from a corporate bottle makes us despicable and ritually impure." As a check on the tendency of people to condemn others, this seems to me defensible.

But to quote Morrissey's remarks, as did John B. Challinor, Director of Corporate Affairs for Nestle Waters Canada, in the context of a policy decision by a local school board seems to me to go beyond the meaning and intention of those remarks.<sup>182</sup> He quoted Morrissey as referring to how the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church said that the provision of water may be justly "entrusted to the private sector." That says nothing about the specifics of bottled water delivery and the selective presentation of this one fact gives the impression that Church teaching is on Nestle's side, when a full appreciation of the ecological facts might well lead to the opposite conclusion.

Looking at this situation, and wanting to put readers straight on the matter of this distortion, what is an Ellulian to do? I believe Ellul himself was sufficiently concerned about the limited space and energy on our planet to want to encourage measures that would preserve and conserve our land for productive use, reduce air and water pollution, etc. So much so that, while combating religious zealotry on a policy matter such as anti-bottling, he might otherwise have favoured strong habit-cultivating measures such

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<sup>181</sup> C.S. Morrissey, "Confusing economic ideology and the Church's social witness," *B.C. Catholic*, December 11, 2010.

<sup>182</sup> John Challinor, "Water into whine," letter, *The Globe and Mail*, April 20, 2012. See also: Randal Marlin, "Bottled Sin," *The Globe and Mail*, April 21, 2012.

In response, John Challinor II sent a letter by regular post to Professor Randal Marlin, April 23, 2012, received April 30, 2012.

as the Toronto School Board was considering. For those who want to learn more about the specifics of this issue some information published in the *San Francisco Chronicle* should be interesting and useful.<sup>183</sup>

The lessons I want to draw from this exchange are the following. First, in today's highly propagandized environment, knowledgeable people may need to be careful how they argue, because their remarks may be seized upon by special interest groups to promote business or political activities that their arguments were not intended to promote.

Secondly, before challenging the spokesperson for a major corporation make sure that you don't misstate any facts or make false claims, because any such mistake will be seized on and your credibility will be destroyed. Fortunately, the Internet has provided the huge service of making a super-abundance of factual material available. How long this will last, I don't know, but while the Internet is as it is the ordinary citizen finally has an effective way of countering propaganda of many different kinds and from many different sources.

Thirdly, do not overstate the religious dimensions of a given issue. I believe that a good Christian should have as an ideal that of promoting the common good, and it does make sense to encourage others to make less use of plastic bottles, but turning users into subjects fit for ostracism strikes me as at odds with Christian charity and excessive. As in so many things the best approach is to create awareness of the facts pertaining to such use. Kierkegaard was very clear about this. You don't engage in effective persuasion by telling another person that they sin when they drink bottled water. Much better to talk about so-and-so who discovered certain environmental costs to bottled water and who as a result reduced his or her consumption of it.

Behind all this trend toward bottled water consumption is the propensity of propagandees to be mesmerized by brand names, like Nestle, that have become so much a part of their lives. The myth of progress colours their thinking to the point where they feel that somehow, science will find a solution to landfill problems, to pollution and contamination problems. Bottled water is indeed a convenience, so that there is a desire among users to believe that no harm is caused from its use, and statistics about recycling efforts give a further sense that science is solving whatever problems bottled water caused some time in the past or in some other country. Ellul knew all about the myths and preconceptions favouring the propagandee's acceptance of consumption practices that run counter to the public good. His views are helpful for counteracting propaganda in the 21<sup>st</sup> century no less, and possibly more than, the previous century.

I've chosen this example because it provides an illustration of some of the pitfalls of engaging in public controversy on a matter where propaganda plays a role. Some of the lessons can usefully be applied to other issues of even greater moment, such as those of war and peace in the Middle East, injustices in Israel-Palestine relations, etc.

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<sup>183</sup> Jared Blumenfeld & Susan Leal, "The Real Cost of Bottled Water," *The San Francisco Chronicle*, February 18, 2007.



Here Ellul may be right to see the more fundamental question as one of the ability to avoid demonizing opponents as a way of coming to a measure of understanding and empathy, and from there to possible solutions. It helps, to do this, to reflect on how we would react to someone else demonizing us when we happen merely to lack some vital bit of information on an issue.

<http://www.commondreams.org/views07/0218-05.htm>

See also Ecology Center, Berkeley, "Seven Misconceptions about Plastic and Plastic Recycling." Downloaded May 2, 2012. Available at: <http://www.ecologycenter.org/ptf/misconceptions.html>.

## **A Faith Embracing All Creatures: Addressing Commonly Asked Questions about Christian Care for Animals.**

**Edited by Tripp York & Andy Alexis-Baker**

Cascade Books, 2012. 183 pages, pb

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"Meat is murder, milk is rape" is the rallying cry of radical vegetarians and vegans in the developed world. Although the contributors to *A Faith Embracing All Creatures: Addressing Commonly Asked Questions about Christian Care for Animals* never use this phrase, it captures the overall sentiment of the second volume in The Peaceable Kingdom Series by editors Tripp York and Andy Alexis-Baker.

The premise of this book is laid out in the subtitle "addressing commonly asked questions about Christian care for animals." More specifically, the book focuses on common questions modern Christian vegetarians receive about their choice to not eat meat. The book does not cover issues of animal "care" relating to the living conditions of endangered animals or circus animals; creatures bred for pets or held in captivity; protocol surrounding animals kept for experimentation; or even the mass manufacturing process of dairy farms in the United States. Instead, attention to dietary choices

comes across passionately throughout the chapters. Authors are careful to delineate between factory farmed animals slaughtered and consumed and wild animals killed and consumed by indigenous populations who have no other means of survival (p. 68). The authors build their argument for moral, religious vegetarianism using Scriptural exegesis as the starting point.

The injunction to a plant-based diet in Genesis 1:29 is a staple of Christian vegetarian apologetics. Notably, all the authors who make use of this Genesis text take it as a literal record of what actually transpired at the beginning of the world. This is surprising considering the ramifications of interpreting other neighboring parts of Genesis literally, such as the possibility for rampant procreation and planetary domination (Gen. 1:28); male headship (Gen. 3:16) and, of course, the difficulty in reconciling Darwinian evolution with God's compartmentalized creation (Gen. 1). Building a case-for or against-vegetarianism based on select passages in the Bible is problematic because of a profound cultural distance between biblical times and our own world.

While trying to push a vegetarian ideology into Scripture has made some chapters into a sort of interpretive gymnastics (ch. 5), pushing a carnivorous agenda into Scripture is equally absurd. The latter is addressed in chapters refuting claims to meat eating based on the Hebrew sacrificial system (ch. 3), the maritime Galilean community (ch. 6) and St. Paul's words regarding weak faith (ch. 8).

It would seem that in terms of diet, both carnivores and herbivores come out scratch when looking to the Bible for justifications of their eating habits. On both counts Christian ethics cannot rest on Scripture alone when Scripture does not specifically address the complexities of modern food choices. The difference in the use of animals for sustenance occasionally and by a small number of people, who slaughtered their own livestock in the Bible, is not equivalent to the mass-produced animal bodies for food consumed by nearly the entirety of the developed world today. Nonetheless, Christians have very good moral, rational reasons for opposing the slaughter and consumption of animals aside from Scripture. These arguments emerge in the brightest chapter in the book and are especially appealing to vegetarians who most often are advocating and defending their pacifist food choices against secular society, not fellow Jesus-followers.

The most impactful chapter comes late in the book and should be read first in the collection of essays since it contextualizes the urgent situation in which vegetarians-Christian and non-are writing from today. Chapter 11 focuses on animal suffering and factory farming, guiding the reader through the grisly trek that a pig makes from factory farm to dinner plate. Using Catholic social thought to make an argument against cooperation with wrongdoing, John Berkman writes with a prophetic conviction, calling a spade a spade. After enumerating the conditions of animals in factory farm he plainly states, "There's simply no moral justification for continuing to buy and consume cruelty pig meat. Doing so is ignorance, laziness, or gluttony, or perhaps all three" (p. 136). In addition to Berkman's chapter, an essay on ascetic vegetarian practices (ch. 14) round out a Bible-heavy book. Utilizing Scripture, reason and tradition to build a case for vegetarianism balanced the book while also allowing Christians from

any denomination to identify with the overall objective of the collected essays. Yet the vegetarian who is already convinced of her position will be left with many questions.

Some topics that were missing in this edited volume included a serious interrogation of Christian vegetarians on points of the tension between “hospitality” (ch. 7) towards a carnivorous pet and the morally objectionable practice of purchasing pet food with meat in it; the line that each vegetarian draws between creatures we care for and those we kill (i.e. bugs or insects); the implications of a plant-based diet both for the environment, since rice is a major contributor to carbon emissions, and for the often unjust working conditions of other humans that harvest grain, vegetables and fruits to be exported to the developed world. Deep reflections are often beyond the questions Christian vegetarians field when defending their food choices and therefore this book cannot be culpable for what it did not set out to do, but vegetarians and vegans need to ask themselves further and more reflective questions. Moving beyond defense and towards offense would have been a boon to persuasive arguments for carnivores to become vegetarian and for the vegetarians reading the book—who are surely a majority of the audience—to re-evaluate their commitment to animal care. These perhaps could be addressed in another volume and have certainly been picked up in the various publications of the authors as a collective.

Overall, the book accomplished its goals on several fronts. Its short chapters were easy to read and the bibliography helpful; it covered a breadth of troublesome biblical passages and balanced biblical ethics with reason and tradition; and it had an impressive diversity of established and new scholars and intellectuals from a variety of racial and denomination backgrounds. This book is a step towards the difficult and emotional discussion of animal treatment in the developed world. Especially where Christians are concerned, a faith that looks first to the God-ordained meaning of each creature, rather than an anthropocentric (or even biocentric) view of creation is essential. The pilgrim journey to Christ cannot be strewn with the dead bodies of sentient beings consumed and discarded for human convenience. Instead, a gradualist or virtue ethics approach allows each disciple to move closer to moral betterment. It is time for Christians to reflect: “if we have been made ‘in God’s image,’ may we not be expected to live by the law God gave us, rather than pursue the cannibalistic patterns loose in Nature?” (p. 147).

## Understanding Jacques Ellul

by Jeffrey P. Greenman, Read Mercer Schuchardt, & Noah J. Toly  
Cascade Books, 2012. 184 pp. pb.

**Reviewed by Jacob Van Vleet**

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Three Wheaton College (Illinois) professors, have provided us with the latest contribution to Ellul scholarship, in their book, *Understanding Jacques Ellul*. This work is intended as an introduction to Ellul, written for those first encountering him. In a systematic and clear manner, Greenman, Schuchardt and Toly offer some of the most important themes weaving throughout Ellul's sociological and theological writings. The work is presented in eight chapters, each representing a key concept, theme, or cluster of ideas essential to understanding Ellul.

Chapter one gives a succinct overview of Ellul's life and thought, highlighting his conversion, political and ecclesiological involvement, and his academic career. There are two particular strengths of this chapter. First, the authors correctly present Ellul as one who was equally influenced by both Karl Marx and Karl Barth. This influence cannot be underestimated, and is absolutely vital when approaching Ellul. Second, the authors remind the reader that Ellul was and is considered an "outsider" to academic philosophers, sociologists, and theologians. His work, though scholarly and profoundly insightful, is unorthodox, idiosyncratic, and always challenges the status quo. For these reasons, the authors remind us, Ellul ever remains on the "margins" of institutional academia.

In the second and third chapters, Ellul's understanding of technique, media, and propaganda are introduced, along with their ethical and spiritual entailments. When explaining concepts such as these, it is necessary to provide updated examples and illustrations that clarify Ellul's arguments and worldview. The authors succeed brilliantly in this regard, showing us that Ellul's thought is more relevant now than ever.

Ellul's sociological and theological conclusions regarding the city, politics, and economics are presented in the fourth and fifth chapters. In their discussion of the city, the authors rely primarily on Ellul's *The Meaning of the City*, while utilizing a "miracle and martyrdom rubric" as well as an insightful distinction between "faithfulness and success" as explanatory tools. By employing these tools, Greenman, Schuchardt and Toly provide much needed clarity and insight into Ellul's understanding of the city. The authors also explore Ellul's analyses of political and economic systems, explicating his views on capitalism, socialism, and the relationship between the political and economic spheres. The high point of this section is found in the discussion of the relationship between money and necessity, a helpful but all too brief consideration.

In the sixth chapter, Ellul's view of scripture is examined. Here Ellul's idiosyncratic and unpredictable hermeneutical methodology is explained in the best of all possible ways: by using various examples from Ellul's own work. This gives the reader an illuminating glimpse into Ellul's understanding of the Word as *living* and *active*; as the

spoken and existentially encountered Word, which continues to transgress traditional hermeneutical boundaries.

Ellul's views on morality and ethics are the subjects of the seventh chapter. The strength herein is the discussion of Ellul's distinction between "technological morality" and "Christian ethics." The first is a moral system bound to quantification, instrumental human value, and ultimately, necessity; the latter is guided by faith, intrinsic human worth, and is motivated by an absolute freedom in Christ. The authors explain: "Following Barth's lead, Ellul affirms that genuine freedom is always freedom for God and is always oriented toward service of God" (135).

*Understanding Jacques Ellul* concludes with a discussion of "exotic involvement" as an explanatory descriptor for Ellul's unique life and work. For the authors, "exotic involvement" is comprised, on the one hand, of Ellul's outsider approach and reception in academia and activism. On the other, it suggests an unconventional posture toward the world, including a radical openness to the voice of God, "... allowing God, and not the world, to set the agenda for reflection and action" (160).

Greenman, Schuchardt, and Toly have provided the reader with a highly useful and insightful presentation of key themes, concepts, and arguments found in Ellul's work. The primary criticism of this engaging book is that it is too brief, often merely scratching the surface. The authors don't interact much if at all with Ellul's many essays and articles and their discussions do not acknowledge or build on the widely available work of Ellul scholars such as David Gill (Ellul views on Scripture, ethics), Carl Mitcham (technology), Cliff Christians and Randal Marlin (communications, propaganda), Darrell Fasching (religion, ethics), Bill Vanderburg (technology), David Lovekin (philosophy, technology, methodology), Daniel Clendenin (methodology), Andrew Goddard (ethics), Patrick Chastenet (politics), et al. Furthermore, the authors do not discuss Ellul's views of universal salvation, non-violence and they only superficially discuss Ellul's concept of dialectic - ideas I believe are fundamental to Ellul's work.

Criticisms notwithstanding, the authors succeed in leaving the reader wanting more discussion and explanation of Ellul's ideas and theories. And this was precisely the authors' intention: to encourage the reader to excitedly delve deeper into Ellul's inspiring activism and prophetic scholarship. Undoubtedly, *Understanding Jacques Ellul* accomplishes this important task.

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## The Sacred, the Secular and the Holy:

The Significance of Jacques Ellul's Post-Christian Theology for Global Ethics

by Darrell J. Fasching

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Technique, Globalization and Apocalypse

In the beginning was the word, and the word gave birth to technique, for through language humans are able to imagine new worlds and devise the means create them. Among the earliest techniques to be invented were the techniques of agriculture which gave birth to the city through the domestication of plants and animals. Technique gave birth to the city, and then, in turn, the city became the midwife of all further techniques of the human, making possible over the centuries the emergence of the technological phenomenon, the comparative selection of the most efficient techniques in every area of human development. And with the self augmenting autonomy of technique came globalization –a global totalism that, according to Ellul, threatens the disappearance of our very humanity. What drives this totalism is the sacralization of technique which domesticates us to its necessities by promising us utopia. Seduced by the utopian ideology of the technical society that promises to fulfill our every hope and dream we have surrendered our freedom and autonomy. So Ellul tells us: "The stains of human passion will be lost amid the chromium gleam" and we will have the luxury of a "useless revolt and of an acquiescent smile (*The Technological Society*, Vintage Books, Random House, 1964, pp.426-427)."

Globalization is the product of the growing interdependence of cultures through emerging global techno-economic and socio-cultural networks that the technological phenomenon requires. This process generates a generalized apocalyptic anxiety –an uneasy sense that the world as we have known it is coming to an end. In a world of instant global communication and jet travel, time and space shrink and force a new awareness upon all the inhabitants of the earth. For these networks transcend local and national boundaries, and in the process they decenter and so challenge all previous forms of authority and identity, both religious and non-religious.

Turning and turning in the widening gyre

The falcon cannot hear the falconer;

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,

The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere

The ceremony of innocence is drowned;

The best lack all conviction, while the worst

Are full of passionate intensity.

("The Second Coming" p. 91, in *The Selected Poems and Two Plays of William Butler Yeats*, edited by M.L. Rosenthal (New York: Collier Books, 1962).

William Butler Yeats, in his poem *The Second Coming*, written in just after WWI, aptly captures the apocalyptic postmodern mood created by an emerging global civilization. Yeats' description became even more apt after WWII, for the appearance of the atomic bomb united the world in a common dread –the dread of an apocalyptic global nuclear annihilation. After two world wars, the apocalyptic anxieties of decentered civilizations, each seeking to shore up its sacred way of life against the further invasion by other sacred ways of life via global media, global corporations and global travel, gave birth to new age of global terrorism. The global terror of nuclear annihilation of the late 20th century driven by the standoff between the USA and the USSR gave way to new terrorist permutations. The most notorious of the new terrorists, Osama bin Laden, who sought to explain his 9-11 attack on the twin towers of New York city in terms of the sacred and the profane, arguing that his goal was a global campaign to put a stop to the violation of the sacred lands of Islam by the profane West.

Western colonialism and two world wars forced globalization on human consciousness. In his 1979 book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (University of Minnesota Press, translation 1984, French 1979) Jean-Francois Lyotard provided a vocabulary by which we could explain to ourselves what was happening. Decentering, he said was a mark of the collapse of the world's great metanarratives.

Even before we humans knew we lived on a globe we sought a global understanding of our humanity. As with the ancient philosophy of Stoicism's attempt to foster a global cosmopolitanism by asserting that to be human was to share a universal "logos" or "reason," the great religions also aspired to universality suggesting that what all humans have in common is God, or Brahman or Tao or Buddha nature (cosmic interdependent co-arising) etc. These religions offered what Lyotard called metanarratives (cosmic myths) that formed transcultural civilizations: Hindu civilization, Buddhist civilization, Jewish, Christian and Islamic civilizations. And then there is the most recent metanarrative - the utopian myth of scientific progress (whether in its Capitalist and Marxist versions) which came in the wake of the Enlightenment and secularization.

Each of these civilizational metanarratives provided a normative center defining what it means to be human. Globalization forces the clash of all such metanarratives and as a result, decenters all of them. Globalization and postmodern culture are two sides of the same coin in which apocalyptic rhetoric aptly catches the mood of the collapse of these metanarratives. The great cities of the world have become microcosms of the religious and cultural diversity of the globe. In the wake of WWII, the borders of civilizations interpenetrated as a result of mass media, global corporations and international travel and provoked and expressed this apocalyptic panic in anti-colonialist reactions to the totalism of dominant metanarratives, often turning poetic apocalyptic



angst into literal apocalyptic scenarios in places like Iraq, Afghanistan and New York City (Sept. 11, 2001).

Globalization created the postmodern city. Our great cities have become decentered or rather pluricentered. The collapse of a metanarratives does not mean they disappear but that they function differently. All the great metanarratives still exist but now they are typically found side by side in every great city. They do not provide a center for the life of the culture as a whole but for individuals and their subcultures. Consequently the public order of postmodern cities has no single sacred temple at their center, spinning a grand all-encompassing narrative which holds all things together. Rather, like Disneyworld and Epcot, different historical and cultural worlds exist side by side in postmodern cities without an integrating center. They are held together instead by technological networks operating behind the scenes. Ultrapostmodern cities like Las Vegas reveal most obviously the underlying reality of all great cities in a global civilization. The city has become eclectic and normless.

Nietzsche, in his vivid parable in *The Gay Science* (1882), tells of a madman entering the city square to announce the "death of God," suggesting that this is like the earth being cut loose from its sun: "Whither are we moving now,? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there any up or down left? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? (*The Gay Science*, 1882 in *The Portable Nietzsche*, pp 95-96, ed. Walter Kaufman, Viking Press, 1954 & 1968) Expressing the sense of a loss of center that came with the emerging global consciousness of the 19th century, nurtured by the invention of the social sciences, especially critical historiography and cross-cultural ethnography (anthropology), all metanarratives seem to him to have collapsed. Each culture had believed its metanarrative described the normative sacred order of the universe. Now, laid out side by side by the techniques of socio-historical consciousness, their very diversity showed each to be a relative human construct. The social sciences did not just report the death of God, they provided the knife with which God was murdered. In such an apocalyptic world, Nietzsche argued, norms would have to be replaced by the will to power and the transvaluation of all values.

Nietzsche said his madman/prophet came too soon but the reality he described was on its way. By 1965 that reality became manifest when the first human beings walked in space and for the first time viewed for themselves the truth of the world as a globe—sending back images from space for all the earth to share. Cut loose from the earth these astronauts experienced Nietzsche's vertigo. Free floating in space, tethered only to their spacecraft, which way was up? Which way was down? The integral links between technique, globalization and apocalypse are summed up in this image. The movement from the Book of Revelation's description of the order of the cosmos collapsing as the sky disappears "like a scroll rolling up" (Rev 6: 12-14) to the loss of horizon by the early spacewalkers breaking free of the earth's gravity and the postmodern sense of loss a center in our great cities around the world sums up the history of civilization in a nut shell.

## Ellul's Post-Christian Ethics –Deconstructing the Sacred

Ellul's work can be understood as an exercise in postmodern, post-Christian theology. *As Lyotard explained, postmodern does not express an historical period so much as a style of thinking.* If postmodern represents a decentered style of thought, post-Christian, represents a decentered style of thinking about the role of Christianity in society. Its role is not to dominate from the center, creating a "Holy Roman Empire" but to subvert throughout the diaspora and transform from within through decentering strategies. Globalization tends to make decentered thinking a dominant trait of our time, nevertheless such thinking can be found here and there throughout history and is at least as ancient as the story of Babel. Indeed, biblical thought tends to be decentered from the very beginning of the Torah, in the book of Genesis, which offers us two alternative stories of creation. This decentering is repeated when Christianity offers us four competing gospels. Perhaps Origen was right when he said that it was the Holy Spirit that put contradictions in the stories of the Bible in order to force us beyond the most superficial literal meaning of the Bible to grasp the deepest level of spiritual meaning.

Tension, contradiction, deconstruction –these are the fruits of the Christian way of life. In the second century Tatian constructed the Diatessaron, the first attempt to harmonize the four gospels into one story. This attempt was rejected by the early church, preferring tension to synthesis. As in the Christian Gospels so in the Christian life, for Ellul the point is not to resolve the tensions but introduce tension and maladjustment as a limit on the totalism of the technicist way of life. Ellul's style of thinking is decentered through and through. His work as a sociologist and as a theologian seemed at first to be the product of dual personalities unrelated to each other. But gradually the two separate authorships were revealed to be part of a larger strategy not of synthesis but of deliberate tension and contradiction. Ellul describes his total critique of technological civilization as a "science of the city" that occurs at the disjunctive juncture of his sociology and his theology. Like Kierkegaard, his authorship offers a thesis and an antithesis but no synthesis. His "science of the city" interfaces a sociology of the sacred with a theology of the holy.

The key distinctions of this science –the sacred, the secular and the holy –were developed between 1946 and 1954. They evolved from the *Theological Foundation of Law* (1946) through *The Presence of the Kingdom* (1948) to the linking of the sacred and the demonic in *Man and Money* (1953 - dates for the original French editions). But it is only two decades later, in his 1973 book *The New Demons (Les Nouveaux Possedes)*, that he maps out the terrain of the sacred and the holy in a way that decisively illuminates his strategy of juxtaposing the sacral necessities of technology with the desacralizing or sanctifying power of the scriptural Word of God theologically explicated. I consider *The New Demons* the Rosetta Stone of Ellul's authorship –for the first time bringing sociology and theology together in one book. Yet his purpose is not synthesis but the creating of a tension between the two by adding a "Coda for Christians" to his sociological analysis of the religiosity of the technological society.

All of this prepares the way for his crowning theological work, *Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation* (*L'Apocalypse: architecture en mouvement*, 1976) where he tells us that the Greek word for judgment, *krisis*, means "to separate" which is the act by which God creates –separating light from darkness, the heavens from earth, land from water, etc. Separation decenters and deconstructs our worlds, the way God's judgment of Babel decentered and deconstructed the totalism of Babel's one language and singular technological project. The *New Demons* and *Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation* show that Ellul's apocalyptic thought grasped the task of postmodern "deconstruction" in a unique brand of religious postmodernism.

In *Philosophy in a Time of Terror* (University of Chicago Press, 2003), Giovanna Borradori published interviews with Jurgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida, followed by her own commentary on each. Borradori summarizes Derrida's deconstructive project as involving four steps: (1) identify the dualisms operative in the text and in society (the one leads to the other), (2) identify the hierarchy of the dualisms in the text and in society, (3) invert or subvert the dualistic hierarchies by showing what would happen if the negative and positive sides of each dualism were reversed as a way of exposing the ideology of the will to power involved in the dualistic classifications, and finally (4) produce a third term "which complicates the original load-bearing structure beyond recognition" and so deforms and reforms it into a new liberating configuration. This is an apt description of Ellul's science of the city as well. Steps one and two are what Ellul accomplishes when he analyzes the sacralization of technique sociologically, dividing the world into sacred and profane. Steps three and four are accomplished when he responds theologically and ethically and transgresses, and so sanctifies and secularizes the sacred in the name of the holy, introducing apocalyptic hope and the possibility of freedom and justice into the technicist society.

Justice is not a word that immediately comes to mind when I think of postmodernism. For years I dismissed deconstruction as irresponsible relativism. In the hands of many of its practitioners it probably is. But I changed my mind on this with respect to Derrida after I began reading some of his later work which is deeply indebted to Immanuel Levinas. Derrida's later work is dominated by the themes of grace (the gift), hospitality, the messianic - and also the surprising insistence that justice is the one thing that cannot be deconstructed (*Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, edited by Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld and David Gray Carlson, (Routledge, 1992), Chp. 1). The law, he said, can be deconstructed but only in the name of the demand for justice. In fact Derrida insists that justice is the driving force of deconstruction - they are, he argues, one and the same. For Derrida, justice, like Ellul's apocalypse of the holy, comes from the outside, as a gift - a gift that subverts all dualisms and makes new beginnings possible. Ellul is a religious postmodernist. His religious postmodernism is able to deconstruct the endless dialectic of absolutism and relativism (the totalist temptations that feed each other in a technicist civilization) that plagues secular postmodernism and so exorcise the "new demons" of the postmodern world. (See my book, *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia?*

(SUNY, 1993) which argues that this dialectic of absolutism and relativism is the underlying dialectic generating the Janus faced bipolar sacral myth of apocalypse/utopia that feeds our embrace of technical necessities. See also, *Religion and Globalization*, Oxford University Press, 2008 –coauthored with John Esposito and Todd Lewis)

For Ellul, the sacred makes a virtue out of necessity in which our utopian hopes deliver us into some literal apocalyptic self-destructive destiny. Today, technique replaces nature as that new realm of necessity that surrounds and overwhelms us and on which we depend for our very existence. It takes the place of nature as the realm of the sacred –the object of our fascination and dread. So a technical society creates a morality that both requires our obedience (always choosing the most efficient solution) and helps us adjust to those requirements by fostering the political illusion of being in control, even as psychological techniques are used to enable us to be "well adjusted" to our society's requirements. The sacred promotes a morality of efficiency under the guise of a rational ethical system which demands our obedience in order to fulfill our wildest hopes and dreams for utopia.

Given the totalism of technicism in an age of globalization, we might wonder whether a Christian can (or even should) cooperate with others, religious and non-religious, in creating a global ethic? Ellul's understanding of Christian ethics opens up a clear path for such trans-cultural and even interreligious cooperation. Decentering goes to the heart of Ellul's view of Christian ethics. Ellul argues that ethics must never become a rational system to which we conform. Ethics does not require unquestioning obedience but the questioning of unquestioning obedience. For Ellul, there is no such thing as a Christian ethic. Christians, like other human beings on the face of the earth, do have a pragmatic need to create an ethic, but such an ethic is always provisional human invention. Christians have used many such human inventions, borrowing from Plato, Aristotle, Kant, etc. But the Christian life is rooted not in some rational system of calculation but in the spontaneous inventiveness of life in Christ, who works in us to will and to do (Philippians 2:13) That inventiveness is the result of the Spirit that blows where it will, so that when we act, it is "I, yet not I, but Christ in me" who acts (Galatians 2:20). Ellul would agree with Augustine -love and do what you will –and also Aquinas, who describes Christian virtue as God working in us without us. The good to be done is God's will as given to me in the moment, in the situation I am confronted with that forces me to invent a response.

Nechama Tec, a sociologist, in her book, *When Light Pierced the Darkness* (Oxford University Press, 1986) studied those who rescued Jews in Poland during the Holocaust. She gives us good insight into ethics as *invention in the moment*. She tried to find the common denominator among all the rescuers. Did they share a common economic status; perhaps a common educational background, or maybe they were all devout church-goers? As it turned out it was none of these things. In fact going to church was more likely to make one anti-Semitic, since "the Jews" were often portrayed as the "bad guys" in the Gospel stories and the sermons based on them. It turned out the one thing she could find that rescuers held in common was a sense of "alienation" –of

being a stranger among one's own. This was hard to isolate because for one person this alienation might be due to having a physical disability which made one feel different than others. For another it might be growing up feeling as if one were the least favored child in the family. And yet another might say he or she grew up feeling less adept at sports than their peers. -and so on.

What is common to all these experiences is "alienation" –the experience of not fitting in and so being an outsider or stranger. Consequently, when strangers showed up at their door looking for rescue these rescuers spontaneously identified with them and took them in without agonizing over the decision. Samuel and Pearl Oliner, in their book, *The Altruistic Personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe* (Free Press, Macmillan, 1988) conducted some 700 interviews trying to understand holocaust rescuers in comparison to their non-rescuing peers. They noted that 90% of the rescuers rescued one or more complete strangers, 76% said their motive was empathy or compassion, often described as an inner compulsion. They note that 70% acted within minutes of being asked for help, and 80% consulted no one.

The rescuers actions reflected the fundamental truth of biblical ethical insight – remember welcome the stranger and love the stranger for "you know how the stranger feels" for you too were once strangers –in the land of Egypt (Exodus 23:9, Deuteronomy 10:19). This call to remember what it is like to be a stranger illuminates the ethical insight essential for the invention of a global ethic.

In the biblical tradition, the most frequent commandment is to welcome the stranger, for by doing so one welcomes God, or God's messiah, or a messenger (angel) of God without knowing it (Genesis 18:1-5; Matt 25:35; Hebrews 13:2). The core of the command "to remember" creates an *empathic analogy*. In different ways we all experience being a stranger at some time in our life (often many times) and so we know what it is like to be a stranger. Jesus' restatement of the Pharisaic teaching, that we ought to do unto others as we would have them do to us, is grounded in this narrative tradition.

The call to remember that we were once strangers is a call that decenters us and our "religion" so that we can grasp the truth of the story of Babel. We do not find God at the center of our society in some sacred temple we have built to celebrate the idolatry of our own identity. That idolatry is built on the presupposition that all of us who share the same language and world view think we can annex God to bless the worship of our own self-image. Given the centrality of the biblical command to welcome the stranger (repeated more often than any other command in the Torah), the moral of the story of Babel is that we find God not through uniformity of thought, belief and technique but through our encounter with the stranger. God confuses the language of the citizens of Babel not to punish them but to redirect their quest. You find God not by building a tower to heaven but by turning to the stranger who does not speak your language and is not like you. God is not found in sameness but in difference. As Isaiah suggests, God is the ultimate stranger whose thoughts are not our thoughts and ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:89).

If we follow Ellul's sociological analysis, in a sacred society one expects to find God at the center, in the sacred temple that reinforces ethnocentric identity. In such a society, all who are the same are sacred and human, all others who are different are profane and less than human. Since we have moral obligations only to other human beings, the stranger can be excluded and dehumanized. But the biblical tradition of the holy is anti-ethnocentric. It decenters our expectations and insists that God cannot be found at the center of our society, or even at the center of our religion, but only outside of it –in the stranger, the one who is not like us. That is the message of the story of Babel that is reinforced at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descends upon the nascent church. When strangers from all over the Roman empire gather, each speaks his or her own language and yet each is understood by all (Acts 2:1-13). The Holy Spirit does not require that we all be the same but reveals God in difference and invites us to invent whatever action will honor that reality.

Hospitality is the direct embodiment of the holy. *Hospitality is the north star of global ethics. Any two or more religious and/or cultural traditions that emphasize hospitality to the stranger are able to work together synergistically to sanctify society, that is subvert and secularize the sacred order that would divide us.* By recognizing the humanity of the one who does not share our identity as the one who brings God into our lives, hospitality decenters us. Speaking as a Christian, we only bring Christ to the stranger when we go out seeking to meet Christ in the stranger. Whenever we welcome the stranger, we welcome God or God's messiah and God is all in all. (See my book on hospitality and universal salvation, *No One Left Behind: Is Universal Salvation Biblical?* (Authors Choice, 2011), an updated version of *The Coming of the Millennium: Good News for the Whole Human Race* (Trinity International Press, 1996). While the sacred sacralizes society and divides the world into the sacred and profane, the holy desacralizes or secularizes and so sanctifies society, rendering it secular and open to the diversity of the whole human race (1 Timothy 4:10). But contrary to Max Weber, secularization is not a permanent accomplishment. The world can remain secular only through the constant iconoclasm of the holy. Without that constant subversion of the sacred by the holy, the secular itself becomes a new sacred order –that is the main argument of Ellul's *The New Demons*.

When I wrote my dissertation on Ellul under Gabriel Vahanian's direction in 1978, I sought to do what Schleiermacher said was the task of the exegete –to understand the author better than he understands himself. I argued that Ellul advocated the rehabilitation of the sacred with respect to "revolution" but seemed inconsistent in regarding "utopianism" as beyond the pale of such rehabilitation. With the aid of Karl Mannheim's book *Ideology and Utopia* (1936; Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc.) I showed that apocalyptic thought can and often has been utopian, and that in fact Ellul's exegesis of the apocalyptic tradition and the ethics of apocalyptic hope can be interpreted, on his own premises, as leading to a rehabilitation of utopianism. For Ellul, the *Book of Revelation* is a mirror for understanding and acting in the world here and now. It is not about changing worlds but about changing the world.

When I sent Ellul my book, *The Thought of Jacques Ellul* (1981, Mellon Press – a revised version of my 500 page 1978 dissertation), Ellul wrote me to say "you are quite right on the subject of Apocalypse and Utopia." Moreover, he added that he was objecting to the popular use of the word "utopia" by "modern intellectuals" while, by contrast, he found Vahanian's use of "utopia/technique to be "very convincing" (personal letter to me, May 2, 1982) In Ellul's book, *The Humiliation of the Word* (1985; translation of *La parole humiliee*, 1981) we see evidence of this when he speaks for the first time about a positive meaning for the term "utopia." There Ellul argues that: "projects, utopias, intentions and doctrines –all these belong to the order of truth, and are known and created by the word (p. 230)." Given his past merciless critique of "utopianism" this was a startling statement.

As with his rehabilitation of "revolution" it seems one can say of "utopia" also, that "whoever receives the revelation of God should give heed to men's hope, not in order to tell them that they are deluded . . . but to help them give birth to their hope" (*To Will and To Do*, p.81). As Ellul argues in *The Ethics of Freedom* (French two volume edition, 1973 & 1975, English translation 1976), Christian ethics does this in three ways that lead to global ethics: 1) dialogue and encounter, (2) realism and transgression, and (3) risk and contradiction. The first is not about getting together for some academic discussion of our similarities and differences (whether religious or political) but discovering these by joining together with all other human beings who are struggling to create a better world. Christians, oriented by an apocalyptic hope, do not place their hope in "this world" of politics and technique and so can work with others to transgress the sacred awe that conforms us to "this world." Such transgression opens the technicist society it to its utopian possibilities. So Christians can and should work together with others of diverse religious and political views to invent those actions which will enable all to contradict the present order, not so much to overturn it as to transform it, so that freedom and justice are possible within it. In my view, these are exactly the tactics created by Gandhi and embraced by Martin Luther King, Jr. in the civil rights Vietnam era that gave birth to one of the first movements in global ethics.

Ellul's apocalyptic critique turns out to be both deconstructive in Derrida's sense and utopian in Gabriel Vahanian's sense. And as such, it opens the door to the participation of Christians in the invention of a global ethic that might assist in helping human beings of all religions and cultures give birth to their utopian hopes.

#### Global Ethics as Subversion of the Sacred: From Ellul to Gandhi and King

In the age of Enlightenment, Kant adopted the Stoic strategy and sought to transcend the "irrational diversity" of the world's religions by appeal to the universality of reason. In the view of many, that experiment appears to impose a Western rationalistic totalism on the globe. An alternate strategy was explored in Chicago in 1993 when the one hundredth anniversary of the *Parliament of The Worlds Religion* was celebrated by holding a second parliament. The holding of these two Parliaments is itself an expression of the solidifying global consciousness of humanity in all its religious diversity. Unlike the first Parliament, which focused on sharing ideas, the second sought to for-

multate a "global ethic" that all religions could agree to. The second Parliament sought to emulate the United Nations declaration of Human Rights created in

1948 in response to the atrocities of World War II, symbolized by the mass death produced at Auschwitz and Hiroshima. The U.N. did not explicitly base its declaration of rights on religious beliefs and practices. The Parliament, however, sought to do just that and, in the process, balance human rights with human responsibilities in a world of global interdependence.

Neither Kant's attempt nor the Parliament's attempt is entirely satisfactory. The first ends up imposing a new totalism and the second reduces ethics to whatever consensus we can agree on. Morality can be defined by consensus, ethics cannot. In Nazi Germany people agreed that killing Jews is good. However, something cannot be considered ethically good just because we agree that it is. Ellul would agree with Socrates, ethics is the questioning of what we commonly agree is good (the sacred), asking as Socrates did: Is what people say is good really good?

Ellul's understanding of ethics is faithful not only to the biblical tradition of the holy but also to the spirit of Socrates, for whom ethics is also a human response to the experience of the holy. To the degree that we can separate Socratic thought from the thought of Plato, it is clear that Socrates does not offer us an ethical theory but lives the ethical life by responding to his *daimon*—a guiding spirit sent by "the god" who never tells him what to do but only warns him when he is plunging off in the wrong direction. Otherwise Socrates is left to his own discretion to invent a way of life centered in the wisdom that comes from questioning all things. Socrates tells us that it is his *daimon* that compels him to question and sends him as a gadfly to Athens, asking the troubling question—*is what we say is good, really good?* Socrates describes this as his religious vocation and it is one that gets him arrested, tried and executed for (1.) impiety toward the gods who render the Athenian way of life sacred and (2.) corrupting the youth by teaching them to question the sacred authority of that way of life. Socrates is accused of being an atheist but says that cannot be since he is being compelled to question by a God other than the gods who sacralize the Athenian way of life. He comes, he suggests, not to destroy the Athenian way of life but to elevate it to meet the demands of justice. To put it in Ellul's terms, Socrates comes "to rehabilitate the sacred in the name of the holy"—where the holy is construed as the Unseen Measure (the infinite) by which our humanity is measured.

In a similar fashion Ellul says he questions the sacred way of life of technological society, not in order to destroy this society but secularize it and so rehabilitate the sacred in order to meet the demands of the holy. So he insists, the Christian serves alongside of others seeking a revolutionary transformation of the technical society not in order to tell them they are deluded but in order to desacralize and so sanctify the city, so as to help others realize their utopian dreams. Ellul's post-Christian or decentered approach to ethics opens a path from Christian ethics to a global ethics of dialogue, transgression and contradiction.



It is desirable for religious communities around the world to identify shared understandings of what constitutes a "good life" across religions and cultures and promote that vision globally. But given Ellul's distinction between the sacred and the holy, we would not call whatever consensus we reached a "global ethic" but rather a "global morality." By a contrast, a global ethic would be a critique of all global morality - asking the Socratic question that challenges all consensus: Is what we claim is good, really good? Ethics in the Socratic sense, rehabilitates morality by questioning it by the measure of an Unseen Measure. Or in the biblical sense, questioning our morality by understanding ourselves as created in the image of a God without image. For the sacred by definition defines some as profane and less than human because "they are not like us." But the holy, as Gabriel Vahanian would say, is "iconoclastic," -being created in the image of a God without image we are all equal. No one can claim to "look more like God" than another" whether because of race, religion or nationality, etc. God is not the answer to all our questions but the question to all our answers. Our answers are always finite while our question are infinite -there is always one more question to force us to maintain our integrity and follow the questions wherever they lead, and so remain open to the infinite and further eschatological transformation.

Ellul argued that those who read his theology should not turn it into dogma but rather build on his analysis, or even challenge it, by thinking for themselves and inventing their own response to our common circumstances. In that spirit, my proposal is that a global ethic can emerge whenever and wherever two or more traditions emphasize narratives of hospitality to the stranger. For to welcome the stranger is precisely to recognize the humanity of the one who is not like me and does not share my story and identity. In the sphere of religion, Mohandas K. Gandhi appears to have lead the first such global religious ethical movement and that movement had a decidedly postmodern orientation. Gandhi tapped the advances in technology that created first global media (radio, telephone, telegraph, film and the international press) to garner international support for his campaign against British colonialism as a form of Western domination. At the same time, he also used the media to promote global interdependence and interreligious harmony. Gandhi thought globally and acted locally, and his movement (both in South Africa and later in India) attracted followers from diverse religions and cultures, showing that religious action can be decentered or multicentered and still promote human dignity.

Most importantly, Gandhi's own ethic of non-violent civil disobedience was forged through an international dialogue (as we have suggested) with the likes of Tolstoy and Jesus' teachings of the sermon on the Mount, even as Martin Luther King, Jr. developed his ethic through an international dialogue with Gandhi and the Gita. Gandhi and King exemplify the strategy of dialogue, transgression and contradiction. The strategy of civil disobedience was built on inter-religious global dialogue and sought to insert tension into a sacred society in order to transgress and contradict its order and so rehabilitate its sacred order to reflect the holy, replacing divisions of sacred and profane with the oneness of humanity. (See my *Comparative Religious Ethics: A Narrative*

*Approach to Global Ethics* (Wiley/Blackwell, 2011 –co-authored with two of my former students, Dell deChant and David Lantigua).

In response to the reach of Western colonialism around the world, a global ethic began to take shape with Gandhi's challenge to the British empire's hold on India.. Then, in the next generation the Gandhian model spread. This occurred during the Civil Rights-Vietnam era in America. with the forging of a common ethic among the spiritual children of Gandhi –Martin Luther King, Jr., Abraham Joshua Heschel, Thich Nhat Hanh and, in his own way, even Malcolm X. This generation, following Gandhi, showed that a global ethic does not have to erase diversity. Rather through passing over and coming back, this diversity can create a synergy in which a common ethical coalition can form to transform the world without its members having to sacrifice their distinctive narratives and traditions. Each speaks his own language yet each is understood by all, finding in each other's lives models of ethical inventiveness.

My understanding of global ethics is embodied in the process that John Dunne in *The Way of All the Earth* (1971) calls "passing over" to another's religion and culture and "coming back" to one's own, finding and sharing wisdom through a global dialogue among those struggling for social justice. That dialogue is not one of those embarrassing, overly self-conscious, abstract academic discussions about how we are different or similar. It is rather the unselfconscious sharing of insight (from our diverse traditions) while engaged in the common struggle to transform the world. It is a struggle that leads persons like Martin Luther King, Jr., (a black Baptist preacher) Abraham Joshua Heschel (a Hasidic Rabbi) and Thich Nhat Hanh (a Buddhist monk) to form ethical coalitions in the 1950s and 1960s for subversive actions that will desacralize and sanctify society.

For Gandhi, ethics is not about obedience to rules but disobedience –a civil disobedience that subverts all rules in order to protect the freedom and hopes of every individual around the world. As I have noted, Ellul argued, that it is not the job of Christians to tell others that they are deluded in their hopes for a better world but to work alongside all persons, whatever their religious or philosophical commitments, to help them realize their hopes. A Christian, on this understanding, is committed to dialogue with all persons and the subversion of all totalisms that imprison and dehumanize human beings everywhere. And Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Thich Nhat Hanh embody Ellul's model of the holy as the experience that calls into question and desacralizes all totalisms by desacralizing and subverting their sacred orders through civil disobedience.

In the case of Gandhi, having gone to England to study law as a young man, he was introduced to the writing of Leo Tolstoy and Tolstoy's understanding of the Sermon on the Mount. The message of nonviolence—love your enemy, turn the other cheek—took hold of Gandhi. And yet he did not become a Christian. Rather, he returned to his parents' religion and culture, finding parallels to Jesus' teachings in the Hindu tradition. And so Gandhi read Hindu scriptures with new insight, interpreting the *Bhagavad Gita* allegorically (citing Paul's saying, the letter killeth but the spirit gives

life) as a call to resist evil by nonviolent means. And just as Gandhi was inspired by Tolstoy as he led the fight for the dignity of the lower castes and outcasts within Hindu society and for the liberation of India from British colonial rule, so Martin Luther King, Jr., would later use the ideas of Gandhi in the nonviolent struggle for the dignity of black citizens in North America.

Gandhi never became a Christian and King never became a Hindu. Nevertheless, Gandhi's Hindu faith was profoundly transformed by his encounter with the Christianity of Tolstoy, just as King's Christian faith was profoundly transformed by his encounter with Gandhi's Hinduism. What they shared was the invention of a secular ethic in response to their experiences of the holy. In the lives of these twentieth-century religious social activists we have examples of "passing over" as a transformative postmodern spiritual adventure.

Whereas in the secular forms of postmodernism all knowledge is relative, and therefore the choice between interpretations of any claim to truth is "undecidable," Gandhi and King opened up an alternate path. While in matters of religion, truth may be undecidable, they showed that acceptance of diversity does not have to lead to the kind of ethical relativism that so deeply troubles fundamentalists. For in the cases of Gandhi and King, passing over led to a sharing of wisdom among traditions that gave birth to an ethical coalition in defense of human dignity across religions and cultures—creating a global ethic. For Gandhi and King, ethical actions arise spontaneously out of their experiences of the holy. For each, such experiences desacralize the divisions of sacred and profane produced by the sacralization of society. Civil disobedience contradicts these divisions and so sanctifies society rendering it secular and so hospitable to all strangers.

The spiritual adventure initiated by Gandhi and King involves passing over (through imagination, through travel and cultural exchange, and especially through a common commitment to social action to promote social justice) into the life and stories and traditions of others, sharing in them and, in the process, coming to see one's own tradition through them. Such encounters are a form of hospitality that enlarges our sense of human identity by embracing the stranger. The religious metanarratives of the world's civilizations may have become "smaller narratives" in an age of global diversity, but they have not lost their power. Indeed, in this Gandhian model, it is the sharing of the wisdom from another tradition's metanarratives that gives the stories of a person's own tradition a new synergistic power. Each person remains on familiar religious and cultural ground, yet each is profoundly influenced by the other to insert an element of tension into society in the name of justice for the stranger.

By their lives, Gandhi and King demonstrated that, contrary to the fears raised by fundamentalists, the sharing of a common ethic and of spiritual wisdom across traditions does not require any practitioners to abandon their religious identity even as it subverts the fears of "secularists" that religion must always lead to a new inquisition - an new totalism. Instead, Gandhi and King offered a model of unity in diversity.

One of the ways Ellul's work furthers this global synergy is by arguing for a Christian understanding of salvation as universal. Ellul's vision of universal salvation operates to subvert the Christian impulse to turn global ethics into a new totalism. The Christian temptation to totalism plagues Christian history from Constantine to the Inquisition and the global missionizing of the colonial period. This temptation has consistently derived its power from the ideology of evangelism as the task of saving all of humanity by converting all to share the Christian worldview. That ideology is a form of the totalistic ideology of Babel before its fall into the diversity of language and worldview, a totalistic ideology that Christians have repeatedly fallen back into throughout history. But Jesus' command was for Christians to be the salt of the earth, not to turn the whole earth into salt. Evangelism is not about making the whole world Christian but spreading the Good News of God's hospitality to the whole human race, not just "believers" (I Timothy 4:10 –See my book, *No One Left Behind: Is Universal Salvation Biblical?* 2011, or its earlier version

*The Coming of the Millennium: Good News for the Whole Human Race, 1996.*)

Both Gandhi and King, like Ellul, rejected the privatization of religion, insisting that religion in all its diversity plays a decisive role in shaping the public order of society. And like Ellul, both were convinced that only a firm commitment to nonviolence on the part of religious communities would enable this without society returning to the kind of religious wars that accompanied the Protestant Reformation and the emergence of modernity. Following Ellul's perspective, I would argue that a global ethic would be human invention created in response to the experience of the holy to help us keep our world open to further eschatological development, an apocalyptic anticipation of a new creation in which all peoples of the earth gather into a city without a sacred temple at its center, a postmodern city where all strangers are welcome and so God is all in all.

In *Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation*, Ellul can be read as suggesting that God's true intention for the human city is revealed. The narrative of Revelation deconstructs the sacral imagination of the cities of the earth, summed up in the city of Babylon, by describing the destruction of these cities centered on their sacred temples and sacred ways of life. But before they are destroyed all their citizens exit these cities and "stand at a safe distance." (Revelation, Chp. 18, especially vs. 9, 11, 15, 17). Then the demons of the religious imagination that sacralize each city (and seduce the citizens of each to attempt to totalize their way of life in conflict with every other) are then consigned to the lake of fire.

In *Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation*, Ellul describes the New Jerusalem as the reverse image of the fallen global city. For while the cities of the earth seek to totalize their respective sacred ways of life by the will to power, in the New Jerusalem, which has no temple at its center, all the tribes of the earth in all their diversity are gathered in and God is all in all. On Ellul's reading, Apocalypse is not about changing worlds but about changing the world. *The Book of Revelation* is an iconoclastic mirror for the world in this present moment. Even the contemporary postmodern global technicist city, once desacralized, becomes open to its truly utopian destiny as the City of God,

in which (to paraphrase the story of Pentecost) each speaks his or her own language and yet each is understood by all.

## ***Silences: Jacques Ellul's Lost Book***

by Yannick Imbert

*Abstract:* In this article, I shall attempt to show how Ellul tried to go beyond the dialectical tension between his sociological and theological works. This thesis, however surprising as it may sound to many Ellulian readers, is supported by the power and importance of poetry for Ellul. To do so, this article will draw some insights from Ellul's poetical work *Silences*. We will consider a few brief examples of how Ellul integrated in a single creative movement two aspects of his works he always claimed to be separate. In this way, poetry demonstrates who Ellul really was: *un homme entier* (a complete and consistent human being)

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### Introduction

Ellul often maintained that his works were to be seen as dialectically connected, each sociological work being intimately connected to, and answering to, a theological one. This procedure has led some to believe that Ellul's works could be thought of apart from one another, especially that one area could be thought of apart from the other. Ellul himself gave this impression when making his theological statements and convictions sound like merely personal convictions.<sup>184</sup> In doing so, he allows for the disconnection of his sociology and theology.<sup>185</sup> This, in part, is the result of his almost radically

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<sup>184</sup> Ellul explained: "I have thus been led to work in two spheres, the one historical and sociological, the other, theological. This does not represent a dispersing of interest nor does it express a twofold curiosity. It is the fruit of what is essentially rigorous reflection. Each part of my work is of equal importance and each is as free as possible from contamination by the other. As a sociologist, I have to be realistic and scientific, using exact methods, though in this regard I have fought methodological battles and had to contest certain methods. As a theologian, I have to be equally intransigent, presenting an interpretation of revelation which is as strict as possible, and making no concession to the spirit of the age." Jacques Ellul, *What I Believe* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 44. Cf. Also Darrell Fasching, *The Thought of Jacques Ellul* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1942), 9.

<sup>185</sup> Throughout his writings, readers become aware of the structural importance of what may be properly called "dialectical hermeneutics," which is the ground for the distinction of sociology and theology. Regarding dialectics, Fasching explains: "This biblical dialectic pronounces both the NO and

consistent dialectics. However, this brief study wants to challenge this assumption in looking at Ellul's poetry.<sup>186</sup>

This article aims to do so through the study of a book that, to the best of the author's knowledge, has never been studied before, namely, *Silences*, one of the two volumes of Ellul's poetry. *Silences* has been chosen rather than *Oratorio*, the second volume of Ellul's collected poetry, the latter being a poetical commentary of the book of Revelation, as Lynch indicated: "These poems, divided into five chapters, form a unified whole narrating Ellul's vision of the Apocalypse."<sup>187</sup> However, this article will focus on *Silences*, since the main thesis of this study is that all the works of Jacques Ellul are integrated in *Silences*, making this work a holistic presentation of his sociological and theological studies. In fact, *Silences* is a more integrative collection of poetry than *Oratorio*, and has a "wholeness" that more clearly takes its inspiration from all of Ellul's works.<sup>188</sup>

Ellul and poetry: Hidden secret of *un homme entier*

Poetry was always for Ellul an eminently mystical experience as well as, and far more profoundly, a way of discovering meaning and expressing deeper experiences of the world.<sup>189</sup> As he commented: "Poetry is the art form which pleases me the most and in which I find deep meaning."<sup>190</sup> The meaning conveyed in poetry is therefore first and foremost a personal one expressed in symbols, and even emotions, making discovery of meaning difficult for those who are not writers of poetry. It is almost as if poetry is written by the writer and for the writer's sake. In fact for Ellul, it is through poetical language that one discovers and explores one's status as *subject*. In his *Humiliation of the Word*, Ellul explains that through "poetical naming," one truly becomes a subject:

A poet is lying when he throws off language: "I said 'Apple' to the apple, and it answered me 'Liar.' And 'Vulture' to the vulture, who did not respond." Human

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the YES of God's word over the world. It brings both God's judgment and his grace into a dialectic which finds its fullest expression in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ." Darrell Fasching, *The Thought of Jacques Ellul* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1942), 7.

<sup>186</sup> There has been not yet been any significant study of Ellul's poetry apart from a partial translation of poems taken from *Oratorio* published in *The Ellul Forum* [James Lynch, "The Poetry of Jacques Ellul: An Essay-Review & Translation", *The Ellul Forum* 22 (January 1999), 11-14] .

<sup>187</sup> Lynch, "The Poetry of Jacques Ellul," 11.

<sup>188</sup> *Contra* Lynch, "The Poetry of Jacques Ellul," 12.

<sup>189</sup> Ellul's poetry contains many historical (Chagall, poem 8; Belgian painter James Ensor, poem 47), mythological and literary references, rendering the reading/interpretation rather difficult. At times, the reference is more obscure as with the "reve de Clarisse" of poem 8. The "dream of Clarisse" is most likely a reference to the *Geste de Doon de Mayence ou Geste des barons revoltes*, an Old French romance [Cf. E. M. Wilmot-Buxton, ed., *Stories from Old French Romance* (New York: Stokes, s. d.), 100-119] . At other times the reference is left unclear as with the reference to Medea, the famous mythological figure taken from classical Greek tragedy, but possibly taken from Jean Giraudoux's adaptation of the same play.

<sup>190</sup> Patrick Troude-Chastenet, *Jacques Ellul on Religion, Technology and Politics* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 49. Some of Ellul's comments are reminiscent of Owen Barfield's study of metaphor in *Poetic Diction* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1984), a work that had a profound influence on J.R.R. Tolkien.

sovereignty is due more to our language than to our technique and instruments of war. One can claim or believe oneself to be free because of language. Naming something means asserting oneself as subject and designating the other as object. It is the greatest spiritual and personal venture.<sup>191</sup>

Indeed, the “word” was for Ellul one of the most distinctive abilities of human nature, since poetical language conveys one’s deepest identity revealed through images and metaphors. Poetry itself makes, more than any other human activity or ability, a person “subject,” or even really human. In fact, Ellul commented that the true power of poetry was to present the human mind with the necessary ambiguity that makes up our daily world. Poetry is a gift enabling us to see the world without giving away its beauty and ambiguity. No caricature, no simplifying: just poetry. Ellul writes:

The poetic contains paradox within it. You believe poetic language to be insignificant, a side issue in comparison with political and scientific talk? You are right, but poetry continually brings the uncertainty of ambiguity to our attention, along with double meanings, manifold interpretations false bottoms, and multiple facets.<sup>192</sup>

Thus, at the very outset of this article, we must recognize that poetry is for Ellul a holistic endeavor, one that cannot be dialectically considered, or better, poetry is the literary manifestation of dialectics. This would further entail that only in poetry is dialectical thought dissolved. Let us, by way of example, turn to poem 10 in which death is the obvious thematic center of the ten verses:<sup>193</sup>

O rigueur de la mort qui deja nous sous-tend arcature profonde ou repose la vie et secrete illumine, inflexive distend le geste le plus simple et l’offrande accomplie. Je connais mon destin mais ne l’accepte pas s’il me reste plus dans la paralysie que l’oeil encor ouvert pour voir venir la mort la reste cependant la valeur de ma vie

Je vis pour te nier mais je ne te rencontre et ne pergois que l’acte et la main superflus

What first strikes the reader is how death is described in the first two verses of this poem. The first characteristic is the rigor of death, through and in which no incertitude or possibility for anything else is left. Death is the beginning and end of all: it encloses man in a “system” from which there is no escape. Death is a necessity, clearly expressed in the second part of verse 1, “O rigueur de la mort qui deja nous sous-tend.” Here death is symbolically compared to something that supports the life of man; death is the foundation of life, the *only* thing which remains when the life of man has ended. Ellul thus affirms that neither technology, nor politics, nor economy can sustain man’s life. Death is the core of life—without death there is no life, and life takes its meaning from the immediacy of death.<sup>194</sup> With this statement about death’s ultimate reality over human life, Ellul summarizes both his sociological observation and his theological conviction.

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<sup>191</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 52.

<sup>192</sup> *Idem.*, 25.

<sup>193</sup> Since Ellul’s poems have no titles, we have to refer to their page number.

<sup>194</sup> One might be tempted to argue on the basis of God’s sovereignty over human history, thus saying that providence, and not death, is ultimate in human actions. However, for Ellul, there is no such thing

We also notice two contrasts in verse 3. First, death, secretive, nonetheless illuminates every action (*geste*) and every human active meaning (*offrande*). All of man's actions, even the simplest ones, and even human secular rituals (*offrande*), are included in death's double contrast. Every action is thus both veiled and revealed by the ultimate nature of death. To begin with, death is in a way secret, for it is hidden in every action, every second. In every moment of human life, death waits for its revelation. In this sense, Ellul's presentation of "secret death" is reminiscent of the futile, ephemeral, and provisory nature of human actions. This triple reference to human actions is closely paralleled to his view of, among other things, political actions. When every human action is futile and ephemeral, only death remains.

In that, death also serves as *revelation* (illumine) of itself and of human deeds: indeed, death, at the last moment, reveals its secret, that there is nothing in human life which death cannot dissolve. Further, every human action takes its meaning when compared to death. In affirming this ultimacy of death, Ellul is most likely offering a radical negation of the myth of human progress:

Thus, according to Qohelet, the human race does not progress... We remain trapped in our condition, by our time and space. People today are no more intelligent than five thousand years ago. Nor are they more just, or superior in any other way.<sup>195</sup>

It is not technologies, political systems nor any other human action, that can reveal the ultimate result of human action, but only death.

In poem 50, a poem dedicated to another major socio-theological theme in Ellul, the city, the same importance of the term "secret" is stressed.<sup>196</sup> Verses 1 and 12 are opposed in their common use of "secret."<sup>197</sup> However, if both verses use the same word, their meaning is quite different. In verse 1, "secret" refers to the city and to the fact that the city itself reveals, albeit unwillingly, its own secrets ("shadows", end of line 2) through the lights and "eyes" of its own streets (verses 1 and 2). Hence, in the first verse, "secret" is used in a negative sense, because of its relation to the city and to the subsequent estrangement of man ("opprobrium", line 8). The "secret" is here what makes the situation of man in the city, tragic. In verse 12, by contrast, "secret" refers to the life of man—that is, to what is hidden in man, and by extension, to what is hidden by God. Man is a stranger in his greatest work,<sup>198</sup> but in the middle of his loneliness, in this very city, salvation will rise again, and the city itself will one day find its redeemed place as the re-creation of the original Eden.<sup>199</sup> There is a grammatical difficulty in finding the relation between verse 1 and verse 2.

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as divine direction of human actions: "History is not a product of God's actions... Praying for God's

<sup>195</sup> *Reason for Being*, 64.

<sup>196</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, especially chapter 5

<sup>197</sup> Verse 1: "Secretes, repliees, lampes, incognitos"

<sup>198</sup> Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 154.

<sup>199</sup> See Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, chapter 5.iii.



The second contrast, in verse 3b of poem 10, begins with the inflexible nature of death, that yet stretches (*distend*) out the meaning of all things.<sup>200</sup> Even though this verse establishes a second contrast, it is also likely that this second one is a parallel, a repetition of the first “illuminated secret” of verse 3a. The contrasts here are meant to stress the ultimacy of death and the order of *necessity*. The direct effect of death, then, is that through it every gesture, every ordinary action, is *illuminated*, and the true meaning and importance of ordinary things is *revealed*. But even more importantly, even the offerings brought to the modern gods are revealed by death as being vain, futile. Death brings all things to the prospect of the end of life. This no doubt has parallels in Ellul’s commentary on Ecclesiastes, *Reason for Being*.<sup>201</sup>

In the second stanza, man comes to the forefront with his doubts and struggles. The tragedy of human life is well expressed in verse 5: “Je connais mon destin mais ne l’accepte pas” (“I know my fate, but do not accept it”). Here Ellul expresses that man, or he himself, knows his destiny, that is, death. But if death is man’s destiny, resignation is no part of what Ellul shows human life to be. There is a deep opposition between what man knows and how he reacts to this *certainty*. Man is almost dead for sure; he is like a man, paralyzed, who can do nothing but see and wait for his fate to fall upon him. His passivity is his only possession.

But even in this paralysis, man does not fall into despair, for to be able to see death *coming* is the real value of man’s life. The point here is difficult to see, but it seems clear first that verse 8 refers to verse 7 and not to verse 9 and 10. The value of life lies then precisely in the fact that man, if he cannot do anything else, can at least see death coming; that is, he can become conscious of the value and the destiny of his life. Here it may be useful to quote what seems for Ellul an important aspect of man’s life, a sentence that Ellul himself quotes at the beginning of his study on Ecclesiastes, after his introduction: “In order to be prepared to hope in what does not deceive, we must first lose hope in everything that deceives.”<sup>202</sup> Thus the death of everything *human* must be affirmed, if hope is to be kindled.

In this poem, Ellul gives a view of life that integrates freedom in God within the basis of his theology. Everything in human life loses its meaning and importance in the light of death, for death is the herald of vanity, especially that of man’s life lived without God’s freedom. This contrast, the opposition of freedom and necessity, is recurrent in Ellul’s work and is present here again. That verse 5 describes the efforts of man to control his life with the term *destin* (fate) is no coincidence. *Destin* bears in its etymology the very idea of necessity imposed on man by the council of the gods,

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<sup>200</sup> One could even argue that death is a giver of meaning for Ellul, even in the social sphere. In fact, he went as far as to argue that “the greatest good that could happen to society today is an increasing disorder.” Jacques Ellul, *In Season, Out of Season: An Introduction to the Thought of Jacques Ellul* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 195.

<sup>201</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990).

<sup>202</sup> Ellul, *Reason for Being*, 46 f.

as it was in ancient Greece or Rome. This Ellul rejects, and he proclaims the freedom of man from the constraints of necessity. He always denied such a mechanical view of the relation between God and man, and rejected some traditional Reformed teaching on predestination, which he took, however wrongly, to be of the same kind of divine imposition and slavery imposed over mankind.

This “necessity,” which man considers his fate, has one consequence, that of freezing every instant, every act and every thought, not lived through God (verse 6). Necessity paralyzes man, whose actions thus have no meaning and no importance on the course of his life. In verses 9 and 10, Ellul states that man lives to deny God, for man is estranged from God. But, in this very estrangement, the hand of God in the life of man appears, as we can see in the use of the pronoun *te*, second person of the singular, referring without much doubt to the divine other, the “you” of man’s most vital relation, i.e. with God.

God is “act and hand superfluous,” says Ellul here in verse 10, but we should not think that Ellul is saying that God is not important and can easily be ruled out of human life. Rather, we have to consider this as an example of the opposition between freedom and necessity in Ellul’s thought. It is known that one of the main features of Ellul’s thought is dialectic, and one of his favorite themes is freedom. This is expressed throughout his books on the relation between freedom and necessity. Here the key theme of freedom and necessity is to be seen again. If death encloses human life in a circle of necessity, God’s presence is freedom itself. Therefore, the superfluous aspect of the act and the hand of “you” is the act of freedom. It is “superfluous” because there is no necessity. Necessity does not lie in God, in whom and by whom is freedom alone. The act of God is a free act, a divine gift of freedom to man. As Ellul affirmed in *What I Believe*:

We must come back unceasingly to grace. Receiving grace is not a matter of good works or of being justified by one’s words. Once again we recall that Jesus did not come to seek the righteous but sinners. Thus God’s grace has

an unparalleled dimension and is universal as the concrete expression of his love.<sup>203</sup>

Conclusion: *Silences*, Jacques Ellul’s “grand narrative”

In closing this brief study, it is necessary to summarize the main point, namely that Ellul’s complete *corpus* is integrated into *Silences* and falls under one main conclusion. By this we mean that Ellul’s main point in *Silences* can be applied to his diagnosis of all previous elements, whether it be technique, propaganda, money, or even his theological writings. This assertion would need to be better supported by quotations from Ellul’s works and by a global analysis of all the poems of *Silences*. However, we can maintain this conclusion because, if we read *Silences* in the complete setting of Ellul’s writing, every aspect is considered in the light of one necessity, that is, death. Human finitude—the vanity of this life and the ultimate event of death— seems to be at the center of

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<sup>203</sup> Ellul, *What I Believe*, 198-199.

*Silences* and encompasses all other aspects of life. In this respect, death is indeed the “great leveler.”

With respect to technique, efficiency and usefulness are considered finally to lead to no end, for what would be the usefulness of a technique that irremediably ends in death? In a way, Poem 57 is an example of such an aim of technique. Of course, technique is not mentioned here, but industrialization is, in verse 2, in which the characteristic of the “people” is to be industrious. Industry is then the only element of human life, the all-inclusive explanation and reason of human life. If we read *Silences* with all the other works of Ellul open next to it, and here particularly *The Technological Society*, we can see that the people described here are concerned by the quest for the progress of their technology, a quest that is inextinguishable and devouring, leading man only to final exhaustion (verse 2). It is primarily, as stated in *The Technological Society*, a quest for usefulness and especially for efficiency.<sup>204</sup> Efficiency is then idealized as a means to produce more “free time,” more “freedom.”

But this so-called quest for freedom by way of efficiency is an illusion, because the quest for efficiency devours time itself. Man does not even have enough time for his quest for efficiency. It is to be noted that this poem contains no reference to death. However, the poem seems to call for a look to the past. We do not think this past would have been idealized by Ellul. Moreover, for him, there is no turning back on the road of history. The past cannot be regained. But this poem calls for meditation on what was at the time when the industrious land was only a solitary wasteland. This is what man has in his soul, “deep in his eyes” (verse 6). This absence of something unknown is nonetheless present in the very heart of man (verse 5). It is the absence of the conscience of what will finally happen to every man, who will return to a place of silence and solitude, when his last breath has left his body.

Poem 49 makes clear that man’s desires for power and glory (verse 1), or youth (verse 5), or wealth (or the absence of wealth, “poverty” in verse 11) are recapitulated in the “deathly secret” of man, death itself. This secret, if we consider *Silences* as a unity, is the necessity of death itself. This poem links the theme of death to the theme of time, “l’instant.” In a short time, glory will be no more, nor youth, nor wealth, nor riches. All these will vanish because at the end, all is vanity. Here we have a precise reference to Ellul’s commentary on Ecclesiastes, a careful study of which will prove highly beneficial for the interpretation of *Silences*. But the secret of man, if it is the necessity of death, is more than death alone. If man’s ultimate secret were that death is necessary, there would be no hope, and Ellul is certainly not a proponent of such a pessimistic view of life. If death is the “ultimate leveler,” the great materialistic judge, it is because, through it, the effect of the judgment of God is dramatically symbolized and this does not condemn, but has as its only goal salvation and God’s manifestation of love. Of course, this may seem contradictory, but Ellul states in several books that God’s curse and judgment are not made against man but for him, for his salvation and

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<sup>204</sup> Ellul, *Reason for Being*, op. cit.

his reconciliation with God's love. Thus, if death is the most visible end, God's love makes life with God the real ultimate end of life. We could continue this exploration throughout all Ellul's themes, such as propaganda and revolution, youth (Poem 49 mentions this also), the word, and ethics.

Death, then, enlightens the reality of existence; it brings the lies of society—illusions of material power, eternal youth, and even political power—under the light of the necessity of death and the freedom of God. Under its light and curse, man can see what he really is—man can decipher his secret, that he is a creature of God and that God loves him. This is a radical subversion of the modern view of death, as the end of all things, but Jacques Ellul is almost a master of such subversions. Death then is the window to God. This is the story of man, the story Ellul had deeply engraved in his soul, and which came to life in his poetry. His *grand "poetical" narrative*, then, is that all of man's desires and wishes will be judged by the curse of death, only to lead to final reconciliation with God in his love.

I have tried in this article to show how *Silences* can be seen as the "missing book" of Ellul, the one in which Ellul integrates all his work. Of course, this study is only preliminary; it is too brief and has passed over some poems that, due to their theme and their place in *Silences*, are most intriguing. But time and space do not allow for a complete study of *Silences*; they allow only for a preliminary consideration of *Silences* as encompassing all of Ellul's thought. In that, Ellul reveals that for him, poetry functions as a fusion of sociology and theology, as the disintegration of dialectics in personal experience.

The author is well aware that this conclusion stands at odds with Ellul's claim that his work is *essentially* dialectic. Indeed, Ellul himself explained: "Dialectic is so much a part of my way of thinking and being that I am talking about myself and my studies rather than about an academic mode of exposition or a philosophy outside myself."<sup>205</sup> This would argue for the necessity of dialectics in *Silences* as with any other work by Ellul. However, given Ellul's conviction about the poetic nature of man, and given the nature of poetry itself, this appears difficult. Indeed, *Silences* is neither a sociological nor a theological work. It is broader and deeper than any other part of Ellul's work because it unifies it all. In fact, Didier Schillinger, director of Opales (the publisher of *Silences*), remembers: "[Ellul] told me that it was, for him, the most important part of his work."<sup>206</sup>

We do not, however, pretend to have given the right explanation of Ellul's *Silences*. It is merely an exploration of a land nobody to my knowledge has yet entered. This is, then, a preliminary study in two respects, first because of its brevity, and secondly because further study of Ellul's poetry should be undertaken. In *Silences*, Ellul tells us that the relation between man and God is the place in which the recapitulation and unity of man's wholeness are found, after death has revealed the secret of man's life,

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<sup>205</sup> Ellul, *What I Believe*, 29.

<sup>206</sup> Didier Schillinger, personal correspondence with Yannick Imbert, 16 March 2006.

his finitude and the value of his life by God's love and freedom. This poetry is also a "silence," an expression of the silence that is before God. For Ellul, the absence of words is a mystery that leads to God: "The Word is a mystery. Silence, the absence of the word, is also a mystery."<sup>207</sup>

Thus the title of his book: the poetry of Ellul is *Silences*, in the plural, because it reveals the mystery of the relations of men with each other, and of man with God. It is "silent poetry," because when confronted with death, man awaits God in faith, for nothing remains as his security—no wealth or power, no vanity of human realization. In *Silences*, we see the mystery of man before God and in the world. The mystery of all-terminating death, and the mystery of God's freedom in bringing all men back to him. This is man's true relationship with the Creator: all of man's works being one under God's freedom.

kingdom and will shows that there is no such thing as providence." [Jacques Ellul, *What I Believe* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 155-156] This points to the notion of Christian responsibility and action in Ellul's thought, as well as his conception of morality and moral action. Ellul continues saying: "In other words, death comes according to natural laws, but God lets nothing in his creation die without being there, without being the comfort and strength and hope and support of that which dies. *At issue is the presence of God, not his will.*" Italics ours.

Verse 2: "pendant que se discourt le secret de ma vie."

## Theologie et Technique: Pour une ethique de la non-puissance

by Jacques Ellul

Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2014

Review Notes by Carl Mitcham

Professor at Colorado School of Mines, author or editor of many works on Jacques Ellul and on the philosophy of technology

Somewhat unexpectedly Jacques Ellul's *Theologie et Technique: Pour une ethique de la non-puissance* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2014) was featured on a display table at the Librairie Mollat in Bordeaux when I walked in. Ellul at least has some popularity in his home town.

What follows is simply a brief note calling attention to this new publication, posthumously edited and prepared for publication by Ellul's son Yves with the assistance of his wife Danielle and Jean Ellul's wife Sivorn and Ellul scholar Frederic Rognon. In the preface, Yves Ellul describes the previously unpublished manuscript as "generally dated to the year 1975." Some passages were previously published as articles during

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<sup>207</sup> *The Humiliation of the Word*, end of chapter 2.

Ellul's lifetime. "There remains a 'body' of six chapters unique to this manuscript and a plan for the book as a whole."

At the same time, the book admittedly has a "rough, unfinished character: the intended plan is not fully respected [and] many repetitions, sometimes with small variations in viewpoint, give a clumsy character to the published text" (p. 7). Despite such weaknesses, "this book [is] both stimulating and challenging [and provides some perspective on] the evolution of mentalities over the last forty years, both in sociology and in theology" (p. 8).

Here in summary are the six core chapters (and their lengths) with brief comments:

1. The Challenges of Theological Production in a Technical Society (23 pages)

It is noted that the chapter and section titles here "have been proposed by the [Ellul] family." (The same is true in multiple other instances in the book). The three sections comment on traditional attitudes of theology toward technology (referencing especially the work of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Emmanuel Mounier); diverse responses to technology with theological implications (such as the Club of Rome and Lewis Mumford); and a reflection on "Technique and transcendence."

2. Situating Theological Reflection on Technique (49 pages)

Three sections deal with "humans, nature, and the artificial"; "Technique according to the Bible"; and "the status of theology in the technical society." The second section was previously published in *Foi et Vie* (1960); an English translation was included in Carl Mitcham and Jim Grote, eds., *Theology and Technology: Essays in Christian Analysis and Exegesis* (1984). [See also Ellul's "The Relationship between Man and Creation in the Bible" in Mitcham and Grote.]

3. Limits (56 pages)

This longest chapter and deals with what Ellul clearly sees as a fundamental issue. To quote from Ellul's own first paragraphs:

Fundamental question: Can human beings do everything or are they limited?

The question needs to be expanded:

— "Everything" means anything, indifferently, or the maximum possible?

— "Can" means what is possible or what is permitted?

— Are some domains forbidden? Forbidden because humans cannot get in (although science and Technique argue "not get in yet but tomorrow ...") or forbidden because there is an absolute bar, impassable, established by God.

— Is the limit fixed by humans, in which case they may move it, or is from nature (in which case it is neutral), or is it from God? (p. 179)

Subsequent sections deal nature and creation, and the Judaism and Christianity as negation of limits.

4. Technique and Eschatology (25 pages)

Includes comments on the thought of Hans Jonas, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Cornelius Castoriadis, Jean Ladriere, and others.

5. Ethical Mediation (46 pages)

6. Ethical Extensions (46 pages)

Chapters five and six revisit issues dealt with at length in Ellul's more extended works on ethics (such as *To Will and To Do* [French1964] and *On Freedom, Love and Power*, compiled, edited, and translated by Willem Vanderburg<sup>208</sup>), but this time especially focused on relationships between ethics and Technique.

These six chapters are further complemented with five "Preliminary Works," the first three of which have previously appeared in print. The first, "Intermezzo instinctive and unscientific" (10 pages) is an

engagement with the thought of Rene Girard. The second is another commentary on the situation of theology in the technical society (14 pages). The third is titled "Search for an Ethics in a technical society" (18 pages). This is followed by a bibliographical essay on theology and Technique (13 pages). The final fifth preliminary work is on The Theological Status of Technique according Gabriel Vahanian" (17 pages).

Finally the volume is further enhanced by Rognon's 17-page introduction placing this book in the larger context of Ellul's work. Rognon has added as well a useful bibliography.

The volume is clearly an important addition to Ellul's body of work and one that deserves translation.

## **Technique, Language and the Divided Brain: Can recent insights from neuropsychology give new life to Jacques Ellul's technology criticism?**

by Matthew Prior

Matthew Prior is a minister in the Church of England and graduate student in theology at Trinity College, University of Bristol, UK

Introduction: the word humiliated?

In the aftermath of the well publicised British riots of August 2011, I found myself thinking of Jacques Ellul. In the Clapham Junction area of South London, whilst stores selling high-end technology were being looted, *Waterstones*, the biggest bookseller in the UK, reported that its shop had been completely untouched. This only became a story with a tweeted invitation from a *Waterstones* staff member to the rioters to take some of their books. 'They might actually learn something', he sighed.<sup>209</sup> All over London, in areas well known to me from six years of Christian ministry in the capital, similar events took place, leading to a process of political and social soulsearching and reflection ongoing to this day.<sup>210</sup> And yet, the analyses suggested and the solutions

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<sup>208</sup> *McCarthy on Trademarks* 3:4.A (emphasis added).

<sup>209</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/booksblog/2011/aug/12/reading-riots-waterstones-looted-books>

<sup>210</sup> A little about my background. I am an ordained minister in the Church of England, and know

put forward have seemed at least to me to be somewhat trite and hollow, on the one hand narrowly focussed on the analysis of ‘twitter traffic’ and the role of social media, and on the other trading in political generalities about urban poverty and the failure of urban education.<sup>211</sup> I have wondered, what greater depth might Ellul’s work offer to the Christian minister seeking to make sense of this potent mix of issues: urban dysfunction and violence, language and literacy, and the image-based technologies of a consumer society? In particular, what perspectives might emerge from a book I take to be one of Ellul’s most enduring and significant contributions, *La parole humiliée* (1981; ET *The Humiliation of the Word*), a remarkable and still pertinent discussion of what happens to language in a technological society?

In *La parole humiliée* Ellul embarks on a sociological exploration of word and image within the framework of his central theological dialectic of truth and reality.<sup>212</sup> Indeed, although this is listed as a sociological work, Ellul states explicitly: we are made in the image of a speaking God, and therefore we listen and we speak in response.<sup>213</sup> In brief summary, the word pertains to what Ellul calls ‘the order of truth’, whereas the image pertains to ‘the order of reality’. Disastrously separated in the ‘rupture’ from God’s purposes, word and image are reunited for a time in the incarnation of the divine Word, Jesus Christ. Yet we still await the fulfilment of the promise when word and image are finally reconciled in a new creation.<sup>214</sup> However, Ellul’s concern is with an alternative modern eschatology: the victory of the image over the word, which eclipses the true horizon of future hope, offering either the hope of instant and constant satisfaction, or the despair of apocalypse now.<sup>215</sup>

The French commentator on Ellul, Frederic Rognon, has referred to Ellul’s ‘thresholds of radicality’<sup>216</sup>, and I for one confess I do not share the entirety of Ellul’s analysis of what he called the ‘audiovisual war machine’. However, I still believe *La parole humiliée* has much to offer to a theological

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well the areas South London affected by the rioting. My interest in Ellul was first kindled during my training for ministry, for here I found insights lacking in other elements of my training.

<sup>211</sup> For example, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2011/aug/16/riots-poverty-map-suspects>.

<sup>212</sup> As Rognon notes, the Truth-reality dialectic is a golden thread in Ellul’s corpus (Rognon 2007, 83).

<sup>213</sup> ‘L’homme cree par Dieu est parlant. Peut-etre que c’est un des sens de l’image de Dieu: le repondant, le responsable, le semblable qui va dialoguer...Spccificite humaine comme specificite de ce Dieu parmi tous les autres’. Ellul 1981, 71

<sup>214</sup> See Ibid, chapter 7, Reconciliation, passim.

<sup>215</sup> ‘Ces deux tendances: l’exigence de tout tout de suite, et la terreur de la fin du monde, issues de la multiplication infinie des images, se conjuguent pour provoquer partout des courants apocalyptiques et messianiques’. Ellul, 1981, 231.

<sup>216</sup> On *Parole*, he notes three such thresholds: the absolute separation of sight and faith, the resulting denial that the image can lead to faith, and the claim that the church’s current decline can be linked to its capitulation to the ‘audiovisual machine’ (Rognon: 365-366).



takes place *within a single text*.<sup>217</sup> In this paper, I make the bold claim that Ellul's best insights can be recollected and weaknesses offset by a dialogue with recent research into communication and the brain in the developing field of neuropsychology. Let me make a brief disclaimer at this point. I come at this dialogue theologically, and not as a neuropsychologist! What I offer is a tentative step forward for theological reflection on language, as well as, I hope, a tribute to Jacques Ellul from a British perspective.

A dialogue between Jacques Ellul and neuropsychology

Over the past thirty years, there has been an increasing *academic and popular* scientific interest in the study of communication, with the two meeting in the bestselling book by Steven Pinker *The Language Instinct*.<sup>218</sup> Over this time, much Christian writing has focussed, perhaps naively, on questions of how to use new communication technologies; few have delved into properly *theological* questions about the nature of language itself. However, one exception to that is a remarkable recent book called *The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* by Dr Iain McGilchrist, a British psychiatrist and literary scholar.<sup>219</sup>

McGilchrist offers a distinctive narrative of the origins of human language, and at times on reading him, one has the impression of reading a scientific mapping of a landscape previously navigated by Ellul. What can account for this apparent overlap? As I have confirmed with McGilchrist, Ellul exercises no direct influence on him. Indeed, at the outset, one is also struck by a key difference between them, particularly in relation to *the status of the scientific method*.

In *La parole humilée*, Ellul disavows any scientific or technical apparatus and advances instead the primacy of the feeling, listening and looking subject, an experimental method indebted to Søren Kierkegaard. In contrast, for McGilchrist, it is precisely neuro-scientific evidence that suggests that a dialectic of word and image is simplistic. For those who like me are interlopers in this area, let me briefly remind you that the brain is divided into two hemispheres, each exercising motor-sensory control of the opposite side of the body. There has long been evidence also to suggest that a degree of lateralisation of functions exists, for example, with regard to language, although it has become increasingly clear that almost every human activity is served at some level by both hemispheres. It is therefore no longer respectable for a neuroscientist to

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<sup>217</sup> Whilst this narrative about the demise of the word and the rise of the image has precedence in Ellul's early theological work (See for example chapter 4 of *Presence au Monde Moderne*, on 'La communication'), the form of *La parole humilée* is regarded as a sociological work. In fact, it does not easily fit into the dialectical division of the Ellul corpus.[.] Joyce Main Hanks raises in the preface to her translation the question of Ellul's intention: 'the author has preferred to integrate sociology and theology into a single whole, for reasons he has not yet explained in print' (Hanks' preface in Eng. Tr. Ellul 1985, xii-xiii).

<sup>218</sup> E.g. Steven Pinker's *The Language Instinct* and Michael Corballis' *From Hand to Mouth*.

<sup>219</sup> The book has rightly been acknowledged as a valuable and largely irenic contribution to a debate that raged through the first decade of this century in the UK, initiated by a more aggressive form of public atheism in British public life, labelled 'new atheism'.

hypothesise on the key to hemispheric differences, partly because the topic has been hijacked.

At a popular level, there exists the notion of a ‘right-brain’ or ‘left-brain’ person. McGilchrist regards this popularised dichotomy as rooted in the ancient Greek association of the right hemisphere with subjective perception (pictures) and the left hemisphere with objective understanding (words).<sup>220</sup> He describes this view as interesting, but deeply flawed, moreover a symptom of the left hemisphere’s dominance in Western culture. With a minutely detailed survey of recent research, he suggests that if the brain displays a fundamental asymmetry, it is a question not of *what functions*, as if the brain were a machine, but of how, *or the manner in which*, the hemispheres operate, as if the brain were part of a living person, which it is. Drawing on a parable of Nietzsche, he suggests that the right hemisphere is the Master and the left hemisphere is its Emissary, or interpreter.

But note that for McGilchrist, all neuroscience works, sometimes unawares, from a prior philosophical position. As he puts it, ‘*Not to be aware* is to adopt the default standpoint of scientific materialism’; this again is a symptom of left-hemisphere bias. Indeed, he describes the essential difference between the hemispheres *in terms of the awareness or attention they bring to bear*. To simplify vastly, the right hemisphere serves whole, sustained attention, concerned with *living in the present*, and living in the body. The left hemisphere serves focussed attention, concerned with *abstracting and re-presenting* a part of the lived world. He aligns his own attention to the world with phenomenology, drawing in particular upon Martin Heidegger. Indeed, McGilchrist regards Heidegger as having anticipated, before neuropsychology, this central importance of attention, particularly in Heidegger’s concept of truth as ‘unconcealing’ over against the mindset of ‘enframing’.<sup>221</sup>

Is this not then a familiar story: Heidegger’s influence and Ellul’s neglect? In part, yes. Of course, given that Ellul and Heidegger share a heritage in Kierkegaard, the influence of Kierkegaard in key passages of *La parole humiliee* leads to statements that resonate with Heidegger, and therefore with McGilchrist.<sup>222</sup> Yet I suggest that Ellul’s theology has more to offer than Heidegger’s. Indeed, I *have suggested* to McGilchrist that Ellul’s understanding of the human word can enrich the tentative theological conclusions he offers in concluding his neuropsychological account of language.<sup>223</sup> I will return to that in closing, but let us first turn to a brief summary of *The Master and his Emissary*.

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<sup>220</sup> See chapter 1, *Asymmetry and the Brain*.

<sup>221</sup> *ibid* 143

<sup>222</sup> In a section drawing on Kierkegaard, Ellul pointedly corrects the priority of *appearances* within phenomenology. ‘La phenomenologie ne doit pas seulement faire apparaitre les choses telles qu’elles sont mais les faire sonner comme elles sont! La philosophie classique ne sait pas ecouter, entendre la verite... le philosophe qui refuse d’ecouter refuse en meme temps la verite et la realite’ (Ellul 1981, 44). This priority of listening is the subject of Ellul’s second chapter on *l’Idole et la Parole*.

<sup>223</sup> This has been confirmed in correspondence with the author. Although McGilchrist does not write

Language and the brain: what's right and what's left?

McGilchrist begins with the early consensus that speech production and comprehension was subserved by the left hemisphere, in Broca's area and Wernike's area respectively.<sup>224</sup> From there developed an explanation for the fundamental asymmetry of the human brain known as Yaklovlevian torque (see below)<sup>225</sup>: that the drive to language necessitated an expansion of the posterior left hemisphere, to house such a complex set of skills. Given that the dominant use of the right hand in tool manipulation is also housed in the left hemisphere, indeed in areas very close to those dealing with words, there appeared an evident connection between language and the hand. The idea took hold that the left hemisphere expanded to support both tool-making and also, in the closest possible connection, the development of the master tool, instrumental language.<sup>226</sup> On this account, language is grasp, providing fixity by firming up and clarity by dividing up. It is a means to power, for by it we can manipulate the world, and indeed, other people.

McGilchrist celebrates what he calls 'referential language' as a vastly precious gift, yet he contends that this narrative is partial, and again biased towards the left hemisphere.<sup>227</sup> He questions it with three pieces of evidence.

*Firstly*, engaging with recent palaeontology, he notes that early fossil records show that primitive humans, *long before it is believed that language developed*, had a similar brain asymmetry to us today, an asymmetry shared moreover by the great apes, *who, he says, clearly have no language*. So whatever caused the expansion of the left hemisphere, it was not the drive to speak, but something more primitive.<sup>228</sup>

*Secondly*, more sophisticated recent accounts of brain functions now show that *language functions are lateralised across both hemispheres*. Yet McGilchrist goes further to assert the fundamental superiority of the right hemisphere, for what he calls the 'higher linguistic functions' of understanding meaning in context, tone, emotion, along with any humour, irony or metaphor, now appear to be housed in the right hemisphere. In simple terms, if language can be compared to painting a picture, it is the left that contains the paintbox, but the right hemisphere that paints.<sup>229</sup> With examples from studies of tribal peoples, child development and the experience of patients with aphasia (or the loss of speech), he argues that thought exists prior to and without language.<sup>230</sup> *In an image drawn from Michael Gazzaniga, he suggests that the left hemisphere is the right hemisphere's interpreter.*

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as a theologian, his work has been eagerly received in theological circles in the UK.

<sup>224</sup> McGilchrist 2009, 23.

<sup>225</sup> McGilchrist, 2009, 23-24.

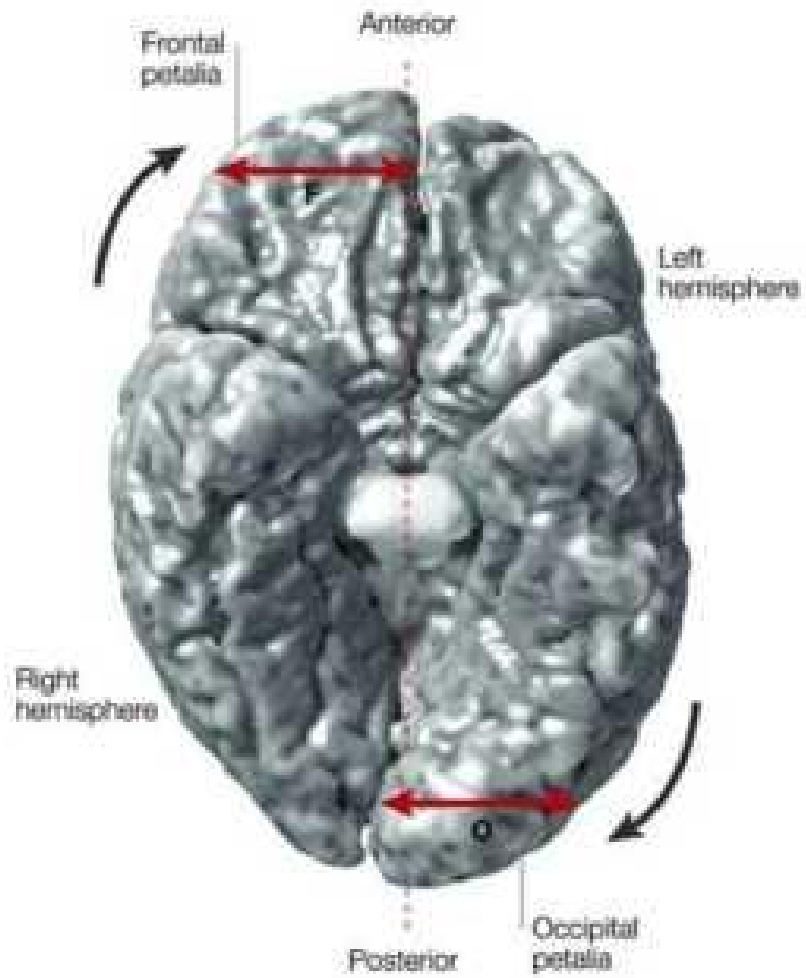
<sup>226</sup> See the discussion of Language and the Hand, *ibid*, 111ff.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

<sup>228</sup> *ibid*, 99.

<sup>229</sup> McGilchrist 2009, 99.

<sup>230</sup> McGilchrist 2009, 105-110. [22] With clear echos of Ellul's concerns (See Ellul, 1981, 22ff) McGilchrist refutes 'structuralist' communication theories, asserting that meaning does indeed exist prior to and outside of the structures of language, in our prior apprehension of the world.



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Figure 1: The brain viewed from above

*Thirdly*, he highlights a fascinating recent discovery of handedness, suggesting that *even in left-handers* tool-use is associated with the left hemisphere, not the right hemisphere, which one would expect to be controlling the left hand side of the body. What seems crucial here is not the side of the body involved, but *the nature of the gesture*.<sup>231</sup> That is to say, it is the very concept of grasping that activates in the left hemisphere, not the control of the hand itself. By contrast, there is new evidence to suggest that gestures which are exploratory and empathic in nature originate in the right hemisphere, as indeed do other non-purposive gestures such as dance, a significant point, as we shall see.

Which came first: grasp or music?

This combination of factors leads McGilchrist to a fuller account of language. Clearly, the left hemisphere has specialised in the interpretive powers of syntax and vocabulary. But the left hemisphere's expansion was not caused by the simple desire to communicate, but by the more primitive desire to manipulate. McGilchrist cites with approval Michael Coballis' suggestion that *referential language* may indeed have evolved, *not from sounds at all, but from hand gesture, in particular, motions to do with grasping*<sup>232</sup>.

But language is more than grasp. Even our most basic intuitions tell us much human language is connotative, social, without a clear purpose beyond communication itself. What then of this language that McGilchrist calls 'I-Thou' language, in contrast to 'I-it' language? On the conventional account, the apparently 'useless' 'I-Thou' language must have evolved from 'I-It' language to serve a broader utility, to enable the group to survive and to thrive. But does that fit the evidence? Anthropologists suggest that for long periods *before any evidence of symbol manipulation*, our ancestors clearly managed to live in social groups. Moreover, recent work on the fossil record suggests that the earliest human skeletons possessed the same highly developed vocal apparatus for articulating sounds that we have.<sup>233</sup> What was this apparatus used for, if anything? The answer put forward is likely to be a surprise, McGilchrist suggests, but what else could a non-verbal language of communication be but © 2014 IJESwww.ellul.orgEllul Forum #54 April 2014 Matthew Prior music? Drawing on the recent book by the archaeologist Steven Mithen *The Singing Neanderthals*<sup>234</sup> he argues for a common ancestor for both language and music: so-called *musilanguage*. It is predominantly the right hemisphere that mediates our experience of music and dance, and therefore the musical and bodily aspects of language are subserved there also.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> *ibid*, 113.

<sup>232</sup> *ibid* 111.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid*.101.

<sup>234</sup> He also draws on and the work of the linguist Daniel Everett, who undertook a controversial recent study of the Piraha tribe in the Amazon basin, concluding that they communicate by a form of musi-language (*ibid*. 2009,106).

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid*,102.

Granted that this account may seem implausible, what further evidence can be advanced in its favour? The idea that musilanguage preceded referential language easily fits with the fact of cultural history that poetry clearly precedes prose.<sup>236</sup> More significantly, metaphor precedes literal language, as the well known study by Lackoff and Johnson argues. Metaphor is, according to McGilchrist, closely linked to gesture, subserved by the right hemisphere. He argues that when we bring two things together, it is because they are felt as sharing a live connection in our embodied experience, not because they fit an abstract concept in our minds.<sup>237</sup> The example he gives is of a clash of cymbals and a clash of arguments, which do not depend on a notion of clash, just the uncomfortable experience of it. For McGilchrist, Metaphor therefore ‘carries us over’ the gap or abstraction from bodily life that literal language entails.

In the highly complex fifth chapter on the Master right hemisphere attention to our embodied experience of the world, McGilchrist draws on pioneering research into gesture by David McNeill, arguing that gesture slightly anticipates speech. On this account, gesture reveals utterances in their primitive form, derived from the right hemisphere. Bodily gestures do not therefore reflect thought - they help to constitute thought.<sup>238</sup>

## Attentive to the body

The significance of the body for McGilchrist cannot be overstated, and language is rooted in our bodily experience, the domain of the right hemisphere. At a popular level, body language is now recognised as a key component of communication,<sup>239</sup> but the hypothesis of ‘musilanguage’ goes further. If it is correct, then anthropological speaking, language originates not in the competitive technique of the hand, but in the social gesture of the body. It is worth citing him at length to summarise the cumulative effect of his argument.

To the extent that the origins of language lie in music, they lie in a certain sort of gesture, that of dance: social, non-purposive (‘useless’). When language began to shift

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid, 105

<sup>237</sup> The implicit comparison we make between one thing and another cannot be ‘translated’ into another set of words by the interpreting left hemisphere without losing its power and novelty. McGilchrist argues that we do not first assume there is an abstract concept to which the two things both conform - rather, that our simple *experience* of their similarity, as processed by the master right hemisphere, comes first. In an interesting twist which seems to confirm this, some studies show that cliched, familiar metaphors are understood by the left hemisphere, suggesting that they have lost their original connection with lived experience. McGilchrist, 2009, 116.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid, 119. Whilst he offers support for McGilchrist’s project, the prominent British philosopher A.C. Grayling registers his dissent by noting that ‘the findings of brain science are nowhere near fine-grained enough yet to support the large psychological and cultural conclusions Iain McGilchrist draws’. In Grayling, A.C. (December 2009). ‘In Two Minds’. *Literary Review*.

<sup>239</sup> McGilchrist agrees that the left hemisphere’s ability with words can be an attempt to hide what gesture reveals (Ibid, 81, 195ff).

hemispheres, and separate itself from music, to become the referential, verbal medium that we recognise by the term, it aligned itself with a different kind of gesture, that of grasp, which is, by contrast, individualistic and purposive<sup>240</sup>

We glimpse here also his concern: what he calls a ‘hijack’ of language from the Master right hemisphere by the usurping left hemisphere. This entire project then, depends on becoming more aware of, attending to the origins of language in the body, served by the right hemisphere. He advances a final key piece of neuroscientific evidence. In the discussions of the dominant left hemisphere, it is often neglected that the human brain exhibits a fundamental asymmetry not only on the left side, *but also on the right frontal side*.<sup>241</sup> Why should this be the case? For McGilchrist, it is the expansion of the right frontal lobes in humans that gives us the capacity for whole attention, a certain distance, enabling us to stand back from our experience and to differentiate ourselves from others. This, uniquely, enables to exercise *empathy towards the other*, whom we can recognise as *somebody like us*. This attentive capacity of the right frontal lobe differentiates us from any other creature. Ultimately, what makes our language human is rooted in this standing back, the distance from the other that produces the desire to reach out, and indeed to reach beyond to the divine Other. Animals may possess reason and a form of language:

But [he writes] there are many things of which they show no evidence whatsoever: for instance, imagination, creativity, the capacity for religious awe, music, dance, poetry, art, love of nature, a moral sense, a sense of humour and the ability to change their minds.<sup>242</sup>

*McGilchrist in dialogue with and defence of Ellul: the Word as Master*

I hope the fruits of this dialogue will already be visible, despite the obvious limits. Of course, there are sparse references to the brain in *La Parole humilée*<sup>243</sup> and no proto-historical narrative of the origins of language. Yet my overall contention in the paper, to repeat, is that Ellul’s work anticipates the developing insights of neuropsychology, and can indeed enrich them. Let me give a few examples in closing.

In a remarkably attentive account of the spoken word, Ellul speaks of the word as a *living presence, requiring two persons in relationship in time*.<sup>244</sup> For Ellul also, it is in

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid, 119. The fact that ‘musilanguage’ would yield little competitive advantage in evolutionary terms has led some to reject the idea of ‘musilanguage’ as implausible (ibid 104, citing Pinker). McGilchrist defends his view by arguing *ad hominem* from utility: ‘If language began in music, it began in (right-hemisphere) functions which are related to empathy and common life, not competition and division’ (123).

<sup>241</sup> Ibid, 126.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid, 127.

<sup>243</sup> Ellul notes the misinterpretation of an early neuropsychology experiment undertaken by British scientists (Ibid, 185 n1). He also takes issue with the work of Michel Thevoz in ‘Le Langage de la rupture’, a study of the language of the mentally ill (198).

<sup>244</sup> ‘La parole est essentiellement présence. Elle est du vivant. Jamais objet’. Ellul 1981, 20. Only when written does it become an object, requiring focussed attention, rather than the ‘coup d’oeil global’ that spoken language enables. Ellul’s treatment alludes, often in disagreement, to the seminal work of

*dialogue and distance that we discover 'le meme-autre et... l'autre-meme'.*<sup>245</sup> Moreover, he argues theologically from the first creation, with reference to Adam's naming of the woman. 'La semblable dissemblable... Le discours recommence toujours parce que la distance subsiste'.<sup>246</sup>

In this distance between speaker and listener, between speech and reception metaphor is born.<sup>247</sup> Almost each time Ellul speaks of *metaphor*, there is a trace of its etymology - 'carrying beyond'.<sup>248</sup> An extended metaphor that serves as a leitmotif for Ellul's account of the word is the musical image of a symphony.<sup>249</sup> Harmony is the achievement of the word as music. By a *polyphony of overtones*, a *symphony of shared echoes* is established, which creates a *concordance*, never static but a movement in time.<sup>250</sup> This richly poetic understanding of the word is clearly concordant with the notion of 'musilanguage' as outlined by McGilchrist. For Ellul, if the word has a power, it is a musical, metaphoric power to reach beyond words, beyond reality, to create another universe, what he calls 'the order of truth'.<sup>251</sup>

In the second theological chapter, Ellul goes further. Since we are created in the image of God, the human word is ultimately a reflection of and response to the word God speaks. In a discussion of the biblical creation accounts, Ellul suggests that it is only the word, and not technique, that offers the power of new creation.<sup>252</sup> Yet this does not mean that technique has no place when restricted to the order of reality. However, in the fourth chapter from which *La parole humiliee* takes its title, Ellul's presents a sombre picture: whereas the word should give us the power to master technique, now the situation is reversed.<sup>253</sup>

On the conventional narrative of language as manipulation, this opposition of word and technique appears absurd.<sup>254</sup> However, the alternative narrative of 'musilanguage' offers support for Ellul against his critics. Indeed, on my tentative reading, what Ellul means by 'word' maps well onto McGilchrist's account of the right hemisphere, but equally what he means by 'technique' maps well onto McGilchrist's account of the left hemisphere. Both have their role, as McGilchrist states: 'it would [not] be a good

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Marshall McLuhan (see, e.g. 31 n1).

<sup>245</sup> Ibid,21.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>247</sup> 'La prennent naissance le symbole, la metaphore et l'analogie'. Ellul 1981, 24.

<sup>248</sup> See for example 26-27,37, 77-78 (in brief dialogue with Paul Ricoeur), 119, 181.

<sup>249</sup> 'Connotations et harmoniques. Et la parole se situe au cmur d'une toile d'araignee d'une finesse infinie'. Ibid, 22

<sup>250</sup> Ibid, 24-25

<sup>251</sup> 'La parole n'est pas liee au reel mais a sa capacite de creation de cet univers autre, sur-reel si on veut, metareel, metaphysique, que par commodite on peut nommer l'ordre du vrai'. Ellul 1981, 27.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid, 76.

<sup>253</sup> Ellul, 1981:177.

<sup>254</sup> The French critic of Ellul, Dominique Bourg, suggests this in his book, *L'Homme-Artifice*, repeating the common anthropological account of language's origins.



thing if the entire population had a left hemisphere stroke'.<sup>255</sup> Yet with a wealth of experimental data, McGilchrist offers the model of Right-Left-Right processing as a kind of healthy norm.<sup>256</sup> In his terms, the left hemisphere, as Emissary, merely *represents* what is first *presented* to the Master right hemisphere. Moreover, it must then submit its representations back to the right hemisphere to be fleshed out in real life, in the musical aspects of communication and meaning. In Ellulian terms, this means a 'both-and' embodied, dialectical reasoning, in place of an 'either-or' abstract rationality.

Engaging in a similarly sweeping cultural history, McGilchrist considers that the abstract accounts of language in structuralism, universal grammar and in popular neurolinguistics form part of a general trend... 'in favour of an abstracted, cerebralised, machine-like version of ourselves...' <sup>257</sup> There is hope, however, and McGilchrist writes in part with an apologetic purpose: to re-ground us and our language in the embodied world. With a rising interest in neuroscience, he detects an opportunity to 'move away from the outworn mode of scientific materialism with its reductive language.'<sup>258</sup> In strikingly Ellulian terms, McGilchrist suggests to the reader the lost 'mythos' of the Christian tradition, for here a transcendent, divine Other, meets us as engaged, vulnerable, and incarnate, offering the hope of the flesh and spirit united in resurrection.<sup>259</sup> This is a hope beyond images of apocalyptic despair or images of the latest must-have product, a hope that keeps us waiting in time, for the end of time, attending to the voice of God in the present, rooted in the real world.

But do I have any policy proposals on how to stop riots and save the inner city? Sadly, no. But I do offer a closing thought. Perhaps a Christian perspective on literacy and education in a technological society might focus more on the renewal of whole attention and empathy that disciplined study might enable, and less on the value of one kind of rationality, and its role in fitting us to be economically productive citizens? The current UK government wants to expand the national management and ICT cadres, ostensibly to keep pace with the UK's global competitors, and yet there are also moves to put resources back into the neglected humanities, with a particular focus on urban schools. And yet perhaps rather than turn to government policy for the funding of empathy, might the church not first seek to discover how to be and to speak God's embodied word in a technological society? Might we not first be challenged to a renewed listening to God, and listening to others, a renewed attentiveness to the actual physical world around us? After all, as British theologian Sarah Coakley has

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<sup>255</sup> *ibid.* 93.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.* 195-203. In a very brief metaphor, he suggests that the relationship between the hemispheres is a little like the way books relate to life. Life goes into books, and books go into life. But the relationship between them is not equal, and yet books add to life, and transform it.

<sup>257</sup> McGilchrist, 2009, 119-120

<sup>258</sup> McGilchrist, 2009, 459

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.* 441

recently put it, ‘When you are working with people in a situation of grave distress and despair, it is the quality of your attention which is what ministry is about’.<sup>260</sup>

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Endnotes

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Matthew Prior

## An Unjust God? A Christian Theology of Israel in Light of Romans 9–11

by Jacques Ellul

Trans. by Anne-Marie Andreasson-Hogg. Forward by David W. Gill.

Eugene, OR: Cascade Books. 2012, xxi + 111 pp, ISBN 13: 978-1-62032-361-8

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<sup>260</sup> Stephen Wilson, ‘ Sarah Coakley discusses waiting on God’, CAM Magazine, Issue 65, Easter 2012, 43.

Reviewed by Andrew Trotter

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Jacques Ellul was many things—law professor, sociologist, philosopher, et al.—but he was not a formally-trained biblical studies expert. So why does he write a book based in a particular biblical text? We will discuss his reasons to some degree below, but let me say now: I am glad he did.

*An Unjust God?* is simply structured. After a brief preface outlining the argument of the book in good Barthian fashion by stating a number of apparent contradictions Paul solves in the selected text, in five chapters Ellul divides the text of Romans 9-11 into five sections: “The Unique People,” “This Unjust God,” “How Will They Believe?,” “The Grafted Olive Tree,” and “Mystery and Renewal.” The book then concludes with an Epilogue, an appendix on the suffering servant surveying the work of Armand Abecassis and a brief bibliography.

*An Unjust God?* makes no claims to precise biblical exegesis; it is a work of biblical theology, not of historical/grammatical criticism. New Testament exegesis, for example, is generally filled with discussion of words and phrases, how they are used in the grammatical and literary context of the passage, and how they are used in other relevant contexts in other ancient writings. Ellul rarely refers to the underlying Greek text; even when he does, he discusses it in general terms that are secondary to his more theological concerns.

When he does refer to a term, he depends on the exegesis of others and can get himself in trouble. So, for instance, when apparently referring to the phrase “zwh\ e'k nekrw^n” (zoe ek nekron) in Romans 11:15 he states “This word ‘vivification’ (which Maillot translates as ‘life surging out of death’) is not quite identical with resurrection” (p. 71), he betrays the fact that he is unaware the underlying Greek is actually in a phrase, not a word. More importantly, he goes on to build a case for the meaning of the phrase, as if its interpretation is relatively stable, when in fact it is one of the most controversial phrases in the whole of the exegesis of Romans 9-11.

Deeper problems result from his lack of insight into the processes of biblical interpretation at the level he seeks with this book. For instance he castigates other interpreters of the role of the Jewish people in Christian thought for eschewing what he calls “the only indisputable and *comprehensive* [italics his] source” for “what a Christian theology of the people of Israel should be,” going on to ignore the Gospels because they give us “indications, but only concerning individuals or certain groups belonging to the Jewish people, not anything about the people as a whole... we have an exact and precise answer to that question [‘understanding where the Jewish people are to be situated in a Christian perspective or what is continued existence means’] in these three chapters of the Epistle to the Romans—there, and nowhere else in the new Testament” (pp. 2-3).

Yet every Gospels researcher knows that the crowds serve just that function in Matthew’s and John’s Gospels particularly and that the whole Old Testament is filled with prophetic and other material important to the theologian for understanding the

Jews in the present day. This is not to argue with the centrality of Romans 9-11 for this question; it is only to say that Ellul should not have looked exclusively to this text in such an absolute fashion.

No, this little book is not a study in the detailed exegesis of Romans 9-11. So has Ellul gotten into waters over his head and given us a book of little worth? And does Ellul's lack of exegetical training mean that he has regularly misused the biblical text for his own purposes? Paul himself might say, "By no means!" What he has done is enter into the world of biblical theology, and there his legal experience and skills serve him in good stead. Biblical theology, or surmising from the text what it has to say to a question relevant both to the text and the reader, is much more an exercise in logic and argument than it is one of translation.

In what Ellul has attempted to do, he shines. I should point out that he claims no creative stance in this book. From the start Ellul makes it quite clear that he is attempting to get people to take seriously work from the past that he believes has gotten the question right, particularly some articles by Wilhelm Vischer, and, to a lesser extent, the famous *The Epistle to the Romans* by Karl Barth. He refers often to Vischer and his work, but differs from Barth on his focus on the church in his interpretation of Romans 9-11, when Ellul firmly believes the chapters have much more to do with the Jews.

So what is the great accomplishment of *An Unjust God*? Simply put, Ellul puts forth a case for the continued importance of the Jews in God's salvation history of humankind that is rigorously argued, clearly enough written, and presented with a passion. At the same time, he proclaims a word of judgment upon the largely Gentile church for not living and acting in accord with the place and privilege bestowed upon it since the "temporary" rejection of the Jews. One could argue with his lack of reference to the history of these chapters, a source rich and replete with both counters to, and support for, many of his positions, but he has given us a simple, straightforward argument for a Christian rapprochement with the Jews, and that is a welcome text to have in these angry, adversative times.

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## Sham Universe: Field Notes on the Disappearance of Reality in a World of Hallucinations by Doug Hill

*Doug Hill (doug.hill25@gmail.com) is a journalist and independent scholar who has studied the history and philosophy of technology for more than twenty years. He earned a masters degree in theological studies in 2009 with a thesis on technology and spirit, focusing on the work of Jacques Ellul. Last October he self-published Not So Fast: Thinking Twice About Technology, which David Gill has called "one of the five best books on technology I've read over the past decade." Not So Fast is currently available as an ebook on Amazon and the other major ebook retailers. This paper was presented at the Jacques Ellul conference held in Ottawa, Canada, in July 2014.*

Let me begin by stating clearly where I'm coming from regarding Jacques Ellul: I'm among those who consider him a genius. I suppose that's a safer statement to make here than it might be in some other venues.

I'd like to recall today some of the things Ellul said more than fifty years ago about technology and propaganda in order to assess how his observations on those subjects might apply today. I think Ellul would be saddened by the degree to which technology and propaganda have come to dominate politics and culture in these early decades of the 21st century. I don't think he would be surprised.

My observations will concern what's happening in the United States because that's the only locality I feel qualified to assess. Obviously much of what is happening in the States is happening at the same time and in roughly the same fashion in other countries.

Allow me to set the table, so to speak, with two comments of Ellul's, one from *The Technological Society*, the other from *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*.

In *The Technological Society* he wrote that the distortion of news represents the first step toward "a sham universe," a step that leads progressively and inevitably to "the disappearance of reality in a world of hallucinations." In *Propaganda* he wrote that "Nothing is worse in times of danger than to live in a dream world."

I think it's clear that we've moved significantly closer to the realization of a "sham universe" today than we were when Ellul published *The Technological Society* in 1954. I think it's also clear that it's become very easy today to live in a dream world, and that many people do. Both developments have been brought to you courtesy of the inexorable expansion of technology.

This is decidedly *not* the view shared by many technological enthusiasts. They believe that the access we have today to virtually unlimited amounts of information has made it easier than it ever has been for the average citizen to ascertain the

truth while at the same time making it more difficult for politicians and © 2014 IJESwww.ellul.org *Ellul Forum #55* September 2014 Doug Hill others in positions of power to obscure it.

In some circumstances it's true that the Internet and other media can expose us to enlightening, empowering information. However, it's also true that the Internet and other media can expose us to vast amounts of *misinformation*, thereby encouraging us to base our opinions and behaviors on distorted perceptions of reality. This has profound implications for the future of governance and society.

Ellul stressed repeatedly that the pejorative connotation attached to the word "propaganda" obscures how we really feel about it. We think we don't like propaganda—that we don't want to be subjected to it. To the contrary, Ellul said, propaganda has achieved the power it has precisely because we so desperately need it.

Why do we need it? Simply put, because propaganda helps us survive. Another thing Ellul stressed repeatedly is that human beings are not cut out for the pressures imposed by life in the technological society. Technique helpfully offers us various means of coping with those stressful conditions. It does so because, at this point at least, human beings are still needed to help keep the gears of the machines turning, and we can't do that if we crack under the strain. Propaganda is a prop deployed to keep us at our stations.

"There is not just a wicked propagandist at work who sets up means to ensnare the innocent citizen," Ellul wrote. "Rather, there is a citizen who craves propaganda from the bottom of his being and a propagandist who responds to this craving."

What exactly does propaganda offer the harried citizen of the technological society? Many things.

Most practically, it provides a sorting tool. Propaganda tells us what's worth paying attention to. This is a key reason why propaganda has become steadily more important in the era of the Internet. Information is power, we're told, but for most of us wading through the volume of information available today is an overwhelming challenge, one that at some point we simply decline to take on.

"It is a fact," Ellul wrote in 1962, "that excessive data do not enlighten the reader or the listener; they drown him. He cannot remember them all, or coordinate them, or understand them; if he does not want to risk losing his mind, he will merely draw a general picture from them. And the more facts supplied, the more simplistic the image."

Propaganda takes advantage of this situation by giving us pre-digested packages of pre-selected information. It may not be comprehensive or balanced information, but it's all we have time for. What matters is that it's manageable. It's a life raft to cling to in an information tsunami.

As pressing as our need for information manageability might be, there's a far deeper need that propaganda satisfies: the need of individuals living in the technological society for reassurance of their value as human beings.

The technological society is a society of depersonalization, an ongoing assault on individual identity. Our daily experience is corrosive. In a thousand ways we're made to feel anxious, lonely, ignored. We become, Ellul said, "diminished."

Propaganda offers us an antidote to our diminishment. It tells us that we know things and that what we know matters. That we matter. As Ellul put it, propaganda "justifies" us. Bolstered by propaganda, he said, the individual can look down from the heights upon daily trifles, secure in the knowledge that his opinion, once ignored or actively scorned, has become "important and decisive."

The implications of this for democracy are profound. If what we seek from the news is existential reassurance rather than accurate information on which to base our opinions and decisions, we have a problem.

Obviously human beings have always been prone to confirmation bias—as Paul Simon put it, a man hears what he wants to hear and disregards the rest. But even though we have access in contemporary culture to a far more diverse range of influences and experiences than ever before, technology allows us to shut much of that diversity out, immersing ourselves in an all-encompassing confirmatory environment much as we immerse ourselves in a warm bath. It also gives us the motivation to immerse ourselves as often and as thoroughly as possible.

At the same time propaganda offers opportunities to find others who feel the same way we do, and opportunities to join with them in mutually-reinforcing groups. In a technological environment of alienation and isolation, propaganda can bind us to a community. But these are highly selective rather than diverse communities. They are actively, aggressively disinterested in sharing discussion and views with members of other communities. The point is affirmation, not an exchange of ideas. This leads, Ellul said (again, in 1962), to "an increasingly stringent partitioning of our society." The more propaganda there is, he added, "the more partitioning there is."

So it is that we live in a time when, despite the availability of unprecedented amounts of information, massive public delusions—climate change denial, the missing Obama birth certificate, the fear that vaccinations can promote autism in children, the belief that Saddam Hussein of Iraq was involved in the 9/11 terrorists attacks, to name a few examples—can flourish and successfully resist any attempt at refutation, no matter how well documented.

"Effective propaganda needs to give man an all-embracing view of the world," Ellul said. "The point is to show that one travels in the direction of history and progress." This all-embracing view of the world, he added, "allows the individual to give the proper classification to all the news items he receives; to exercise a critical judgment, to sharply accentuate certain facts and suppress others, depending on how well they fit into the framework."

In my day job as a journalist, I had the opportunity last year to interview a political scientist who studies deception and distortion in public affairs. His name is Brendan Nyhan and he's an assistant professor at Dartmouth College. One case he examined



was the "death panels" controversy that arose in connection with the Obama Administration's Affordable Care Act in 2009.

The controversy stemmed from claims made repeatedly by former Alaska Governor and former Republican vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin that under the Affordable Care Act, bureaucrats would decide which senior citizens are "worthy" of receiving medical care. Her remarks to that effect received extensive news coverage despite being widely debunked.

To determine if more aggressive media fact-checking could correct the death panels myth, Nyhan and two colleagues conducted an experiment in which two groups were asked to read fictitious but realistic-looking news articles about the death panel claims. The article read by one group contained a paragraph at the end that explained why "nonpartisan health care experts" had concluded that the death panel story was wrong. The corrective paragraph was omitted from the article read by the control group.

Reading the version of the article with the correction successfully reduced belief in the death panel myth among two types of reader: Those who already held an unfavorable opinion of Palin, and those who viewed her favorably but had relatively little knowledge of politics. Opposition to the Affordable Care Act also declined among those readers.

Among readers who were both Palin supporters and relatively knowledgeable about political affairs, the opposite occurred. After reading the corrected article they were *more* likely to believe the death panel myth and more likely to oppose the Affordable Care Act.

Nyhan calls this tendency to cling more tightly to beliefs when they're challenged "the backfire effect."

"We have an intuition," he said, "that political knowledge should be good, that people who know more have more accurate beliefs. In some cases that's true, but in other cases, when we have a motive to preserve an existing belief or attitude, political knowledge can actually equip us to better defend that attitude or belief. It gives us more tools to fend off information we don't like and convince ourselves that we're right."

In the age of the Internet, the tools we have at our disposal for fending off information are as plentiful as the tools we have at our disposal for gathering information. Often as not they're the same tools.

Observing how readily our hunger for reinforcement trumps our hunger for truth caused Ellul to issue one of those statements that has earned him his reputation for pessimism.

"Democracy is based on the concept that man is rational and capable of seeing clearly what is in his own interest," he wrote in *Propaganda*, "but the study of public opinion suggests this is a highly doubtful proposition."

There is one more of Ellul's points on propaganda I'd like to discuss today, and that is what he called "sociological propaganda."

In contrast to propaganda aimed at convincing people on a specific issue, sociological propaganda articulates a much more general collection of beliefs and assumptions that define for an entire society what is considered normal, acceptable, desirable, and beyond question.

Sociological propaganda is promulgated by television and radio programs, newspapers and magazines (the advertising as well as the articles), by Sunday sermons, by bumper stickers on cars, and by the kinds of cars that carry the bumper stickers. It speaks out from the products on the shelves of supermarkets and department stores and from the mouths of the people we pass on the street as well as from the style of their clothes and the style of their haircuts.

Ellul called sociological propaganda “propaganda as integration” and “a propaganda of conformity.” It seeks to stabilize, unify and reinforce the status quo, and to provide a plausible rationale for the status quo. It helps create, he said, “a general climate, an atmosphere that influences people imperceptibly without having the appearance of propaganda; it gets to man through his customs, through his most unconscious habits.. it is a sort of persuasion from within.”

This description reminds me of one of my favorite Ellul-isms from *The Technological Society*: “Technique doesn’t terrorize. It acclimates.”

Sociological propaganda in our current state of hyper-capitalism is where we see the power of technology come fully into its own. Technology enables an unprecedented degree of immersion in the fundamental message that everything that matters is defined by what you own and what you consume. Indeed, the entire technological society can be viewed as a form of propaganda promoting the absolute normalcy of— you guessed it—the technological society. Thus anyone who doesn’t own a car, a television set, a computer, or a smartphone is viewed as an oddball and a loser. A Luddite.

When I first sent [conference organizer] Randal Marlin a summary of what I intended to talk about today, he suggested I might want to include some “prescriptive” remarks, some suggestions on how the deleterious trends the paper as a whole describes might be countered. Those who have read *The Technological Society* are aware that Ellul specifically declined in that book to offer remedies for the deleterious trends he so powerfully described. Those who have read Ellul’s theological works know that he looked to miracle for hope and the possibility of redemption.

I no longer consider myself a religious person, and among those who know me I’ve earned my own reputation as a pessimist. Thus I’ll limit my prescriptive remarks to a couple of very simple, very obvious suggestions.

Tell the truth to power, as often and as convincingly as you can. Don’t buy the myth that there isn’t any truth, and don’t be afraid to decline propaganda’s invitations to integration and passivity.

One contemporary myth I find especially annoying is the self-congratulatory mantra of aspiring tech billionaires in Silicon Valley who vow that the new platform or new app they’re developing will be truly “disruptive.” All they’re really setting out to disrupt, of course, is a business model whose profits they hope to appropriate for

themselves. They're bravely disrupting one product—one form of self-indulgent consumerism, usually—with another. That's not what I call a revolution.

So, my prescriptive advice is this: Be truly disruptive. Make some noise. Cause some trouble. Do whatever you can to free yourself and those around you from the web of dreams and lies the technological society so relentlessly spins.

As I said, I'm no longer religious, but I'll close with a story from the Bible. Jesus has gone to pray in the garden of Gethsemane. The disciples are supposed to keep watch, but they can't keep their eyes open. They fall asleep. Soldiers enter the garden, arrest Jesus, and take him away.

The message is clear. This is no time to be caught napping.

"Nothing is worse in times of danger than to live in a dream world."

## **A Being *On* Facebook but not *Of* Facebook: Using New Social Media Technologies to Promote the Virtues of Jacques Ellul**

by Brian Lightbody

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In this paper, I wish to show how new technologies come to alter one's initial enjoyment and comportment towards a hobby. What I show is that new technologies serve to transform leisurely activities into a technique, in the Ellulian sense of the term. I begin from the outside in, as it were, by first articulating what I take a hobby to be. Secondly, I then examine the time-honoured pastime of fishing to show that new technologies, if utilized, either cause the hobby to take on aspects of traditional work or in other cases, causes the hobbyist to quit the activity because the hobby is now deemed undesirable; the technological advancement makes the hobby too easy. Thirdly and finally, I turn my attention to another kind of hobby or leisurely activity, which some have called "Facebooking." Looking at Facebook through an Ellulian lens, there are, to be sure, some rather unsettling aspects of the activity, but despite this, all is not lost; Facebook may be used as a tool to practice the Ellulian virtue of non-selectivity.

Ellul uses the term "Technicality" to refer to the increasing encroachment of technologies on all aspects of life.<sup>261</sup> New technologies are developed with one purpose in mind: to make work, in all forms, more efficient. More production, more efficiency, less time seems to be the battle cry of both technocrats and the average person on the

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<sup>261</sup> For a succinct analysis of Ellul's view on technology, see Darrel Fasching, *The Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Toronto: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1981) chapter 2.

street. Efficiency is no longer attached to some goal, but indeed becomes a goal in itself.

At times, Ellul thinks of “Technicality” as an autonomous yet dynamic entity. It is self-propelled and selfregulating as it is always geared towards maximal efficiency. Human beings cannot help but get caught up in this system as a technical improvement in one area leads to an improvement in another and so on. As a result, all members within modern societies are increasingly controlled and limited by a web-like system of interconnected technologies, practices and policies.

Ellul was not the first thinker to have noted the progression and detrimental effects of what the Frankfurt school called “instrumental rationality” in all sectors of society. But what I think is most interesting about Ellul’s work, is that technicality doesn’t simply dominate work life, but indeed comes to exercise control over every aspect of leisure time. The traditional contrary form of activity to that of work, as affirmed by most scholars in the Leftist tradition, has been that of leisure, but not idleness. It is fair to say that a traditional conception of leisurely pursuits is where one is free to pursue a hobby. Indeed some Frankfurt philosophers, such as Marcuse, believed that technology was a god-send as it allowed us to further control nature so that we could pursue activities that were enjoyable in themselves.<sup>262</sup> A hobby provides one with the means to while away time without being bored; one derives pleasure from engaging in one’s chosen hobby and as one’s skill level increases, more pleasure is derived. Fishing is a perfect example of such an activity. It is an activity that is pleasurable, requires skill and has a definite aim—progress may be tracked © 2014 IJESwww.ellul.org *Ellul Forum #55* September 2014 Brian Lightbody by the number and size of fish caught, but one usually is not required to catch anything. The time spent engaged in the activity is pleasurable in itself.

Minimally construed here, a hobby is an activity that one enjoys doing, but where one is not reduced to or identified with the activity itself. In *The German Ideology*, Marx confirms this idea, namely that a hobby is very different from work provided that it is freely engaged in for its own sake, and that the one who engages in the hobby is not identified with it. Marx writes: “In communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity... society regulates production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic.”<sup>263</sup> What is key here is that one does not become a fisherman: one is not identified with his or her job. One is free to pursue other activities as he or she sees fit. Secondly, it is important that fishing does not become work. In other words, in order for a hobby to remain a hobby, it is

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<sup>262</sup> For a succinct overview of Marcuse’s position on technology, see Brian Lightbody, “Can We Truly Love That Which Is Fleeting? The Problem of Time in Marcuse’s Eros and Civilization” in *The Florida Philosophical Review*, Summer Vol. X Issue 1, 2010 25-42.

<sup>263</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, in *Karl Marx Friedrich Engels Collected Works* (Vol .5) (New York: International Publishers, 1976,) 47.

crucial that a hobbyist is not expected to produce x number of fish in a given day; for such requirements turn one's hobby into work: one's production output is measured over time.<sup>264</sup>

However, there is something missing in Marx's analysis so Ellul would argue. What Marx perhaps only implicitly realized, but was fully demonstrated and understood by Ellul is the following: technological advancements turn such traditional leisurely activities into productive practices and what's more, these practices, when enframed in terms of production output, are shot through with measures of efficiency. What turns such hobbies into technical activities? New advances in technology. Again look at fishing as an example. Gone are the days of loading up a rowboat with fishing gear, rowing to one's favourite fishing hole and hoping for the best. Now one uses sonar. Sonar provides anglers with a simulated underwater representation of the water they are fishing - one can determine the depth of the body of water and indeed know both the number and size of fish in one's fishing hole. And, when sonar is combined with GPS, anglers are at a further advantage: one can mark the most productive spots in a lake, for example, and navigate to the exact location in the future. Indeed the very notion of a finding a good fishing hole is exploded with these new technologies. A hole denotes both presence and absence: one cannot measure the precise circumference of a hole as the very boundaries that mark the hole are themselves not strictly part of 'it,' whatever this 'it' may be.<sup>265</sup> Likewise, a fishing hole is by its nature inexact; it is its very approximation that makes it a magical, sacred place. Indeed, a fishing hole is often passed on from father to son or mother to daughter as sacred knowledge.

This idea of passing on sacred knowledge to those deemed worthy, however, is completely undermined with the advent of GPS technology. The device does all the work: all one has to do is link up with another person's unit, receive the precise coordinates and the gates of the kingdom as it were, are opened. Ellul's insight is that these so-called 'technological advancements' turn what was once a hobby or a skill into a technique. The hobby is increasingly desacralized: the hobby is now caught up in a productive circle. In spending money on these devices, an angler expects them to work and this work is measured in terms of production. What's more, new devices are measured against the only metric the angler has available, namely, the size and number of fish caught. The technological advancements themselves force one to take a technical approach to the hobby he or she once loved and, in so doing, the freedom one experienced from practicing the craft now feels more like an exercise in production.

Peter Ludlow, a philosopher of technology and cyberspace, explores the desacralization of leisure activity in a recent article in *The Atlantic* magazine. Using Ellulian insights, he produces some rather disturbing if interesting conclusions from his analy-

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<sup>264</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the activity of fishing as a hobby, see William James Booth, "Gone Fishing with Marx: Making Sense of Marx's Communism", *Political Theory*, Vol. 17, 2 May 1989. 205-222.

<sup>265</sup> For more on the ontology of holes, see David Lewis and Stephanie Lewis, 'Holes' *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 48, 2, 1970, 206-212.

sis regarding how the internet has made some hobbies too efficient such that the joy that once was found in the hobby simply vanishes. He shows that the idea of producing, what economists call “frictionless areas of consumption,” has infiltrated all aspects of modern living from stamp collecting to dating. The Internet has, single handily, radically transformed these areas of activity.

In the article “The Many Problems of Online Dating’s Radical Efficiency” Ludlow persuasively argues that all aspects of human behaviour are continually and consistently viewed from the standpoint of economics where the goal is to decrease “friction” that is, to bring consumers and producers together as efficiently as possible.<sup>266</sup> The goal of this frictionless model of consumer interaction is to remove pesky middlemen who stand in the way of consumers and the items they wish to consume. MOOCS or Massive Open Online Courses, for example, are another technological godsend according to such economists because universities, as physical institutions, are nothing more than an obstacle to learning or so it is argued. One may agree or disagree with this assessment, but in any case, Ludlow demonstrates how the application of this type of thinking to other areas has some rather surprising and depressing results. He shows that when this penchant for “radical efficiency” is applied to hobbies like stamp collecting and more interestingly to dating, that the frictionless method breaks down—the best means to the end, leads to the dissolution of the end itself. The end, in other words, is no longer deemed worth pursuing. He writes:

Let me illustrate this point with an example that has nothing to do with dating. It is a deep dark secret of mine that I used to be a philatelist—yes, you can denigrate that fine hobby by calling it stamp collecting if you wish. I collected certain kinds of 19th-century postal history (mailed envelopes) and I used to enjoy travelling from dealer to dealer digging through bins of musty postal history looking for the items that I collected. And then the Internet happened.

Collecting postal history has gone from a labor of seeking out interesting shops and sales and digging through musty boxes to one of logging on to eBay, typing in a search request (19th-century postal history), and clicking on whatever envelope covers catch my eye. The search process has for all practical purposes become frictionless, and the net result is that it just isn’t fun anymore. My collection has been placed in a storage locker. I’m done with it.<sup>267</sup>

Why is Ludlow “done” with stamp-collecting or more accurately, envelope collecting? The answer is that radical efficiency has snuffed out the flame of desire. In a perplexing move, the technology used to make stamp collecting more efficient eventually foreclosed on the hobby itself. The internet rendered the entire hobby undesirable because the aims of the hobby were too efficiently arrived at. I suppose the same result would occur

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<sup>266</sup> Peter Ludlow, “The Many Problems with Online Dating’s Radical Efficiency”, *The Atlantic*, Jan. 2013

<sup>267</sup> Peter Ludlow, “The Many Problems with Online Dating’s Radical Efficiency”

if any activity was made too easy: no adult, after all, wants to play the fish pond game at a carnival because the end result is “a winner every time.”

Ludlow then applies this lesson to another fishing hole as it were: online dating. Frictionless methods of maximal efficiency, Ludlow argues, are taking all the fun out of this sphere, too. E-harmony, for example, virtually guarantees match-making success by subjecting users to a thorough and intimate questionnaire developed by a stable of psychologists. Another popular dating website, aptly called Plenty of Fish, allows users to input a wide array of filters to ensure that one is connected with the perfect person or, at least, the perfect ‘hookup.’ But again what Ludlow shows is that the fun of dating has evaporated with these more efficient means of meeting like-minded individuals. In a sense, Ludlow complains that the entire activity has become all too easy: the service finds 20, 30 or maybe 40 perfect matches each of whom have the same interests and hobbies as I do. What’s more, introductions are already made by the program—a ranked list of the newest and most compatible profiles is emailed to your account on a daily basis.<sup>268</sup>

The most intriguing and illuminating content in the article in my opinion, however, was found in the comment section. The comment section to this article overwhelmingly substantiates Ellul’s insight that technology not only desacralizes in the name of efficiency, but that once the activity has been viewed in terms of maximal efficiency, there is in some sense no going back: new technologies will be developed that will make the hobby even more efficient until, I suppose, there is some kind of “efficiency death” a la stamp collecting. Some commentators pointed out that that they would go on two or three dates a night, all with individuals who shared common interests and hobbies. One user remarked that he would give a date 45 minutes to entertain him; if after 45 minutes he found he was bored, he would end the date, go back online and arrange for another date within a few hours. What I find interesting, (although deeply disturbing) is that the above commentator’s reasoning is perfectly sound if unforgiving: ‘Why waste any more time with an individual who does not interest you?’ ‘Surely it is easier to find someone new who is more attractive, more entertaining, and who shares more of my interests and hobbies?’

I now want to turn to a final source of leisurely activity, namely, that of “Facebook-ing.” Facebook is interesting from an Ellulian analysis for two reasons: first, a user is responsible for enframing herself. What is interesting about this phenomenon, is that it is usually the Other (with a capital O) who is enframed—I view the stranger as a means to my end. Sartre, for example, discusses this tendency in terms of his notion of the “instrumental complex”—I cannot help but view the world, including the people within it, as objects of use for me.<sup>269</sup> I absorb them as part of my totality of narrative as Levinas might say. Of course there is a dialectical dimension to this relationship

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<sup>268</sup> Peter Ludlow, “The Many Problems with Online Dating’s Radical Efficiency”

<sup>269</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness*. trans. Hazel Barnes. New York: Philosophical Library, 1956

between self and Other as Sartre well-understood: “Hell is Other people”, Sartre wrote because they enframe us as well.<sup>270</sup>

Ellul, too, is of course interested in establishing communities whereby we treat each other as neighbours and not as useful strangers who simply do things for us within the system. Facebook, I think Ellul would argue, does nothing in removing my perceived strangeness to others. If anything it acts as a powerful reductive agent in that I am become best known according to the pictures and comments I have made online. And certainly many corporations agree: scanning a job candidate’s Facebook profile has become a better interview tool than the interview itself.

A second interesting aspect of Facebook and the hobby of “Facebooking” itself, is that text is clearly subordinate to the images contained within a person’s profile. Most profiles simply consist of pictures with brief comments. Facebook, I would argue, is carving out new and mostly icon driven forms of subjectivity for 21<sup>st</sup> century persons. One presents one’s totality as it were as an avatar—an artificial character created through uploaded images, comments, as well as ‘likes’ and ‘dislikes’ which is then interpreted and judged by others, namely, ‘friends.’ But the consequence of this technology, I am sure Ellul would argue, violates the sacredness of the word. Pictures are substituted for description. And acronyms like lol, omg etc. are nothing more than canned expressions that are substitutes for real dialogue. Facebook, as a technology, would appear to be a form of social media that Ellul would abhor.

So what is to be done? Should one simply turn off and tune out from all forms of social media? Are we to retreat into some Luddian silent utopia?

I would suggest that “Facebooking” does have one advantage: it accelerates Ellul’s call to practice nonselectivity. Non-selectivity is the act of seeking out others, very different from oneself and engaging these others in dialogue. In *The Ethics of Freedom*, Ellul writes: “We always meet those who resemble us, but the commandment ...to love even enemies deconditions us. If we become capable of encountering and receiving all sorts and conditions of men, if we become capable of taking the initiative with all sorts and conditions of men, this can happen only if we are free enough not to select whom we will meet, not to pass prior judgment on whom we can meet and not to decide in advance whom we cannot meet.”<sup>271</sup>

Depending on the security settings for a profile, Facebook may be used to peer into very different worldviews. Indeed such behaviour, of looking at some stranger’s profile has its own name. It is called “creeping.” I think it is fair to say that most creeping is simply an exercise in idle curiosity. The intention, in most cases I would suspect, is to peer into the ‘world’ of some other being. To have in a sense a God’s eye view of a fellow person. We turn such a person into the Other. And the word, “creeping” corroborates this sense of otherness: I can see what you are up to, but you cannot see my profile

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<sup>270</sup> See Jean-Paul Sartre, *No Exit*

<sup>271</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom*, Translated and Edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley ( Grand Rapids Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976, 326.



and you do not know that I am spying on you. But notice the following phenomenon: the term reinforces the behaviour. If I am viewing someone's else's profile then I am aware I am "creeping" this person and therefore whatever pleasure I derive is derived once again from this taboo pleasure I receive from seeing while remaining unseen. I objectify the Other, just as I objectify the other by staring at someone getting dressed from the Sartrean keyhole.<sup>272</sup>

With all that said, an important question remains: is it not possible to creep without engaging in creepy behaviour? If I am using Facebook to peer into life-worlds very different from my own, not for the sake of puerile entertainment, but for the sake of really trying to understand someone I normally would not associate with, then am I not, in some minimal way, practicing non-selectivity? Furthermore does not this activity allow me to establish a closer tie with this person? Is it not the case that I am seeing that this person too has his or her ups and downs, her personal struggles, her triumphs? And while this idea, namely that others are like me, they too are struggling in this world and have the same fears as I do, is known, it is known very often in an abstract way. Viewing someone's profile in the above manner, however, somehow concretizes their identity and mine as well. I am drawn closer to my fellow human being. Such creepy behaviour allows me to bond with others whether they be friends or strangers insofar as I can see myself in their struggles and triumphs. The anonymous mass of individuals that Ellul greatly and rightly feared can be disassembled by "Facebooking" in this way, or so I suggest. And although this practice does not transform this mass into a community, still the world becomes a little less Other a little less strange for it is slowly transformed into a world of known strangers who are just like me.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/saxes/archive/2013/01/the-many-problems-with-online-datings-radical-efficiency/266796/>

## Notes on Recent Books by and about Jacques Ellul

*The Ellul Forum welcomes critical reviews of these and other books addressing issues of the interplay of technology, culture, politics, theology, communication and other topics. Feel free to submit your proposals, essays, and reviews to IJES@ellul.org*

Jacques Ellul, *The Empire of Non-Sense: Art in the Technological Society*  
(Papadakis Publisher, 2014) 168 pp. [www.papadakis.net](http://www.papadakis.net)

Translated by Michael Johnson & David Lovekin from *L'Empir du non-sens* (Presses universitaires de France, 1980)

At long last (34 years after its original publication in French!) we have an English translation of Ellul's study of art in the technological society. Introductory essays by Samir Younes (Professor of Architecture, Notre Dame) and David Lovekin (Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at Hastings College in Nebraska and author of *Technique*,

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<sup>272</sup> See Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 259.

*Discourse, and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul*, 1991) add greatly to the value of this major work. The work begs for serious reading and discussion.

Jacques Ellul, *If You Are the Son of God: The Suffering and Temptations of Jesus* (Eugene OR: Cascade Books, Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2014) 95 pp. www.wipfandstock.com Translated by Anne-Marie Andreasson-Hogg from *Situ es le fils de Dieu: souffrances et tentations de Jesus* (Editions Centurion, 1991)

This is a remarkable little book. Ellul begins by reflecting on the meaning of temptation and on the biblical ideas of Jesus' simultaneous divinity and humanity. In the first half of the book he explores many different aspects of the "suffering servant." In the second half he focuses on many aspects of the temptations of Jesus, exploring especially the famous threefold temptation at the beginning of his public career. This (like all of Ellul's work) will not be your usual seminary or religious professional study! Great, provocative, illuminating insights.

Jacques Ellul, *On Being Rich & Poor: Christianity in a Time of Economic Globalization*

(University of Toronto Press, 2014) xxii, 273 pp. www.utppublishing.com

Compiled, edited, and translated by Willem Vanderburg.

As he did in *Jacques Ellul: On Freedom, Love, and Power* (2010) with tape recordings of Ellul's studies of parts of Genesis, Job, Matthew, and John, Bill Vanderburg (Emeritus Professor and Director of the Centre for Technology and Social Development at the University of Toronto) does now in *On Being Rich and Poor* with tape recordings of Ellul's studies of the biblical books of Amos and James. Both of these volumes are major contributions to lovers of Ellul's brilliant if idiosyncratic (that is a compliment!) engagements with the biblical text. We are continually amazed and challenged by his unusual but well-grounded interpretations. Yes, it is too bad there was not first created a French text from these recordings but for those interested it is possible to listen to the original French recordings which are catalogued in the special Jacques Ellul Collection at Wheaton College (IL). Any who have ever worked from a recording of a live interview or event to a publishable manuscript know that a wise and sometimes strong editorial hand is essential and certainly Bill Vanderburg provides that. Bill was present at many of these studies 1973 - 1978 in Bordeaux. (I was privileged to sit in on Ellul's studies of Ecclesiastes in 1984-85 in Bordeaux which Ellul himself turned into his book *Reason for Being* (1987; ET 1990) so I can well imagine the profound experience to which he refers). Both of these volumes are major contributions for which we are indebted to Bill Vanderburg —and which deserve a wide reading and a deep review.

## **Jeffrey M. Shaw, *Illusions of Freedom: Thomas Merton & Jacques Ellul on Technology and the Human Condition***

(Eugene OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014). 193 pp. [www.wipfandstock.com](http://www.wipfandstock.com)

Jeff Shaw recently completed his doctorate with a thesis that is now edited and presented in this book. Sometimes one of the best ways to understand better a thinker or author is to do a side-by-side comparison with another thinker, distinctive but with several touch points that invite comparison. Shaw puts the American Catholic monk alongside the French Protestant sociologist to helpful effect in terms of their views of technology, theology, sociology, and politics. Brothers for sure, reinforcing many of the same perspectives, but with interesting distinctives. To receive a fuller critical review in a future *Ellul Forum*.

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## On Terrorism, Violence, and War: Looking Back at 9/11 and Its Aftermath

By Patrick Troude-Chastenet

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"I am not given to hasty conflation, and I am therefore weighing my words when I say terrorists are Nazis."<sup>273</sup>

At a time when Salafist attacks in Europe and Africa are being perpetrated in the name of the Prophet, when the beheading of American journalists is put online by Jihadists at war with the West, when social networks and Fox News have no compunction about showing the unbearable images of the death throes of a Jordanian pilot being burned alive in front of a cheering crowd—thereby spreading ISIS propaganda, we ought to keep in mind that if its forms have changed somewhat over the last fifteen years, terrorist violence is still intent on striking the imagination as much as on destroying bodies.

In hindsight, we can now say those who dated the start of the twenty-first century from September 11, 2001 were correct. A "sequence" was opened that day, and no one can tell when and how it will end. It is now a truism that there was a pre-9/11 time and that we live in a post-9/11 era, when things will never again be as before. And indeed, to paraphrase a famous formula, since that day, a specter is haunting the West, the specter of Islam, and vice versa, it might be added.<sup>274</sup> Be that as it may, if the terrorist attack, and especially the military retaliation against it, have lent themselves to the most contradictory interpretations, no one has dared to deny the importance of this unheard-of event, one that is "radically new" for Claude Lanzmann,<sup>275</sup> a pure event, "the absolute event," as French philosopher Jean Baudrillard put it.<sup>276</sup>

The magnitude of this drama should not however prevent us from considering modern terrorism as a particular form of political propaganda whose deep meaning is inseparable from the technological nature of contemporary societies. This hyperterrorism functions at once as evidence of the level of vulnerability of technological societies and as an indicator of the inherent fragility of pluralistic democracies. By virtue of its

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<sup>273</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Les combats de la liberte, Ethique de la liberte*, vol. 3, 1984, p. 166.

<sup>274</sup> Claude Liauzu, *Empire du mal contre Grand Satan. Treize siecles de cultures de guerre entre l'islam et l'Occident*, Armand Colin, 2005.

<sup>275</sup> Director of *Shoah*, Jean-Paul Sartre's sometime secretary and director of the review *Les Temps Modernes*.

<sup>276</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, (Verso, 2003), <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/jean-baudrillard/articles/lesprit-du-terrorisme/>

spectacular brutality, it has also acted as a reminder that force, not to say violence, is always and everywhere political action's specific means as *ultima ratio*.

The armed challenge against the modern state's claim to the monopoly of legitimate physical violence partially renews the theme of the yoking of politics and war. Finally, if terrorism is "intrinsically bad" in Jacques Ellul's words, it is not—in itself—a new form of totalitarianism but only a weapon in the hands of various totalitarian groups or regimes. The solutions used to fight it raise in turn the classic question of means and ends. From this angle, and so as to throw some light on our present situation, we may wonder about the lessons to be drawn from the tragedy of 9/11, first by coming back to the sequence of events as we experienced them at the time, then to examining its consequences, that is, war in its many guises as it ensued, and the questions, both moral and political, it raises on both sides of the Atlantic.

What happened that day? If we try to mentally go back in time, how did we receive and perceive this unprecedented event at the time?

### **Images of power and the power of images**

Beyond what was immediately presented as a declaration of war to America and/or the Western world, or even as the beginning of the first war of the twenty-first century, the first puzzle had to do with the choice of the targets. Their nature. Which came down to asking a series of basic questions: who did what, how, and with what results? And the persistent puzzle of the identity of the perpetrator(s) —the question of who—has tended to eclipse the question of what. The question of how has been literally absorbed by the image—broadcast in a loop—of the Boeings smashing into the towers.

We will come back to the targets' symbolic dimension, but no one could fail to notice that they happened to be sites of power—representations, images of Power. Economic and financial power: the World Trade Center. Military power: the Pentagon. Political power: the abortive attack on the White House. The visual dimension is essential, in the sense that the whole affair was shot through with spectacle—tragic to be sure, but still spectacle, and what is more, televised spectacle . . . viewed live. September 11 marked the comeback, amid fanfare, of CNN time and image.<sup>277</sup> A comeback that proved very temporary, as it turned out, though not that of Ted Turner's network as such, but of a genre that has been so criticized, in France at least, during and after the Gulf War (1991). The universal spread of images issuing from a single broadcaster, the risk of manipulation and censorship, biased information, the omnipresence of retired generals and security experts in television studios, the muffling of any dissenting voice . . .

For about forty-eight hours, aeronautics, counter-espionage, and international terrorism experts followed each other on our screens, giving the event a feeling of *deja-vu*, without however proving able to be up to its magnitude. That very evening, the question was no longer to know whether, but when, the Americans would retaliate. By

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<sup>277</sup> In symptomatic fashion, the 24-hour Qatari news network Al-Jazeera would promptly be termed "the Arab world's CNN" by French news media.

way of the 24-hour information channel CNN, were we about to relive that obscene spectacularization of war: the sky of Baghdad lit up by bombs that seem like fireworks, air raids shot from the angle of innocent video games?

But let us return to the attacks. What did we see on September 11? *America under attack*, live on all TVs on the planet. The first strike (north tower) took place at 8:45 AM in New York. (2:45 PM in Paris). Nobody saw it.<sup>278</sup> The second strike (south tower) took place at 9:06, that is, 21 minutes later, as though the first strike's function had been not only to start making victims, but above all to draw the attention of television networks and viewers to the real

carnage that was to follow. And indeed, the attack of the second Boeing could be filmed live by one of CNN's automatic cameras and seen live in the afternoon in Europe and in the evening in the Near East and Asia. "That moment was the apotheosis of the postmodern era," as novelist Martin Amis would later note. But what were, at the time, the effects on us, the unwilling captive audience of the catastrophe unfolding live under our very eyes? Dare we speak, about this predicament, of collateral damage?

Facing death live on television, we do not think, or we cease to, our brain no longer breathing, glued to the spectacular presentness of the images shown in a loop on our screens. The very enormity of the event prevents us from taking our eyes off the set. We become powerless witnesses to the bracketing of some of our "vital" functions, including the critical function. How do we escape the tyranny of the image that hypnotizes our minds? Shocking images leave us in a state of shock . . . We are submerged by images of the catastrophe that are being played and replayed on all stations. The "we" being all the *heavy viewers*<sup>279</sup> we have become on this occasion.

There is suddenly an impossibility of getting away from such a telegenic drama. After catalepsy, addiction? We are oscillating between two ills: the risk of overdose and a state of withdrawal. The repeated broadcast of those images all witnesses called incredible, unthinkable, unimaginable, ends up creating an extra need for images, as though to authenticate a spectacle deemed "unbelievable," "unreal." Conditioning, addiction, dependency. The sight of these Boeings crushing the towers has generated in the viewer, indignant at so much cruelty, a new need, impossible to admit, a kind of unconscious expectation: that of images of preparations for military retaliation, of planes taking off, of young American military, White and Black, united one and all in the same yearning to avenge their country. In other words, heroic images worthy of the best (or worst) Hollywood fare.

In 1998 already, Edward Zwick's *The Siege* depicted a series of Islamic fundamentalist attacks aimed at New York. Actually, for over thirty years, Hollywood has been flooding screens the world over with disaster movies. From *Airport* (1969) to *The Siege* (1998), through *The Poseidon Adventure* (1972), *Towering Inferno* (1974), *Die Hard*

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<sup>278</sup> The scene was however filmed by a French amateur filmmaker, whose images were broadcast by CNN only around midnight local time..

<sup>279</sup> In English in the original.

(1988), *Independence Day* (1996), and *Mars Attacks!* (1997), the US film industry has been churning out an uninterrupted stream of such spectacular productions. The genre has its rules. The disaster's function is both to reveal and to redeem. It usually allows the timid to act as fearless adventurers, the avowed bad guys to redeem their crimes, while the falsely brave are unmasked and seemingly respectable people behave like total bastards.

By a kind of irony at which History seems to excel, terrorists have turned this ideological weapon or cultural message against its sender. Originally meant as entertainment fiction, the disaster screenplay has been brutally translated to the real world by America's enemies, in a bloody "return to sender"! "It may have been no accident that they chose the language of American movies. They were creating not just terror; they were creating images."<sup>280</sup> *This time, the scene was real.*<sup>281</sup> Consequently, CIA experts seek the counsel of Hollywood screenwriters to anticipate the form new attacks will take. At the movies, disaster also reveals the hero dormant in the *regular guy*.<sup>282</sup> Many Americans actually believe the White House was saved from United Airlines flight 93, the plane that crashed near Pittsburgh, by a handful of amateur sportsmen.<sup>283</sup>

### **Symbols of power and the power of symbols**

It wasn't buildings that were attacked but above all a metaphor, or symbols, if one prefers. And not just any symbols, but those of US hyperpower, symbols of economic power, of military power and political power. Journalistic clichés always hold their share of truth. "We were aiming at the heart of America." "America hit in the heart." The Twin Towers were indeed the symbolic high place of US economic and financial power. Since it was located a few steps away from the Wall Street Stock Exchange, the press sometimes referred to the World Trade Center as the "Temple of Commerce." The religious connotation also applies to the Pentagon when it is called the *Shrine of War*. As for the White House, it obviously symbolized the seat of power of the head of the most powerful state on Earth. In other words, a sacred place *par excellence*.

In all three cases, attacking those loci of power bearing a high symbolic charge amounts to a sacrilege. By their gigantic nature alone, the twins did indeed look like cathedrals. Besides, even if a confession does not necessarily prove guilt, it will be noted that the presumed mastermind behind these attacks (the "message"'s sender) did confirm, a month after the events, what was still one interpretation among other possible ones. "The true targets were icons of US military and economic power."

By using the term "icons," Osama Bin Laden seems to want to prove Jean Baudrillard right, though he likely never heard of him. "This terrorist violence is not 'real.' It is worse in a sense: it is symbolic."<sup>284</sup> According to Baudrillard, we were all secretly

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<sup>280</sup> Neal Gabler, "This Time, the Scene Was Real." *New York Times*, September 16, 2001.

<sup>281</sup> In English in the original.

<sup>282</sup> In English in the original.

<sup>283</sup> The very title of the French documentary by Thomas Johnson: *Vol 93, les nouveaux héros de l'Amérique*, reflects this viewpoint very well.

<sup>284</sup> Jean Baudrillard, "L'esprit du terrorisme." *Le Monde*, November 3, 2001.



dreaming such a thing would happen, and in their strategy, terrorists know “they can count on our unspeakable complicity.” By deliberately positioning himself on the field of the collective unconscious, the French philosopher thus eludes all discussion, but by the same token he cannot make any scientific claim. Al-Qaeda’s founder justifies the slaughter of innocents by a politicalreligious rhetoric that tends to erase the physical reality of the victims to better underline the symbolic power of the targets. Thus, the victims were not targeted as such, but were only guilty of being at the wrong place at the wrong time. This is what killed them. And in a way, Bin Laden kills them symbolically a second time, by denying them their status as genuine targets. What does he care if the destruction of these so-called icons involved the death of thousands of very real flesh-and-blood people?

The day after the drama, on the first page of the French daily *Le Monde*, one could see Uncle Sam as a giant, striding amidst New York skyscrapers, his legs wounded by the first plane’s impact. The image was reminiscent of some famous scenes of the movie *King Kong* (1933), especially since the Twin Towers had replaced the Empire State Building in John Guillermin’s remake. But it is also impossible not to think of a giant with feet of clay or even of the Colossus of Rhodes in the peplums of yore. To be precise, if we want to have a measure of the target’s symbolic power, we have to remember that the Greek colossus was only 32 meters high, that the Mesopotamian ziggurats that inspired the biblical parable of the tower of Babel were 40 to 100 meters high, whereas the Twin Towers were 420 meters high.

For a religious fundamentalist, isn’t the American skyscraper the modern equivalent of the tower of Babel? “A tower that reaches to the heavens” (Genesis 11). A kind of challenge made by Promethean man against God to assert his power. The skyscraper as Godscraper? The Biblical episode of the tower of Babel does refer to the offence of hubris. Besides, for ultraconservative Christians as for some fundamentalist Muslims, New York is Babylon or Sodom and Gomorrah: a cosmopolitan city of decadent mores deserving destruction and divine punishment. Would it be a slight to psychoanalysis to involve it in a commonplace? The towers as a representation of sexual potency, the skyscraper as phallic symbol? From this standpoint, the attack would be tantamount to a kind of architectural and urban castration. America struck in its manhood, emasculated live by a still-unknown but clearly savage enemy.

On the first page of *Le Monde* on September 13, on the left third of the picture, one could only see the Statue of Liberty and, in the background, a thick black smoke. As though the collapse of the World Trade Center’s Twin Towers caused the very symbol of liberty to reemerge. For its part, the special issue of *Time* magazine on the tragedy showed on its front cover the two towers in flames, and on its back cover the Statue of Liberty in front, her arm held high, in dazzling profile against a backdrop of thick black smoke. The image of this unharmed statue unflinchingly overlooking a genuine field of ruin made a strange impression.

Right after the events, there were at least two possible readings of this new skyline. In the absence of any immediate claim, the famous statue appeared in the New

York sky as a kind of signature. An attack committed in the name of the right to independence? The liberation of occupied territories, the liberation of the Holy Places, the discontinuation of US bombings in Iraq, the liberation of all the oppressed in the world! This was proof of the need to destroy the temple of Western commerce to put back on the horizon the very symbol of freedom. Or then again, quite the contrary, it could be seen as an illustration of the very failure of the terrorists, who had destroyed buildings and killed innocent people without being able to dent the main, immaterial thing: the spirit of America, her principle, her values, symbolized by this world-famous statue. Besides, if liberty appears as the national religion of the United States—aside from the worship of money, then Francois Bartholdi's sculpture was its first icon, that is a "symbolic-hypostatic representation," a mere image leading to the origin and as such, ever at risk of lending itself to idolatry.

From this perspective, the Statue of Liberty would have made a much more symbolic target than the Twin Towers or the Pentagon. The target was without a doubt harder to reach, and the message was liable to becoming muddled. For if we take Osama Bin Laden's discourse seriously, the term "icon" may lead us to believe that the target of the attacks was not

America as such but the implicit model she embodies for a handful of corrupt leaders in the Middle East, starting with those of his native country, Saudi Arabia.

Finally, a parallel could be made between the astonishment of Western public opinion upon the discovery of US citizens among Taliban fighters and the current reaction of Europeans as they realize the importance of Jihadist networks leading volunteers to Syria, and especially of French people after the bloody attack aimed at the editorial board of the satirical weekly *Charlie Hebdo*. Just as the terrorist billionaire and expert in financial circuits could be termed "America's family secret" or "the president's evil twin," according to Arundhati Roy, we may wonder if the kamikaze air pirates who had been living in the United States long enough to blend in were not after all Americans in a sense, by virtue of their lifestyle, and especially, their technological culture?

### **Communication technologies and the communication of technology**

Who could deny that the United States represents the archetype, or even the matrix, of technological societies? In the era of cyberterrorism, the September 11 terrorist attack gives us the opportunity to raise the more general question of the role of technology in modern societies.

The Internet is supposed to have been invented by American engineers and originally used by the army and later by academics who wanted a faster way to exchange information with colleagues abroad. The police investigation seems to prove that the operation's organizers favored this communication technology to coordinate the attacks. More discreet than the telephone, electronic mail is said to make it possible to hide messages by a combination of cryptography and steganography. The messages would first be coded, and then concealed (in the grey area not visible to the human eye) in the middle of seemingly innocuous photographs (in particular, the most commonplace images on the Web, namely, pornography) and transmitted under the guise

of an attachment. According to Ron Dick, Deputy Director of the FBI, not only did the pirates use Internet, but they “used it well.”

As for money, the crux of any war, it will suffice to recall two elements too well-known to be dwelt upon. While the Taliban regime did persecute poppy growers, a sizable part of al-Qaeda’s fortune came from opium trafficking: how to get rich by poisoning infidels! The heroine consumed by US junkies mostly comes from Afghanistan, even as the Bush administration finances the war against drugs in that country. Talk about selling capitalists the rope that will be used to hang them! Second paradox: the ambiguous role, to say the least, played by US banks regularly working on behalf of filthy-rich businessmen from the Arab Peninsula or the Persian Gulf. With a little more curiosity about the precise identity of its clients, Citibank might have refrained from financing the kamikaze pilots based in Florida. At least since the attacks against US embassies in East Africa and the last one to date aimed at the *USS Cole*, a modicum of vigilance was to be expected. Yet Mustafa Ahmad, al-Qaeda’s treasurer, apparently had no trouble transferring funds to the head of the commandos, the Egyptian Mohammed Atta, by way of Citibank’s New York head office.

The terrorist attack against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon is to be set within the global context of technological societies. Over half a century ago, Jacques Ellul showed that the phenomenon of technology was characterized among other things by unity and by totalization.<sup>285</sup> Technology functions as a network of complex ramifications that wreak havoc with traditional distinctions opposing form and content, or civilian and military. Who, for instance, can guarantee the peaceful use of the nuclear, pharmaceutical, or chemical industry? Aside from the color of its tarpaulin cover, what sets apart a military truck from a civilian truck?

If terrorists now use school supplies (such as box cutters) as part of their arsenal, they also know how to turn an airliner into a weapon of war. We also find this unity of a system made up of interdependent elements in the phenomenon of the chain reactions generated by the September 11 attacks: financial crash, airline company bankruptcies, lay-offs in the aeronautics industry and the tourism sector, cuts in communications budgets, drop in consumption, economic recession. Furthermore, specialization entails totalization. Each one of the parts counts less than the system of connections binding them together. What makes the strength of the technological system is also its weakness. The network structure increases the fragility of technological societies that have become vulnerable by the very fact of their high degree of sophistication.

For modern terrorists, there is no shortage of targets. We may think of Internet viruses, mail-transmitted diseases (anthrax), the poisoning of a city’s waterworks or of a major hotel’s or hospital’s air-conditioning system, not to mention *communications hubs*: airports, train stations, power plants, or nuclear plants. The giant towers in which a midsized city’s population is concentrated are the perfect illustration of the

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<sup>285</sup> Jacques Ellul, *La technique ou l’enjeu du siècle*, Armand Colin, 1954.

fragility of what sociologist Alain Gras has called technological macrosystems.<sup>286</sup> The perpetrators of the attacks on the World Trade Center were well aware of this, as they secured the privilege of appearing to be part of international opinion as the new David striking down the US Goliath.

In our modern societies, technology is ambivalent, since it liberates as much as it alienates. It creates new problems as soon as it resolves them and increases itself through the— technological—solutions it brings. New equipment is already being developed to reinforce air safety. Sooner or later, it is going to be circumvented by a new generation of terrorists, which will in turn give rise to new countermeasures. But technological progress has a price that is not just financial. Its negative effects are inseparable from its positive effects, and this progress always entails a great many unpredictable consequences. To be sure, it is our leaders' duty to try to think of everything in advance. It is no less certain that caution dictates we keep in mind the share of risks inherent in any society based on technological power. It is also wise to be wary of all talk of a neat harmony of security and freedom within the State, as of all those who would combine war and justice abroad. In this respect, the military retaliation's code names, *Infinite Justice* and then *Enduring Freedom*, may be interpreted as the titles of a propaganda film projected by the US government on the world's big screen.

Is war, as Clausewitz stated, "the continuation of politics by other means," or, on the contrary, is Michel Foucault right to reverse that dictum by making politics the continuation of war? In this particular instance, it has been said—not without justification—that it was "the absence of politics by other means."<sup>287</sup> But from the afternoon of September 11, the war of images and words had begun. Later on, George W. Bush would term the military action launched in Afghanistan a "battle for civilization."

#### **The war of words and the words of war**

Communication is no doubt to propaganda what publicity is to advertising, but if the outer trappings change, the aim remains the same. Jacques Ellul has shown that, contrary to received wisdom, information (the realm of the Good and of Truth) cannot be so neatly set apart from propaganda (the instrument of Evil and lies). Far from being exclusive of one another, information is the precondition for the very existence of propaganda. Furthermore, propaganda is a necessity for those who govern as well as for the governed. It is a response to a desire for political participation, and it reassures by simplifying a reality made more complex by the mushrooming of information. President Bush's political discourse is a fine illustration of his ideas.

"Freedom itself was attacked this morning by a faceless coward. And freedom will be defended. I want to reassure the American people," George W. Bush declared on Tuesday the 11th, ". . . that the United States will hunt down and punish those responsible for these cowardly acts." Beyond the resort to the classic rhetorical trope of

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<sup>286</sup> Alain Gras, *Grandeur et dependance, Sociologie des macro-systemes techniques*, Presses universitaires de France, 1993.

<sup>287</sup> Jean Baudrillard, art. cit.

personification, the president's speech immediately situates itself on the moral plane—the better to shunt away the political dimension: (terrorist) cowardice gets opposed to (American) virtue. It is not a state, it is not a superpower, nor even what some call a hyperpower, which has been attacked, nor even a country, but a value, the fairest and noblest of all: Freedom (embodied by America). The “gaps” left in this discourse are at least as significant here as the ideas expressed. The president does not utter a single word about the foreign policy of “the most powerful Empire in history” (Arno J. Mayer), on its strategic interests in the world, or on its alliances in the Middle East.

The same evening, live from the Oval Office, he continues to omit key aspects: “These acts of mass murder were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat. But they have failed; our country is strong. A great people has been moved to defend a great nation.” Speaking of murder is again a way to depoliticize by criminalizing the opponent. This is again a way to reassure the population by stirring up patriotic feelings. Great people, great nation. The variations are meant to hammer home the same idea. Redundancy is intended. Bush again uses personification: America has been moved, unanimous to a man! In this context of major crisis, the president is trying to boost the sense of national unity.

”Today, our nation saw evil, the very worst of human nature. And we responded with the best of America—with the daring of our rescue workers, with the caring for strangers and neighbors who came to give blood and help in any way they could.” George W. Bush is still playing on personification: seeing Evil. As though it was absolute evil, and as though it was wholly contained in the images of the attack. The country has seen evil as one would say “it has seen the devil.” To the worst, we answered with the best. The president is expressing here a Manichean view of the world. The blackness of the human soul as opposed to a concentrate of American virtues. This symmetry is bogus insofar as helping victims is an obligation within the framework of modern societies (Welfare State and/or Zorro State) and the actual answer will come later, in the guise of military retaliation.

”Freedom and democracy are under attack,” he states on Wednesday. “This will be a monumental struggle of good versus evil, but good will prevail.” George Bush, Sr., used to compare Saddam Hussein to Adolf Hitler. His president son revives the Reagan-era terminology of the *Evil Empire*, which had referred to the USSR, and which now (perhaps unconsciously) reflects his own simplistic—not to say childish—worldview, as though he was announcing a new *Star Wars* episode! Finally, on September 13, he utters the word “crusade” at the very moment when Samuel Huntington's ideas are being rediscovered<sup>288</sup>: a particularly unfortunate choice of words for someone who wanted to avoid conflating Islam and terrorism.

There is an endless supply of such declarations, fraught with simplistically Manichean binaries: good versus evil, democracy versus archaism, civilization versus barbarism, light versus darkness, good guys versus bad guys . . . Osama Bin Laden

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<sup>288</sup> Samuel Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs*, 72.3 (Summer 1993): 22-49.

was perfect in the part of the bogeyman, an evil genius heading a radical Islamic version of the Spectre international crime syndicate in the James Bond franchise.

As though echoing the president's Freudian slip (?), on the same Manichean mode opposing the Umma (the Muslim nation or the community of believers) to the rest of the world, al-Qaeda's leaders would answer him on Sunday, October 7, less than two hours after the beginning of US-UK strikes on Afghan soil. "The crusade war promised by Bush has effectively started," said the spokesman of the political-religious sect. After having called to jihad, he referred to those "thousands of young people who want to die as much as Americans want to live." The authentic Muslim was described by those "madmen of God" as the one who cares about respecting his faith more than his own life (here below). This is a recurrent theme in the discourse of radical Islam: the cause is worth sacrificing one's life for it, and the mujahedeen are not afraid of dying. Bin Laden's words belong to this logic.

"America has been hit by Allah at its most vulnerable point, destroying, thank God, its most prestigious buildings." "There is America, full of fear from its north to its south, from its west to its east. Thank God for that." Throughout his statement, Bin Laden refers to America and not to a specific country, the United States; America not as a continent, but as an evil entity. Aside from omnipresent references to God, it deals with the "most vulnerable point" (the Achilles' heel or the giant's feet of clay) and "prestigious" buildings (prestige, honor, humiliation: this confirms that the targets were primarily symbolic in nature). "There is America, full of fear" —of God, of course!

"What America is tasting now is something insignificant compared to what we [Muslims] have tasted for scores of years." The rhetorical device of legitimization consists in presenting the bloody attack of September 11 as a fair turning of the tables, or better yet, as the suffering inflicted was supposedly far less than the suffering endured. It is all about having the victim appear as the executioner, and justifying to public opinion—especially but not exclusively among Muslims—an operation consisting in making anonymous office clerks, ordinary people, including Muslims, pay for the consequences of the US government's foreign policy. Hence the importance of the resort to the generic term America. Personification makes this sleight of hand possible. It is not thousands of US citizens who have been killed, wounded, bereaved, or simply traumatized . . . but **America**, an abstract and evil being along the lines of the "Great Satan" trope once used by Ayatollah Khomeini's Iran.

"Our nation [the Islamic world] has been tasting this humiliation and this degradation for more than 80 years. Its sons are killed, its blood is shed, its sanctuaries are attacked, and no one hears and no one heeds." Bin Laden is addressing this still-imaginary nation that it is the point to build. He speaks in its name. He speaks about it, to it, and to its enemies. In doing so, he starts to make it exist for real . . . in hearts and minds or in mental representations. This is how you "do things with words."<sup>289</sup> It is all about getting from the potential nation (at the time, over 1.2 billion Muslims

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<sup>289</sup> John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Oxford University Press, 1962.

spread around the world) to the actual nation. If one agrees to define nationalism as society's self-worship, let us not forget that it is not nations that beget nationalisms, but nationalism that creates nations.<sup>290</sup>

"And when God has guided a bunch of Muslims to be at the forefront and destroyed America, a big destruction, I wish God would lift their position." In accordance with al-Qaeda's usual strategy, the attack was not overtly claimed. Bin Laden rejoices at the operation's success, without however suggesting he was involved in its inception. He feeds doubt by denying the enemy any detailed admission. We may see this as abiding by the line followed from the beginning of the struggle between the Taliban regime and the US government: invoking the lack of evidence to justify refusing to give over Bin Laden. This argument would become a shibboleth in Islamic countries: "If Osama is indeed responsible for the September 11 attacks, why doesn't America provide the evidence?" But the trope of admission and definite evidence is mostly aimed at Western public opinion, and it makes sense within the framework of human justice. But the message has a second addressee: Muslim public opinion, at which the main message is aimed, namely, that the real instigator of the September 11 attack is none other than God Himself! Bin Laden only happened to be His humble spokesman or His modest interpreter.

"And when those people have defended and retaliated to what their brothers and sisters have suffered in Palestine and Lebanon, the whole world has been shouting, as the unbelievers and hypocrites have done."<sup>291</sup> The word "retaliate" is meant to legitimize the attack. It was, after all, an act of self-defense. Muslims are oppressed by Americans; it is normal that they defend themselves. The reference to Palestine belatedly appeared in Bin Laden's discourse so as to increase his potential for sympathy. Anti-Zionism constituted a powerful vector for the unification of Muslim public opinion, well beyond the Near East and Middle East. This aim was reached if we recall how his popularity rating shot up in Arab streets and among part of African youth. In the context of the second Intifada (the *Aqsa intifadeh*), Bin Laden instrumentalized the Palestinian cause. He was careful not to say that the PLO had condemned the attack and that Yasser Arafat got himself filmed in the midst of giving his blood as a sign of solidarity with American victims.

"They (Americans) are debauchees who supported the executioner against the victim and the unjust against the innocent child. God gave them what they deserve." This transparent allusion to US support for Israeli policies refers to a TV report<sup>292</sup> that had deeply troubled international public opinion, showing the death of Mohammed al-Durah (12 years old) during exchanges of fire between Tsahal and Palestinian Security Forces on September 30, 2000. Bin Laden hammers in the notion that terrorists have done nothing but execute Allah's will.

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<sup>290</sup> Ernst Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford, 1983.

<sup>291</sup> On this concept, see <http://www.cultures-et-croyances.com/etude-le-concept-de-lhypocrisie-dans-la-morale-islamique/>

<sup>292</sup> [http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x5qhp7\\_la-mort-de-mohammed-al-dura\\_news](http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x5qhp7_la-mort-de-mohammed-al-dura_news)

"These events have split the whole world into two camps: the camps of belief and the camps of disbelief!" This simplistic discourse contrasts with the complexity of the real. Bin Laden's message constitutes the reverse mirror image of George W. Bush's message: "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." But if the former claims to be fighting **injustice** (in the name of Islam), and the latter to claims to be defending ("enduring") **freedom**, their discourses are partly interchangeable. Bin Laden claims freedom for all oppressed Muslims, and Bush leads his war of reprisals to enact justice.

The oath of al-Qaeda's founder will be met a month later by that of the US president in front of the UN General Assembly: "[. . .] *their hour of justice will come*. [. . .] I make this promise to all the victims of that regime: the Taliban's days of harboring terrorists, and dealing in heroin, and brutalizing women are drawing to a close. [. . .] We have a chance to write the story of our times—a story of courage defeating cruelty, and of light overcoming darkness." The two speakers share the same Manichean view of the world. We are dealing with a genuine instance of mimetic rivalry as per Rene Girard's theory.<sup>293</sup> The similarity can even be found in unexpected areas such as health. President Bush publically swears he has not caught anthrax, while Bin Laden explains to the Pakistani press that his "kidneys are working fine."

"Every Muslim should **arise** in support of his religion, and now the wind of change has blown up to destroy injustice on the Arabian Peninsula." Americans who rise are thus met by Muslims who arise. The Arabian Peninsula is a holy land, because the Prophet was born and lived in Mecca. Bin Laden criticizes Saudi leaders for tolerating the presence of infidels (US military stationed since the Gulf War) near the holy places of Islam. "And to Americans, I say to it and its people this: I swear by God the Great, America will never . . . taste security unless we feel security and safety in our land and in Palestine." We have here a sort of mutual figure for constructing the monster. In the hours following the terrorist attack, it was only the name of Osama Bin Laden that was fed to the press and world opinion. Presidential and media rhetoric focused on this scarecrow. Bin Laden did his best to stick to this part, not without talent, it must be said. As an inspired prophet of Allah, he reveled in striking the pose of the lone champion of justice challenging the Empire by himself.

### **War of images and images of war**

Beyond the threats uttered against America, on Sunday, October 7, 2001, the success of the PR operation consisted first in the contrast between our snowy screens, on which we saw nothing of the US and UK air strikes in Afghanistan but a few green dots in the pitch dark night, and the sudden appearance in broad daylight of Public Enemy No. 1, having finished his diatribe and sipping tea in front of his cave with a prophet's serenity. If we may dwell a moment on non-verbal communication, the audiovisual staging of this discourse could only cause dismay in the Western viewer used to other codes. It

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<sup>293</sup> Rene Girard, *Achever Clausewitz*, Flammarion [2007] .



aroused in him a sense of fascination/repulsion, or at least, of troubling otherness. By contrast, in Islamic lands, it helped reinforce the aura of the charismatic leader.

A cave in the desert as sole backdrop. Muslims the world over know that Mohammed hid for three days and three nights in a cave near Mecca, to escape from his enemies who had sworn to kill him. In his time, the Prophet harangued the people to ask it to renounce the cult of images and worship the One God. His clan (the Hashemites) was then undergoing persecution. As the target of the hostility of oligarchies and polytheistic religious leaders, Mohammed then had to flee Mecca, and was forced to go in exile first in Abyssinia, then, during a second emigration (the Hijra), to the oasis that would become Medina. Bin Laden today, like the Prophet long ago, has also been expelled from his country of Saudi Arabia (1991), and then from the Sudan (1996), before finding refuge in Kandahar, among the Taliban. Mohammed also had to hide before his cause triumphed through force of arms: in 630, at the head of 10,000 troops, he had returned to Mecca as a victorious warlord.

Hands folded, eyes half-shut, in a meditative pose, Bin Laden is quietly seated on his heels in the midst of the other cross-legged bearded men. The bodily position is in conformity with the Muslim rites codifying the five daily prayers. He assumes the posture of both sage and warrior. Just like the Prophet! A religious man's beard. Military fatigues and white turban. A kerosene lamp is set on a rock, at the back, aligned with the Egyptian Ayman Al-Zawahiri, former leader of Islamic Jihad, Bin Laden's physician and counsellor. His favorite weapon, a Kalakov (AK-74), taken from a Russian soldier in combat, leaning against the cave wall, is visible, but only in the background during much of his talk. It is there as a reminder of Jihad, and perhaps also of the fact that Islam in its heyday triumphed by the sword. In his previous propaganda tapes, the al-Qaeda leader maintained his reputation as an intrepid horseman and a sharpshooter. The Kalakov also calls to mind the victorious war against the Red Army. Message: Muslims are going to defeat the US "paper tiger" as they have defeated the Soviet Great Satan.

But Osama Bin Laden could not have played Spectre's Blofeld without the complicity of the 24-hour news channel Al-Jazeera, and especially without the herd mentality of Western TV networks, converted to the one religion of profit and thus to the competition for ratings. In the name of national defense, from the very next day, the executives of the main US networks were brought to heel by the government after a moment of aberration. Under the fallacious pretext that al-Qaeda videos could contain coded messages aimed at triggering new terrorist attacks, the White House asked the big US networks to screen all images provided by Qatari television before broadcasting them. The result no doubt exceeded the expectations of the national security advisers, since images of Bin Laden disappeared from the screens for all intents and purposes. Self-censorship was also a factor in the print media. Whereas in its October 1 issue, the cover of *Time* magazine showed only Bin Laden with the caption "Target," over the following weeks one had to carefully scrutinize the pages inside to find paltry excerpts of his declaration of war on America.

Philosopher Bernard-Henri Levy expressed the opinion of many Frenchmen when he called Al-Jazeera “Bin Laden’s network.” From a Western standpoint, the accusation was not without grounds, but it needs to be qualified. It is a fact that until Kabul fell to the Northern Alliance, “the CNN of the Arab world” enjoyed a monopoly position that forced the whole world’s TV networks to rebroadcast its images strapped with a wide strip indicating their origins. But it is just that Al-Jazeera found itself in Afghanistan in a position comparable to that of CNN during the Gulf War. Whereas CNN is still viewed by international public opinion as a purely “made in USA” cultural product like Coca-Cola, its correspondent had been the only one allowed to remain in Baghdad. The Iraqi regime had thus given exceptional means to Peter Arnett, who enjoyed exclusivity as a trade-off with censorship. But because CNN showed the whole world the damage caused by US bombings among the civilian population, it was accused of playing into Saddam Hussein’s hands.

The same thing happened to Tayssir Allouni, the only reporter allowed to remain in the Afghan capital before the military balance of power was reversed. Dwelling on mis-directed strikes and civilian victims, lingeringly showing corpses in the villages bombed by the US Air Force, only relaying the words of Kabulis denouncing this war against Islam, making a display of Bin Laden’s own children armed to the teeth and singing the praises of the “emir of believers,” Mullah Omar, against a backdrop of the wrecks of helicopters and planes supposedly downed by the Taliban, the reporter made Al-Jazeera very unpopular with Washington. Accused by US authorities of broadcasting al-Qaeda propaganda, the Arabic network responded with a retrospective shown in a loop, featuring mutilated faces on hospital beds, crippled children and disfigured babies, all maimed in the name of this so-called “battle for civilization.” For its part, CNN’s executives forced employees to tag every image of civilian victims of US bombings with this ritualistic reminder: “The Taliban are protecting terrorists who are responsible for the death of 5,000 innocent people.”

If Al-Jazeera has not managed to convince Westerners of its neutrality by refusing to decide between “the war on terror, as America says” and “the war against the infidels, as al-Qaeda says,” the land of press freedom and the First Amendment has beaten all records when it comes to controlling images. In the name of its soldiers’ safety, the Pentagon has even extended its grip to photographic documents. During half of the conflict, due to a lack of independent journalists on location, any media wanting to illustrate the US presence on the ground had to be content with only the images of US commandos taken and selected by the Defense Department.

The patriotic fervor unleashed right after the attacks was not limited to the boom in sales of the Star-Spangled Banner. While, in contrast with the Vietnam conflict, the American press has, if anything, been given to self-censorship, journalists have been accused of endangering the lives of “our boys” by providing the enemy with exceedingly accurate information. A petty, slanderous accusation when one knows that said information came from briefings or the website of the Pentagon’s PR department, but this type of delusion says a lot about the expectations of much of the public. The

newspapers that dared publish pictures of Afghan babies killed by US bombs were pelted with insults. The concept of “collateral damages” is acceptable, but just as long as it remains at the level of a disembodied abstraction!

Jacques Ellul was right when he described the complicitous relationship uniting the propagandist and the propagandized. The average citizen has no taste for seeing photographs of slaughtered infants when President Bush himself has spoken of the struggle of Good against Evil, led by a nation that is decidedly good and peace-loving, but that is hated because it is misunderstood. Announcing military strikes on the same day that Bin Laden made his threats on TV, Bush had promised: “At the same time, the oppressed people of Afghanistan will know the generosity of America and our allies. As we strike military targets, we will also drop food, medicine, and supplies to the starving and suffering men and women and children of Afghanistan.” But since the small yellow containers holding food rations were the same color as the explosives scattered by cluster bombs, the latter were easy to mistake for the former. How many additional victims were there compared to how many lives saved? The “humanitarian” balance sheet of these very telegenic drops might have turned out to be a cruel exercise for its sponsor, but was the aim to persuade the whole world of American goodness or to maintain the good conscience of the supporters of this war, already a vast majority in the country?

”The word is only relative to Truth. The image is only relative to reality.”<sup>294</sup> Jacques Ellul reminds the image consumers we are, rendered bulimic since September 11, that it would be wrong to mistake the real for the true. While the word has to do with truth—and thus also with lies—the image can completely stick to reality without being true. Sight makes us see the obvious, while the word, ever uncertain, excludes it.

### **War against democracy and democracy at war**

War compels each of us to choose sides. It orients our gaze, conditions our visual memory, makes us see what we want to see, and forget the images that do not fit our interpretive framework. Propaganda reassures, because it filters, orders, and simplifies. But it would be the height of intellectual presumption to believe that (deceptive) propaganda is reserved for ordinary folks and (genuine) information to the elite. It would likewise be very naive or cynical to believe in the discourse of *just war*. As Ellul reminds us, there is no such thing as just wars, only necessary wars!

The US counter-attack was not the war of *Freedom* against *Terrorism*, but that of a Western state legitimately defending its power interests in the name of values that have a claim to universality. First of all, freedom cannot wage war, even when one goes to war in its name. Violence is always the province of necessity, that is, freedom’s antithesis. Secondly, terrorism is a highly subjective notion, which can refer to very different realities. We may recall that the Nazis used it to discredit the Resistance during their Occupation of France.<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> Jacques Ellul, *La parole humiliée*, La Table Ronde, 2014, p. 44, [1981]

<sup>295</sup> Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*. Basic

Not being able to prevent wars, international organizations have had to fall back on codifying wars. The member states of the European Union have defined as terrorist “any act . . . intended to cause death or serious bodily injury to certain persons, and provided its purpose is to intimidate a population, or to compel a government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing something.” Who could swear that this definition does not include the bombings and embargo undergone by the populations of Iraq, Iran, and Syria? As is his wont, Noam Chomsky offers a critique that is even more merciless to the powerful: “In practice, terrorism is violence committed against the United States—regardless of the perpetrators. One would be hard-pressed to find an exception to this rule in history.”<sup>296</sup>

Article 51 of the United Nations Charter recognizes an inherent right to legitimate defense in case of armed aggression. This right then raises the issue of the *proportionality* of the response. The Geneva Conventions make a distinction between civilian and military objectives and tend to proscribe the disproportionate use of force. The problem with proportionality is not limited to its legal dimension and obviously raises issues of a moral nature. Carpet-bombing strategies have generated deep discomfort even among those best-disposed toward the United States. The means used in Afghanistan in December have given rise to remorse among the very people who, in a burst of legitimate emotionalism, had claimed themselves to be “all Americans now” in September. Was it necessary to burn down the haystack to find the needle? Under the pretext that Bin Laden was as difficult to look for as a needle in a haystack, did one have the right to burn down the whole haystack and part of the field too? With all-out bombings of a country already ravaged by war and famine, all that was achieved was adding more victims to the victims. The tons of bombs dropped around Tora Bora have caused the death of numerous civilians.

President Bush pretended to have just discovered the appalling plight of Afghan women. By a neat historical irony, he was thereby unwittingly using as justification for his war the arguments invoked in 1979 by Georges Marchais, leader of the French Communist Party, to greet the Soviet intervention: putting an end to a feudal regime that demeaned women. And yet, the violation of human rights in general, and of women’s rights in particular, not to mention the scandalous destruction of the giant Buddha statues of Bamyan, had not prevented the US administration from negotiating with the Taliban until July 2001, holding out international recognition of the regime against the handover of Bin Laden. In the background for this was the oil lobby, so dear to the Bush clan, and its interest in Central Asian oilfields. From a strict *Realpolitik* standpoint, future events were to show it would have been more judicious to help the Taliban’s main adversary: Commander Massoud.

Still at the level of realism, suffice it to recall that the main instigator of the September 11 attacks was long a valued helper of the United States, armed and trained by

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Books, 1977.

<sup>296</sup> Noam Chomsky, “Cette Amerique qui n’apprend rien.” *Le Monde*, 22/11/2001

the CIA, ready to do anything in the struggle against international Communism. By equipping his troops, e.g. with Stinger missiles, the Americans made him a victorious hero of the struggle against the Soviets in Afghanistan. For reasons of his own, the creature turned against his creator after the Gulf War. Our enemies' enemies are not always our friends after all!

Along these lines, the partnership of mutual convenience tying Washington to Islamabad has led the US to close their eyes to human rights violations in Pakistan and the illegal production of a nuclear weapon, symbolically termed "the Islamic bomb" by President Ali Bhutto himself. Without the help of the Pakistani government as subcontractor of US interests in the region, without the help of its "volunteers" and secret service, the Taliban could never have taken Kabul. Because they were still thinking in Cold War terms, the United States supported the Pakistani military that put in power the Taliban, who then protected Bin Laden's networks. The idea was British, the financing was Saudi, the execution was Pakistani, but the design of this time bomb can be laid at the doorstep of the US government. There can be no question here of using a historical explanation as a kind of underhand justification. No actual or supposed crime of the US government can pretend to excuse the horror of the attacks. There is no need to invoke Dilthey or Weber to make clear analytical distinction between explaining, understanding, and justifying. The best propaganda, which is to say the most technically efficient one, is not built upon lies, but using incomplete or partial data.

In the name of anti-imperialism, a number of intellectuals were quick to disclaim any solidarity with American reprisals by invoking the United States' iniquitous policies in the Near East and their cruelty to the Iraqi people. But the Israel-Palestine conflict does not explain the September 11 attacks any more than the Great Depression explains the Holocaust. Besides, one would be hard-pressed to cite the name of a single European statesman who did more than Carter and Clinton to try to bring back peace to this part of the world. As for Iraq, those who speak of the children who died as a result of the embargo—by outrageously inflating already frightful figures: 600,000 according to UNICEF, from 1 to 1.5 million according to their own statistics—never mention the fate of 150,000 Kurds who were exposed to chemical and biological weapons at Saddam Hussein's will. In a single day, March 17, 1988, his army gassed a city of Iraqi Kurdistan, causing the death of 5,000 civilians in the throes of atrocious agony. You cannot criticize the Americans for not having a policy and at the same time make them responsible for all the evils of this world. If, as bleeding hearts believe, terrorism is the symptom and not the disease, if the economic hardships arising from neoliberal—and hence American!—globalization is its sole source, then one would have to explain why Bin Laden was a Saudi billionaire and not a Sahelian peasant.

Terrorism presents a terrible dilemma to democracies, by condemning them either to betray their basic principles or to disappear at the enemy's hands. To resist as political regimes here and now, they have no other choice than to make a mockery of the values

that found them as a normative ideal. Curtailment of civil liberties, witch hunts in the press and pressures on the media, arbitrary arrests, extension of police custody for foreigners, establishment of exceptional justice and military tribunals, searches of vehicles and people, large-scale development of phone tapping (including of “friendly countries”), and e-mail monitoring. Even within a legal framework (US Patriot Act, security law in France) and with the assent of a public opinion all too eager to trade in its freedom against a return to order, the drift to a security state at home contradicts the democratic spirit just as much as violations of the laws of war abroad. This war was no doubt inevitable even if it was not likeable, but it was in no way a just war; for if there are just causes, there cannot be just wars. “The noblest ends assigned to war are rotten by war,” as we are reminded by Jacques Ellul, for whom not only the end does not justify the means, but the means corrupt the ends. The nobler the ends are said to be, the crueler the methods to reach them will be. The whole discourse of the US government consisted precisely in justifying the use of inhumane means in Afghanistan as retaliation for an “aggression against all mankind.” As we know all too well, politics is not an industry based on morals. Machiavelli taught us that in politics, force is just when it is necessary. In the same sense, Weber taught us that in politics, we do not always get the Good through the Good. Ellul, who emphasizes the catalytic function of Christians, this peculiar role of sheep among wolves, and who advocates not only non-violence, but non-power, could never have shared Weber’s admiration for that character in Machiavelli’s *Florentine Histories* who declared that those who preferred the greatness of their City to the salvation of their soul ought to be congratulated. Ellul for his part never tired of proclaiming that a just world could not be founded by unjust means, nor a free society by the means of slaves.<sup>297</sup>

## The Prophet of Cuernavaca: Ivan Illich and the Crisis of the West

By Todd Hartch, Oxford University Press, 2015

Reviewed by Peter Escalante

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Ivan Illich, idiosyncratic Catholic priest, dissident theologian, and philosopher, is known primarily for his series of short phenomenological essays illuminating some aspect of modern life. Like Agamben’s archaeology, his method in these aims to reveal the deep imaginal underpinnings of modern life. It is easy to get the impression from

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<sup>297</sup> Jacques Ellul and Patrick Troude-Chastenet, *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology and Christianity*, Wipf and Stock, 2005.

the essays that he was a calmly panoptic intellectual, though a passion for justice obviously warms his writing.

His life was tempestuous and often frustrated but always self-directed, perhaps even self-willed, and by no means merely incidental to his intellectual work. Even his death was a gesture of a piece with his life-work; he died of an extremely painful and disfiguring facial cancer. Illich in fact wrote his sophisticated essays in much the same way, and for much the same sort of purpose, as Subcomandante Marcos writes his communiqués, as Las Casas wrote his remonstrances. Thus this well-written and very attentive biography is long overdue and a welcome arrival.

And it is relentlessly biographical, steadily eschewing the temptation to become merely a chronology of his life or an exegesis of the essays, or to take too forward a position of its own regarding Illich's remarkable itinerary. This is very helpful, because, as Hartch makes very clear, Illich is not so much difficult to understand in his writing as, rather, extremely difficult to recognize in his role, and only close attention will reveal the motive idea of the man.

The key thing Hartch notes, and rightly, is that Illich was a Christian priest and a missionary of the Catholic Church. The great and perhaps insuperable difficulty of Illich's mission was that the Catholic Church as he conceived it was dramatically different from the institution that goes under that name, and thus he was not a missionary of the ordinary sort and was in fact perhaps wholly unrecognizable as one.

The book is an extended consideration of this project and this predicament. Hartch traces throughout all of Illich's moves his willingness to position himself outside the hierarchical bureaucracy but still within not only charism but even office of minister and missionary (despite his radical critique of institution and mission as actually existing forms), his cultivation of convivial associations, and his teaching, a single missionary and reforming motive.

Hartch very helpfully explicates Illich's critique of the modern West and of the clerical bureaucracy which he regarded as its matrix and exemplar, as not simply a cry of protest but also a prophetic call toward convivial communion. In Illich's own eyes, he was a missionary not "from" the West, but rather to the West, and sent from the Catholic Church that he distinguished sharply from the organization that holds the name as a trademark. This is a really remarkable insight into Illich and illuminatingly unifies his life and works. Although the book is very responsibly and consistently biographical, for this reason I think it can also serve as a very fine introduction to the Illich's thought.

The book ends by recounting his many failures and frustrations, many of which were due to the unrecognizability of both his mission as mission and his church as church. In the extremity of the near-unrecognizability of his mission, and in the radicalism of both his analysis and his personal risk, Hartch sees Illich as assuming the mantle of prophet. As is often the case with prophets, his short-term failures seem to be spectacular. In particular, the reformed convivial and conciliar church, whose way Illich hoped to make clear through his ferocious critique of Roman Catholic missions, never appeared;

what grew in the field he cleared were seeds planted by Protestant missionaries, whose churches, although plural and more populist, were nevertheless as institutionalist in their way as the Roman Church. And within Rome itself, those inspired by more hopeful readings of the texts of Vatican II were immediately re-circumscribed within the official institutions. Most painfully, perhaps, Illich ends up with fewer and fewer interlocutors, finding himself largely alone. But Hartch sees Illich's mission as leaving lasting testimony for those who wish to hear it.

## Ellul, Machiavelli and Autonomous Technique

by Richard Kirkpatrick<sup>298</sup>

Richard L Kirkpatrick attended Connecticut College and Johns Hopkins University. He studied Ellul and Machiavelli under the guidance of Professor F. Edward Cranz, author of *Nicholas of Cusa and the Renaissance*, and other works. This piece is dedicated to him.

"In spite of the frequent mention of Machiavelli's *Prince*, the truth is that until the beginning of the twentieth century no one ever drew the technical consequences of that work."<sup>299</sup> Jacques Ellul thus remarks without elaboration in *The Technological Society*, although he had more elsewhere to say about Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527), as appears below. While many have noted a "technical" dimension to Machiavelli's thought,<sup>300</sup> none has considered it specifically in light of Ellul's conception of "autonomous technique"—deterministic technique that is "self-directing." Ellul's main study was the "technical system" as a civilizational phenomenon, the historical origins of

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<sup>298</sup> My thanks to David Lovekin and Jeffrey Shaw for help shaping this paper.

<sup>299</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*. Translated by John Wilkerson (New York: Vintage, 1964), 232.

<sup>300</sup> An early twentieth-century example, perhaps one Ellul had in mind, was Carl Schmitt, *Dictatorship*, 67, cited in J. McCormick, *Carl Schmitt's Critique of Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 129-130 (finding in Machiavelli "purely technical interests . . . technicity"). S. Ruffo-Fiore, in *Niccolo Macchiavelli: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Greenwood, 1990) collects many articles and books touching on Machiavelli's "technical" approach and "technique." Some interpreters of Machiavelli have equated or conflated the terms "technical" and "scientific" (e.g., Hughes in "The Science of Machiavelli"). Also see Ernst Cassirer, *The Myth of the State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1946), 153, under the caption "The Technique of Politics," for a comparison of Machiavelli with Galileo. The interpretation of "Machiavelli the Scientist," which flowered mid-twentieth century (see C. Singleton, "The Perspective of Art," *Kenyon Review* 15 (1953)), was widely criticized. See also Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1958), 20 as well as his "Three Waves of Modernity," *An Introduction to Political Philosophy: Ten Essays*, edited by Hilail Gildin (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 86-87. In nuanced passages, Ellul considered "science" and "technique" to be related, but he regarded technique as a separate phenomenon, and, in its modern stages of extreme acceleration, to have precedence over science. My observations on Machiavelli in this piece are strictly limited to the terms of Ellul's conception of "autonomous technique."



which he found in the eighteenth century CE<sup>301</sup>. Thus, Machiavelli—two hundred years before then—was unquestionably far from the fully realized “technical system” in its modern maturity, and extreme contemporary acceleration. Ellul, however, glimpsed in his thought early characteristics or symptoms of the phenomenon of technique applied to humans—“a lightning flash,” as one scholar put it, “long before the main storm.”<sup>302</sup> This chapter presents Machiavelli’s pertinent line of thought and brief extracts from the *Prince*, the *Discourses*, and his letters,<sup>303</sup> then draws the technical consequences in Ellul’s terms.

### Niccolo Machiavelli

”On many occasions,” Machiavelli wrote,<sup>304</sup> he considered a dilemma, in sum: You consistently do your will and reach your intended ends when you adapt yourself and match your “modes of proceeding” (*modi del procedere*)<sup>305</sup> to changes of fortune and of the times. Everyone, however, has a given nature, so you are *unable* to adapt as needed. Fortune and the times change, but you, stuck in your nature, do not—to your ruin. When Machiavelli counsels you “to use” the lion and to use the fox,<sup>306</sup> he knows it is impossible—the fox is no more leonine than the lion is vulpine; the same inflexibility is to be found in humans, whose stubborn natures obstruct their wills.<sup>307</sup> We get in the way of our own goals.

In this as in all his observation and reading, Machiavelli presents examples of “the actions of great men.”<sup>308</sup> Two of his favorite ancient exemplars of modes of proceeding were Hannibal the Carthaginian and Scipio the Roman—opposites: Scipio used the mode of “love” with “piety, fidelity, and religion,” Hannibal, the mode of fear, with

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<sup>301</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System*. Translated by Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Continuum, 1980), 79 and Jacques Ellul, *Perspectives on Our Age: Jacques Ellul Speaks on His Life and Work*. Edited by Willem H. Vanderburg (New York: House of Anansi, 2011), 29-30.

<sup>302</sup> F. Edward Crazz, *Technology and Western Reason* (New London, CT: De Litteris, 1980), 24.

<sup>303</sup> Citations to the *Prince* are by chapter numbers, and to the *Discourses* by book and chapter numbers, which are standard in all editions.

<sup>304</sup> J. & P. Bondanella, *Niccolo Machiavelli, Discourses on Livy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 281 (*Discourses* 3.9: “Io ho considerate piu volte”). See also R. Ridolfi, “I Ghiribizzi al Soderini,” *La Bibliofilia* 72 (1970), 53, a critical edition of the text at Nicolo Machiavelli *Opere*. Edited by M. Martelli (Florence: Sansoni, 1971), 1082-83; see also the tercets on Fortuna at *Opere*, 978, lines 103-05, 112, 112, 114, 126; G. Inglese, *Machiavelli Capitoli* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1981), 122-23; M. McCanles, *The Discourse of Il Principe* (Malibu, CA: Udena, 1985), chapter 25; *Opere*, 1136-39, 1252-56 (April 29, 1513 letter to Vettori); *Opere*, 295-96 (*Prince* 25); 211-14 (*Discourses* 3.8-9); 226-27 (*Discourses* 3.21).

<sup>305</sup> As translated by H. Mansfield in *Machiavelli: Discourses on Livy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) and in Mansfield’s *Machiavelli: The Prince* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

<sup>306</sup> For the composite man-beast, the centaur, see E. Raimondi, “The Centaur and the Politician,” in Ascoli & Kahn, *Machiavelli and the Discourse of Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 14560.

<sup>307</sup> Richard Greenwood, “Machiavelli and the Problem of Human Inflexibility,” in *The Cultural Heritage of the Italian Renaissance: Essays in Honor of T. G. Griffiths*, edited by C. Griffiths & R. Hastings (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1993), 196.

<sup>308</sup> The quoted passage is from Machiavelli’s dedication of the *Prince*.

“cruelty, perfidy, and irreligion.”<sup>309</sup> Both were successful, but changing times and fortunes might have required reversal: Hannibal to adopt the mode of love, and Scipio, fear, or yet other modes. These men, however, being unable to adapt themselves and their modes, would have failed. As Professor Ferroni summarizes:

The guarantee of happiness and success can be offered, in Machiavelli’s anthropology, only by the individual’s capacity for adapting his particular nature to the variations of Fortune, and thus of repeatedly “transforming” the modes of proceeding, according to the directions of these variations. If Fortune moves continuously between extreme and opposite poles, we will be able to match her only if we also know equally well how to shuttle between extremes, only if we are always ready to reverse our own mode of proceeding (if, in sum, we succeed in “transforming into the contrary”).<sup>310</sup>

One of Machiavelli’s well-known attempted answers to the problem is *virtue*,<sup>311</sup> a force of nature to match capricious Fortuna, by “beating her and holding her down.”<sup>312</sup> *Virtu* is a personal gift— ancient, atavistic, and, as Machiavelli knows, rarely to be found. *Virtu* is extraordinary, personal, natural—the “modes of proceeding” are abstract, universal, impersonal. “Modes” do not much matter to those having “great *virtu*” or “extraordinary *virtu*,”<sup>313</sup> but few have *virtu* at all, and fewer still have it in abundance. “The operations of greatest *virtu*” are things of the past.<sup>314</sup> If *virtu* is not in your given nature, you cannot hope to acquire it. Besides, a savage who possesses *virtu* may flex it without consulting Machiavelli. *Virtu*, the natural force, does not answer Machiavelli’s procedural problem—to find modes accessible to those who understand (*intende*) and who “know” fortune and the times,<sup>315</sup> so that they always (*sempre*) reach their ends successfully.<sup>316</sup>

Another of Machiavelli’s responses to the problem is pretense, but only to disguise personal qualities in yourself you cannot change or to simulate qualities you do not have. As to morals, you need not “have them in fact” but only “appear to have them,” and it may be advantageous sometimes even “to be” so. “But the mind must be framed in a way that, needing not to be, you can know how to change to the contrary.”<sup>317</sup> When, as here, *seeming* and *being* elide, the old dilemma recurs.

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<sup>309</sup> Ridolfi, “*I Ghibibizzi al Soderini*,” note 6. Book 3, chapter 21 of the *Discourses* is titled “Whence It Arises that with a Different Mode of Proceeding Hannibal Produced Those Same Effects in Italy as Scipio Did in Spain.” *Discourses* 3.21.

<sup>310</sup> G. Ferroni. “‘Transformation’ and ‘Adaptation’ in Machiavelli’s *Mandragola*.” In *Machiavelli and the Discourse of Literature*, A. Ascoli & V. Khan (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 19.

<sup>311</sup> For a start on the enormous bibliography of *virtu*, see Mansfield, *Machiavelli: Discourses on Livy*, 31516.

<sup>312</sup> *Prince* 25.

<sup>313</sup> *Discourses* 3.21.

<sup>314</sup> *Discourses*, preface to book 1.

<sup>315</sup> Ridolfi, “*I Ghibibizzi al Soderini*,” note 6. “Et veramente chi fussi tanto *savio* che *conoscessi* e tempi e l’ordine delle cose et adcomodassisi ad quelle.” Martelli, *Machiavelli Opere* 1083a (emphasis added).

<sup>316</sup> *Prince* 15; *Discourses* 3.21.

<sup>317</sup> *Prince* 18 (emphasis added).

As Professor Najemy explains:

Particularly thorny for Machiavelli was the philosophical conundrum of agency and contingency . . . The unpredictability of events, the irrationality of history, and people's inability to deviate from their inborn nature and inclinations (all of which flow into what he meant by fortune) caused him to wonder where and how agency, or free will, could determine or influence the outcome of events (which is at least one important sense of Machiavellian *virtu*) . . . If, in theory, random variation and

unpredictability can be tamed either by prudence or impetuosity, in practice *both methods are rendered inefficacious by the prison of unchanging individual natures that occludes the required flexibility*. In his poetry and letters Machiavelli recasts the problem by relocating the "variation" of fortune in both nature and human nature, and thus no longer only in external randomness . . . [T]his theoretical dilemma . . . never ceased to trouble him.<sup>318</sup> (emphasis added)

Machiavelli scholar Professor Atkinson adds, "The question would continue to haunt him."<sup>319</sup>

Culminating his long search for accessible and consistently effective modes of proceeding, Machiavelli was led in a radically new direction—"dans d'étranges domaines," as Ellul calls the realm of the technical bluff.<sup>320</sup> In Machiavelli's letter dated April 29, 1513, the main subject is the latest in political news, the truce between the king of France and Ferdinand, king of Spain. Machiavelli exhaustively argues both sides of the case—that Ferdinand was wise in his modes, then, with equal facility, the reverse: that he was unwise. Machiavelli ventures a third alternative:

One of the modes (*modi*) for holding on to new territories and for either stabilizing equivocal *minds* or keeping them hanging and irresolute is to arouse great expectations of oneself, always keeping men's *minds* busy with trying to figure out the end (*fine*) of one's decisions and one's new ventures. The king has recognized the need for this and has employed it to advantage . . . He has not tried to foresee the end (*fine*): for his end (*fine*) is not so much this, that, or the other victory, as to win prestige among his various peoples and to keep them hanging with his multifarious activities. Therefore he has always been a spirited maker of beginnings, later giving them that end (*fine*) which chance places before him or which necessity teaches him.<sup>321</sup>

The reader may well wonder if the theory makes "any coherent sense" and consider it, as Machiavelli himself allowed, a stingray "sold with its tail lopped off," that is, a

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<sup>318</sup> John M. Najemy, *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 11.

<sup>319</sup> James B. Atkinson, *Niccolo Macchiavelli: A Portrait*, in Najemy, *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*, 18-19.

<sup>320</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), xvi.

<sup>321</sup> James B. Atkinson & David Sices, *The Sweetness of Power: Machiavelli's Discourses & Guicciardini's Considerations*. (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002), 235 (emphasis added).

“fish without head or tail”—in the vernacular, “without rhyme or reason”<sup>322</sup> or “higgledy-piggledy.”<sup>323</sup> We have however two versions of the letter, one draft, one final; the great epistolographer says what he wishes, how he wishes.

Ferdinand reappears as an exemplar in the *Prince*, in which Machiavelli promises to deliver the “effectual truth” (*verita effettuale*).<sup>324</sup> By attacking Granada, Machiavelli writes, Ferdinand

kept the minds of the barons of Castile preoccupied; while thinking of that war, they did not think of [political] innovations.<sup>325</sup> By this means (*mezzo*), without their realizing it, he acquired great prestige and authority over them . . . Thus he consistently planned and executed great projects which have always kept the minds of his subjects in suspense and wonder—concentrated on the outcome (*evento*) of

events. His moves have followed so closely one upon the other that he has never given men an ample enough interval between his exploits to work quietly against him.<sup>326</sup>

A hypothetical figure comparable to Ferdinand appears in Machiavelli’s *Discourses*. Machiavelli notes that “men are desirous of new things.”<sup>327</sup>

This desire, therefore, opens the doors to anyone in a province who makes himself the leader of an innovation: if he is a foreigner, they run after him; if he is from the province, they gather around him, augmenting and favoring him so that however he proceeds he succeeds in making great strides in those places.<sup>328</sup>

This “Innovator” may be a reformer, seditionist, or busy politician. His innovations are much like Ferdinand’s “beginnings” and “great enterprises.” Ferdinand makes up his nominal “ends” as he goes along; Machiavelli’s Innovator has no identified ends at all. He has no name. Machiavelli gives no exemplar among men past or present. In neither the Innovator nor Ferdinand does Machiavelli identify *virtu*; they do not need it. Nor do they need to dissemble to succeed. Constant action itself blinds people, or, as spectacle, fascinates them. The success, “needing not to be” anybody, is, literally—nobody. In sum, this idea is a perfect example of “autonomous technique” in the thought of Jacques Ellul.

### Jacques Ellul

Ellul’s conception of “autonomous technique” illuminates Machiavelli’s novel thoughts on Ferdinand and the Innovator. Technique becomes autonomous, Ellul explains, when one “method [*methode*] is manifestly the most efficient [*plus efficiente*]

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<sup>322</sup> John M. Najemy, *Between Friends: Discourses of Power and Desire in the Machiavelli-Vettori Letters of 1513-1515* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 126.

<sup>323</sup> James B. Atkinson & David Sices, *Machiavelli and His Friends: Their Personal Correspondence* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996), 236, 506.

<sup>324</sup> *Prince* 15.

<sup>325</sup> Rinaldi, *Machiavelli, Opere*, volume 1, 345, note 17, explains the political connotations of “*innovazione*.”

<sup>326</sup> *Prince* 21 (emphasis added).

<sup>327</sup> *Discourses* 3.21: “*gli uomini sono desiderosi di cose nuove*.” (Martelli, *Machiavelli Opere* 227a); *Discourses* 1.37: “*gli uomini sogliono affliggersi nel male e stuccarsi nel bene*.” (Id., 119a)

<sup>328</sup> *Discourses* 3.21.

of all the other means [ *moyens* ],” —at that crux— “the technical movement becomes self-directing . . . The human being is no longer in any sense the agent of choice . . . He does not make a choice of complex, and, in some way, human motives. He can decide only in favor of the technique that gives maximum efficiency [ *le maximum d’efficience* ].”<sup>329</sup> Autonomous technique “is an end in itself . . . Technique obeys its own determinations, it realizes itself [ *elle se realize elle-meme* ]”<sup>330</sup> Ellul teaches that, from “the moment efficacy [ *l’efficacite* ] becomes the criterion of political action,” no one can choose [ *ne pourrait choisir* ] by any other criterion. Ellul writes that Machiavelli “does in fact conclude that politics is autonomous. Doctrine enters only when he tries to establish general rules [ *une politique generale* ] and formulate the political courses that he considers the most efficient, having first established efficiency as a value . . . Machiavelli really demonstrated the Prince’s role, above all, is to be effective [ *efficace* ]. By doing so, he introduced a new perspective, revolutionized his time, introduced efficiency [ *l’efficacite* ] as a value.”<sup>331</sup>

When discussing Machiavelli’s “theory of prestige and of diversion,” Ellul cites the passage of the *Prince*, quoted above, on Ferdinand and adds:

The prince must first ensure his prestige by psychological means, and secondly he must divert the attention of his opponents and of his subjects on questions that impassion them while he himself acts in another domain . . . Although Machiavelli did not devote a special chapter to propaganda, one can say that it is everywhere in his work, that he is the premier theoretician of propaganda (*le premier theoricien de la propagande*), and that his theory is famously encapsulated: “to govern is to make believe (*gouverner, c’est faire croire*).”<sup>332</sup>

After a long, frustrating effort to mediate possibility and necessity, ends and means, Machiavelli’s “philosophical conundrum” is not solved but erased. Machiavelli’s Ferdinand and Innovator are entrained in modes of proceeding that are autonomous, self-directing. Ferdinand circles endlessly:

- His means are to keep people guessing about his end, so
- He takes actions without seeing their end, because
- His end is to keep people guessing.

The stingray with its tail lopped off is circular, and circles have no “end.”<sup>333</sup> Ferdinand undertakes ceaseless actions without seeing their ends as the means to hold

<sup>329</sup> Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 80 (“les autres moyens” appears in the original French).

<sup>330</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System*. Translated by Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Continuum, 1980), 125,141. See also Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*, 243.

<sup>331</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Political Illusion*. Translated by Konrad Kellen (New York: Knopf, 1967), 69-70.

<sup>332</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Histoire de la Propagande* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967), 47-48.

<sup>333</sup> F. Montanari, *La Poesia del Machiavelli* (Rome: Studium, 1968), 70 (“circolo della necessita . . .

people in “suspense and wonder” about his ends; nobody can make “head or tail” of him. Ferdinand’s “ends” are whatever happens. In the *Discourses*, the Innovator has no stated ends whatsoever; he does nothing but innovate—*what* is unspecified. “However he proceeds he succeeds” —*to what purpose* is unspecified. He fascinates people—*why* is unspecified. Spectacle and fascination are technically related,<sup>334</sup> and both support Ferdinand’s dominion of everyone’s minds.

For both Ferdinand’s “great enterprises” and the Innovator’s “great strides,” unnamed ends have disappeared into technique, which is its own end. To adapt Ellul, Ferdinand and the Innovator have set out “at tremendous speed—to go *nowhere* [*vers nulle part*].”<sup>335</sup> Machiavelli’s technical “modes” in the political world are what Ellul calls “make believe” or “*Le Bluff Technologique*.”<sup>336</sup> Ellul scholar David Lovekin explains that Ellul’s technique “is always artificial . . . and abstractive.”<sup>337</sup> Machiavelli anticipates our own technically abstract vocabulary as applied to humans: modes, procedures, operations,<sup>338</sup> managing.<sup>339</sup>

The solution to the means-ends problem that so vexed Machiavelli, in the revolutionary terms of autonomous technique, is technically “sweet.” For Ferdinand and the Innovator, the “effectual truth” (Machiavelli) and the “means absolutely most efficient” (Ellul) have no ends. Says Ellul: “the ends have disappeared, or they seem to have no connection with means . . . The means no longer has any need of the end . . . [Technique] goes where every step leads it, an implacable monster which nothing can stop.”<sup>340</sup> Paradoxically, Machiavelli intended the modes of proceeding as a way to preserve “our free will”<sup>341</sup> (*el nostro libero arbitrio*),<sup>342</sup> but autonomous technique is deterministic: Ellul’s technical man (*l’homme technicien*) is “absolutely no longer an agent of choice [*n’est absolument plus l’agent du choix*].”

If the technical solution seems irrational—autonomous technique inverts reason and creates a rationality of its own, which Ellul names “unreason.” As he explains: “The desire . . . to rationalize human behavior will *always* lead to a point of reversal and an explosion of the irrational . . . We have here a kind of monster. Each piece is

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la legge fondamentale della tecnica”).

<sup>334</sup> Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*, xvi, 323ff. See also Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*. Translated by Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), for a discourse on the primacy of spectacle in the technical system.

<sup>335</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom*. 2d ed. (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1989), 56 (emphasis in the translation).

<sup>336</sup> Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*, xvi.

<sup>337</sup> David Lovekin, *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 1991), 160. See also, F. Chiapelli, *Studi sul Linguaggio del Machiavelli* (Florence: F. Le Monnier, 1969), 45-46 for an explanation of the comparably abstract character of Machiavelli’s prose.

<sup>338</sup> *Discourses* 1 preface; the Ghiribizzi of 1506, supra n 5.

<sup>339</sup> *Prince* 9; *Discourses* 3.40.

<sup>340</sup> Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom*, 54, 59, 60.

<sup>341</sup> *Prince* 25.

<sup>342</sup> For the crucial importance of the will in Machiavelli, see Singleton, “The Perspectives of Art,” 176.

rational but the whole and its functioning are masterpieces of irrationality . . . There is a process which leads on from apparently sane and acceptable premises to irrational conduct and plans.”<sup>343</sup>

In Ferdinand and the Innovator, the apparent absurdity and irrationality of Machiavelli’s modes of proceeding are irrelevant to technique, which for Ellul is “the triumph of the absurd,” culminating in “ultimate idiocies [*ultimes sottises*].”<sup>344</sup> Just as autonomous technique subverts free will, the engine of Machiavelli’s modes, it also subverts reason, one of the few standards usually observed by the otherwise infamously subversive Machiavelli.<sup>345</sup> To adapt Benedetto Croce’s famous observation by substituting “technique” for “politics”: “Machiavelli discovers the necessity and autonomy of *technique*, of *technique* that is beyond, or, rather, below, moral good and evil, that has its own laws against which it is useless to rebel.”<sup>346</sup>

Ellul explains that “the system presupposes a more and more thorough interrogation of each element, including man, as an object . . . a manageable object [*d’objet maniable*] . . . in this inhuman universe [*univers inhumain*] . . . Modern man, having been dehumanized by means, [has] himself become a means.”<sup>347</sup> Ellul approvingly quotes a commentator: “Technique has nothing to do with inner life except to abolish it [*l’abolir*].”<sup>348</sup>

Scholars have observed the phenomenon in Machiavelli’s actors, subjects, and objects. They are “raw material.”<sup>349</sup> “Have not all readers of Machiavelli felt how his heroes have no inside?” “The image is all, the reality nothing.” The prince “must make himself a person with no qualities whatsoever . . . a cipher, possessing no qualities, either bestial or human, as his own . . . The prince never *is* this or that, he *uses* this or that quality . . . A void at the center of the *Prince* marks the absence of the prince himself.” Humans are, in a word, “zero.”<sup>350</sup> These are “the technical consequences,” in Ellul’s terms, to be drawn from Machiavelli’s *Prince*.

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<sup>343</sup> Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*, 108, 169, 221 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>344</sup> Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*, 197, 381.

<sup>345</sup> While variations on *ragione* in Italian have a number of different connotations, Machiavelli’s uses emphatically include *ragione*’s noetic sense. See the glossaries in Mansfield, *Machiavelli, The Prince*, 134 and Mansfield, *Machiavelli: Discourses on Livy*, 339-40. See also April 29, 1513, letter, *supra*, n. 6: “I do not want to be prompted by any authority but reason (*ragione*),” and, from Mansfield, *Machiavelli, Discourses on Livy*, 1.58: “I do not and I never shall judge the defense of any opinion by reasons (*ragioni*) without recourse to either authority or force to be a flaw.” Atkinson & Sices, *Machiavelli and His Friends*, 233.

<sup>346</sup> B. Croce, *Politics and Morals* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1945), 59. “*Machiavelli scopre la necessita e l’autonomia della politica, della politica che e di la, o piuttosto di qua, dal bene e dal male morale, che ha le sue leggi a cui e vano ribellarsi.*” The essay “*Machiavelli e Vico*” was first published in 1924.

<sup>347</sup> Ellul, *The Technological System*, 12, 46, 112, and Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom*, 55.

<sup>348</sup> Ellul, *The Technological System*, 119.

<sup>349</sup> Schmitt, *Dictatorship*, 6; McCormick, *Carl Schmitt’s Critique of Liberalism*, 131.

<sup>350</sup> Singleton, “The Perspective of Art,” 180; McCanles *The Discourse of Il Principe*, 105-06 (emphasis original); J. Barish *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 97-98; Montanari, *La Poesia del Macchiavelli*, 69; see Jeffrey Shaw, *Illusions of Freedom: Thomas Merton and*

# Digital Vertigo: How Today's Online Social Revolution Is Dividing, Diminishing, and Disorienting Us

By Andrew Keen, St. Martin's Press, 2012

Reviewed by David Lovekin

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Keen begins with a reference to Alfred Hitchcock's remark, ". . . that behind every good picture lay a great corpse" (1). Keen notes that Hitchcock's *Vertigo* is a film about a man in love with a corpse. Keen then moves to the corpse of Jeremy Bentham, British philosopher, founder of utilitarianism, and visionary of the prison—the Panopticon—who died 1832 and whose body ended up in London's University College. The body is in a mahogany case with folding glass doors and is seated in a chair with a walking stick across its lap. The head is made of sculpted wax. The construction is labeled an "AutoIcon." Bentham, it seems, had made an image of himself. Keen writes that the idea for his book came to him as he stared at the cabinet in the university building on Gower Street, with a Blackberry in one hand and a Canon digital camera in the other (2). He had come to London from Oxford, where he had been at a conference titled, "Silicon Valley Comes to Oxford," with Reid Hoffman, Biz Stone, Mike Malone, Chris Sacca, and Phillip Rosedale, social media experts and entrepreneurs. Against prevailing views, Keen argued that social media like Facebook, LinkedIn, Zynga, etc., have not brought us together, have not made us wiser, and have left us in a place devoid of history and a clear sense of a present, or at least that's my read on it.

The thesis of Keen's book is that social media have made us images of ourselves, absolutely real fakes in the realm of the *Hypervisible*, to cite Umberto Eco (14). We are imprisoned in the image (with a nod to Foucault's treatise, *Discipline and Punish*, on Bentham's prison and to Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*). In fact, we nod to many citations—37 pages of endnotes in a 232-page book. I do not mean this as a criticism but as an observation; much social criticism has become journalism. To know is to be loaded with information, although, as Keen maintains, information is not necessarily knowledge. Facts require wisdom for interpretation. He tentatively writes, "I UPDATE, THEREFORE I AM" (12). Thinking better of it, he adds, "I UPDATE, THEREFORE I AM NOT" (15). What is and what is not are often conjoined.

The strength of the book lies in the metaphor between the prison—the house of inspection—and the movie house. Finding all come together in the entombed body of

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*Jacques Ellul on Technology and the Human Condition* (Eugene OR: Pickwick, 2014), 6, quoting Carl Mitcham: "technology . . . is largely an unthinking activity."



Jeremy Bentham is ingenious, though not without problems. Keen states that Bentham willed his body to University College, and then put himself on display, an exemplar of utilitarian greed at his death, in 1832. A website for University College, however, attempts to dispel several myths about Bentham. Bentham had no real connection—other than as a spiritual father—to the university. Further, he had willed his body to his friend Thomas South Smith. The body was to be dissected in the interests of public health and the greater good, the goal of utilitarianism. Bentham's motives, thus, were not clearly selfish. Finally, the body was then moved to University College in 1850. Warning: some of this information was found on a website. Providence may enter in failure. History dogs most claims. Keen's facts may be wrong while being nonetheless on track. There are no facts, finally, without a story.

His over-riding contention is that the image has come to control, and that pleasure, as it was for Bentham, is the greatest good that is now found in the image. The image is like Narcissus's mirror—a presence without depth, the locus of society's current pleasure that obscures the importance of history and speculation. Beneath surfaces lie more facts. The true, I believe, is the whole, to invoke Hegel and Jacques Ellul, neither of whom are in Keen's entourage. The box of our auto-iconhood is larger and more complex than Bentham's. Again, *what is* often resides in *what is not*.

We suffer, Keen claims, from digital vertigo, not unlike Scottie Ferguson, the detective in Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, who has been hired by industrialist Gavin Elster to shadow his wife, Madeleine, who is acting strangely and distant. Elster's mistress, Judy Barton, has been hired to impersonate Madeleine. Elster knows of Scottie's malaise that he will use in a plan to murder his real wife in a faked suicide. Elster tells Scotty that his wife feels she is possessed by a great grandmother—Carlotta Valdez, who did commit suicide—and Gavin wants to know what she does with her day. We see Judy, the fake Madeleine, buying flowers, traveling to Valdez's tomb, and then sitting in a gallery before a painting of Carlotta. The flowers and her hair are a near perfect match. She appears captivated by the image, but it is Scottie who is transfixed.

She travels to the home, now a hotel, where Carlotta lived, and then goes to the Golden Gate Bridge and jumps in the water. Scottie rescues her, takes her home and dries her out, and falls in love—in love with her image, it turns out. They spend time together, go to a forest and wax on about history and nature, and end up in a small church in San Juan Bautista. Judy appears possessed. She runs into the church, with Scottie following, up a winding staircase. He suffers vertigo, as does the viewer, and is unable to get to the roof, where Elster and Judy are hiding with the real Madeleine, who has been killed. Scottie sees her body fall by a window; he is traumatized and then institutionalized. He suffers, the doctor says, from acute melancholia and is unable to speak.

Apparently cured, he returns to San Francisco where he finds Judy, abandoned by Elster. He begins to date Judy and forces her to dress and to look like Madeleine. Clearly he is in love with an image. Judy asks him what he wants—confused, guilty,

and frightened—and he says, “We could just see a lot of each other.” I have here fleshed out a bit more than Keen, but his analysis is useful and sharp.

Judy seems to give in to Scottie’s obsession, but then absentmindedly wears a necklace that Carlotta wore in her portrait. They race back to the church, with Scottie saying, “There’s one last thing I have to do, and then I’ll be free of the past.” Of course, his past is a fake past: a past he has helped fabricate, and from which he is a victim. He forces the truth on Judy while pushing her back up the staircase, the scene of the crime. As the tension builds, and as Judy recoils from Scottie’s accusations, a nun appears from the shadows and frightens Judy, who falls from the roof. “I heard voices,” and “God have mercy,” the nun says. Keen notes that Scottie has been in love with a corpse who is an image. I add that Judy is both image and woman who cannot come together, and she dies for it. Scottie is finally in possession with a past that he cannot possess. Such is a present without a past.

Of course, we, the audience of spectacle, like Scottie, are in love with movies, with real fakes who often guide and direct our desires and our lives. We have become detectives in the mazes and mansions of advertising, hoping to solve the crimes of embodiment, of appearing and being less than perfect; we wish to become American Idols on stage, to be worshipped in a Being that is to be seen, the essence of techno-being.

Between the discussion of Bentham’s prison and auto-icon and the film *Vertigo*, Keen explains social media further. Web 3, a development of Web 2, provides the ultimate prison in which we willingly wear the shackles of *being seen*. The Facebook of Mark Zuckerberg—where everyone will be united in frictionless sharing, where what we read, think, do, hope, and dream—will be our auto-icon (63). We will all share together in the once mythical global village forecast by Marshal McLuhan, in a nostalgia for the future (112-113). We become images far and wide. Our cell phones, our computers, our navigation devices, which are no longer separate, give away our locations, our buying preferences, and even our political proclivities (40). Sherry Turkle, one of Keen’s favorite sources, writes, “We have so many ways of communication, yet we are so alone” (58).

Attempts at political rebellion, Keen contends, are often co-opted. The much-touted Arab Spring failed in lack of leadership and direction (72). Many had their “say,” their 15 minutes of fame, but the movement went away, like the changing of channels. The same appears to have happened with Occupy Wall Street (71). The police have now come to peruse Facebook accounts.

Aware that modern viewers’ lack a sense of history, Keen shows how the development of the transistor led to Silicon Valley and to the monopolies of hardware, which also led to the hegemonies of software, to the gods of social media (41-45). In all cases, Keen contends, the masses do not financially benefit (74-76). Instead, they become more efficient shoppers. Communication leads to the largesse of the few, who promulgate the myths of sharing and togetherness. Zuckerberg’s Law is that in each year twice as many people will begin to share (58). This law is echoed in Gordon Moore’s law that the number of transistors on a computer chip would double every two years (96).

In turn, architecture takes a turn toward transparency, visibility. The 1851 Crystal Palace, together with Bentham's prison house, the space of inspection, embody these concerns (136). Much more is connected and inferred. Keen is a genius of analogy. For example, he connects Elster's mahogany desk with Bentham's mahogany cabinet. All serve to show the universality of the move to visibility, which leads to separation and ultimately to enslavement (85).

Strangely, Keen holds individual and social character to be at fault (107). Technology is off the hook, regarded simply as a collection of tools, machines, and devices (106-107). He does invoke the problem of genesis: is it character that influences practice, or does practice—like tool using—influence character? Ellul could have helped. As Ellul explains throughout his works, technique is a mentality brought to bear on multiple elements of western civilization after 1750. The symptoms of this mentality are the reduction of all to images and to the silencing of the word. That is, the logic of identity trumps the logic of metaphor and contradiction. One cannot be both something and another opposing thing at the same time. Judy Barton cannot be a salesperson from Kansas, the mistress of Elster, and Madeleine at the same time, and yet she is. Keen is what he uploads (his social being), and yet he is also his privacy, his silence, and his words that invoke a dimension like history that surrounds and gives meaning to a present. This is the domain of the word, what he is not, that has been eclipsed by the image. The photograph, we can remember, is a *slice* of life, no matter how much it moves, to continue the corpse metaphor. But like any concept, it will be an abstraction. For Ellul, concepts are embodied and then forgotten, are technical phenomena parading automatically, geometrically, and endlessly in a manufactured and false paradise where what can be done will be done.<sup>351</sup> Bentham's cabinet and prison would make sense in this spread of technology, where the body is disciplined, contained, and constrained.

*Vertigo* begins with a mouth trying to speak filling the screen; then in an upward pan we see two eyes looking left and then right; and then one eye fills the screen, widens, and then the film unfolds in a spiral that ultimately explains Scottie's vertigo—he is unbalanced bodily, gravitationally, linguistically, and socially. He simply wants to look at Judy and to revisit a fake history that was his undoing. His world collapsed into the images of Madeleine that define and ultimately kill Judy Barton, who, tragically, is what she is not. A nun has the last word.

Technology disembodies, as Ellul has shown, and turns them into Facebook images and virtual friends with no substance beyond fascination, as Keen understands. Born in North London and educated both in England and America, Keen did his stint as an entrepreneur in Silicon Valley; his venture Audiocafe.com failed, but his interests in the impact of internet activity have not. His insights could be strengthened if joined to

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<sup>351</sup> For a more detailed account of Ellul's logic of technique, see my *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 1991).

those of Ellul and moved beyond a journalist's collection of data. A larger history of technology is needed to go beyond Bentham's box and even beyond Foucault's prison (Foucault, of course, does visit the asylum and the clinic in *The History of Madness* and in the *Birth of the Clinic*). The metaphor of a digital vertigo then can be more fully fleshed out.

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## On Terrorism, Violence and War: Looking Back at 9/11 and its Aftermath

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"I am not given to hasty conflation, and I am therefore weighing my words when I say terrorists are Nazis."<sup>352</sup>

At a time when Salafist attacks in Europe and Africa are being perpetrated in the name of the Prophet, when the beheading of American journalists is put online by Jihadists at war with the West, when social networks and Fox News have no compunction about showing the unbearable images of the death throes of a Jordanian pilot being burned alive in front of a cheering crowd -thereby spreading ISIS propaganda, we ought to keep in mind that if its forms have changed somewhat over the last fifteen years, terrorist violence is still intent on striking the imagination as much as on destroying bodies.

In hindsight, we can now say those who dated the start of the XXIst century from September 11, 2001 were correct. A "sequence" was opened that day and no one can tell when and how it will end. It is now a truism that there was a pre-9/11 time and that we live in a post-9/11 era, when things will never again be as before. And indeed, to paraphrase a famous formula, since that day, a specter is haunting the West, the specter of Islam, and vice versa, it might be added<sup>353</sup>. Be that as it may, if the terrorist attack, and especially the military retaliation against it, have lent themselves to the most contradictory interpretations, no one has dared to deny the importance of this unheard-of event, one that is "radically new" for Claude Lanzmann<sup>354</sup>, a pure event, "the absolute event," as French philosopher Jean Baudrillard put it<sup>355</sup>.

The magnitude of this drama should not however prevent us from considering modern terrorism as a particular form of political propaganda whose deep meaning is inseparable from the technological nature of contemporary societies. This hyperterrorism functions at once as evidence of the level of vulnerability of technological societies and as an indicator of the inherent fragility of pluralistic democracies. By virtue of its

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<sup>352</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Les combats de la liberté, Ethique de la liberté*, vol. 3, (1984), 166.

<sup>353</sup> Claude Liauzu, *Empire du mal contre Grand Satan. Treize siècles de cultures de guerre entre l'islam et l'Occident* (Armand Colin, 2005).

<sup>354</sup> Director of *Shoah*, Jean-Paul Sartre's sometime secretary and director of the review *Les Temps Modernes*.

<sup>355</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism* (Verso, 2003), <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/jean-baudrillard/articles/lesprit-du-terrorisme/>

spectacular brutality, it has also acted as a reminder that force, not to say violence, is always and everywhere political action's specific means as *ultima ratio*.

The armed challenge against the modern state's claim to the monopoly of legitimate physical violence partially renews the theme of the yoking of politics and war. Finally, if terrorism is "intrinsically bad" in Jacques Ellul's words, it is not - in itself - a new form of totalitarianism, but only a weapon in the hands of various totalitarian groups or regimes. The solutions used to fight it raise in turn the classic question of means and ends. From this angle, and so as to throw some light on our present situation, we may wonder about the lessons to be

drawn from the tragedy of 9/11, by first coming back to the sequence of events as we experienced them at the time, to then examine its consequences, that is, war in its many guises as it ensued, and the questions, both moral and political, it raises on both sides of the Atlantic?

What happened that day? If we try to mentally go back in time, how did we receive and perceive this unprecedented event at the time?

### **Images of Power and the Power of Images**

Beyond what was immediately presented as a declaration of war to America and/or the Western world, or even as the beginning of the first war of the XXIst century, the first puzzle had to do with the choice of the targets. Their nature. Which came down to asking a series of basic questions: who did what, how, and with what results? And the persistent puzzle of the identity of the perpetrator(s) - the question of who - has tended to eclipse the question of what. The question of how being literally absorbed by the image - broadcast in a loop - of the Boeings smashing into the towers.

We will come back to the targets' symbolic dimension, but no one could fail to notice that they happened to be sites of power - representations, images of Power. Economic and financial power: the World Trade Center. Military power: the Pentagon. Political power: the abortive attack on the White House. The visual dimension is essential in the sense that the whole affair was shot through with spectacle - tragic to be sure, but still spectacle, and what is more, televised spectacle... viewed live. September 11 marked the comeback, amid fanfare, of CNN time and image<sup>356</sup>. A comeback that proved very temporary, as it turned out, though not that of Ted Turner's network as such, but of a genre that has been so criticized, in France at least, during and after the Gulf War (1991). The universal spread of images issuing from a single broadcaster, the risk of manipulation and censorship, biased information, the omnipresence of retired generals and security experts in television studios, the muffling of any dissenting voice.

For about forty-eight hours, aeronautics, counter-espionage and international terrorism experts followed each other on our screens, giving the event a feeling of *deja-vu*, without however proving able to be up to its magnitude. That very evening, the question was no longer to know whether, but when the Americans would retaliate. By way

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<sup>356</sup> In symptomatic fashion, the 24-hour Qatari news network Al-Jazeera would promptly be termed "the Arab world's CNN" by French news media.

of the 24-hour information channel CNN, were we about to relive that obscene spectacularization of war: the sky of Baghdad lit up by bombs that seem like fireworks, air raids shot from the angle of innocent video games?

But let us return to the attacks. What did we see on September 11? *America under attack*, live on all TVs on the planet. The first strike (North tower) took place at 8:45 AM in New York. (2:45 PM in Paris). Nobody saw it<sup>357</sup>. The second strike (South tower) took place at 9:06, that is, 21 minutes later, as though the first strike's function had been not only to start making victims, but above all to draw the attention of television networks and viewers to the real carnage that was to follow. And indeed, the attack of the second Boeing could be filmed live by one of CNN's automatic cameras, and seen live in the afternoon in Europe and in the evening in the Near East and Asia. "That moment was the apotheosis of the postmodern era," as novelist Martin Amis would later note. But what were, at the time, the effects on us, the unwilling captive audience of the catastrophe unfolding live under our very eyes? Dare we speak, about this predicament, of collateral damages?

Facing death live on television, we do not think or we cease to, our brain no longer breathing, glued to the spectacular presentness of the images shown in a loop on our screens. The very enormity of the event prevents us from taking our eyes off the set. We become powerless witnesses to the bracketing of some of our "vital" functions, including the critical function. How do we escape the tyranny of the image that hypnotizes our minds? Shocking images leave us in a state of shock... We are submerged by images of the catastrophe that are being played and replayed on all stations. The "we" being all the *heavy viewers*<sup>358</sup> we have become on this occasion.

There is suddenly an impossibility of getting away from such a telegenic drama. After catalepsy, addiction? We are oscillating between two ills: the risk of overdose and a state of withdrawal. The repeated broadcast of those images all witnesses called incredible, unthinkable, unimaginable, ends up creating an extra need for images, as though to authenticate a spectacle deemed "unbelievable", "unreal". Conditioning, addiction, dependency. The sight of these Boeings crushing the towers has generated in the viewer, indignant at so much cruelty, a new need, impossible to admit, a kind of unconscious expectation: that of images of preparations for military retaliation, of planes taking off, of young American military, White and Black, united one and all in the same yearning to avenge their country. In other words, heroic images worthy of the best (or worst) Hollywood fare.

In 1998 already, Edward Zwick's *The Siege* depicted a series of Islamic fundamentalist attacks aimed at New York. Actually, for over thirty years, Hollywood has been flooding screens the world over with disaster movies. From *Airport* (1969) to *The Siege* (1998) through *The Poseidon Adventure* (1972), *Towering Inferno* (1974), *Die Hard*

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<sup>357</sup> The scene was however filmed by a French amateur filmmaker whose images were broadcast by CNN only around midnight local time. The scene was nevertheless filmed by a French amateur filmmaker whose images were broadcast by CNN only around midnight local time.

<sup>358</sup> In English in the original.



(1988), *Independence Day* (1996) and *Mars attacks !* (1997), the US film industry has been churning out an uninterrupted stream of such spectacular productions. The genre has its rules. The disaster's function is both to reveal and to redeem. It usually allows the timid to act as fearless adventurers, the avowed bad guys to redeem their crimes, while the falsely brave are unmasked and seemingly respectable people behave like total bastards.

By a kind of irony at which History seems to excel, terrorists have turned this ideological weapon or cultural message against its sender. Originally meant as entertainment fiction, the disaster screenplay has been brutally translated to the real world by America's enemies, in a bloody "return to sender"! "[...] it may have been no accident that they chose the language of American movies. They were creating not just terror; they were creating images.<sup>359</sup>" *This time, the scene was real.*<sup>360</sup> Consequently, CIA experts seek the counsel of Hollywood screenwriters to anticipate the form new attacks will take. At the movies, disaster also reveals the hero dormant in the *regular guy*.<sup>361</sup> Many Americans actually believe the White House was saved from United Airlines flight 93, the plane that crashed near Pittsburgh, by a handful of amateur sportsmen<sup>362</sup>.

## Symbols of Power and the Power of Symbols

It wasn't buildings that were attacked, but above all a metaphor, or symbols if one prefers. And not just any symbols, but those of US hyperpower, symbols of economic power, of military power and political power. Journalistic clichés always hold their share of truth. "We were aiming at the heart of America." "America hit in the heart." The Twin Towers were indeed the symbolic high place of US economic and financial power. Since it was located a few steps away from the Wall Street Stock Exchange, the press sometimes referred to the World Trade Center as the "Temple of Commerce". The religious connotation also applies to the Pentagon when it is called the *Shrine of War*. As for the White House, it obviously symbolized the seat of power of the head of the most powerful state on Earth. In other words, a sacred place *par excellence*.

In all three cases, attacking those loci of power bearing a high symbolic charge amounts to a sacrilege. By their gigantic nature alone, the twins did indeed look like cathedrals. Besides, even if a confession does not necessarily prove guilt, it will be noted that the presumed mastermind behind these attacks (the "message's" sender) did confirm, a month after the events, what was still one interpretation among other possible ones. "The true targets were icons of US military and economic power."

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<sup>359</sup> Neal Gabler, "This Time, the Scene Was Real", *New York Times*, September 16, 2001.

<sup>360</sup> In English in the original.

<sup>361</sup> In English in the original.

<sup>362</sup> The very title of the French documentary by Thomas Johnson: *Vol 93, les nouveaux héros de l'Amérique*, reflects this viewpoint very well.

By using the term “icons”, Osama Ben Laden seems to want to prove Jean Baudrillard right, though he likely never heard of the latter. “This terrorist violence is not ‘real’. It is worse in a sense: it is symbolic.<sup>363</sup>” According to the latter, we were all secretly dreaming such a thing would happen and in their strategy, terrorists know “they can count on our unspeakable complicity.” By deliberately positioning himself on the field of the collective unconscious, the French philosopher thus eludes all discussion, but by the same token he cannot make any scientific claim. Al-Qaeda’s founder justifies the slaughter of innocents by a politicalreligious rhetoric that tends to erase the physical reality of the victims to better underline the symbolic power of the targets. Thus, the victims were not targeted as such, but were only guilty of being at the wrong place at the wrong time. This is what killed them. And in a way, Ben Laden kills them symbolically a second time by denying them their status as genuine targets. What does he care if the destruction of these so-called icons involved the death of thousands of very real flesh-and-blood people?

The day after the drama, on the first page of the French daily *Le Monde*, one could see Uncle Sam as a giant, striding amidst New York skyscrapers, his legs wounded by the first plane’s impact. The image was reminiscent of some famous scenes of the movie *King Kong* (1933), especially since the Twin Towers had replaced the Empire State Building in John

Guillermin’s remake. But it is also impossible not to think of a giant with feet of clay or even of the Colossus of Rhodes in the peplums of yore. To be precise, if we want to have a measure of the target’s symbolic power, we have to remember that the Greek colossus was only 32 m high, that the Mesopotamian ziggurats that inspired the Biblical parable of the tower of Babel were 40 to 100 m high, whereas the Twin Towers were 420 m high.

For a religious fundamentalist, isn’t the American skyscraper the modern equivalent of the tower of Babel? “A tower that reaches to the heavens” (Genesis 11). A kind of challenge made by Promethean man against God to assert his power. The skyscraper as Godscraper? The Biblical episode of the tower of Babel does refer to the offence of hubris. Besides, for ultraconservative Christians as for some fundamentalist Muslims, New York is Babylon or Sodom and Gomora: a cosmopolitan city of decadent mores deserving destruction and divine punishment. Would it be a slight to psychoanalysis to involve it in a commonplace? The towers as a representation of sexual potency, the skyscraper as phallic symbol? From this standpoint, the attack would be tantamount to a kind of architectural and urban castration. America struck in its manhood, emasculated live by a still unknown but clearly savage enemy.

On the first page of September 13’s *Le Monde*, on the left third of the picture, one could only see the Statue of Liberty and, in the background, a thick black smoke. As though the collapse of the World Trade Center’s Twin Towers caused the very symbol of liberty to reemerge. For its part, the special issue of *Time* magazine on the tragedy

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<sup>363</sup> Jean Baudrillard, “L’esprit du terrorisme,” *Le Monde*, November 3, 2001.

showed on its front cover the two towers in flame, and on its back cover the Statue of Liberty in front, her arm held high, in dazzling profile against a backdrop of thick black smoke. The image of this unharmed statue unflinchingly overlooking a genuine field of ruins made a strange impression.

Right after the events, there were at least two possible readings of this new skyline. In the absence of any immediate claim, the famous statue appeared in the New York sky as a kind of signature. An attack committed in the name of the right to independence? The liberation of occupied territories, the liberation of the Holy Places, the discontinuation of US bombings in Iraq, the liberation of all the oppressed in the world! This was proof of the need to destroy the temple of Western commerce to put back on the horizon the very symbol of freedom. Or then again, quite the contrary, it could be seen as an illustration of the very failure of the terrorists, who had destroyed buildings and killed innocent people without being able to dent the main, immaterial thing: the spirit of America, her principle, her values, symbolized by this world-famous statue. Besides, if liberty appears as the national religion of the United States -aside from the worship of money, then Francois Bartholdi's sculpture was its first icon, that is a "symbolic-hypostatic representation", a mere image leading to the origin and as such, ever at risk of lending itself to idolatry.

From this perspective, the Statue of Liberty would have made a much more symbolic target than the Twin Towers or the Pentagon. The target was without a doubt harder to reach and the message was liable to becoming muddled. For if we take Osama Ben Laden's discourse seriously, the term "icon" may lead us to believe that the target of the attacks was not

America as such, but the implicit model she embodies for a handful of corrupt leaders in the Middle East, starting with those of his native country Saudi Arabia.

Finally, a parallel could be made between the astonishment of Western public opinion upon the discovery of US citizens among Taliban fighters and the current reaction of Europeans as they realize the importance of Jihadist networks leading volunteers to Syria, and especially of French people after the bloody attack aimed at the editorial board of the satirical weekly *Charlie Hebdo*. Just as the terrorist billionaire and expert in financial circuits could be termed "America's family secret" or "the president's evil twin" according to Arundhati Roy, we may wonder if the kamikaze air pirates who had been living in the United States long enough to blend in were not after all Americans in a sense, by virtue of their lifestyle, and especially their technological culture?

### **Communication Technologies and the Communication of Technology**

Who could deny that the United States represent the archetype, or even the matrix, of technological societies? In the era of cyberterrorism, the September 11 terrorist attack gives us the opportunity to raise the more general question of the role of technology in modern societies.

The Internet is supposed to have been invented by American engineers and originally used by the army and later by academics who wanted a faster way to exchange information with colleagues abroad. The police investigation seems to prove that the

operation's organizers favored this communication technology to coordinate the attacks. More discreet than the telephone, electronic mail is said to make it possible to hide messages by a combination of cryptography and steganography. The messages would first be coded, and then concealed (in the grey area not visible to the human eye) in the middle of seemingly innocuous photographs (in particular the most commonplace images on the Web, namely porn pictures) and transmitted under the guise of an attachment. According to Ron Dick, Deputy Director of the FBI, not only did the pirates use Internet, but they "used it well".

As for money, the crux of any war, it will suffice to recall two elements too well-known to be dwelt upon. While the Taliban regime did persecute poppy growers, a sizable part of al-Qaeda's fortune came from opium trafficking: how to get rich by poisoning infidels! The heroine consumed by US junkies mostly comes from Afghanistan, even as the Bush administration finances the war against drugs in that country. Talk about selling capitalists the rope that is going to be used to hang them! Second paradox: the ambiguous role, to say the least, played by US banks regularly working on behalf of filthy rich businessmen from the Arab Peninsula or the Persian Gulf. With a little more curiosity about the precise identity of its clients, Citibank might have refrained from financing the kamikaze pilots based in Florida. At least since the attacks against US embassies in East Africa and the last one to date aimed at the *USS Cole*, a modicum of vigilance was to be expected. Yet Mustafa Ahmad, al-Qaeda's treasurer, apparently had no trouble transferring funds to the head of the commandos, the Egyptian Mohammed Atta, by way of Citibank's New York head office.

The terrorist attack against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon is to be set within the global context of technological societies. Over half a century ago, Jacques Ellul showed that the phenomenon of technology was characterized among other things by unity and by totalization<sup>364</sup>. Technology functions as a network of complex ramifications that wreaks havoc with traditional distinctions opposing form and content, or civilian and military. Who, for instance, can guarantee the peaceful use of the nuclear, pharmaceutical or chemical industry? Aside from the color of its tarpaulin cover, what sets apart a military truck from a civilian truck?

If terrorists now use school supplies (such as box cutters) as part of their arsenal, they also know how to turn an airliner into a weapon of war. We also find this unity of a system made up of interdependent elements in the phenomenon of the chain reactions generated by the September 11 attacks: financial crash, airline company bankruptcies, lay-offs in the aeronautics industry and the tourism sector, cuts in communications budgets, drop in consumption, economic recession. Furthermore, specialization entails totalization. Each one of the parts counts less than the system of connections binding them together. What makes the strength of the technological system is also its weakness. The network structure increases the fragility of technological societies that have become vulnerable by the very fact of their high degree of sophistication.

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<sup>364</sup> Jacques Ellul, *La technique ou l'enjeu du siècle* (Armand Colin, 1954).

For modern terrorists, there is no shortage of targets. We may think of Internet viruses, mail-transmitted diseases (anthrax), the poisoning of a city's waterworks or of a major hotel's or hospital's air conditioning system, not to mention *communications hubs*: airports, train stations, power plants or nuclear plants. The giant towers in which a mid-sized city's population is concentrated are the perfect illustration of the fragility of what sociologist Alain Gras<sup>365</sup> has called technological macrosystems. The perpetrators of the attacks on the World Trade Center were well aware of this, as they secured the privilege of appearing to part of international opinion as the new David striking down the US Goliath.

In our modern societies, technology is ambivalent, since it liberates as much as it alienates. It creates new problems as soon as it resolves them and increases itself through the - technological - solutions it brings. New equipment is already being developed to reinforce air safety. Sooner or later, it is going to be circumvented by a new generation of terrorists, which will in turn give rise to new countermeasures. But technological progress has a price that is not just financial. Its negative effects are inseparable from its positive effects and this progress always entails a great many unpredictable consequences. To be sure, it is our leaders' duty to try to think of everything in advance. It is no less certain that caution dictates we keep in mind the share of risks inherent in any society based on technological power. It is also wise to be wary of all talk of a neat harmony of security and freedom within the State, as of all those who would combine war and justice abroad. In this respect, the military retaliation's code names, *Infinite Justice* and then *Enduring Freedom*, may be interpreted as the titles of a propaganda film projected by the US government on the world's big screen.

Is war "the continuation of politics by other means" or on the contrary, is Michel Foucault right to reverse Clausewitz's dictum by making politics the continuation of war? In this particular instance, it has been said - not without justification - that it was "the absence of politics by other means"<sup>366</sup>. But from the afternoon of September 11, the war of images and words had begun. Later on, George W. Bush would term the military action launched in Afghanistan a "battle for civilization".

### **The War of Words and the Words of War**

Communication is no doubt to propaganda what publicity is to advertising, but if the outer trappings change, the aim remains the same. Jacques Ellul has shown that, contrary to received wisdom, information (the realm of the Good and of Truth) cannot be so neatly set apart from propaganda (the instrument of Evil and lies). Far from being exclusive of one another, information is the precondition for the very existence of propaganda. Furthermore, propaganda is a necessity for those who govern as well as for the governed. It is a response to a desire for political participation and it reassures by

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<sup>365</sup> Alain Gras, *Grandeur et dependance, Sociologie des macro-systemes techniques*, Presses universitaires de France, 1993.

<sup>366</sup> Jean Baudrillard, art. cit.

simplifying a reality made more complex by the mushrooming of information. President Bush's political discourse is a fine illustration of his ideas.

"Freedom itself was attacked this morning by a faceless coward. And freedom will be defended. I want to reassure the American people", George W. Bush declared on Tuesday the 11th, "... that the United States will hunt down and punish those responsible for these cowardly acts." Beyond the resort to the classic rhetorical trope of personification, the President's speech immediately situates itself on the moral plane—the better to shunt away the political dimension: (terrorist) cowardice gets opposed to (American) virtue. It is not a state, it is not a superpower, nor even what some call a hyperpower, which has been attacked, nor even a country, but a value, the fairest and noblest of all: Freedom (embodied by America). The "gaps" left in this discourse are at least as significant here as the ideas expressed. The President does not utter a single word about the foreign policy of "the most powerful Empire in history" (Arno J. Mayer), on its strategic interests in the world, or on its alliances in the Middle East.

The same evening, live from the Oval Office, he continues to omit key aspects: "These acts of mass murder were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat. But they have failed; our country is strong. A great people has been moved to defend a great nation." Speaking of murder is again a way to depoliticize by criminalizing the opponent. This is again a way to reassure the population by stirring up patriotic feelings. Great people, great nation. The variations are meant to hammer home the same idea. Redundancy is intended. Bush again uses personification: America has been moved, unanimous to a man! In this context of major crisis, the President is trying to boost the sense of national unity.

"Today, our nation saw evil, the very worst of human nature. And we responded with the best of America — with the daring of our rescue workers, with the caring for strangers and neighbors who came to give blood and help in any way they could." George W. Bush is still playing on personification: seeing Evil. As though it was absolute evil, and as though it was wholly contained in the images of the attack. The country has seen evil as one would say "it has seen the devil". To the worst, we answered with the best. The President is expressing here a Manichean view of the world. The blackness of the human soul as opposed to a concentrate of American virtues. This symmetry is bogus insofar as helping victims is an obligation within the framework of modern societies (Welfare State and/or Zorro State) and the actual answer will come later, in the guise of military retaliation.

"Freedom and democracy are under attack", he states on Wednesday. "This will be a monumental struggle of good versus evil, but good will prevail." George Bush Sr. used to compare Saddam Hussein to Adolf Hitler. His president son revives the Reagan-era terminology of the *Evil Empire*, which had referred to the USSR, and which now (perhaps unconsciously) reflects his own simplistic - not to say childish-worldview, as though he was announcing a new *Star Wars* episode! Finally, on September 13, he utters the word "crusade" at the very moment when Samuel Huntington's ideas

are being rediscovered<sup>367</sup>: a particularly unfortunate choice of words for someone who wanted to avoid conflating Islam and terrorism.

There is an endless supply of such declarations, fraught with simplistically Manichean binaries: Good versus Evil, Democracy versus archaism, Civilization versus Barbarism, light versus darkness, good guys versus bad guys... Osama Ben Laden was perfect in the part of the bogeyman, an evil genius heading a radical Islamic version of the Spectre international crime syndicate in the James Bond franchise.

As though echoing the President's Freudian slip (?), on the same Manichean mode opposing the Umma (the Muslim nation or the community of believers) to the rest of the world, al-Qaeda's leaders would answer him on Sunday, October 7, less than two hours after the beginning of US-UK strikes on Afghan soil. "The crusade war promised by Bush has effectively started", said the spokesman of the political-religious sect. After having called to jihad, he referred to those "thousands of young people who want to die as much as Americans want to live". The authentic Muslim was described by those "madmen of God" as the one who cares about respecting his faith more than his own life (here below). This is a recurrent theme in the discourse of radical Islam: the cause is worth sacrificing one's life for it and the mujahedeen are not afraid of dying. Ben Laden's words belong to this logic.

"America has been hit by Allah at its most vulnerable point, destroying, thank God, its most prestigious buildings." "There is America, full of fear from its north to its south, from its west to its east. Thank God for that." Throughout his statement, Ben Laden refers to America and not to a specific country, the United States; America not as a continent, but as an evil entity. Aside from omnipresent references to God, it deals with the "most vulnerable point" (the Achilles' heel or the giant's feet of clay) and "prestigious" buildings (prestige, honor, humiliation: this confirms that the targets were primarily symbolic in nature). "There is America, full of fear" -of God, of course!

"What America is tasting now is something insignificant compared to what we [Muslims] have tasted for scores of years." The rhetorical device of legitimization consists in presenting the bloody attack of September 11 as a fair turning of the tables, or better yet, as the suffering inflicted was supposedly far lesser than the suffering endured. It is all about having the victim appear as the executioner, and justifying to public opinion - especially but not exclusively among Muslims - an operation consisting in making anonymous office clerks, ordinary people - including Muslims, pay for the consequences of the US government's foreign policy. Hence the importance of the resort to the generic term America. Personification makes this sleight of hand possible. It is not thousands of US citizens who have been killed, wounded, bereaved, or simply traumatized... but **America**, an abstract and evil being along the lines of the "Great Satan" trope once used by Ayatollah Khomeini's Iran.

"Our nation [the Islamic world] has been tasting this humiliation and this degradation for more than 80 years. Its sons are killed, its blood is shed, its sanctuaries

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<sup>367</sup> Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72(3) (Summer 1993): 22-49.

are attacked, and no one hears and no one heeds.” Ben Laden is addressing this still imaginary nation that it is the point to build. He speaks in its name. He speaks about it, to it, and to its enemies. In doing so, he starts to make it exist for real. in hearts and minds or in mental representations. This is how you “do things with words.”<sup>368</sup> It is all about getting from the potential nation (at the time, over 1.2 billion Muslims spread around the world) to the actual nation. If one agrees to define nationalism as society’s self-worship, let us not forget that it is not nations that beget nationalisms, but nationalism that creates nations<sup>369</sup>.

”And when God has guided a bunch of Muslims to be at the forefront and destroyed America, a big destruction, I wish God would lift their position.” In accordance with al-Qaeda’s usual strategy, the attack was not overtly claimed. Ben Laden rejoices at the operation’s success, without however suggesting he was involved in its inception. He feeds doubt by denying the enemy any detailed admission. We may see this as abiding by the line followed from the beginning of the struggle between the Taliban regime and the US government: invoking the lack of evidence to justify refusing to give over Ben Laden. This argument would become a shibboleth in Islamic countries: “If Osama is indeed responsible for the September 11 attacks, why doesn’t America provide the evidence?” But the trope of admission and definite evidence is mostly aimed at Western public opinion, and it makes sense within the framework of human justice. But the message has a second addressee: Muslim public opinion, at which the main message is aimed, namely, that the real instigator of the September 11 attack is none other than God Himself! Ben Laden only happened to be His humble spokesman or His modest interpreter.

”And when those people have defended and retaliated to what their brothers and sisters have suffered in Palestine and Lebanon, the whole world has been shouting, as the unbelievers and hypocrites have done<sup>370</sup>.” The word “retaliate” is meant to legitimize the attack. It was after all an act of self-defense. Muslims are oppressed by Americans, it is normal that they defend themselves. The reference to Palestine belatedly appeared in Ben Laden’s discourse so as to increase his potential for sympathy. Anti-Zionism constituted a powerful vector for the unification of Muslim public opinion, well beyond the Near East and Middle East. This aim was reached if we recall how his popularity rating shot up in Arab streets and among part of African youth. In the context of the second Intifada (the *Aqsa intifadeh*), Ben Laden instrumentalized the Palestinian cause. He was careful not to say that the PLO had condemned the attack and that Yasser Arafat got himself filmed in the midst of giving his blood as a sign of solidarity with American victims.

”They (Americans) are debauchees who supported the executioner against the victim and the unjust against the innocent child. God gave them what they deserve.” This

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<sup>368</sup> John L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1962).

<sup>369</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1983).

<sup>370</sup> On this concept, see <http://www.cultures-et-croyances.com/etude-le-concept-de-lhypocrisie-dans-la-morale-islamique/>



transparent allusion to US support for Israeli policies refers to a TV report<sup>371</sup> that had deeply troubled international public opinion, showing the death of Mohammed al-Durah (12 years old) during exchanges of fire between Tsahal and Palestinian Security Forces on September 30, 2000. Ben Laden hammers in the notion that terrorists have done nothing but execute Allah's will.

"These events have split the whole world into two camps: the camps of belief and the camps of disbelief!" This simplistic discourse contrasts with the complexity of the real. Ben Laden's message constitutes the reverse mirror image of George W. Bush's message: "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." But if the former claims to be fighting **injustice** (in the name of Islam) and the latter to claims to be defending ("enduring") **freedom**, their discourses are partly interchangeable. Ben Laden claims freedom for all oppressed Muslims and Bush leads his war of reprisals to enact justice.

The oath of al-Qaeda's founder will be met a month later by that of the US president in front of the UN General Assembly: "(...) *their hour of justice will come.* (.) I make this promise to all the victims of that regime: the Taliban's days of harboring terrorists, and dealing in heroin, and brutalizing women are drawing to a close. (.) We have a chance to write the story of our times - a story of courage defeating cruelty, and of light overcoming darkness." The two speakers share the same Manichean view of the world. We are dealing with a genuine instance of mimetic rivalry as per Rene Girard's theory.<sup>372</sup> The similarity can even be found in unexpected areas such as health. President Bush publically swears he has not caught anthrax, while Ben Laden explains to the Pakistani press that his "kidneys are working fine."

"Every Muslim should **arise** in support of his religion and now the wind of change has blown up to destroy injustice on the Arabian Peninsula." Americans who rise are thus met by Muslims who arise. The Arabian Peninsula is a holy land because the Prophet was born and lived in Mecca. Ben Laden criticizes Saudi leaders for tolerating the presence of infidels (US military stationed since the Gulf War) near the holy places of Islam. "And to Americans, I say to it and its people this: I swear by God the Great, America will never... taste security unless we feel security and safety in our land and in Palestine." We have here a sort of mutual figure for constructing the monster. In the hours following the terrorist attack, it was only the name of Osama Ben Laden that was fed to the press and world opinion. Presidential and media rhetoric focused on this scarecrow. Ben Laden did his best to stick to this part, not without talent, it must be said. As an inspired prophet of Allah, he reveled in striking the pose of the lone champion of justice challenging the Empire by himself.

### **War of Images and Images of War**

Beyond the threats uttered against America, on Sunday October 7 2001, the success of the PR operation consisted first in the contrast between our snowy screens, on which

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<sup>371</sup> [http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x5qhp7\\_la-mort-de-mohammed-al-dura\\_news](http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x5qhp7_la-mort-de-mohammed-al-dura_news)

<sup>372</sup> Rene Girard, *Achever Clausewitz*, Flammarion, 2007.

we saw nothing of the US and UK air strikes in Afghanistan —but a few green dots in the pitch dark night— and the sudden appearance in broad daylight of Public Enemy No. 1, having finished his diatribe and sipping tea in front of his cave with a prophet’s serenity. If we may dwell a moment on non-verbal communication, the audiovisual staging of this discourse could only cause dismay in the Western viewer used to other codes. It aroused in him a sense of fascination/repulsion, or at least, of troubling otherness. By contrast, in Islamic lands, it helped reinforce the aura of the charismatic leader.

A cave in the desert as sole backdrop. Muslims the world over know that Mohammed hid for three days and three nights in a cave near Mecca, to escape from his enemies who had sworn to kill him. In his time, the Prophet harangued the people to ask it to renounce the cult of images and worship the One God. His clan (the Hashemites) was then undergoing persecutions. As the target of the hostility of oligarchies and polytheistic religious leaders, Mohammed then had to flee Mecca, and was forced to go in exile first in Abyssinia, then, during a second emigration (the Hijra), to the oasis that would become Medina. Ben Laden today, like the Prophet long ago, has also been expelled from his country of Saudi Arabia (1991), and then from the Sudan (1996), before finding refuge in Kandahar, among the Taliban. Mohammed also had to hide before his cause triumphed through force of arms: in 630, at the head of 10,000 troops, he had returned to Mecca as a victorious warlord.

Hands folded, eyes half-shut, in a meditative pose, Ben Laden is quietly seated on his heels in the midst of the other cross-legged bearded men. The bodily position is in conformity with the Muslim rites codifying the five daily prayers. He assumes the posture of both sage and warrior. Just like the Prophet! A religious man’s beard. Military fatigues and white turban. A kerosene lamp is set on a rock, at the back, aligned with the Egyptian Ayman Al-Zawahiri, former leader of Islamic Jihad, Ben Laden’s physician and counsellor. His favorite weapon, a Kalashnikov (AK-74), taken from a Russian soldier in combat, leaning against the cave wall, is visible, but only in the background during much of his talk. It is there as a reminder of Jihad, and perhaps also of the fact that Islam in its heyday triumphed by the sword. In his previous propaganda tapes, the al-Qaeda leader maintained his reputation as an intrepid horseman and a sharpshooter. The Kalashnikov also calls to mind the victorious war against the Red Army. Message: Muslims are going to defeat the US “paper tiger” as they have defeated the Soviet Great Satan.

But Osama Ben Laden could not have played Spectre’s Blofeld without the complicity of the 24-hour news channel Al-Jazeera, and especially without the herd mentality of Western TV networks converted to the one religion of profit, and thus to the competition for ratings. In the name of national defense, from the very next day, the executives of the main US networks were brought to heel by the government after a moment of aberration. Under the fallacious pretext that al-Qaeda videos could contain coded messages aimed at triggering new terrorist attacks, the White House asked the big US networks to screen all images provided by Qatari television before broadcasting

them. The result no doubt exceeded the expectations of the national security advisers, since images of Ben Laden disappeared from the screens for all intents and purposes. Self-censorship was also a factor in the print media. Whereas in its October 1 issue, the cover of *Time* magazine showed only Ben Laden with the caption: "Target", over the following weeks, one had to carefully scrutinize the pages inside to find paltry excerpts of his declaration of war on America.

Philosopher Bernard-Henri Levy expressed the opinion of many Frenchmen when he called Al-Jazeera "Ben Laden's network". From a Western standpoint, the accusation was not without grounds, but it needs to be qualified. It is a fact that until Kabul fell to the Northern Alliance, "the CNN of the Arab world" enjoyed a monopoly position that forced the whole world's TV networks to rebroadcast its images strapped with a wide strip indicating their origins. But it is just that Al-Jazeera found itself in Afghanistan in a position comparable to that of CNN during the Gulf War. Whereas CNN is still viewed by international public opinion as a purely "made in USA" cultural product like Coca-Cola, its correspondent had been the only one allowed to remain in Baghdad. The Iraqi regime had thus given exceptional means to Peter Arnett, who enjoyed exclusivity as a trade-off with censorship. But because CNN showed the whole world the damage caused by US bombings among the civilian population, it was accused of playing into Saddam Hussein's hands.

The same thing happened to Tayssir Allouni, the only reporter allowed to remain in the Afghan capital before the military balance of power was reversed. Dwelling on mis-directed strikes and civilian victims, lingeringly showing corpses in the villages bombed by the US Air Force, only relaying the words of Kabulis denouncing this war against Islam, making a display of Ben Laden's own children armed to the teeth and singing the praises of the "emir of believers", Mullah Omar, against a backdrop of the wrecks of helicopters and planes supposedly downed by the Taliban, the reporter made Al-Jazeera very unpopular with Washington. Accused by US authorities of broadcasting al-Qaeda propaganda, the Arabic network responded with a retrospective shown in a loop, featuring mutilated faces on hospital beds, crippled children and disfigured babies, all maimed in the name of this so-called "battle for civilization". For its part, CNN's executives forced employees to tag every image of civilian victims of US bombings with this ritualistic reminder: "the Taliban are protecting terrorists who are responsible for the death of 5,000 innocent people".

If Al-Jazeera has not managed to convince Westerners of its neutrality by refusing to decide between "the war on terror, as America says" and "the war against the infidels, as al-Qaeda says", the land of press freedom and the First Amendment has beaten all records when it comes to controlling images. In the name of its soldiers' safety, the Pentagon has even extended its grip to photographic documents. During half of the conflict, due to a lack of independent journalists on location, any media wanting to illustrate the US presence on the ground had to be content with only the images of US commandos taken and selected by the Defense Department.

The patriotic fervor unleashed right after the attacks was not limited to the boom in sales of the Star-Spangled Banner. While, in contrast with the Vietnam conflict, the American press has, if anything, been given to self-censorship, journalists have been accused of endangering the lives of “our boys” by providing the enemy with exceedingly accurate information. A petty, slanderous accusation when one knows that said information came from briefings or the website of the Pentagon’s PR department, but this type of delusion says a lot about the expectations of much of the public. The newspapers that dared publish pictures of Afghan babies killed by US bombs were pelted with insults. The concept of “collateral damages” is acceptable, but just as long as it remains at the level of a disembodied abstraction!

Jacques Ellul was right when he described the complicitous relationship uniting the propagandist and the propagandized. The average citizen has no taste for seeing photographs of slaughtered infants when President Bush himself has spoken of the struggle of Good against Evil, led by a nation that is decidedly good and peace-loving, but that is hated because it is misunderstood. Announcing military strikes on the same day that Ben Laden made his threats on TV, Bush had promised: “At the same time, the oppressed people of Afghanistan will know the generosity of America and our allies. As we strike military targets, we will also drop food, medicine and supplies to the starving and suffering men and women and children of Afghanistan.” But since the small yellow containers holding food rations were the same color as the explosives scattered by cluster bombs, the latter were easy to mistake for the former. How many additional victims were there compared to how many lives saved? The “humanitarian” balance sheet of these very telegenic drops might have turned out to be a cruel exercise for its sponsor, but was the aim to persuade the whole world of American goodness or to maintain the good conscience of the supporters of this war, already a vast majority in the country?

”The word is only relative to Truth. The image is only relative to reality<sup>373</sup>.” Jacques Ellul reminds the image consumers we are, rendered bulimic since September 11, that it would be wrong to mistake the real for the true. While the word has to do with truth—and thus also with lies—the image can completely stick to reality without being true. Sight makes us see the obvious, while the word, ever uncertain, excludes it.

### **War against Democracy and Democracy at War**

War compels each of us to choose sides. It orients our gaze, conditions our visual memory makes us see what we want to see and forget the images that do not fit our interpretive framework. Propaganda reassures, because it filters, orders and simplifies. But it would be the height of intellectual presumption to believe that (deceptive) propaganda is reserved for ordinary folks and (genuine) information to the elite. It would likewise be very naive or cynical to believe in the discourse of *just war*. As Ellul reminds us, there is no such thing as just wars, only necessary wars!

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<sup>373</sup> Jacques Ellul, *La parole humiliée* (La Table Ronde, 2014), 44, [1981] .

The US counter-attack was not the war of *Freedom* against *Terrorism*, but that of a Western state legitimately defending its power interests in the name of values that have a claim to universality. First of all, freedom cannot wage war, even when one goes to war in its name. Violence is always the province of necessity, that is, freedom's antithesis. Secondly, terrorism is a highly subjective notion, which can refer to very different realities. We may recall that the Nazis used it to discredit the Resistance during their Occupation of France<sup>374</sup>.

Not being able to prevent wars, international organizations have had to fall back on codifying wars. The member-states of the European Union have defined as terrorist "any act ... intended to cause death or serious bodily injury to certain persons, and provided its purpose is to intimidate a population, or to compel a government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing something." Who could swear that this definition does not include the bombings and embargo undergone by the populations of Iraq, Iran and Syria? As is his wont, Noam Chomsky offers a critique that is even more merciless to the powerful: "In practice, terrorism is violence committed against the United States - regardless of the

24 perpetrators. One would be hard-pressed to find an exception to this rule in history<sup>375</sup>".

Article 51 of the United Nations Charter recognizes an inherent right to legitimate defense in case of armed aggression. This right then raises the issue of the *proportionality* of the response. The Geneva Conventions make a distinction between civilian and military objectives and tend to proscribe the disproportionate use of force. The problem with proportionality is not limited to its legal dimension and obviously raises issues of a moral nature. Carpet-bombing strategies have generated deep discomfort even among those best-disposed toward the United States. The means used in Afghanistan in December have given rise to remorse among the very people who, in a burst of legitimate emotionalism, had claimed themselves to be "all Americans now" in September. Was it necessary to burn down the haystack to find the needle? Under the pretext that Ben Laden was as difficult to look for as a needle in a haystack, did one have the right to burn down the whole haystack, and part of the field too? With all-out bombings of a country already ravaged by war and famine, all that was achieved was adding more victims to the victims. The tons of bombs dropped around Tora Bora have caused the death of numerous civilians.

President Bush pretended having just discovered the appalling plight of Afghan women. By a neat historical irony, he was thereby unwittingly using as justification for his war the arguments invoked in 1979 by Georges Marchais, leader of the French Communist Party, to greet the Soviet intervention: putting an end to a feudal regime that demeaned women. And yet, the violation of human rights in general, and of

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<sup>374</sup> Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

<sup>375</sup> Noam Chomsky, "Cette Amerique qui n'apprend rien.", *Le Monde*, November 22, 2001.

women's rights in particular, not to mention the scandalous destruction of the giant Buddha statues of Bamyan, had not prevented the US administration from negotiating with the Taliban until July 2001, holding out international recognition of the regime against the handover of Ben Laden. In the background for this was the oil lobby, so dear to the Bush clan, and its interest in Central Asian oilfields. From a strict *Realpolitik* standpoint, future events were to show it would have been more judicious to help the Taliban's main adversary: Commander Massoud.

Still at the level of realism, suffice it to recall that the main instigator of the September 11 attacks was long a valued helper of the United States, armed and trained by the CIA, ready to do anything in the struggle against international Communism. By equipping his troops, e.g. with Stinger missiles, the Americans made him a victorious hero of the struggle against the Soviets in Afghanistan. For reasons of his own, the creature turned against his creator after the Gulf War. Our enemies' enemies are not always our friends after all!

Along these lines, the partnership of mutual convenience tying Washington to Islamabad has led the US to close their eyes on human rights violations in Pakistan and on the illegal production of a nuclear weapon, symbolically termed "the Islamic bomb" by President Ali Bhutto himself. Without the help of the Pakistani government as subcontractor of US interests in the region, without the help of its "volunteers" and secret service, the Taliban could never have taken Kabul. Because they were still thinking in Cold War terms, the United States supported the Pakistani military that put in power the Taliban, who then protected Ben Laden's networks. The idea was British, the financing was Saudi, the execution was Pakistani, but the design of this time bomb can be laid at the doorstep of the US government. There can be no question here of using a historical explanation as a kind of underhand justification. No actual or supposed crime of the US government can pretend to excuse the horror of the attacks. There is no need to invoke Dilthey or Weber to make clear analytical distinction between explaining, understanding, and justifying. The best propaganda, which is to say the most technically efficient one, is not built upon lies, but using incomplete or partial data.

In the name of anti-imperialism, a number of intellectuals were quick to disclaim any solidarity with American reprisals by invoking the United States' iniquitous policies in the Near East and their cruelty to the Iraqi people. But the Israel-Palestine conflict does not explain the September 11 attacks any more than the Great Depression explains the Holocaust. Besides, one would be hard-pressed to cite the name of a single European statesman who did more than Carter and Clinton to try to bring back peace to this part of the world. As for Iraq, those who speak of the children who died as a result of the embargo - by outrageously inflating already frightful figures: 600,000 according to UNICEF, from 1 to 1.5 million according to their own statistics - never mention the fate of 150,000 Kurds who were exposed to chemical and biological weapons at Saddam Hussein's will. In a single day, March 17 1988, his army gassed a city of Iraqi Kurdistan, causing the death of 5,000 civilians in the throes of atrocious

agony. You cannot criticize the Americans for not having a policy and at the same time make them responsible for all the evils of this world. If, as bleeding hearts believe, terrorism is the symptom and not the disease, if the economic hardships arising from neoliberal - and hence American! - globalization is its sole source, then one would have to explain why Ben Laden was a Saudi billionaire, and not a Sahelian peasant.

Terrorism presents a terrible dilemma to democracies by condemning them either to betray their basic principles or to disappear at the enemy's hands. To resist as political regimes here and now, they have no other choice than to make a mockery of the values that found them as a normative ideal. Curtailment of civil liberties, witch hunts in the press and pressures on the media, arbitrary arrests, extension of police custody for foreigners, establishment of exceptional justice and military tribunals, searches of vehicles and people, large-scale development of phone tapping (including of "friendly countries") and e-mail monitoring. Even within a legal framework (US Patriot Act, security law in France) and with the assent of a public opinion all too eager to trade in its freedom against a return to order, the drift to a security state at home contradicts the democratic spirit just as much as violations of the laws of war abroad. This war was no doubt inevitable even if it was not likeable, but it was in no way a just war; for if there are just causes, there cannot be just wars. "The noblest ends assigned to war are rotten by war", as we are reminded by Jacques Ellul, for whom not only the end does not justify the means, but the means corrupt the ends. The nobler the ends are said to be, the crueller the methods to reach them will be. The whole discourse of the US government consisted precisely in justifying the use of inhumane means in Afghanistan as retaliation for an "aggression against all mankind". As we know all too well, politics is not an industry based on morals. Machiavelli taught us that in politics, force is just when it is necessary. In the same sense, Weber taught us that in politics, we do not always get the Good through the Good. Ellul, who emphasizes the catalytic function of Christians, this peculiar role of sheep among the wolves, and who advocates not only non-violence, but non-power, could never have shared Weber's admiration for that character in Machiavelli's *Florentine Histories* who declared that those who preferred the greatness of their City to the salvation of their soul ought to be congratulated. Ellul for his part never tired of proclaiming a just world could not be founded by unjust means, nor a free society by the means of slaves<sup>376</sup>.

## **On the Symbol in the Technical Environment: Some Reflections**

By David Lovekin

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<sup>376</sup> Jacques Ellul and Patrick Troude-Chastenet, *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology and Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005).

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In "Will the Gospel Survive? Proclamation and Faith in the Technical Milieu," the Reverend Dr. Gregory Wagenfuhr considers whether the messages of the Gospel in which God is revealed can survive in the technical environment that is all-encompassing. He concludes: "The gospel will survive by God's grace and power alone. It is the responsibility of Christians to recognize the fundamentally different milieu in which we live and the problems it poses for the understanding and transmission of the gospel."<sup>377</sup> Christians have always faced problems justifying the gospel in any environment because the gospel is not an environment (milieu), it ". . . is not fundamentally social, natural, or technical."<sup>378</sup> Only the individual can be reconciled with God and only

. . . through the mediation of the love of God can one love one's neighbor. Thus, the gospel is, in actuality, radically destructive to a human society whose unity lies outside God, to natural religions and to the technical milieu. The gospel must, therefore, always be Wholly Other, even as it is translated into each new world. The good news is reconciliation to God mediated only by the person of Christ.<sup>379</sup>

Thus, God's message, news from the Wholly Other, would in most societies, by definition, be disruptive if heard at all. Christ, God's incarnation, was viewed as a criminal and as a troublemaker to be tortured and executed; his message challenges any society not "unified" in relation to God, Wagenfuhr contends. Christ insisted on a radical love, even for one's enemies, with an absolute freedom often in opposition to conventional restraints in an embrace of the power of the powerless. Convention typically urges hate for enemies and allows strength only in power and wealth made possible by a freedom flowing from political rules and regulations. Could a message be more ironic? Irony is symbolic—one is saying what one doesn't mean and meaning it—and overturns a literal use of language, which is the staple of technique. Symbol and metaphor, however, are the backbones of the biblical texts that plague the language and the mentality of a technological society. Why is symbolic language threatening to technique?

Wagenfuhr briefly traces the movement of language, which he takes to be essentially social (he uses Aristotle's theory of four causes to make this point), as it progresses from the natural milieu to the social milieu to the technical milieu. Language and society transform together forming three environments (milieus). An environment pro-

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<sup>377</sup> Gregory Wagenfuhr, "Will the Gospel Survive? Proclamation and Faith in the Technical Milieu," *Ellul Forum* 57 (2016), 11.

<sup>378</sup> Wagenfuhr, 11.

<sup>379</sup> Wagenfuhr, 12.



vides, Wagenfuhr states, “the primary source of life, the primary source of death, and therefore also, the primary experience through which all other experience is mediated. The milieu is all-encompassing, but it is this third point, that of mediation, that is most essential. For in mediating experience, the milieu provides symbol and thus the possibility of language and creativity.”<sup>380</sup> In the environment of nature, both threatening and beneficent, he adds, “Nature mediated experience and thus gave rise to natural society and natural techniques.”<sup>381</sup> He claims that nature and various techniques were “mediated through society,”<sup>382</sup> creating the social. The social and the natural environments are then eclipsed and mediated by technique, which becomes the all-encompassing and a new immediacy deaf to the symbolic message of the gospel. How does this take place? To consider this question I will pursue my claim that technology is a mentality that does not know itself as one, and I will take my own path, which may or may not agree with Wagenfuhr. My emphasis will clearly differ. I am concerned with the nature of the symbol from an epistemological standpoint. I will stand the symbol as word against the image as fact, following Ellul’s advice. The true appears from the contexts of the word as it reaches for a whole; the image as a certainty gestures for the real, which is part of the true. These are dialectical tensions that devolve with the mentality of technique.<sup>383</sup>

The tensions between mind/body, image/word, and technical operation/technical phenomenon are the grounds for this dialectic for which separation and distance enable true knowledge.<sup>384</sup> The natural world, for the Greeks, was full of gods. Nature as a collection of merely physical forces obeying disinterested laws of necessity is the result of symbolic labor. This labor is the background for the technological society becoming a system and perhaps losing any real sense of society. An environment is an expression of symbolic action, which, then, offers further symbolic interaction as it can become an “other” to itself. Water, for fish, is not an environment in this sense. An environment provides a sense of immediacy and protection but provides grounds for change, for transcendence. The natural world can become the social world, as the natural world takes on the character of “other.” Animals are to be tamed. Housing is to adjust to climate and topography. Laws will appear to allow for the distribution of property.

Technique, however, is not an environment, Wagenfuhr notes, but is an immediacy that it does not know itself as an environment having transcended the social. Technology, I will claim, does not know itself as making, as facing an “other.” The “other”

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<sup>380</sup> Wagenfuhr, 12.

<sup>381</sup> Wagenfuhr, 12.

<sup>382</sup> Wagenfuhr, 12.

<sup>383</sup> I first developed the notion of a technical mentality in David Lovekin “Jacques Ellul and the Logic of Technology,” *Man and World* 10 (1978): 251-272. More fully, this examination continues in David Lovekin, *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul* (Bethlehem, PA and London and Toronto: Lehigh University Press, 1991), 82-116, hereinafter cited as *TDC*.

<sup>384</sup> I discuss more fully the technical operation and the technical phenomena in *TDC*, 152-187.

becomes the made. What technology makes becomes the real thing. The “other” for technique becomes a problem for conceptual control and manipulation according to mathematics-like methods. It becomes the real by becoming rational, and thus produces in whatever case, the thing-in-itself, the absolutely perfect, efficient, object. The distance between subject and object collapses. The implications for religion, art, or philosophy, purveyors of symbolic labor, are dire. They require a sense of an “other” that is a value beyond technical production and understanding, which have become coterminous.

For example, with Marshal McLuhan’s famous Global Village we have a “space” where no one moves about, talking to one another and interacting. Involvement in this village takes place on the couch with remote in hand and with the eye assembling pixels or some electronic *ephemerata*. This environment is a screen of false immediacy that many do not take as “false.” The possibility of “Reality TV” waited upon TV becoming reality. “Globalization” does allow making money and wealth, transformed by technique, for those up the technological food chain. No amount of talking to this screen in words and gestures has any effect. Interaction has become symbolic, at best, although the symbols are pre-made, cliches that express what Ellul calls the technical phenomena that are now the technological system. These *ephemerata* are the ghosts of the society that still haunt sensibility and provide a useful nostalgia of a “village.” This needs further development.

## I

Fundamentally, as a mentality, I stand before some object of which I am aware. Then, I become aware that I am aware, and my experience is divided in two. A goal for knowledge and meaning, then, is to mediate these two dimensions. I want to know the object before me and I want that knowledge to be true. Language and gesture are basic aids in this process. Language, for Ellul, flows in basically two directions: toward the image as a sensual and visual presence and toward the word as an aural invocation. Both aspects become conflated for technique and then combined such that all meaning is reduced to the visual. The aural, initially, gives us a sense of the “around,” of a context of meaning beyond that which is before the eye. As Ellul states, a sound behind necessitates a turn of the head. Sound seeks clarification and clarity becomes increasingly determined by the visual, by that which is a certainty before which we stand. Of course, experience commonly shows that the two dimensions never coincide. As much as we write, as much as we televise, etc., meaning, if carefully considered, is always beyond the outstretched hand or magnified gaze.

In *The Humiliation of the Word*, from which I have been drawing, Ellul maintains that language stemming from the image proceeds according to the ways of logic that posit identities and deny contradictions.<sup>385</sup> From the standpoint of sight I see that a

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<sup>385</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerd-

red apple is not both red and not red at the same time. But to read the apple from the perspective of the word, red apple may also be the apple of temptation. The tempting apple then suggests other aspects, particularly with the understanding that most really red apples in super markets are the results of chemicals and additives. Words, then, may become symbols and open to dimensions that invite contradiction and dispute. There is no contradiction in seeing the red inviting apple as also not inviting, as dangerous to my health. Thus, for Ellul, the symbol opens us to a dialectic between viewer and object such that the object as object is questioned. Its “reality” may demand more “truth.” In the technological society logic is used to provide means for manufacture, commerce, and life committed to the image that is not known as mediation. Symbols remind us of what the image lacks. The symbols of the Gospel are cases in point. The Hebrews understood that God could not be reduced to an image and that even His name was not to be pronounced. God was the Wholly Other against which all “others” stood. Symbolic language and sign language—the language of the image—are both representations given the awareness of being aware that one is aware. The “other” enables this awareness. Thus, ignorance is important for knowledge, allowing it to grow. Even though God cannot be known except through scriptures embedded with contradiction, knowing this is a step toward knowing the limits of knowledge: knowing what one does not know, as Socrates would remind. As such, the technological society does not know what it does not know, having reduced knowledge to what is before it, to that which it has made without allowing such making takes place. How does this happen?

To recapitulate, for Ellul, the mediation that produces an environment involves the encounter of an ‘other’ by a subject, a mentality that evokes a symbol or silence, submission, or avoidance. An environment or milieu is produced through such an encounter with symbolic energy and weight. Ellul states:

Man cannot have a relationship with another save by the intermediary of *Symbolization*. Without mediating symbols, he would invariably be destroyed by raw physical contact alone. The ‘other’ is always the enemy, the menace. The ‘other’ represents an invasion of the personal world, unless, or until, the relationship is normalized through symbolization. Very concretely, to speak the same language is to recognize the ‘other’ has entered into the common interpretive universe; to display recognizable or identical tattoos, for example, is an expression of the same universe of discourse.<sup>386</sup>

Thunder and lightning in nature say nothing until they issue the voices of the gods, which in turn lead to social and institutional instantiations directed or observed by the gods. How, then, does a social or natural environment mediate without first being mediated? How does a milieu provide a symbol when it is the result of symbolization? Of course, any aspect of experience can become an ‘other.’ Perhaps this is a matter of

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mans, 1985), hereinafter cited as *Humiliation*. I discuss the problem of the image and the word more fully in *TDC*, 188-220.

<sup>386</sup> Jacques Ellul, “Symbolic Function, Technology, and Society,” *Journal of Social and Biological Structures* (3) (July 1978), 210, hereinafter cited as “Symbolic.”

definition or perhaps it is a matter of perspective and priority. I believe it is at least an epistemological issue, as I will explain. For example, what is it for something to call out to be noticed and named? How is significance established?

The human appears in a world that is separate from view, from understanding. Another world apart from the world that appears requires the ability, “. . . to imagine a dimension other than that of the immediately sensible—a universe of which he is the constituent and where he continues to reinterpret and to institute new things—he becomes also the master of the real world.”<sup>387</sup> We can then reconfigure Wagenfuhr’s three environmental conditions: life, death, mediation. We have awareness and a sense of being, and then a sense of non-being or threat, or Otherness, and then perhaps a mediation with possible symbolization. The imagination and memory are crucial in Ellul’s account, making an historical interpretation and reinterpretation possible. Mediation obviously requires separation that, in turn, provides a history and narrative beyond mere fact, the domain of the image. Facts are made and not simply given. Indeed, *Factum* means making.

Ellul states: “I have demonstrated that the aristocracy in primitive Rome could not have emerged except by the process of symbolization.”<sup>388</sup> Against the materialistic claim that money, physical courage, and power established hierarchy for patrician families, Ellul contends that hierarchy was tied to “some primordial ancestral hero celebrated for his excellence.”<sup>389</sup> Further:

his great deeds were collected, transformed into an epic *account*, and then reconstructed in such a fashion as to become symbolic. At this moment, a double movement is produced: one moves towards the heights, further from the origins, as the eponymous ancestor becomes the concentration point of symbols and is attached to a higher symbolic origin. This results in a god—goddess or demigod who is established symbolically as the true origin and as the explanation of the progenitive power of the ancestor.<sup>390</sup>

Thus, a double movement produces a present that is connected to a past that constructed it. The Roman present was constructed by the symbol, which surrounded their present. Materialistic explanations of the past beg the question of meaning and environment that is established by technique where the true is reduced to fact, a present with no meaningful past, no transcendental ground of explanation, a bad infinity, which I will later develop.

Roman society, Ellul observed in his *L’Histoire des Institutions*, was built upon a “sacral ground” where all was of an undifferentiated piece: “The Roman sacred is at the same time both religious and magical. It is religious in that it worships the transcendental powers and it is magical in that it utilizes these powers which are immanent.”<sup>391</sup> The gods were not true others but were located in nature that was,

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<sup>387</sup> Lovekin, *TDC*, 97.

<sup>388</sup> Ellul, “Symbolic Function, Technology, and Society,” 212.

<sup>389</sup> Ellul, “Symbolic,” 212.

<sup>390</sup> Ellul, “Symbolic,” 212.

<sup>391</sup> Jacques Ellul, *L’Histoires des Institutions*, vol. I, Lovekin translation. (Paris: Presses Universi-

nonetheless, transformed to give a symbolic meaning that opened up the social world with formative and creative language beyond the merely representational. The strong man or woman attained strength through ancestral myths and stories. These stories are not true because they are factual but are true because they involve the making of the fact and the recollecting of that making. The true has not become a simple narrative but is a part of it like the fact.<sup>392</sup> In this way a whole precedes a part but is then part of a larger whole, and so it goes. The notions are in some degree relative but not wholly so.

The triad of Jupiter, Mars, and Quirinus provided a locus for Roman institutions and values. These gods and goddesses were found in nature as well. Jupiter was the god of light and the god of trees, as well as the god of Roman law. Mars was the god of war and strife who established the military. Quirinus was the god of fecundity, the god of earth, water, and plants who established agriculture. These gods are true symbols in the above sense, having double and triple significance. They help to provide the true inclusive of facts of Roman civilization.<sup>393</sup> Jupiter was not merely the god of mere lightning—a flashing in the sky. Ellul writes:

It is not because there is thunder and lightning that man invents the sacred. Man made the thunder the source of meaning and of limitation because the world has to have an order, because action has to be justified. With a spontaneity, an “instinct,” as inescapable as those he could have for hunting and fishing, man “knew” that he could not justify himself, that he could not tell himself that he was right . . . neither can he say to himself 18 that it is he who establishes an order in the world whereby he can locate himself.<sup>394</sup>

The true is made by the human out of parts, of certainties given in experience without meaning and direction. The symbol makes these meanings and quests for meaning possible. It is no surprise, but is ironic, that materialistic accounts arise in a technological culture in denial of the symbol that made technology possible. The sacral world where all is of a piece and rife with symbolic making involves an imaginative separation and account of that unity that produces irrevocably a diversity. And this suggests that an environment is never simply a given. Or rather, a given is, by definition, that which is yet to be named, to be represented.

The myths that established past societies are taken as falsehoods. The dictates of “reason” and efficient methodology take precedence with the transformation of objects, means, methods in the production of technical phenomena, which, like clichés, suspend and obviate the symbol and its crucial labors while leaving a vacuum, a great absence, in their wake. The technical phenomenon is the result of reducing objects, means, makers, and made to the schemas of logic and method that destroy the possibility of true critique, analysis, or creation. The possible is replaced with the necessity of

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taires de France, 1955), 220-221.

<sup>392</sup> *Humiliation of the Word*, 123.

<sup>393</sup> *L' Histoire des Institutions*, 220-221.

<sup>394</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The New Demons*, trans. C. Edward Hopkin (New York: Seabury, 1975), 55.

progress achieved only by the accumulation of moments trapped in a vicious immediacy. The maker no longer stands before the made. The true becomes the made, only to flounder in the immediate, a present with no past, no context, and thus no true meaning. In brief, and metaphorically speaking, Coke becomes the real thing, as those with memory know; reality is what technology makes.

Technique is a mentality that pursues absolute efficiency with a mathematics-like method. It becomes an absolute in the denial of absolutes. Ellul states:

This rationality, best exemplified in norms, and the like, involves two distinct phases: first, the use of “discourse” in every operation [under the two aspects this term can take (on the one hand, the intervention of intentional reflection, and, on the other hand, the intervention of means from one term to the other)]; this excludes spontaneity and personal creativity. Second, there is the reduction of method to its logical dimension alone. Every intervention of technique is, in effect, a reduction of facts, forces, phenomena, means and instruments to the schema or logic.<sup>395</sup>

The technical mind stands before a technical operation like cutting a tree, like paddling a boat, and asks: how can this action be perfected? First, the tension between mind and body is cancelled. Too many variables intervene. The strong can cut faster and deeper, can row faster and harder. A mathematics-like method produces the way of subverting difference in all ways. A cannot be both A and not A. Perfection will require producing identities. A language of logical discourse intervenes grounded in Aristotelian logic. A motor will undermine bodily difference to fell the tree and to power the boat. With the use of such techniques the distance between mind and body lessens. No longer are the objects of nature directly at hand. Attention 20

is now shifted to the device, and a sense of body is co-opted.<sup>396</sup>

Soon, the distinction between the natural and artificial disappears. Coke becomes the real thing. Choices are made automatically on the basis of quantity become quality. More is always greater. Devices proliferate as operations and objects are subjected to “perfection.” A trip down a soap aisle in a supermarket shows how many ways emulsification can be made more efficient by the laboratory and by advertising. In one sense all are identical with the difference that some are newer and in different packages. Cliches announcing such perfection and progress abound. Moral and ethical judgments are summarized simply: that which can be done will be done. Cultural difference like bodily difference goes the way of all other forms of symbolization. Zen temples are as strange and disorienting to Japanese citizens as they are to visitors from other countries. At this point of technical development, Ellul states, technique becomes the sacred. It can no longer distinguish what it has made from what it has not made.

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<sup>395</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1965), 78-79. I have amended Wilkinson’s translation with a phrase in brackets that he left out.

<sup>396</sup> See Lovekin discussion of the characteristics of technique discussed here and following in *TDC*, 152-187.

As objects become concepts, concepts become objects with no limit. The technical society embodies what Hegel called the bad infinity.<sup>397</sup> Perfection, an absolute, and an infinity, requires members. But how is membership determined? If perfection is the absolutely efficient, which is defined by mathematical method, then new methodologies and products are required: the value of “the one best way” prevails. But, the one best way is always a step away. Either efficiency is a term with no content—never achievable—or an abstraction that always requires a new member. There is no criterion for membership that stands apart from the series. This problem besets most attempts at conceptualizing any infinity. The idea of the counting numbers must go beyond one more counting number, for example.  $N + 1$  reaches for that understanding. An infinite series of counting numbers cannot be just one more number. Further, the infinity or the absolute must not merely exist outside the group as an empty class concept. Number could not mean a class of no number at all. This would explain nothing of the particulars it pretends to group. The notion of number must include any number without being exhausted by it. As Kurt Godel showed, a mathematical system cannot be complete and consistent at the same time. Once determined, a member of an infinite series cannot define the series because some member will always be left out. This problem infects concept formation of all kinds. Consider the well-worn theological problem of how a God can be an infinite Wholly Other who is a creator of that which is and a being who provides the creation meaning and yet be totally outside of that creation. If God is simply what his creation is not, He is meaningless to that creation beyond being an absolute negative, an empty class concept. For Ellul, God’s meaning and message is ongoing and is one that invites human participation, but how is this possible given the above framework? If God is Wholly Other, how is this otherness even “other” as meaningful beyond being merely negative. An account or theory is meaningful in terms of what it includes and does not exclude (apologies to Leibniz).

Ellul understands that his God, albeit unknowable, has to be known to be so. The contradictions of biblical literature provide symbols being symbolic. They require constant interpretation. Neither God nor the truth change but our views of them do. Wagenfuhr’s question of whether the Christian gospel survives begs the question of which gospel we have in mind. Ellul indicated the need for the gospel to be interpreted continually, but he also insisted that this occur individually with a belief continually seeking faith. The Gospel, or any holy text, invites reduction to the sacred. The Bible is not a machine, Ellul insists. Faith, for Ellul, indicates a totality surrounding any belief that can swerve, correct, and amend errors of elisions. Belief remains alone until it seeks substance, context, and coherence. The whole, or a totality, precedes the parts in logic, in experience, in theology, and certainly, in philosophy. Analysis of any kind is always separation.

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<sup>397</sup> I discuss this at great length in *TDC*, 98-105.

## II

The important dialectic between image and word, fact, and meaning, collapses. Meaning considered above involves a tension between members of a continuum and the notion that defines it. If the notion becomes just one more member, it loses meaning. The symbol, however, absorbs the space between the meaning and meant as a presence of absence. The absent is the concern for the symbol.<sup>398</sup> The image, a totality before the viewer, supports the Aristotelian logic that empowers the technological rationality of logical self-identities. God could not be both imminent and transcendent from this strictly logical point of view reinforced by the visual world, a strict logic of exclusion. Inclusion will be made up in a bad infinity where a meaning is produced by adding members. Repetition is not imitation, which suggests a transcendent, a type and form, a meaning outside the meant.<sup>399</sup> The creation of the technical system involves the linking of techniques such that no one technique is the cause of any other. The system predominates making a social reality impossible.

As I stated earlier, technique cannot be symbolized because it cannot know itself as other. As Ellul states in *The Empire of Non-Sense: Art in the Technological Society*,

Technique cannot be symbolized for three principle reasons. First, it has become the universal mediator, and because it is itself a means . . . it is not the object of symbolization but rather it is also, by its power, outside of all other systems of mediation. It is, in the second place, a producer of a communal sense. The communal act today no longer relies on the support of the symbolic but rather on a technical support (the play of media, for example). Simply technique establishes a non-mediated—an immediate—relation with man, who, in the past felt a strong need to distance himself from nature, but technique seems not to require such a distance. It seems to be the direct extension of the body. Who has not heard it said that the tool is merely an extension of the hand? Thus, we pass from an organic world, where symbolization was an adequate and coherent function in relation to the milieu, to a technical system where the creation of symbols has neither place nor sense. What symbols are necessary are produced out of technique itself.

Television or advertising offer abundant symbols of technique but those come from the very working of technique itself. Therefore, the technical milieu is never understood because symbolization is excluded. And, from this fact, art, the foremost minion of symbolization, finds itself chaotic and torn between its “vocation” and that to which it can no longer aspire: an environment made up of discrete pieces belongs to structuralism but not to symbolization.<sup>400</sup>

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<sup>398</sup> See *TDC*, 97-98.

<sup>399</sup> See Samir Younes, “Jacques Ellul and the Eclipse of Artistic Symbolism,” in *The Empire of Non-Sense: Art in the Technological Society*, trans. Michael Johnson and David Lovekin, with Introductory Essays by Samir Younes and David Lovekin (Winterbourne, Berkshire, UK: Papadakis Press, 2014), 7-19, hereinafter cited as *Empire*.

<sup>400</sup> *Ibid.*, 66. Also see my discussion of technology, art, and the symbol in “Looking and Seeing: The



Technique, then, is self-mediating, which is no mediation. Meaning reduced to structure renders meaning meaningless. Change becomes mere change, repetition. The time of the digital clock, a series of nows. In ten minutes I can drive to the market, I can brush my teeth, comb my hair, and lotion my body; in ten minutes I could get a civil service wedding, and I could wish, while dying, friends and lovers goodbye. All mean the same by the clock in the space of technique.

### III

We cannot step into the same river twice, as Heraclitus said, until we named the river and understood it to be a metaphor for time and experience as flux (*panta rhei*).<sup>401</sup> We could step and run and step and run until we ran into the Aegean Sea and drowned. With the notion of *panta rhei*, everything flows. Ellul commends Heraclitus with this phrase for being near the truth.<sup>402</sup> Instead of claiming the truth to be relative as the flux metaphor might seem, Heraclitus inserts the power of the *Logos*, the word, a meaning that conjoins opposites. Ellul states, “If truth is truth even beyond the limits of our grasp and our approximations, it *exists*. And that settles it. In observing vanishing reality, Heraclitus says something that does not vanish, and his statement falls within the scope of truth.”<sup>403</sup> Thus, before the symbol a presence is portended, a finite to be woven from symbolic cloth, to be conceptual about it. To be more existential, a river extends over rocks, that in Norman Maclean’s hands, become words:

Then in the Arctic half-light of the canyon, all existence fades to a being with my soul and memories and the sounds of the Big Blackfoot River and a four-count rhythm and the hope that a fish will rise.

Eventually, all things merge into one, and a river runs through it.

The river was cut by the world’s great flood and runs over rocks from the basement of time. On some of the rocks are timeless raindrops. Under the rocks are the words, and some of the words are theirs.

I am haunted by waters.<sup>404</sup>

On the river, soul and body are one in a two count rhythm of loading and unloading the fly rod; this count is not clock time but the time of becoming one with mind, body, water, and sky, all the elements. In the pre-Socratic world in which Heraclitus lived, nature and the elements were spiritual, embodying *physis*, far removed from our ideas of physics and the physical. Heraclitus’s nature as *physis* also expressed *Moirai*, destiny and fate. The gods were still in all 29 things, as Thales proclaimed. Nature was not the

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Play of Image and Word—The Wager of Art in the Technological Society: A Revision,” *Bulletin of Science, Technology, and Society* 32 (4) Fall, 2012, 273-286.

<sup>401</sup> *Humiliation*, 39.

<sup>402</sup> *Humiliation*, 40.

<sup>403</sup> *Humiliation*, 40.

<sup>404</sup> Norman Maclean, *A River Runs Through It and Other Stories* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), 104.

field of dreary natural law and necessity.<sup>405</sup> Maclean evokes this sense of nature where words and rocks correspond and evoke the great flood, a tragic retribution. Maclean's beloved brother Paul, an artist with the fly rod, was beaten to death, perhaps over a gambling debt. His brother could not appreciate his value as an artist, and Norman realizes that he could not understand him, not understand his father, not understand the many people he lived with and loved. And then he understands that this is why he wrote this story with words reaching out to the beyond.

Words are God's gifts, Ellul stated:

God speaks. Myth is born from this word, but rarely is it heard directly and never conveyed just as it is received, because human beings cannot speak God's words. Myth is the analogy that enables us to grasp the meaning of what God has said. As discourse constructed to paraphrase the revelation, it is a metaphor that should lead the listener 30 beyond what he has heard.<sup>406</sup>

With our words we try to say what we mean; if we knew fully what we meant, we would neither speak nor write. Because we do not know we use the symbolic language best suited toward that purpose. We try to understand what we can barely understand hoping that others will hear, will read, and will help us. And, in so doing, we embrace the divine as it is, to us, available.

## Security, Technology and Global Politics: Thinking With Virilio

By Mark Lacy. Routledge, 2015. 168 pp. pb.

**Reviewed by Jacob Rollison**

Jacob Rollison is PhD candidate at the University of Aberdeen. He is the author of *Revolution of Necessity: Language, Technique, and Freedom in the Writings of Jacques Ellul and Slavoj Zizek*, forthcoming from Atropos Press.

It has been said that a significant challenge for those introducing Ellul for the first time is "to persuade sensible people not to throw it down before they have negotiated even the first ten pag-es."<sup>407</sup> This challenge applies equally, if not more so, to the Italian-born French theorist Paul Viril-io, and it is a challenge which Mark Lacy has constructively navigated in this concise volume.

Lacy is a Lecturer in Politics and International Relations (IR hereafter) at Lancaster University, UK, who has published variously on intersections of security, IR, politics, and art. This book is intended for an academic readership, primarily in the English-

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<sup>405</sup> See F. M. Cornford's marvelous *From Religion to Philosophy: A Study in the Origins of Western Speculation* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965).

<sup>406</sup> *Humiliation*, 106.

<sup>407</sup> John Wilkinson in his introduction to Ellul's *The Meaning of the City*. Ellul, Jacques. *The Meaning of the City* (Vancouver: Eerdmans, reprinted by Regent College Bookstore, 1993), xii.

speaking world, who are not familiar with Virilio (or the terrain of continental critical thought to which he more or less ‘belongs’) or who are likely to misread and dismiss him (as they might Ellul) as an outlying, pessimistic, rhetorician so insistent on questioning that he doesn’t give many ‘satisfying’ answers. Lacy’s stated audience of technology, politics, and IR students will likely find it especially worthwhile.

Lacy begins with a short biographical introduction to Virilio and his works. For Ellul Forum readers not familiar with Virilio, a short word of introduction:<sup>408</sup> the son of an Italian immigrant to France, a ten-year old Virilio was profoundly shaped by witnessing the bombing of his hometown of Nantes in occupied France during WWII—rendering him a self-named “child of total warfare.” A radical leftist (but against Marx), a practicing Catholic, a student of architecture, media, war, aesthetics, philosophy, and ‘dromology’ (his term referring to studying the increase of *speed*, his most constant theme), an activist, artist, and teacher with a large body of work from the 1960s to the present—one can both understand why he requires an introduction for the average reader, and recognize some Ellulian similarities.

Lacy follows this with a section on how to read Virilio, warning readers that Virilio’s *style* might be the biggest difficulty in reading him. “Virilio writes like a French Science Fiction Existentialist,” Lacy remarks, and he’s not wrong.<sup>409</sup> Readers who enjoy the rhetorical jabs occasionally landed in Ellul will likely find the heightened pace and pithy power of such punches in Virilio’s hyperbolic style an exhilarating force, though sometimes exhausting and perhaps excessive.

Here (and throughout the work) Lacy carefully introduces Virilio interestedly but fairly, arguing for his relevance for contemporary political/IR thinkers while cataloguing critiques of Virilio along the way. Lacy focuses on the political dimension of Virilio’s thought, a focus which sets his apart from other introductory volumes.<sup>410</sup> A central value which Lacy finds in reading Virilio is the critical questioning which he performs and to which he drives his readers; as such, Lacy’s volume is in part the charting of his personal journey reading Virilio and his resulting path. But he also aims for a synthetic course through Virilio’s works, “a body of work that is often difficult to ‘access’ simply by reading one or two books.”<sup>411</sup> The majority of the work follows these two paths alternately and links them together, including contemporary political and pop-cultural references along the way (and situating Virilio against other continental thinkers like Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, Agamben, and Baudrillard).

He splits the body of the text into two parts, corresponding to overriding themes of Virilio’s corpus. Part I addresses “The endo-colonization of society,” a term signifying

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<sup>408</sup> Some of this paragraph, and its quote, come from this *Vice* interview with Virilio: “Paul Virilio”. Interview by Caroline Dumoucel. Available at [https://www.vice.com/en\\_uk/read/paul-virilio-506-v17n9](https://www.vice.com/en_uk/read/paul-virilio-506-v17n9), accessed Jan. 13, 2016.

<sup>409</sup> Mark Lacy, *Security, Technology and Global Politics: Thinking With Virilio* (London: Routledge, 2015), 6.

<sup>410</sup> See footnote 66 on page 24.

<sup>411</sup> *Security, Technology and Global Politics*, 19.

both the end of nation-state expansion through colonization of external geographic territories, and what Virilio views as its replacement, the turning-inward of the ‘military class’ on its own population, driven by ideologies of health, security and consumerism, presupposing a “degraded political culture.”<sup>412</sup> Part II focuses on the “Integral Accident,” Virilio’s term for destruction which emerges by virtue of the networks of our society. Virilio’s focus on the accident—on the form of destruction created by the inevitable eventual breakdown of every new invention—lends to his perceived pessimism. Virilio’s conceptual vocabulary receives proper elucidation throughout; Lacy focuses on terms such as ‘chronopolitics’—the post-geographical politics of ‘real-time’ surveillance, ‘democracy of emotion’—a ‘synchronization’ of emotions which “reduces the world to fear, panic, and insecurity,” ‘siege psychosis’—a fearful obsession with security and fear of ‘dangerous otherness’, and others.<sup>413</sup> These terms function (similarly to Ellul’s *la technique*) as “a vocabulary or set of concepts to help us make sense of the world around us.”<sup>414</sup> Lacy also highlights how, despite the apparent political despair Virilio drives us towards, he ultimately considers himself a ‘revelationary’—he is interested in looking at the world through “an unfamiliar gaze,” looking at problems head on in order to move past them.<sup>415</sup> We might say that Virilio aims to enact a shift in perception, creating awareness of the ways we are shaped by the world around us; Lacy finds and critiques these things in his own life.

Lacy’s work admirably provides a ‘sensible’ entry to Virilio’s work for many readers who might never encounter it. Virilio’s works (and thus Lacy’s book) should be of interest to Ellul Forum readers not least for common themes too substantial and numerous to detail here. In making Virilio more widely palatable, Lacy necessarily dulls some of the stylistic edge which makes Virilio so incisive. This is understandable: he’s trying to bridge a gap between the apocalyptic critique of a French radical and a more tame, academic, and institutionalized readership, between Virilio and the fearful, anxious, integrated, and security-obsessed society he describes.

In his conclusion, Lacy suggests that Virilio’s “profound hope” “comes from his ‘method’, his commitment to our capacity to keep asking questions.. .”<sup>416</sup> In light of the similarities between Ellul and Virilio, and Ellul’s insistence that his sociology would have driven him to suicide without the hope his theology offered, Lacy’s attribution of Virilio’s hope only to a method of questioning—and not to something as subversive to modern categories as the “hope against hope” of his theology—comes off as going beyond the rhetorical ‘dulling of an edge’ and borders on taming Virilio’s radical position.<sup>417</sup>

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<sup>412</sup> *Security, Technology and Global Politics*, 27.

<sup>413</sup> *Security, Technology and Global Politics*, 40.

<sup>414</sup> *Security, Technology and Global Politics*, 145.

<sup>415</sup> *Security, Technology and Global Politics*, 150.

<sup>416</sup> *Security, Technology and Global Politics*, 150.

<sup>417</sup> Virilio mentions this theological ‘hope against hope’ in the interview listed above. To be fair to Lacy here, Virilio mentions his faith, but rarely discusses its relation to the rest of his thought at length.

# Dialectical Theology and Jacques Ellul: An Introductory Exposition

by Jacob E. Van Vleet, Fortress Press, 2014. 239 pp. pb.

Reviewed by Paul Tyson

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Ellul is a seminal figure in 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy of technology scholarship. Two of Ellul's books - "The Technological Society" and "Propaganda" - are recognized classics in the field. Even so, Ellul's work tends to be treated in a rather piecemeal manner and not considered as a whole. To Van Vleet, this tendency to cherry pick a few key ideas from Ellul's work, and only from his recognized philosophy of technology classics, profoundly distorts a fair appreciation of Ellul's work. Most noticeably, those who only read Ellul's above classics readily tend towards the entirely erroneous view that Ellul was a technological determinist.

There is no excuse for failing to notice the centrality of dialectical theology to Ellul's understanding of technique and propagandes. In his preface to "Propaganda" Ellul notes that whilst he sees propaganda as a necessary feature of modern technological society, he does not "worship facts and power"; indeed, he maintains that because a "phenomenon is necessary means, for me, that it denies man: its necessity is proof of its power, not proof of its excellence." Here, the unstated dialectical partner to determinist material necessity is indeterminate spiritual freedom.

Because he studies necessity from a place 'above' necessity, key features of Ellul's conceptual outlook are simply invisible to those who do "worship facts and power", to those who approach the study of society without any theological appreciation of freedom. Yet it is here, in his dialectical theology, that Ellul is most keenly differentiated from Marx, Durkheim and Weber. Because of his theology Ellul's careful analysis of the necessities of modern technological society transcends what it is possible to think of within classical sociology.

Van Vleet has given us an accessible and solid introductory synthesis of the key ideas in the major works in Ellul's expansive corpus using dialectical theology as the hermeneutic key unlocking its unity. If one is already acquainted with Kierkegaardian dialectical theology, this key itself is not

novel. What is still bracing to the conceptual categories of our times, though, is reading Ellul's sociology as grounded in theology. This approach is entirely within the ambit of both Ellul and Kierkegaard, and contemporary scholars such as John Milbank. Indeed, sociology itself, as influenced by 19<sup>th</sup> century counter-enlightenment thinkers and 20<sup>th</sup> French theorists, is increasingly open to theology. Van Vleet's text will be

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In general, Virilio certainly isn't at pains to explain himself in detail—his style addresses the reader more as an enigmatic provocation.

particularly valuable to those sociologically interested in Ellul, but not familiar with dialectical theology.

There are, of course, some serious perils involved in seeking to write a clear and systematic synthesis of an inherently dialectical, even paradoxical, thinker's work. Van Vleet performs this tricky dance with real grace and stylistic ease, maintaining a lightness of accessibility undergirded by solid scholarship. This is a beautiful example of what a fine introductory exposition can achieve. But one does not 'master' Ellul by this means, and nor is a mastery of Ellul Van Vleet's intention.

Van Vleet offers us a conceptual entree gently acquainting the intellectual palate of the non-dialectical and the non-theological with the exotic flavours of Ellul's outlook, and a basic appreciation of how his theological flavours should - and should not - be combined for satisfying intellectual digestion. But the point of the entree is, of course, the main meal to follow. After reading Van Vleet, I do think that the social scientist, or the thinker interested in contemporary French scholars influenced by Ellul, will far better understand Ellul's classic texts. This sort of appreciation will open up those interested in the philosophy of technology to the importance of dialectical theology in the work of Ellul and in the work of thinkers like Henry, Virilio etc., who also have a profound theological sensitivity grounded in the 'phenomena' of the mystery of humanly experienced reality, at the same time that they see the disturbing necessities of our technological situation.

In sum, Van Vleet's book has everything a good introductory exposition of Ellul needs - solid scholarship of the entire major corpus, clarity and accuracy in presenting a synthesized overview of core insights and ideas, and a clear exposition of the key interpretive dynamics of Ellul's dialectical theology.

Note: This review is a substantially revised version by the author, originally published in *Cultural Politics*, Volume 11, Issue 2, Duke University Press.

## **Will the Gospel Survive? Proclamation and Faith in the Technical Milieu**

**By Gregory Wagenfuhr**

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### **Abstract**

Ellul's concept of technique grows throughout his writing, to the point that he begins to see technique as the milieu in which modern people live. Because experience is mediated through technique, technique gives content to symbol and it alters language in all its aspects: its form, its content, and its purpose. If God's revelation is in his Word and language itself is fundamentally altered, can the gospel survive translation into the technical milieu? Is the gospel subverted by the very means used to communicate it? This paper briefly examines the alteration of language in the technical milieu and the social milieu in which the Word of God was revealed in Scripture. It is then argued that the technical milieu subverts communication of the gospel, but... no more than the social milieu in which it was delivered.

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### **Introduction: The Progression of Technique**

Jacques Ellul is perhaps best known for his critique of technology. Barring the problem with the translation of 'technology' for *la technique*, that Ellul himself addressed,<sup>418</sup> there is the further issue that his conception of the role and character of *la technique* grows throughout his career. Unfortunately, many of his readers tread not beyond the confines of a select few books and thus fail to understand this progression of thought. Nor has this progression been well documented in summaries of Ellul. The phenomenon of *la technique* is, at times, understood by Ellul to be the dominant force in society in the 20th century. Thus, around the time of *La technique ou l'enjeu de siecle* (1954) / *The Technological Society* (1964), Ellul considers his understanding of technique to be analogous with Karl Marx's conception of capital as the dominant so-

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<sup>418</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Continuum, 1980), 24.

cial force or factor in the 19th century.<sup>419</sup> Later in Ellul's thought, however, technique becomes something larger than a social phenomenon akin to capital.

Ellul introduces his sequel to *The Technological Society, Le system technicien* (1977) / *The Technological System* (1980) in this way:

Technology is not content with *being*, or in our world with being the *principal or determining factor*. Technology has become a system . . . Twenty-five years ago, I arrived at the notion of the "technological society"; but now, that stage is passed.<sup>420</sup>

Thus, Ellul begins to see that technique is a whole system, something larger than a dominant factor within a social system. Chapter two of *The Technological System* explains how technique is the milieu in which people now live. It is a decade later near the end of his writing career when Ellul finally pieces it all together. In *Ce que je crois* (1987) / *What I Believe* (1989), Ellul devotes four chapters to an all-encompassing metanarrative of human history in which technique features as one of three milieux in which humanity has lived. Technique, then, is not just one phenomenon amongst many, a system governing social life, but is the world in which humanity lives.

Whereas the generally accepted metanarrative of philosophy in the West proceeds through the premodern, modern, and postmodern, I have argued elsewhere that Ellul's metanarrative of three milieux provides a better account of history than a rational-centric narrative.<sup>421</sup> This account of "the human adventure" is the most important interpretative lens through which one must read Ellul's works; most important because it integrates the totality of his idea of *la technique* in its material and spiritual realities and explains its development on a grand scale.

## 2. Three Milieux

For Ellul, a milieu is characterised by three things: it is the primary source of life, the primary source of death, and therefore also, the primary experience through which all other experience is mediated.<sup>422</sup> The milieu is all-encompassing, but it is this third point, that of mediation, that is most essential. For, in mediating experience, the milieu provides symbol and thus the possibility of language and creativity. These three milieux of Ellul correspond to the three epochs of prehistory, history, and post-history.<sup>423</sup> In the natural milieu, human beings were most benefited and threatened by natural causes. Nature mediated experience and thus gave rise to natural society and natural techniques. To oversimplify, human relations existed in highly naturalistic ways—for the purpose of survival and biological thriving. With the dawn of history

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<sup>419</sup> Jacques Ellul & Madeleine Garrigou-Lagrange. *In Season, Out of Season: An Introduction to the Thought of Jacques Ellul* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 176. cf. also "On Demande Un Nouveau Karl Marx." *Foi et Vie* 45, 3 (1947).

<sup>420</sup> Ellul, *The Technological System*, 1.

<sup>421</sup> Wagenfuhr, Gregory. "Postmodernity, the Phenomenal Mistake: Sacred, Myth and Environment." In *Jacques Ellul and the Technological Society in the 21st Century*, ed. Helena M. Jeronimo, Jose Lws Garcia & Carl Mitcham (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013).

<sup>422</sup> Jacques Ellul, *What I Believe*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 99ff.

<sup>423</sup> Ellul, *What I Believe*, Part II.



and the development of the city, society itself begins to be the totality of experience. Nature and technique are mediated through society and are thus social. Nature exists for the purpose of the social groups. Technique is social and is utilised for social ends. Finally, with the end of history comes the technical milieu. Ellul's most famous book *The Technological Society* was an expression of the transition between the social and technical milieux. In the technical milieu, nature and society exist for the purpose of technical development and all experience will increasingly be mediated through technique. Thus, *la technique* is not an isolated set of phenomena that can be identified as 'alien' and eradicated. *La technique* is the interpretative framework of human life.

This is increasingly evident in the details of life. The separation of the food consumer from the production of food is increasingly broad. Even basic food preparation is highly mediated through technology. Food consumption was not so long ago a highly social affair, in the technical milieu, food consumption is technical—fast, efficient, oriented more around data on how much of what to eat in a day to be healthy than on a display of personal wealth and taste to garner social status. Nature is utilised for technical progress. To even experience untouched nature requires the use of technological transportation and in many countries is completely impossible. We have to experience a 'transport' in the spiritual sense; we have to exit the world in order to experience nature. Indeed, our very conception of the world as 'ecosystem' demonstrates that we conceive of the natural world in technical terms.

Society is also mediated through technique and technology. It is increasingly impossible to participate in society without Internet access. Communication with other human beings is increasingly mediated through techniques that alter the form and content of conversation. This helps form a technical people, a people who have no time for small talk, no time for pleasantries and politeness, but who have time only for the almighty *Fact*.<sup>424</sup> Pragmatism is the philosophy of technique. The technical person, the human resource, uses language to communicate information and data.

The mediation of nature and society through technique raises a plethora of important questions. What implications does the technical milieu hold for the revelation of God in Scripture and the proclamation of the gospel? Will the gospel survive translation into the technical world? What is theology without knowledge of God and how can that knowledge of God be knowable except through revelation? Thus, the problem of revelation in the technical milieu must be raised prior to any moral or practical questions. If the gospel is modified by the transition of milieux, if it cannot survive this translation, nothing remains but the remnants of an outdated religion that no longer serves a vital social function.

### **3. Revelation as Social**

The revelation of God, in Ellul's account of history, falls clearly within the social milieu. That this is the case is evident from a number of points. First of all, both the

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<sup>424</sup> Jacques Ellul, *A Critique of the New Commonplaces*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Knopf, 1968), 202ff.

Old Testament and the New Testament lie within the social milieu. Their respective and evolving situations are almost entirely social. That is, their primary institutions are social institutions, e.g. marriage, tribe, family, nation. Their concerns for justice are social, relating to the widow, the orphan, the outcast, the poor. In the technical milieu justice and morality are mediated through technical concerns, such as efficiency, utilitarian ideas, maximisation of productivity with minimum of effort.<sup>425</sup>

The Bible, taken as a grand narrative, is a concern of God and his reconciliation with an ever expanding group of people. It is relational and therefore it seems that the application of 'social' to this message is fitting. Ellul prefers the term *la rupture* instead of the Fall precisely because he sees the gospel as concerned with rupture and reconciliation of relationship.<sup>426</sup>

Ellul argues, for example, that Jesus is the rider on the white horse of the book of John's Apocalypse. Jesus, on his reading, exists within history as that which gives history meaning. Only Jesus has the power to open the book of history and make it meaningful.<sup>427</sup> Because Jesus is the meaning of history, for Ellul, and the social milieu is the period of history, it seems that Jesus was incarnate within the social milieu. If Jesus is the meaning of history, and the technical milieu abandons history,<sup>428</sup> it follows that Jesus has no real meaning in the technical milieu. Jesus, and God for that matter, is at best irrelevant to the technical mindset.

Ellul argues such a point in *Humiliation of the Word*. The Word of God is humiliated by the *de facto* triumph of the image, especially in the contemporary technical world. And, to devalue the word is to devalue the incarnation, as Ellul explains:

Since all Christianity depends on the incarnate Word, the Word made flesh, we must say that there is no Christian faith outside the Word; our description of the God who speaks points to what is specific and particular in Christian revelation . . . If we devalue the Word even a little, we are rejecting all of Christianity and the Incarnation.<sup>429</sup>

Clearly, Jesus belongs in the social milieu and has little possibility of communicating to us in the technical milieu. After all, as we continually separate ourselves from our physical bodies by the creation of 'avatars' on the Internet, why should we want an incarnate God?

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<sup>425</sup> Ellul notes that there is a kind of technical anti-morality present in the technical milieu. Technique tolerates no morality, but has an order of its own that creates a 'morality' of its own. See Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Knopf, 1964), 134.

<sup>426</sup> Andrew Goddard, *Living the Word, Resisting the World: The Life and Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002), 62ff. Goddard succinctly summarizes Ellul's theology as one of rupture and communion.

<sup>427</sup> cf. Jacques Ellul, *Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation* (New York: Seabury Press, 1977), 177ff., chapter 5.

<sup>428</sup> Ellul titles his chapter on the technical milieu "The Posthistorical Period and the Technological Environment." See Ellul, *What I Believe*, 133.

<sup>429</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 51-52.

One final point to make to demonstrate the seemingly social nature of the gospel is to simply point out that key concepts of Scripture seem to be social. God is love.<sup>430</sup> How can we understand the love of God, its patience, kindness, selflessness, when 'love' to us is a technical action that we make happen by the gratification of the flesh? Sex, as Ellul notes in *New Demons* is treated as a sacred of transgression of technique, but in the process is itself transformed into technique.<sup>431</sup> Ellul also explains the seeming liberation of sex and the love relationship by technique as slavery to technique in *Ethics of Freedom*.<sup>432</sup> In this situation, the love of God must be understood from a functional perspective, i.e., what can it do for me, for humanity? What purpose does the love of God play for the furthering of the technical milieu?

Community is an evergreen term used in Christian circles. The church is seen as God's community to be active in the human community. What most contemporary writers have failed to see is that neither community nor individualism are fitting descriptions of any alternatives in the technical milieu. What does the church mean to a massified humanity?<sup>433</sup> The meaning of 'church' is evident by its *de facto* division along socioeconomic or professional lines. The church may be viewed as a functional entity rather than a social identity, as such it risks becoming a social *resource* rather than the living body of Christ.

Prayer is a further concept that Ellul noted was modified in the technical milieu. *L'impossible priere* or *Prayer and Modern Man* is a look into the possibility of prayer in this world. Ellul observes that the foundations of prayer are fragile, that the reasons for it seem lacking in a secular world of "man come of age."<sup>434</sup> Prayer is empirically inefficient and ineffective. It may provide some psychological benefit, some psychosomatic healing, but technology and advanced technique is mainly responsible for the provision of daily bread, for healing, for the means of life and the source of death. Technique is the benefactor and malefactor, that which may bless or curse. Prayer to a God outside this milieu seems irrelevant and is demonstrably ineffective. Prayer, thus, becomes seen as a technique. Prayer is a function, a means to some further end.<sup>435</sup> Ellul combats this by celebrating the death of the former naturalistic and religious reasons for prayer because he believes prayer can be recovered for the Christian for what it truly is—an expression of freedom.<sup>436</sup>

Thus it is seen that certain concepts intrinsic to Christian revelation have been modified such that, though words remain, the symbolic world through which they are

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<sup>430</sup> 1 John 4:8, 16.

<sup>431</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The New Demons*, trans. C. Edward Hopkin (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 75ff.

<sup>432</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 482ff.

<sup>433</sup> For Ellul on the massification of humanity cf. Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 333-34.

<sup>434</sup> A favorite critique by Ellul of Bonhoeffer. cf. e.g. Ellul, *A Critique of the New Commonplaces*, 67-81. Ellul, *The New Demons*, 20.

<sup>435</sup> Popular Christian teaching and campaigns bear this out, e.g. "PUSH: Pray Until Something Happens." Prayer is thus seen as a means to any end, but that it is effective in bringing something about.

<sup>436</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Prayer and Modern Man* (New York: Seabury Press, 1970), 99ff.

mediated has changed. But if specific words have changed, how has language changed from the social milieu to the technical? For, if symbol and language themselves have been modified, how might a message delivered in social terms to a social milieu be translated into the technical milieu? And can this be done successfully without a subversion of its message?

#### 4. Symbol—Language in the Technical Milieu

As a milieu, technique is immediate. This means that experience of the natural and social worlds are mediated through technique. The linguistic consequences of this mediation are profound. Language is essentially a social entity. It exists for social ends. If truth is always and everywhere only expressible by language, and language is social, truth is social. The mediation of truth through technique leads to the submission of truth to the purposes of ‘fact.’ For Ellul, there is a categorical difference between truth and fact that corresponds to the difference in word and image, or language and reality.<sup>437</sup> Truth, we might say, is existentially relevant, it is interpretation and application. Fact is objective and meaningless.<sup>438</sup> In the technical milieu truth becomes quantitative and subjected to fact.<sup>439</sup> In this way language itself is modified by its integration into the technical milieu. Ellul writes:

Linguistic studies (and not just structuralism) tend more and more to reduce human language to a certain number of structures, functions, and mechanisms giving us the impression that we now understand this strange and mysterious phenomenon better than before. But what modern linguistics really does is to reduce language in such a way as to make it fit neatly into this technological universe, trimmed down as an indispensable communication for the creation of the system. Language is losing its mystery, its magic, its incomprehensibility.<sup>440</sup>

Language, if it loses its incomprehensibility and mystery, leads to non-symbolic communication, communication that is efficient but dull. In Orwell’s famous *1984*, he introduced a similar concept that he called ‘newspeak.’ Though Orwell’s vision remains unfulfilled in a great number of ways, he did understand the importance of language on the pattern of thought of people. ‘Thoughtcrime’ could become impossible by the elimination of difference and distinction in the definition of words. What Orwell missed, which is the reason Ellul preferred Huxley’s *Brave New World*,<sup>441</sup> is that this reduction process is not conscious, violent, anti-sexual, or eliminating of the semblance

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<sup>437</sup> Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*.

<sup>438</sup> Ellul, *A Critique of the New Commonplaces*, 202-206. In *Commonplaces*, Ellul criticises an attitude of submission to fact by noting that bowing to fact is a justification of fate and a denial of the unique human capacity to reject the sovereignty of fact.

<sup>439</sup> Ellul, *A Critique of the New Commonplaces*, 240-49. Ellul critiques the proposal that all science is quantitative or mathematical by observing that taking only one side of the division between numerical and non-numerical, or quantitative and qualitative, will necessarily exclude the possibility of the qualitative in order to use the method. Thus, the method simply reproduces its presuppositions.

<sup>440</sup> Ellul, *The Technological System*, 49.

<sup>441</sup> Ellul, *What I Believe*, 137. Though Ellul is also skeptical about many features of this work. See also Jacques Ellul & William Vanderburg, *Perspectives on Our Age: Jacques Ellul Speaks on His*

of freedom. Rather, as with Huxley's account, people are trained in a language that corresponds to and integrates one into a particular milieu from birth. The technical milieu alters the formal, material, instrumental and final 'causes' (to use Aristotle's terms) of language, as I will now explain.

#### **4.1. Transition from Social Language to Technical Language**

##### *Formal Cause of Language*

Language is social. The form of language, as it has been known throughout human history, is social. The form language has taken, its grammatical structure, its symbols, have corresponded to the needs of society. As Ellul noted, milieu is that which gives language its symbolic content and thus makes language possible. Symbol can be classified into Ellul's three milieux: the natural, social and technical. The non-human world gives innumerable symbols. But these symbols acquire meaning, not by the natural features themselves, but by the meaning superimposed by a social group. Claude Levi-Strauss, for example, points out how colour symbolism is ambiguous.<sup>442</sup> The ancient Jews associated the sea and deep waters with chaos and fear, whereas seafaring people tend to use its symbols positively, as lifegiving and fertile. The point is, even though symbol exists within the milieu, its meaning is fixed by usage within a group, rather than within the milieu itself.

In the technical milieu, however, the form of language is no longer social. Instead of usage providing meaning, meaning becomes more and more objective, resting more in a lexicon and set syntax than in usage. Language in the technical world becomes increasingly standardised, objective and technical, with meaning increasingly lying within the word itself, rather than in the intention of the subject or in the relationship of speaker and audience. Rather than a form of social interaction between subjects, language becomes a form of information transfer. Language is taken to be equivalent to reality, insofar as it is a transmission of data, rather than a communication of truth and value. That is, the qualitative and evaluative component of language so prevalent in social discourse is supplanted by quantitative fact. Indeed, it may be fitting to suggest that the postmodern call to remember subjectivity inherent in language and communication comes at precisely the time when it is in most danger of disappearance.

##### *Material Cause of Language*

The material cause of language is social. The matter, substance or essence of language is social. Communication between subjects is, in itself, a representation of the subject itself. One's word is one's bond. *Communication* is about the coming together of individuals in a type of community. The very act of communication requires the loss of difference, requires common ground to be formed, common experience to be shared.

In the technical milieu, however, the matter, or substance of language is technique itself. Ellul says of communication, "Technology is the support of inter-human com-

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*Life and Work*. 2nd revised ed. (Toronto: House of Anansi, 2004), 54-56. See also Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 337.

<sup>442</sup> Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 6465.

munion. But this communion, no longer symbolic, has turned into sheer technological communication."<sup>443</sup> The mediation of the technical milieu sterilises language, demonstrating that the essence of language becomes technical itself. Technology, in contrast to older forms of mediation, is univocal, superficial, but stable. It involves clear and orderly mediation, but without playing or evoking, without remembering or projecting. It is a truly efficient medium, and it has imposed itself in lieu of poetic mediations. It sterilizes all around itself anything that could

disturb that rigor.<sup>444</sup>

Thus, the material cause of language is itself no longer social. The form and content of language is increasingly technique itself in a universal self-augmenting way. Again, this does not mean that language loses its social aspects, but that the social aspects are heavily modified by mediation through technique.

#### *Instrumental Cause of Language*

The instrumental cause of language is society. That is to say, society itself is the instrument by which language exists. Language comes by means of society. It develops through common usage in distinct social and geographical groups. Language is delivered via society. Society provides the means by which speaking, listening and comprehensibility is possible. Through a process of socialisation a child or foreigner is integrated into the group by means of learning the language.

In the technical milieu, however, language becomes an instrument of technique. Technique is the means by which language acts are constructed. Communication is increasingly only possible mediated through communication technologies. To be integrated into the world, one need learn fewer social rules, fewer shibboleths, and more universal forms of expression via information technology. Learning basic computer and Internet skills is more socially important than learning the subtleties of formal conversation. Language, therefore, becomes an expression of technique rather than an expression of society.

#### *Final Cause of Language*

The final cause, or purpose, of language is social. Language exists so that people might communicate with each other, might move interaction beyond the purely physical to the emotional and intellectual. Without language, human civilisation is impossible. It is not without accident that tower of Babel narrative expresses the disempowerment of humanity by confusion of language.<sup>445</sup> This narrative is not to be understood as an aetiological myth for the presence of different languages, but is a statement on the confusion of language. It is less about the speaking, more about the power that mutual comprehensibility and human unity brings.<sup>446</sup> Language exists for the purpose of building human community and society. In order for communication

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<sup>443</sup> Ellul, *The Technological System*, 36.

<sup>444</sup> Ellul, *The Technological System*, 37.

<sup>445</sup> Genesis 11:1-9

<sup>446</sup> cf. Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, trans. Dennis Pardee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 19.

to be a possibility there must be common ground. In order for there to be common ground, there must be a willingness on the part of individuals to assume positions and identities otherwise alien. Agreement, community, communion, are made possible by language.

In the technical milieu, however, with a biological-functional definition of human ontology, the growing uniform and global human identity makes the social functions of language increasingly superfluous. Language increasingly exists for the purpose of function-performance. Jargon and computer programming language are only two obvious examples of this. A more subtle example is the moralisation of language often called 'political correctness'. Just as blasphemy was formerly a serious crime, so now the use of socially divisive terminology is sometimes criminal. This is not for the purpose of social cohesion, but because language exists for the purpose of technique. By the use of technical language former controlling social identities such as race or nationality are systematically eliminated. Tolerance is always and everywhere a devaluation of formerly held values by submission to a higher value. Thus, instead of creating a social identity through language, language works to minimise social identity by the prioritisation of technical function. Technique necessarily devalues identities deemed irrelevant to function.<sup>447</sup>

Language—that means by which people may come together as one—has, in many ways, reached its zenith in our own time. Global human unity has never been more a reality than it is today. As the number of distinct social groups and cultures die away in the face of monolithic technical anti-culture,<sup>448</sup> traditional forms of language have been and will become irrelevant. Language is thus fundamentally altered in its form, its essence, its instrumentality, and its purpose.

#### **4.2. Spiritual Dimensions**

This transition from social to technical language is not simply a material fact without spiritual value. Language is bound to spirituality and the fundamental change in milieu is also spiritual. As, Ellul says in *The Humiliation of the Word*:

Human sovereignty is due more to our language than to our techniques or instruments of war . . . Naming something means asserting oneself as subject and designating the other as object. It is the greatest spiritual and personal venture.<sup>449</sup>

Language is humanity's greatest spiritual venture, and when this venture is turned toward technique, technique becomes endowed with sacral qualities that make technique all-pervasive. This is the dialectic of milieu that is so essential to understand.

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<sup>447</sup> Whether one is black or white, male or female, homosexual or heterosexual, Christian or Muslim, is completely irrelevant for the vast majority of technical functions. What becomes essential now is a functional human ontology that views people as 'human resources.'

<sup>448</sup> "Culture exists only if it raises the question of meaning and values. In the last analysis one might say that this is the central object of all culture. But here we are at the opposite pole from all technique. Technique is not at all concerned about the meaning of life, and it rejects any relation to values." Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*, 148.

<sup>449</sup> Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 52.

The milieu is dialectically dependent upon humanity as well as being external to and above people. That technique is a human creation is obvious. That it has become a milieu is perhaps less obvious. But, if it is truly an all-pervasive milieu then it must be our responsibility, is indisputable. Of vital importance is what Ellul says in *New Demons*, “It is not technique itself which enslaves us, but the transfer of the sacred into technique.”<sup>450</sup> Technique is not the enemy, our spirituality conditioned by *la rupture* is. And, if language represents this spiritual power, as Ellul has said, the fact of the technical milieu seems to be deadly to the Word of God. The adoption of this milieu means that the significance of the incarnation has been undone by humanity. The Word of God that came to dwell among us in a relationship for the purpose of reconciliation has been robbed of its symbolic relationship to ourselves. By removing from ourselves that last possibility of communication with God, we systematically deny his Word a presence in our world.

It is not as though the technical milieu removes speech or relationships. Rather, the technical milieu mediates all aspects of life through technique. This means that the gospel is conceived in technical terms. Evangelism occurs for results. Jesus becomes a means to an end, whether that be social justice, psychological well being, divine moral approbation, a prayer-answerer, the giver of the Holy Spirit who works miracles of healing and wealth-creation, etc. Ellul well speaks of faith as meaningless in *Living Faith*.<sup>451</sup> Following Dietrich Bonhoeffer,<sup>452</sup> he thinks that faith in Jesus Christ must always be ultimate,<sup>453</sup> which means that it can never exist for any reason other than itself.

But, if faith is truly meaningless, purposeless, and therefore always only an end in itself, such a thing is inconceivable in the technical milieu wherein ends do not exist, but only means and means become their own ends.<sup>454</sup> *The Word of God turned into means ceases to be the Word of God*. The Word of God as means makes the ‘God’ of this phrase to be ourselves deified. For if the revelation of God truly is self-revelation in Jesus Christ, our possession of it, our ownership, our *use* of it makes us to be masters of it. This leads us to the main question—can the gospel survive translation into technical language in the technical milieu? To attempt an answer, it is expedient to observe what the technical gospel looks like.

### 4.3. The Technical Gospel

The gospel is viewed through the lens of technique, which is little more than means and an ensemble of means.<sup>455</sup> A technical gospel delivers quantitative and measurable

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<sup>450</sup> Ellul, *The New Demons*, 206.

<sup>451</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Living Faith: Belief and Doubt in a Perilous World* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 157ff.

<sup>452</sup> See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West and Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005).

<sup>453</sup> Ellul, *Living Faith: Belief and Doubt in a Perilous World*, 116ff.

<sup>454</sup> cf. Ellul, *The Technological Society*.

<sup>455</sup> Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 19.



results. The gospel or the Word of God becomes a resource for life, for social justice, for ideological justification, for spiritual revitalisation. Religion becomes another means to maintaining the efficiency of the human resource by the semblance of freedom. The gospel *via* technique, then, is very different from the gospel *via* society insofar as the Word of God is used to encourage and justify human technique. The technical gospel is one in which the content of Christian proclamation becomes about technique itself. Not just religious technique, though the recent revival of "spiritual disciplines" is telling, but in technical religion as well. This is a gospel of human progress, of humanity working with God for the redemption of the world. This notion of stewardship is resource-oriented and it asks questions of efficiency and progress. It is a gospel oriented to answering the questions of the day, e.g. ecological concerns and economic distributive justice, questions the gospel itself is not *primarily* addressing.

One brief example of the technical gospel is useful. Stewardship, though once the domain of economics in theology, has spread to ecology and personal ability. In this way the natural world and the individual human are seen as resources that must be utilised in a managed and efficient fashion. The focus on vocation or calling further views the individual as a functional unit that must be utilised in the one best way for the kingdom of God. Stewardship often fails to ask the question that must come prior to its standard question of how to act responsibly with the resources at hand, that is the question, "How did we get the resources we have?"<sup>456</sup> Furthermore, stewardship tends to economise or resource the non-economic and thus devalue the human individual or the natural world itself. The question must be asked, "Is this properly a resource?" before it is asked what might be done with it. True management of 'capital' must always question what rightly qualifies as 'capital.'

### **5. Conclusion—Will the Gospel Survive?**

Will the gospel survive the technical milieu? Does it need radical new translations? In actuality, such translations have long been underway. Faith in Jesus Christ has always been subverted in human reality. In the natural milieu, the revelation of God said that nothing had spiritual value unless given to it by God, that the sun, moon and stars were not gods and had only natural impact on human affairs. In the social milieu Jesus was the one who came declaring that he came not to bring peace, which is what religion so earnestly desires, but a sword of division.<sup>457</sup> He came to cast a fire on the earth, to divide social groups down to even the family unit.<sup>458</sup> In the technical milieu, Jesus is the one who claims that he is the way himself, not that he is the way to somewhere, but that he is himself a unity of means and ends. Jesus is the way to the Father, but is also one with the Father.<sup>459</sup> As such, the gospel to the technical world must be a dual proclamation. On the one hand, we proclaim that Christ does

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<sup>456</sup> Cf. Jacques Ellul, *Money & Power*, trans. LaVonne Neff (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press), 1984, 30.

<sup>457</sup> Matthew 10:34.

<sup>458</sup> Luke 12:49-53.

<sup>459</sup> John 14:6-9.

not provide the means to any further end, e.g. justice, peace, material prosperity, etc. On the other hand, we proclaim that Christ is the one and only means to liberation from the sacralisation of technique that has so modified human relationships.

Thus, the Ellulian conclusion: the gospel has been de-incarnated and militated against for as long as it has been revealed. The social form of Christianity was not a golden age, rather, the social milieu had its own very pernicious forms of subversion, many of which Ellul well documents.<sup>460</sup> The attempt at the subversion of Christian faith is a fact rooted in the notion of incarnation itself. God is revealed in weakness, in the Word. The Word is terribly alterable, its meaning difficult to solidify. The world to which symbols refer changes dramatically.

Thus, though the incarnation was an historical event, the world to which Jesus came is different from our own in ways more radical than many are prepared to consider.

The gospel will survive by God's grace and power alone. It is the responsibility of Christians to recognise the fundamentally different milieu in which we live and the problems it poses for the understanding and transmission of the gospel. Can the gospel be translated into the technical world? It already has been and yes, it is a radical subversion of the gospel. But this is not necessarily a new situation insofar as the gospel has been subverted throughout its history by the social milieu in which it was revealed. The solution, therefore, can in no way be a re-socialisation of the gospel. To attempt such is not only quixotic, but creates a utopian golden-age vision of the past that is radically naive.

The gospel is not the milieu; it is not the transmission of the milieu. The gospel is not fundamentally social, natural, or technical. The good news of God in Christ is reconciliation, but this is not social insofar as reconciliation to God cannot be mediated through human societies. This reconciliation has at its root the relationship between the individual and God. It is by means of this individual and unique relationship that the church is formed. That is, only through the mediation of the love of God can one love one's neighbour. Thus, the gospel is, in actuality, radically destructive to a human society whose unity lies outside God, to natural religions and to the technical milieu. The gospel must, therefore, always be Wholly Other, even as it is translated into each new world. The good news is reconciliation to God mediated only by the person of Christ. Thus, we cannot approach the technical world with a technical gospel, the social world with a social gospel, the natural world with a natural gospel. Neither can we approach the technical world with a social gospel, as is being done currently. Rather, we approach the world with the person of Christ as the one who interrupts the technical world by his incarnation.

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<sup>460</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986).

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## “Bringing Ellul to the City Council: A Council Member Reflects on How Ellul Has Guided His Work”

Interview of Robb Davis by Mark D. Baker

Robb Davis holds a master’s degree in public health and a Ph.D. in population dynamics from Johns Hopkins University. He has over twenty years’ experience in international development in the field of maternal and child health and nutrition. He was the executive director of the Mennonite Central Committee. He contributed an article to the *Ellul Forum* (#46). He is fluent in French and reads Ellul in French. He was elected to the Davis, California, city council in June, 2014 and began serving as mayor of Davis in July 2016. In addition to his role in city government he also dedicates a significant amount of time to work on issues related to homelessness and restorative justice in relation to youth crime.

Mark D. Baker, professor of theology and mission at Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary, interviewed Robb on July 7, 2016 as part of the conference of the International Jacques Ellul Society. What follows is an edited version of excerpts of that session, including two of the questions from the audience.

**Mark:** It would be surprising to many that an enthusiastic reader of Jacques Ellul would run for political office. How did Ellul’s work factor into your decision to run for city council?

**Robb:** I’ll start by that saying Ellul arguably is the reason I became involved in city politics. Maybe even more surprising than my claiming to have run for office on the basis of something Ellul said, which many might consider to be paradoxical, is that I am also a Mennonite. I wasn’t just trying to break some molds. I had spent about 25 years travelling the world. I was a technician, dispensing wisdom to many villages and communities all over the planet—45 different countries. I started reading Ellul, and Patrick Deneen, and they started challenging me about living and acting locally. I realized that I didn’t know anything about my hometown Davis, California. So about 7 years ago, I stopped travelling. I decided not to get in an airplane anymore. And that changed everything, and not always in a good way. Because when you make a decision like that, all of a sudden everything that your identity is tied up in is no longer there. People in my hometown didn’t know me. When I started digging into my hometown I realized that the brokenness that I had experienced other places was actually more profound in Davis, California. We had a veneer of privilege and beauty, and not too far below the surface we had serious problems of addiction and homelessness and racism and exclusion. And the more I got involved, the more I realized that acting locally is really not fun. I didn’t really want to look at it. I wanted to leave, actually, but

I stuck it out. While staffing an overnight shelter I saw firsthand how we fail as a society to treat mental health, how we fail as a society to deal with addiction, and how these things are syndromes that leave people broken, and our solutions are to toss the problems over to the nonprofits to try to figure out a solution. So what I want to say about that experience, and where I really drew from Ellul quite a bit, was the idea of the flourishing of intermediating entities outside the state. The state was incapable, even at a local level, of really effectively dealing with these problems. Into the interstices into the breach, came these small organizations. My commitment at that time was to try to work with them to make them stronger, to help them plan, to try to take some things I'd learned in my trips around the world, and to try to bring them into the community. And of course in a situation like that sometimes you do that for a while, and you're asked to be on a commission, you're asked to be on a task force, and then somebody knocks on your door one day and says, "Maybe it would be useful for you to run for office." I didn't believe that I should or could do it. And my main concern was some things that were raised today at this conference about power. Could I go into politics and authentically bring some solutions? The thing that pushed me towards the decision was the idea that perhaps in that role, and this gets back to power, I could encourage the flourishing of these intermediating agencies in the community. I could encourage them. Because one reality of being a political leader is, when you pick up the phone and say to someone, "Come to a meeting," they'll come. They will. I thought, "Maybe I can bring people around the table who aren't talking to each other, maybe I can bring the school district together with the police department, together with the city, to do a restorative justice program."

Another key factor that led me to run was born out of something I read in Ellul: "A key fact of this civilization is that more and more, sin has become collective and that the individual is constrained to participate in it." (Ellul, *Presence au monde modern*, 1948, p. 19—Robb's translation). I was talking to a friend of mine, and we realized that if we had someone in office who was engaging in regular confession about our participation in that collective sin, maybe that would be helpful to a community. And so I've tried to make it my practice to be confessional.

**Mark:** How did Ellul influence your campaign, how you ran?

**Robb:** In *The Technological Society* Ellul, commenting about propaganda, states: "Whether technique acts to the advantage of the dictator or the democracy it makes use of the same weapons, acts on the individual, manipulates his subconscious in identical ways, and in the end leads to the formation of exactly the same type of human being" (375). What I saw is that people running for office even locally were using propaganda for very, very specific ends, which is the building of allegiance toward themselves. They have around them people using propaganda to do one basic thing: build allegiance toward that figurehead. Why? Because it's a lot easier to raise money when you can invite someone to pay \$300 a plate at a table around a leader than it is to give it to some disembodied political party or university. So right out of the gate, I was being told, "You've got to sell yourself. This is about you, Robb. This is about your image;

this is about what you've done in the community." And I knew I couldn't do that. I mean, I could have done that, but I felt like that was idolatry. That the real problem with propaganda is that it creates allegiance towards something that's not God. And I am a follower of Jesus. So I struggled with that.

When I was discerning whether to run or not, through a long series of conversations others helped me understand that it came down to two things. Could I run a campaign where I could be honest about my limits? And the limits of political power? I brought that commitment into the campaign, but my campaign team said, "Do not ever talk about that." I wrote an essay that I put out on a local news blog, without telling my campaign team, and it was entitled, "I'm going to disappoint you." What I was trying to say is, "you are projecting on me many, many hopes. You are projecting on me your desires. I'm going to disappoint you. Because there's no way I can fulfill those needs." So that decision to not listen to my campaign team, and to actually get them upset, was an intentional act to try to communicate that I did not have solutions to these problems. That all I offered was the ability to try to bring people together, to try to work together to solve some of the issues.

**Mark:** With the campaign team, was it one time you did this, and they said, "Robb that's stupid," and then it was over, or was it ongoing conflict with them?

**Robb:** It was ongoing conflict, but not about everything. For instance, I made a commitment during the campaign that my political career begins and ends in Davis. So I am committed to localism. I'm committed to this bioregion. I'm committed to naming the giftedness of the people in this town and drawing on that giftedness to solve our problems. I'm committed to understanding the natural resources, to solving conflict locally. So I laid that out and I said, "This is my commitment, that I will not seek higher office." My campaign team was okay with that.

I think the reason I won, even though I did not always follow the counsel of my campaign team, is that we knocked on every single door in the community and I held almost 40 face-to-face meetings around tables in neighborhoods where we sat and listened to people. And, oh my goodness the fear and the trauma I encountered in a privileged community like Davis; you would be shocked by what people were afraid of. And all they wanted was someone to listen.

**Mark:** Let's return to your comment about confession for collective sin. Can you give an example of how you do that?

**Robb:** I am asked to speak frequently at different events. Recently I spoke at a demonstration against Bakken crude oil coming through our town by rail. It is very volatile and there have been railroad accidents and explosions in other places, killing many people and causing significant environmental destruction. What I mean by public confession is standing in front of a group of environmental activists and saying, "You know the oil company is not going to the Bakken formation to make our lives miserable. The oil-producing company is not going to the Bakken shale to give us heartache, or to challenge our goal of local control of land use. They're going to the Bakken shale because we're telling them too. We're asking them, we're begging them, our society,

our lifestyles are drenched in oil. That's why they're going." Now, that's my public confession of my participation in systemic sin. We're raping Canada's timber to build houses in California. We've despoiled the Ecuadorian rainforests to drive our cars. We need to say that; we need to acknowledge that. And I've felt like I could make a commitment to do that. And in the end to be confessional to acknowledge my role in the systemic.

**Mark:** Ellul wrote: "The first great fact which emerges from our civilization is that today everything has become 'means.' There is no longer an 'end;' we do not know whither we are going. We have forgotten our collective ends, and we possess great means: we set huge machines in motion in order to arrive nowhere" (Jacques Ellul, *Presence of the Kingdom*, p. 63). How have you observed this?

**Robb:** Two months after I was elected an MRAP, Mine-Resistant Armored Personnel Carrier, arrived in our town. It looks like a tank without a turret. It was surplus military equipment sent by the U.S. Government at the request of our police department.

**Mark:** Sent to your town and many others. . .

**Robb:** Many others. Hundreds of towns across the United States. I asked, "We need a tank?" And the police said, "Yes. We need it for lone shooter events were somebody's hiding and shooting. We need it in case of a disaster. We need it in case there's a riot."

Means and ends. The day it arrived, the first thing that came into my mind was, "Means and ends." What did Ellul say about means and ends? Now let's think about this vehicle, the MRAP. It has an end. It was developed for a reason. It was developed for one very specific reason. It can carry large numbers of soldiers down a flat Iraqi road, have an explosive device go off underneath it, and preserve the lives of the people inside. It was created because of a lie. If you disagree with me that the Iraq war was a lie we can discuss it later. The end to which it was set was based on a lie. It achieved the end of keeping people alive, but when the war was over, the U.S. Government needed to do something with it, and so it committed to sending these MRAP's to every community that wanted one in the United States, no strings attached. A vehicle worth \$750,000 each.

And our police are saying to me, "We need it. We need it." So I challenged them, and I said, "What's the concern? Security, right? We need it for our security." And we did Town Hall meetings, and people came and said, "We need it for our security." That's the end that we're trying to achieve, security.

So I asked the police in public meetings, "What's the security threat?" They said two things, which are very telling in this world. And think of this through the lens of Ellul. Everything is becoming means. We've forgotten the ends. So we have a machine that's created for certain ends, which are based on a lie, now this machine, this means, is coming to a community and what we're trying to do is find an end that justifies this means so that we can keep it. We "create" ends to justify its continued use. But it's an instrument of power and control.

And so, the police said, “Well, we have drug deals going down in our town, and the drug dealers are stealing each other’s stashes, and they get into gun battles with each other, and we need it in case we’re going in to arrest the drug dealers because they’re heavily armed.”

Okay, now think about that in terms of ends. The first question was, “Who’s buying the drugs?” And the police turned to me and said, “Our largest problem is drug sales—a heroin problem among our young people and a methamphetamine problem among our middle-aged population.” This is a real problem in our community. The demand for drugs is not dropping out of the sky; again, these guys are not cultivating drugs and selling them just to make our lives hell, they’re doing it because there is a demand. So how do we respond to this problem? We’re going to address addiction with an MRAP. We are trying to achieve certain ends (reduction in drug sales) by focusing on the wrong means. We should be looking at the causes of addiction, not stopping drug sales caused by it with an MRAP

The second one is even more telling. It gave me chills and I hope it gives you chills too. The assistant chief of police came to me separately, and said, “Robb, we have legitimate concerns. There are people in this community who are tactically trained. They’re trained in police tactics, and they know how to counter us, and by the way Robb—some of these folks have PTSD. If they get guns in their hands, it’s very difficult for us to deal with them.” And I said, “We have people in our community who are tactically trained, who have PTSD, and access to weapons?” He said, “Yeah. Former military.”

Means and ends, right? We go off to Iraq. We wage war. Men come back with PTSD, tactically trained. And the way we deal with them is an MRAP so that we can take them out? And the government is not paying anything to deal with the PTSD? This is the way we’re dealing with the problems in our community? With an MRAP? So we voted to get rid of it. It felt significant, but the Department of Defense sent it 10 miles north to the city of Woodland. We were the laughingstock of the neighborhood. The big blowback came a few weeks later though and relates to another insight from Ellul. In the film, “The Betrayal of Technology” he said, “Technique will not tolerate (or accept) any judgment passed on it. In other words, technicians do not easily tolerate people expressing an ethical or moral judgment on what they do.”

”Technique does not accept judgment.” Moral Judgment. And then Ellul wrote, “in other words, the technician.” I find it very interesting that he started by saying, “*la technique*,” which shows me that technique is a spiritual power. In addition to the technicians, there is *la technique*, there is technique, which is the Power. The blowback we got, which was severe, and I almost thought I was going to be recalled, was that we were accused of compromising the security of our city. We were accused. I sat with the police and the police said, “*We* are the experts. *We* understand security. *You* are a politician, you do not know about security, you’ve taken a tool of security out of our hands.” I said to them in a public meeting, “The problem I have with the MRAP



is that it is a symbol.” It is a symbol of the most destructive military force that the world has ever known, and we’re bringing that into our community.”

Most politicians don’t want to talk about ends, because a lot of times the ends that they’re working towards are hidden. They’re not the ends that they say publically. Push them on ends. Push them. Push them. The other thing is that we do have, in every bureaucracy, we have people who are enamored with means who will look for ends to which the means can be applied. It is means in search of ends.

**Mark:** In what ways have you personally felt challenged in relation to these themes we have been talking about, and what have you done in response?

**Robb:** People don’t corrupt you overtly. They do it this way: “Man, you’re amazing. You know if you—I know we have a weak mayor form of government Robb but, if you push this, it’ll pass, because people respect you. And so, could you push it?” So it’s subtle. It’s people projecting their hopes on you and convincing you, or trying to convince you that you are the solution to the problem, and if you take the lead—and that’s every single day. Every single day there is the temptation to use power in a way that looks good, but here’s what happens. For instance, I want to work on restorative justice with youth. So one day I pick up the newspaper and it says, “Robb Davis led the initiative on restorative justice.” I read it and think, “Actually, no I didn’t. There were like 10 of us in the room.” So I have a choice at that point. Am I going to go correct the paper and say, “Actually there were 10 of us in the room, and I didn’t lead anything.” Or am I going to let that go.

And most people would say, “Let it go. Let it go.” Because if you let it go, you can move that initiative forward so much more quickly. People will follow you. And you’ll be able to move much more quickly.”

Here’s what happens: The goal is restorative justice. That is the end that you want to achieve. What happens when you start listening to those voices, or when you don’t correct those errors, or when you accept you know that praise? You actually start going doing that path. And you start saying, “You know what’s most important is that I am able to bring change.” And so what I need to do is I need to accumulate a little more of that status and power so that I can be better at bringing change.

Two things can occur. First, I can use the positive end, restorative justice, to justify means inconsistent with restorative justice itself and, for me, importantly, inconsistent with the way of Jesus. Second, with increased emphasis on the means to achieve power, eventually the original end of implementing the practice of restorative justice can get lost. Achieving power becomes the true end—even if not the acknowledged one.

Therefore, I must re-orient regularly. I so easily get pulled off track. As part of that reorientation I have had to do things like go before people and say, “You know what, I should’ve spoken up earlier, I had nothing to do with that. I didn’t do anything about that. I can’t take any credit for that.”

**Mark:** As you point out, to make effectiveness the supreme goal can become problematic, yet you do seek to be effective, correct? As you state, you desire to see an increased practice of restorative justice. You want to be effective in that.

**Robb:** Yes, we can't live without some commitment to effectiveness. The problem is making effectiveness or efficiency the supreme goal that drives and determines everything. I have found it is of utmost importance to have made premediated commitments. For instance, like Ellul I am committed to not use violence. Without that commitment, if violence appeared to be required to achieve a goal I might too easily succumb to the ends justifying that means—the means of violence. Ellul has certainly been a key influence in helping me, as a follower of Jesus, determine what my pre-commitments are—things I will not do in spite of what efficiency may demand or promise. This is not to say I am always faithful. As I just said, re-orientation is a constant necessity.

**David Lovekin:** If I were an average citizen in Davis I would probably have the idea that you are a thoughtful politician, more thoughtful than most, but would I know you are a Christian?

**Robb:** I made a decision to bring some explicit Christian theological language into my day-to-day political work. One explicit way I bring in faith language, and I think an authentic way, is to say what I'm actually doing as a leader in the community is I'm looking out for giftedness. I'm looking for gifts that can be brought to bear on dealing with the challenges of our community. So I use concepts like that, that we are given gifts. I don't say God gives us gifts, I say we are given gifts, and they're for the good of the community. That's Paul. I also say, to my colleagues, "What we need to be modeling as a council is grace and forgiveness." I talk explicitly about needing to reconcile the broken relationships in our community. And I do that by encouraging factions, whether it's in the business community or whatever, to go through mediated processes. And these are things that have never happened before in Davis, but we're starting them, and we're having some success. And I talk about reconciliation and forgiveness. Grace, reconciliation, forgiveness, giftedness. Confession. I encourage people to confess when they hurt someone else. So I bring those terms in because they're meaningful to me. I think they're meaningful to the discourse. People definitely pursue me afterwards on certain things and say, "Where did you get that from? Like giftedness. What do you mean by that, Robb?" I haven't had any pushback, and part of it is I'm not saying, "Paul said," "Jesus taught."

**David Gill:** As an ethics professor I always say to my students something like this: "Ethics is a team sport, not a solo sport. So you're not going to do well living or discerning what's right all by yourself. So you need some people around you." So my question is, do you have some people around you who will help keep you sane, keep you in check so you don't get arrogant about good things that happen?

**Robb:** In the spirit of confession, I think I'm doing that rather poorly. Leadership of this kind is isolating. And there are real trust issues. So the people who I trust are not engaged in city politics. And people engaged in city politics have some trust issues. Can I just acknowledge that? So I'm not doing a very good job at that. And it's lonely and it's not healthy.

**Mark:** But you do have people that you get together with who pray for you?

**Robb:** Yes, every two months we have a small group of people who come together on a Saturday afternoon and they put their hands on me and they pray for grace and patience and wisdom. You know, that's important. But it's not easy to get a group of people around who can simultaneously entertain deep conversation on policy and really be trustworthy—that they don't have an interest that they're trying to push. And I haven't found that group yet. And I'm despairing that I will. And so, maybe I'll just leave it at that.

# Book Reviews

## The Empire of Non-Sense: Art in the Technological Society

*By Jacques Ellul; translated by David Lovekin and Michael Johnson, edited by Samir Younes.*

*Papadakis, 2014. 168pp.*

**Reviewed by Zachary Lloyd**

Zachary Lloyd studied with David Lovekin at Hastings College before going on to complete an MA in philosophy at the New School for Social Research. Currently he is a PhD student in comparative literature at the City University of New York.

Nearly forty years after its publication in French, Jacques Ellul's seminal work *The Empire of Non-Sense* has been made available to the English speaking world. This beautiful, hardbound edition also contains two introductory essays by David Lovekin and Samir Younes, both of which constructively engage with the text and with Ellul's broader philosophical perspective. As the subtitle of the work ("Art in the Technological Society") indicates, Ellul's subject is art and those who create it—and indeed, a dizzying array of contemporary artists, architects, critics, and cultural movements are given due consideration. However, the pivot of these analyses lie in their relation to a complex set of phenomena that Ellul calls *la technique*: basically, the totality of methods of and for achieving absolute efficiency in every field of human knowledge. We moderns, as Ellul has it, are so beguiled by machine productivity that we reconstruct, almost unconsciously, all of our cultural and social institutions on this paradigm—namely, on the pursuit of unrelenting efficiency. In effect, technique surreptitiously predisposes a certain manner of operating not merely for our interaction with machines, but also with each other; it becomes as if our very substance, a mentality and an environment fully in and of itself. It is no coincidence, for example, that cognitive science draws heavily from computational models; today the line between brains and processors is nothing if not muddled. In the technical society as Ellul perceives it, human action is re-envisioned as function, something that may be tweaked and fine-tuned; the individual—the site of eccentricity and spontaneity—is increasingly unneeded, and, indeed, is nothing now but a potential source of error. Subsequently, this mentality subtends not only our desiccated assemblages of bureaucracy and economic productivity, but even the vaunted, ironically detached freedom of the artist. In a so-

ciety where creativity has been co-opted by hyper-rational methods, the official art of the age is inevitably artificial.

The modern artist, consuming and consumed by the technical society, is placed in a position the likes of which human history offers no counterpart. Ellul, in his rich, slightly polemical, and overtly sarcastic style of writing (very faithfully captured by the translators), spends the bulk of *Empire* problematizing the theories and practices of the artist's position by dialectically revealing the contradictions that underlie it. Beginning with the notion that the Modernist art movement had purportedly freed itself from the shackles of tradition and authorial control, Ellul goes on to show that this supposed liberation has only amounted to a deepening technical captivity. In other words, artistic practices have become increasingly infatuated with their technical procedures or methods rather than with whatever it is they actually create. For example: An empty canvas hangs on a gallery wall. I am standing before it; sensuously, symbolically, there is nothing there but this blank object. Slightly confused, I glance down to the little placard next to it which enables me fill in the void with some appropriately elaborate theory (e.g., "This is a painting that is not yet a painting"). What is emphasized here is not the painting, but the technical procedure of painting; theory and the generative procedure of the artwork have become the work's very claim to art. The work, subsequently, no longer speaks for itself—the placard, or the art critic (which amount to the same), speaks for it and guarantees its place in the newly minted technical discourse of value. In other words, we are confronted with a situation wherein the meaning of the work is, like a sticky note, "tacked on" from the outside. But this need for the "tacking on" of meaning does, in fact, accomplish the very opposite of what it intends: it only reveals the vacuity and actual meaninglessness of the (non)painting itself. This veneration and overvaluation of artworks that are inherently devoid of sense or meaning is precisely what Ellul considers to be the sense of nonsense.

Once again: modern art professes to have been freed—free from tradition, free from material constraints, free from the godhead. Yet once art has refused the communication of meaning, it has refused itself; in keeping with its nihilistic trope art becomes anti-art. Ellul contends that in such a situation—when art obliterates meaning—all that is left is the bare process by which the artwork is created, along with an absurdly opaque technical discourse that attempts to veil the work's own vacuity. What was once believed to be a revolution or a freeing has only become an emptying and a stripping of sense. Now the only value of art is in its ability to "question," precisely because technological rationality and the homogenizing principles of technique throw into question the very value of the individual. In short, this is where Ellul locates the fundamental contradiction: art, as it attempts to revolt against the oppression and subjugation of the individual to technical ideology, profitably uses and proliferates this ideology even as it appears to denounce its value. Accordingly, modern artistic freedom has amounted only to one more capitulation: an enslavement to the technical mentality; an endorsement to a world in which technique is the absolute benefactor of value; a genuflection before the pervasive Empire of Non-Sense.

In the final analysis, *Empire* is a proleptic work, a kind of promise. It is reasonable to ask, after nearly forty years of sweeping technological advancement that would have surely surprised even Ellul, whether the situation looks more hopeful now; whether art has remained on the level of technique and ignored fundamental human issues or whether its particular capacity for immanent critique (i.e., for using oppressive methods in order to lend awareness to their very oppressiveness) can be successful in bringing to light the reality we are facing. In any case, the issues Ellul has presented are, no doubt, all the more pressing today—the meaninglessness of art he has described only mirroring the meaninglessness permeating our everywhere and everything—and to ignore these issues is as if to give in; to declare as a bitter necessity that which we have only chosen.

## Liberalism and the State in French and Canadian Technocritical Discourses

Intersections and Contrasts between George Grant and the Bordeaux School<sup>1</sup>

By Christian Roy

Christian Roy is an independent scholar of intellectual and cultural history (PhD McGill 1993), an art and cinema critic, and a translator from several European languages. A specialist of the French Personalist tradition (having for instance identified its Bordeaux “school” around Bernard Charbonneau and Jacques Ellul as fount of the critique of technology), he has published his thesis and many articles on the subject, as well as on George Grant (e.g.

[www.revueargument.ca/article/2002-03-01/207-george-grant-lidentite-canadienne-face-a-lempire-de-la-technique.html](http://www.revueargument.ca/article/2002-03-01/207-george-grant-lidentite-canadienne-face-a-lempire-de-la-technique.html)), and is on the editorial committee of the Ellul Forum ([ellul.org](http://ellul.org)). He is also the author of *Traditional Festivals: A Multicultural Encyclopedia* (ABC-Clio, 2005).

### ABSTRACT

In English translation (1964), Jacques Ellul’s *The Technological Society* framed the definition of its topic in North America and elsewhere, expressing a key insight that remained marginal in France, where it first arose in the 1930s in a Southwestern faction of the Personalist movement led by Ellul’s lesser-known mentor Bernard Charbonneau, pioneer of the Green movement. Ellul’s analysis was taken up by political philosopher George Parkin Grant, buttressing his defense of Canadian nationhood against US hegemony as the vortex of technology’s drive toward a “universal homogeneous State”(Kojève/Strauss). Grant was first noticed in France in a review of his *Technology and Empire* (1969) by Daniel Cerezuelle, founder of the *Societe pour la*

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<sup>1</sup> This article was originally a paper given at the Sorbonne in Paris on September 21 2013 at the 6th Tensions of Europe Plenary Conference “Democracy and Technology. Europe in Tension from the

Philosophie de la Technique as a second-generation member of the Bordeaux School. Beyond such cross-fertilization, some differences with Grant remain about the role of the State, despite related understandings of liberalism as the matrix and chief vector of technology.

In its 1964 English translation, Jacques Ellul's book on *The Technological Society* framed the definition of its topic in North America and beyond, even though its impact remained marginal in France, where it was first published in 1954. It was a belated fruit of over twenty years of critical reflection and activism in a Southwestern faction of the French Personalist movement, driven by Ellul's lesser-known mentor Bernard Charbonneau, who invented political ecology in that prewar context.<sup>2</sup> Charbonneau (1910-1996) and Ellul (1912-1994) formed a tandem of thinkers who were so close that it almost did not matter which one of them discussed what topic; so much so that each devoted his first major book to the other's main concern. Having first originated the concept of Technique as the distinctive, overarching organizing principle of modern society, Charbonneau entrusted it to Ellul, so that he, rather than this Christian anarchist, could dwell on the State in his own book *L'Kail*, which would only find a publisher forty years later, in 1987. It was around that time that the Societe pour la Philosophie de la Technique was launched at the initiative of disciples of Charbonneau and Ellul, the second generation of what may be seen as the Bordeaux School, by analogy with the Frankfurt School of critical theory.<sup>3</sup>

Not coincidentally, Daniel Cerezuelle, a pillar of the Societe pour la Philosophie de la Technique, coming back from studying with Hans Jonas at New York's New School for Social Research, was the first scholar in France to discuss, alongside the latter, the Canadian philosopher George Parkin Grant (1918-1988) in a 1976 article for an early issue on Technique of the journal *Les Etudes philosophiques* published by the Presses universitaires de France. Cerezuelle highlighted among the philosophical investigations of "the meaning and implications of technological progress" that had appeared in North America over the previous decade those that "tend to undermine the prevalent notion of the universality and axiological neutrality of the technological phenomenon"<sup>4</sup>, as the Bordeaux School had been doing since the early 1930s. The parallel was left unmentioned in that text, but I want to explore it by following the thread of a line of argument Cerezuelle highlighted in Grant that can be traced back

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19th to the 21st Century."

<sup>2</sup> Christian Roy, "Aux sources de l'ecologie politique: Le personalisme gascon de Bernard Charbonneau et Jacques Ellul," in *Canadian Journal of History/ Annales canadiennes d'histoire*, Vol. 27, No.1, April 1992, 67-100.

<sup>3</sup> Christian Roy, "Ecological Personalism: The Bordeaux School of Bernard Charbonneau and Jacques Ellul," in *Ethical Perspectives* (quarterly review of the European Ethics Network), Vol. VI, No. 1, April 1999, 33-44 (summarized as document no. 698481 in Vol. 36 of *The Philosopher's Index*, 2003), downloadable at <http://www.ethical->

<sup>4</sup> English abstract of D. Cerezuelle, "La philosophie de la technique en Amerique," in *Les Etudes philosophiques*, No. 2, April-June 1976, 209.

to Ellul, beyond the direct influence his book on *The Technological Society* admittedly had on the Canadian philosopher.

In his own *Technology and Empire*, George Grant had maintained in 1968 that progressive narratives of emancipation were not really in a position to sustain a coherent challenge to the enfolding of all aspects of life within technology, which he defined as something more than technique, understood by Ellul as the whole complex of rational methods for absolute efficiency, since it entailed a “belief in the mastering knowledge of human and non-human beings.” As both a practice and an ideology, Grant wrote in passages quoted by Cerezuelle, technology “arose together with the very way we conceive our humanity as an Archimedean freedom outside nature, so that we can creatively will to shape the world to our values.” The problem is then that “the moral discourse of ‘values’ and ‘freedom’ is not independent of the will to technology, but a language fashioned in the same forge together with the will to technology.”<sup>5</sup> As a result, “our liberal horizons fade in the winter of nihilism” before “the pure will to technology (whether personal or public);” for if, “within the practical liberalism of our past, techniques could be set within some context other than themselves—even if that context was shallow,” “we now move towards the position where technological progress becomes itself the sole context within which all that is other to it must attempt to be present.”<sup>6</sup>

Before Grant, the Bordeaux School viewed liberalism as the ideological seedbed of technology’s threat to the values of freedom and equality claimed by that ideology. Ellul could describe “Fascism as Liberalism’s Child” (1937) in the Personalist review *Esprit*, for as Charbonneau had maintained earlier in the newsletter of its Bordeaux group of followers, both, like communism, have quantifiable production as their final argument. Fascism and communism, being but “spectacular reformisms,” share in this the assumptions of the liberalism they aim to replace, and thus cannot change an increasingly alienated daily life.<sup>7</sup> Grant also saw these three rival ideologies as the modern political systems consonant with the dominance of technology, which had replaced Christianity in Western man’s assumptions about reality.<sup>8</sup> Asked about Ellul in a 1978 interview, Grant voiced his distaste “of the liberal and Marxist ideologists and their accounts of technology as a means at the disposal of human freedom. When they speak that way they forget that both capitalism and communism are but predicates of the subject, technology.

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<sup>5</sup> George Grant, “In Defence of North America” (1968), in *Technology and Empire. Perspectives on North America* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1969), 32.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>7</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, “*Les actes necessaires*,” in *Bulletin du groupe de Bordeaux des Amis d’Esprit*, No. 2, *s.d.*

<sup>8</sup> George Grant, “Religion and the State” (*Queen’s Quarterly* 1963), in *Technology and Empire. Perspectives on North America* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1969), 41-60.



Ellul's description of technology was quite outside such a shallow account, and he faced what was actually happening with his lucid French and Christian common sense."<sup>9</sup>

Ellul thus ascribed the emergence of a "pre-fascist mentality" to the fact that, "by proclaiming freedom of thought, liberal society had freed itself from thought," since "any thought is equivalent to any other," and need not be matched by corresponding action to be validated. Subjective opinion and arbitrary imagination go unchecked, but remain powerless, while "the material world tends to organize itself on bases that are absolutely independent of any effort of thought"<sup>10</sup>; until, that is, they are imposed as public dogma through advertising and propaganda, forming "abstract masses" of individuals whose psychological reactions are gauged and manipulated by the statistical methods of the social sciences. By its ability to go a step further and concretely mobilize these abstract masses, "fascism appears, from a social standpoint, as a better designed, more willful amorphism than the other, liberal state, but of the same nature, belonging to the same type of society."<sup>11</sup> Even "fascism's lack of theory is a liberal characteristic."<sup>12</sup> Fascism is thus the worthy heir of liberalism: "it keeps all of its father's features —only with the addition of those of its mother, technique,"<sup>13</sup> just as for Grant modernity itself, as "the dream of liberalism and its scientific mistress —'neutral' technology"<sup>14</sup>, seems destined to gut freedom and equality of substantive content. Ellul concludes with the description of fascism he claims to find in Alexis de Tocqueville, when this nineteenth-century liberal thinker, who remained a touchstone for Charbonneau and him, writes of "democratic societies that are not free though they may be rich, refined, ornate, magnificent even, powerful by the weight of their homogeneous mass," where private virtues may still flourish even in the absence of civic spirit, once this mass quietly embraces absolute rule.<sup>15</sup>

In a 1968 collection of "candid Canadian opinions" of the United States, Grant used their example to likewise "assert the ancient and forgotten doctrine that evil is, not the opposite, but the absence of good,"<sup>16</sup> fostered by liberalism's "value-freedom" as

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<sup>9</sup> Larry Schmidt (ed.), *George Grant in Process: Essays and Conversations* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1978), 146.

<sup>10</sup> Jacques Ellul, "Le fascisme, fils du libéralisme," first published in *Bulletin du groupe de Bordeaux des Amis d'Esprit*, No. 4, *s.d.*, then in *Esprit*, No. 53, February 1 1937, 761-797, and cited here from the reissue in *Cahiers Jacques Ellul. Pour une critique de la société technicienne*, No. 1 ("Les années personnalistes"), 2003, 118-119.

<sup>11</sup> Jacques Ellul, "Le fascisme, fils du libéralisme," 136.

<sup>12</sup> Jacques Ellul, "Le fascisme, fils du libéralisme," 118.

<sup>13</sup> Jacques Ellul, "Le fascisme, fils du libéralisme," 136.

<sup>14</sup> Frank N. Flinn, "George Parkin Grant: a Bibliographical Introduction," in L. Schmidt (ed.), *George Grant in Process: Essays and Conversations* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1978), 199.

<sup>15</sup> Jacques Ellul, "Le fascisme, fils du libéralisme," *Cahiers Jacques Ellul. Pour une critique de la société technicienne*, No. 1, 2003, 137.

<sup>16</sup> George Grant, "From Roosevelt to LBJ," in Al Purdy (ed.), *The New Romans. Candid Canadian Opinions of the U.S.* (Edmonton: M. G. Hurtig Ltd., 1968), 41.

theorized by John Rawls, of whose *Theory of Justice* he was thus an early critic, long before the communitarians.<sup>17</sup> “The emptiness of a moral tradition that puts its trust in affluence and technology results in using any means necessary to force others to conform to its banal will,” “when deemed necessary to comfortable self-preservation,” in a “use of power” “which perpetrates evil from its very banality.”<sup>18</sup> For “the ‘good life’ to which it is proper to aspire in technological society is not a life constrained by moral judgments; [...]. This quest for freedom divorced from virtue entails the desire to dominate necessity, hence leads to tyranny.”<sup>19</sup> Charbonneau already saw the banality of evil as an issue going far beyond the specific “Responsibilities of the German People” he discussed in a November 1945 article for one of the Protestant publications his friend Ellul gave him access to, agnostic though he was: for “if we can only imagine a mechanical civilization where personal responsibility is lost,” then “we will have to manufacture good Germans the same way Hitler manufactured bad Germans. But let us remember that it is when we start from those neutral techniques that can be used for anything indifferently, when we start especially from this neutral being that gets formed and deformed, that everything is possible,”<sup>20</sup> even when it is a liberal regime that proposes to “win hearts and minds” —or else. Thus, in 1967, Grant is not surprised that “what is being done in Vietnam is being done by the English-speaking empire and in the name of liberal democracy,” and not by what “could be seen as the perverse products of western ideology —National Socialism or communism.”<sup>21</sup>

Charbonneau presciently picked up on a tell-tale early sign of that shift within liberalism in a 1952 article on this “Heart-Rending Revision” for the Protestant weekly *Reforme*. He argued that Western societies, “particularly Anglo-Saxon ones, were founded on the myth of Progress that confused material progress and spiritual progress, that of collective power: of science and technology, with that of individual freedoms. There wasn’t a problem: it is understood that that the societies that are technically most advanced are also the freest, as shown by the case of America.” “Having long confused Progress with Freedom and Democracy, America is now mulling over their contradiction, but I fear it won’t be for long,” for “today, it is becoming perfectly natural to sacrifice the latter to the former, since the facts have demonstrated that Freedom is an

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<sup>17</sup> George Grant, *English-Speaking Justice* (first published by Mount Allison University, Sackville, New Brunswick, as the Josiah Woods Lectures, 1974), intr. Robin Lathangue, Toronto, House of Anansi, 1998.

<sup>18</sup> George Grant, “From Roosevelt to LBJ,” in Al Purdy (ed.), *The New Romans. Candid Canadian Opinions of the U.S.* (Edmonton: M. G. Hurtig Ltd., 1968), 41.

<sup>19</sup> John Badertscher, summarizing Grant’s essay “Tyranny and Wisdom” (*Social Research* 1964) from *Technology and Empire*, 79-109, in “George P. Grant and Jacques Ellul on Freedom in Technological Society,” in Larry Schmidt (ed.), *George Grant in Process: Essays and Conversations* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1978), 84.

<sup>20</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, “Responsabilites du peuple allemand,” in *Le Semeur* (organ of the French Federation of Christian Student Associations), Second (post-war) Year, No. 1, November 1945, 85-86.

<sup>21</sup> George Grant, “Canadian Fate and Imperialism” (*Canadian Dimension* 1967), in *Technology and Empire. Perspectives on North America*, 65.

obstacle to Progress,” in the guise of “totalitarian successes.” Identifying their values with their national power, when forced to choose, “liberal democracies will brutally suppress their political freedoms, equality in education or salaries, leading to a regime where the dictatorship of the central power would underwrite a policy of massive investments,” surviving freedoms having first been emptied of content by the cult of efficiency: “while Human Rights are on display on the first floor, torture is being practiced in the basement.” —be it in Algeria at that time or in Guantanamo in ours. For whether it be H-bombs or drones, “what is the use of changing your weapons system without also updating your principles,” as Charbonneau had first asked upon introducing the musings of “an American journalist” on which this text was a commentary, to the effect that “we have to wake up from our illusions of easy technical and material superiority;” Soviet life is based on force rather than consent, but “are we so sure that our social aims, derived from the individual’s right to free will, are stable, constructive and based on lasting values?”<sup>22</sup>

The author of this quote, identified as Lester Pearson, was actually neither American, nor a journalist, but Charbonneau still could not have chosen a better specimen of the contradiction at the core of Anglo-Saxon liberalism than this Canadian minister of Foreign Affairs who would win the Nobel Peace Prize in 1957 for his invention of UN peace-keeping troops during the Suez Crisis, and would go on to become leader of the Liberal Party in 1958 and Prime Minister from 1963 to 1968. The policy of military, even nuclear cooperation with the United States that brought Pearson to power was the pretext for the book that made Grant famous in his own country in 1965, *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism*. As Grant explained in introducing its 1970 reissue, behind the specific political decisions arising from Canada’s ambiguous status within the American empire was “the deeper question of the fate of any particularity in the technological age. What happens to nationalist strivings when the societies in question are given over, at the very level of faith, to the realisation of the technological dream? At the core of that faith is service to the process of universalization and homogenisation” in the name of technology’s “one best means.” Hence a Canadian sensitivity to this issue, exemplified by Grant among others,<sup>23</sup> since any “distinction will surely be minimal between two nations which share a continent and a language especially when the smaller of the two has welcomed with open arms the chief instrument of its stronger brother —the corporations.” Viewing the United States as “the only society which has no history (truly its own) prior to the age of progress,” and as a result, no horizon beyond the one defined by technology, Grant lamented the passing of a British North America that drew from its acknowledged roots in the older

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<sup>22</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, “Revision déchirante,” in *Reforme*, from a clipping dated December 1952 without further identifying data that was shown to this writer by the author’s widow around the turn of the century. Charbonneau would go on to publish numerous essays in this periodical over the following decade.

<sup>23</sup> Arthur Kroker, *Technology and the Canadian Mind. Innis/McLuhan/Grant* (Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1985).

European cultures of France and the United Kingdom the “belief that on the northern half of this continent we could build a community which had a stronger sense of the common good and of public order than was possible under the individualism of the American capitalist dream”<sup>24</sup> unleashed by the Revolution his Loyalist ancestors had fled.

Grant sympathized with French Canadian nationalism for keeping a similar hope alive, despite its current modernizing wager to have it both ways, a typically Canadian position he thought “had been put most absurdly by the Liberal leader in Quebec, M. [Robert] Bourassa: ‘American technology, French culture’ —as if technology were something external (e.g. machines) and not itself a spirit which excludes all that is alien to itself. As Heidegger has said, technique is the metaphysic of the age.”<sup>25</sup> Feeling that a strong national State was the only thing that might defend Canada’s identity and communitarian ethos against the encroachments of American corporate liberalism, Grant admired Charles De Gaulle for taking such a stance for France, and giving his country a measure of independence from the dictates of the United States as the hegemonic center of the liberal version of the “universal homogeneous State” devoted to neutralizing “politically relevant natural differences among men” “by progressing scientific technology,” “thanks to the conquest of nature and to the completely unabashed substitution of suspicion and terror for law,” in the terms drawn from Leo Strauss’s debate with Alexandre Kojève<sup>26</sup> that Grant applied to America.

Charbonneau, on the other hand, could never forgive General De Gaulle for making France into a nuclear power, and presiding over the planned modernization of the country justified by the bid to retain some status on the world stage. For in the name of “a certain idea of France,” the reality of the country, and whatever was worth preserving about it, was being readily sacrificed, from the age-old nature-culture synthesis of the countryside down to its very existence and that of all mankind as a likely result of nuclear proliferation and the increasing risk of worldwide conflict. This for him exemplified the logic of the modern State as it has developed in the West since the eleventh century as the centralizing vortex of the converging control processes culminating in technology.<sup>27</sup> Ellul also underlined that “the increasing interrelationship of state and technique affects political life on a global level. The ultimate product is a

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<sup>24</sup> George Grant, “In Defence of North America,” in *Technology and Empire. Perspectives on North America*, 17. On this much-debated “Red Tory” paradigm of Canadian identity, often associated with George Grant, see Gad Horowitz, “Conservatism, Liberalism, and Socialism in Canada: An Interpretation,” *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. XXXII, No. 2, May 1966, 143-171.

<sup>25</sup> George Grant, *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, “The Carleton Library,” 1970), ix.

<sup>26</sup> Leo Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1959), 132-133, cited in G. Grant, “Tyranny and Wisdom,” in *Technology and Empire. Perspectives on North America*, 96.

<sup>27</sup> Christian Roy, “Charbonneau et Ellul, dissidents du ‘Progres’. Critiquer la technique face a un milieu chretien gagne a la modernite,” in Christophe Bonneuil, Celine Pessis & Sezin Topen (eds.), *Une autre histoire des “Trente Glorieuses.” Modernisation, contestations et pollutions dans la France d’apres-guerre* (Paris: La Decouverte, 2013), 291.

total world civilization.”<sup>28</sup> Grant would have agreed that “protecting romantic hopes of Canadian nationalism is a secondary responsibility” “in an age when the alternatives often seem to be between planetary destruction and planetary tyranny [...],”<sup>29</sup> feeding the dialectic of system and chaos that Charbonneau, in a book written between 1951 and 1967, described as the driving force of exponential development, in a vicious cycle calling on ever more technological control to counter the latter’s increasingly disruptive environmental and social effects.<sup>30</sup>

For Charbonneau and Ellul, any nation-state, including such smaller-scale ones as might result from the breakup of larger units, was bound to be a vector in that worldwide process of technological homogenization, whatever claims of cultural particularity might be invoked to justify building a State apparatus so as to be politically and economically competitive. That is why, shunning the draw of Paris and faithful to their provincial roots, they took aim at the hold of the centralized State in France as the oldest modern nation, in a defence of local life against planned modernization and untrammelled development that happened to be rooted in the same Southwestern region as the Girondin party of federalists crushed by the Jacobins in the French Revolution.<sup>31</sup> Faced with a French centralism whose claim to embody the common good went unchallenged, Charbonneau appreciated what remained of individualism in Anglo-Saxon cultures, as it was this Protestant element that had allowed them to discover nature as an ally for individuals who resisted the encroachments of industrial society and the technocratic State.<sup>32</sup> Conversely, Grant liked to turn to France for a sense of the common good such as he was hoping to maintain through Canadian statehood, in the face of American corporate domination built on liberal assumptions about the innocence of technology and the possessive individualism it

enabled. Yet it seems no coincidence that the powerful critiques of technique’s alleged neutrality mounted first by the Bordeaux School and later by George Grant arose on the marches of France and the United States respectively as the historic centers of progressivism in the Old and New Worlds, motivated by concern for the fate of both local particularity and genuine personal freedom in the Brave New World remade as one by technology. For they all saw in Technique the underlying dynamics shared with overtly State-worshipping ideological competitors by the liberal consensus, until the latter prevailed as both its matrix and its most potent vector.

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<sup>28</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, tr. John Wilkinson, intr. Robert K. Merton (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), 318.

<sup>29</sup> George Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, ix-x.

<sup>30</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Le Systeme et le chaos: ou va notre societe?* intr. D. Cerezuelle (Paris: Le Sang de la Terre, “La pensee ecologique,” 2012; originally published as *Le Systeme et le chaos: Critique du developpement exponentiel*, Paris: Anthropos, Paris, 1973 ; 2nd edition: Paris: Economica, 1990).

<sup>31</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Sauver nos regions. Ecologie, regionalisme et societes locales*, intr. Pierre Samuel (Paris: Le Sang de la Terre, “Les Dossiers de l’ecologie,” 1991).

<sup>32</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Le Feu vert. Autocritique du mouvement ecologique*, intr. D. Cerezuelle (Parangon/Vs, « L’Apres-developpement », 2009; original edition: Paris: Karthala, 1980; English translation by C. Roy as *The Green Light* in progress for Bloomsbury, due to appear in 2017).

## **Illusions of Freedom: Thomas Merton and Jacques Ellul on Technology and the Human Condition**

*By Jeffrey M. Shaw. Pickwick Publications, 2014. 193pp.*

**Reviewed by Jacob Van Vleet**

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Many readers of Jacques Ellul and Thomas Merton have long recognized the similarities in thought between both prophetic thinkers. Jeffrey Shaw is the first to bring both into dialogue in book length form, in his *Illusions of Freedom: Thomas Merton and Jacques Ellul on Technology and the Human Condition*. The work is divided into seven clearly written and engaging chapters. By presenting and working through the arguments and ideas found in Merton and Ellul, Shaw awakens readers to the profound limiting and restrictive effects modern technology has on individual freedom and agency, and also on the political, the ethical, the religious, and various other sectors of society.

The first chapter introduces the reader to both Merton's and Ellul's definitions of technology and freedom, pointing out their striking resemblances. Chapter two details the early influences on Merton's and Ellul's religious thought and how this would go on to influence their respective views on technology and their social criticism. The third chapter presents a fascinating and indepth discussion of the influence of theologian Karl Barth on both Merton and Ellul. It also discusses how each thinker appropriated particular Barthian ideas in their work. Chapter four examines the philosophical and sociological influences on Merton and Ellul, with an emphasis on how the ideas of Soren Kierkegaard and Aldous Huxley guided the worldviews of both men. Chapter five delves into the influence of Karl Marx on Merton and Ellul, and how Marx's thought is developed, changed, and extended in their views on technological development and freedom. This insightful chapter also provides a discussion of how Merton and Ellul, in their own ways, criticized contemporary capitalist and communist societies from a theological vantage point, instead arguing for a "third way" which would escape the propaganda and the technological fetishism found in modern industrial societies. In chapter six, Shaw returns to another similarity between Merton and Ellul: their respective analyses of human language. For both thinkers, the Revealed Word is the ultimate source of freedom, and it provides a counterbalance to the enslavement of our present era (an entailment of the unfettered dominance of technology). The seventh and final chapter concludes and summarizes the previous chapters.

Of the many strengths of *Illusions of Freedom*, four stand out. First, Shaw is a clear and coherent writer. This makes the book a pleasure to read. Second, Shaw demonstrates an indepth knowledge of the many writings of both Thomas Merton and Jacques Ellul (in French and English), leaving the reader with a sense of confidence in Shaw's analysis and conclusions regarding their work. Third, Shaw thoughtfully appropriates insightful and illuminating key quotations from Merton's and Ellul's work which illustrate his arguments and explanations in a quite helpful way. Finally, Shaw is persuasively and doggedly convincing that the prophetic sociological, philosophical, and theological insights of Merton and Ellul are more relevant today than ever before - and that we owe it to ourselves to listen.

Overall, *Illusions of Freedom* is an insightful work, and one which will hopefully stimulate readers of Ellul to read Merton, and readers of Merton to read Ellul. A deeply interesting book which is highly recommended.

**Issue #59 Spring 2017**



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For the Critique of Technological Civilization

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## Editorial

Jeff Shaw

Welcome to the spring 2017 issue of the *Ellul Forum*. Longtime readers will instantly recognize the return of the classic *Forum* look, and for this I would like to thank Lisa Richmond for initiating the reformatting of our journal and for bringing this issue together and providing the translation for the French articles herein. As guest editor, she has provided our readers with an opportunity to engage with Ellul's thought on medicine. Lisa's administrative assistant at Wheaton College, Eli Nupanga, contributed the actual layout. Special thanks are also due to Raymond Downing for suggesting an issue focused on Ellul's essay on medicine, and to Raymond, Frederic Rognon, and Richard Stivers for their contributions.

I would like to invite our readers to contribute to the *Forum* or to step forward and volunteer ideas for special issues like this one, focusing on a particular topic. We were privileged to hear a number of emerging scholars speak at the conference last July in Berkeley, and many of these presentations would fit nicely into future issues. Perhaps some of our veteran Ellul scholars would also like to follow Lisa's lead and either present ideas for the next few issues or be willing to run through the editing and formatting process as she has done. Either way, the *Forum* will benefit tremendously, as will we all, from our collaborative input.

Please enjoy the spring issue of the *Ellul Forum*, and keep in mind as well that the Vancouver conference is only a little over a year away. We hope to see you there!

## Biblical Positions on Medicine

Jacques Ellul

**IT** may seem strange to go to the bible for enlightenment in a field as technical and modern as medicine. The bible can apparently give us only an archaic conception of medicine, primitive and of mere historical interest. But if, in truth, medicine means the care of man, the preservation of health, it is obvious that we need to know something about man in order to care for him. How can we know something about man? This is the whole question. We can inquire by a rational inventory of experiments and observations. We can also receive what God gives us in a revelation on this subject. The two methods can go together. They can also be contradictory. But we can easily posit, on the basis of faith, that because God created man and inspired the bible, what he tells us in the bible about man is most true. For God knows more about man than man does himself. And when God reveals man's reality to us, it is indeed this reality and not some other that is ultimate, that holds sway over all the rest. Thus the bible enlightens medicine about these ultimate realities that shape man's life, and as a result it can inspire a particular development in medicine.

### THE IDEA OF MAN

What does the bible tell us about man? Many things that we will pass over, because they would be without immediate relevance or are well known:

1. Man is a creature. He is not an autonomous being who possesses life by himself or who holds anything on his own. He is wholly dependent on the creator.

2. Man is created in the image of God. But may we say that man is this image today? No—but it is always expressly testified to us that we have known what this true image of God was: it is Jesus Christ (Phil. 2:6). It is thus Jesus Christ who, being the true image of God, represents man to us such as God desired and created him to be. He is the one who—although God—is more truly man than any one of us. And as a result, in order for us to find out what man is and ought to be, truly, we need to look to Jesus. It is he who provides the key to this ultimate reality of man.

3. Man is not delivered over to destiny. He does not live in a world that is the plaything of blind forces or calculated fate. He does not live by a fate that dominates man's development. There is no blind good luck or bad luck. The life of man is completely known, guided, and used by God. God is the one who combines in it the good and the bad, happiness and unhappiness—taking into account Satan's activity, which God uses, and the presence of sin.

4. For man is radically sinful, in his essence and not only in his actions. He is oriented toward evil. He pursues evil, and ultimately death, because, despite his conscious horror of death, his profound tendencies compel him to seek death as well as sin.

5. We will spend more time on the idea that man is presented to us in the bible as a unity. Contrary to current thinking, the bible does not separate out two elements in man, the soul and the body.

Man is considered a unity in which we can identify three elements that are distinct but not separate: the body, the soul (the ensemble of mental and psychological qualities), and the spirit, which is the particular place of encounter between God and man. This spirit opposes the soul-body complex in the sense that the soul-body is purely natural and wholly perishable. The spirit, by contrast, is the gift of God, supernatural. From a biblical point of view, therefore, the soul has no particular value. There is no such thing as the immortality of the soul. In themselves, none of the elements that compose man are immortal; he receives this capacity only through grace, as a result of judgment. The bible therefore is not spiritualistic: even the spirit does not exist apart from God, the personal God who is the God of Jesus Christ.

As for the two parts, soul-body and spirit, they are as we have said closely linked, completely intertwined, to such an extent that no man can differentiate them and separate what is natural in man from what is supernatural. God alone can separate them (Heb. 4:12). So no one has any right to disregard one of the elements in order to say that only the others are interesting. No one has the right either, even for convenience, to isolate one of the elements that make up man. When man is considered, he must be taken in his totality—because he must be taken such as God desired him and with the appearance that God gave him. This shows already that the doctor cannot limit himself to caring only for the body, without engaging precisely in this kind of isolation.

Ellul, Jacques. "Biblical Positions on Medicine." *Ellul Forum* 59 (2017): 3-7. Translation © Lisa Richmond, CC BY-NC-SA. The translator is grateful to Daniel Cerezuelle and Frederic Rognon for their comments.

And, besides, on another point relative to man, the bible has to do with medicine: the body, which up to this point has been the object of essentially medical preoccupations, is not foreign to the bible's preoccupations. First and essentially, it is in the body that our attitude toward God is manifested (Rom. 12:1). The body is thus an element that gives materiality to our "inner life," and as such it must take part in this inner life. It can be neither disregarded nor separated from the spiritual life, particularly since it is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). It is thus not negligible: not because it has an independent value of beauty, power, or joy, but because it was created by

God to be his temple. Receiving this eminent dignity from God, it cannot be held in contempt by man. And finally, it is this body (taking part in the flesh) that is promised to resurrection. No more or less than the rest of man, it is placed under judgment and promised to resurrection. The bible therefore does not consider one part of man as noble, high, divine in itself, immortal, and another part as vile, corrupt, and destined for death. All is corrupted by sin, and all is promised to salvation.

Thus the body, this primary concern of medicine, also has much to do with faith. The body is not a domain external to faith. It is the very presupposition of ethics—and since nothing that happens to the body is indifferent to faith, since all action upon the body has its reaction upon the spiritual life (because of their fundamental unity), for this reason the bible has something to tell us about medicine.

### **SPIRITUAL AND CORPOREAL**

It is generally assumed today that the corporeal influences the spiritual. And in fact the bible assumes this, as we will see. But much more often, the bible presents the opposite idea: the influence of the spiritual on the corporeal. Most often, the relation between the two is presented to us in such a way that the corporeal appears only as a sign of what the spiritual is, and as a result it experiences only the repercussions of what happens on the spiritual level. The real drama, the real action, takes place on a stage to which we don't have access, where we do not feel comfortable. And what we see and observe naturally is only the end point of the drama, the leftover part of the action, that shows through on the level that we can perceive and that takes shape for us there.

But again, it must be understood that when we speak of the spiritual, we do not mean a mystical outpouring, or the "unknown region," or the capital of the human spirit, or the realm of the feelings or the irrational. It is precisely the relation between man and the God of Jesus Christ, that is, the action of this God upon man and the attitude that this man take up in response to this action.

The fear of the Lord is health for the muscles and refreshment to the body (Prov. 3:7-8). That is, between the creature and the Creator there can be a right order of relation, and this is what can promote health best. What weakens the body is the will to live for oneself, as an independent creature. It is the act of breaking the bond with the creator. When this right bond is established, this attitude of fear (which concerns the life of every man) is expressed as a moral life, stability of heart, a certain purity, and here we have one of the essential elements for the establishment of health (Prov. 4:20-24). But then we arrive at this simplification: it is the good (with a meaning as yet undetermined) that preserves man from illness—and the reverse: evil brings illness upon the sinner. This is not false, to the extent that sin gives birth to death, and this idea in simplified form inspires in part the disturbing questions of Job, who does not understand that the just may be afflicted with illness. But the thing becomes too simplistic when it tends to precisely equate the good with health and when it forms a necessary link between ideas of the good, evil, sickness, and health.

For the moment, what is important to hold is that what dominates man's life is not the relationship of man and his body with the things and the world around him. That is only a repercussion, only a secondary phenomenon. The primary phenomenon, what determines man's life, is the relation of his spirit with the Spirit of God—with Wisdom—and this relation is also what influences (among other things) health and sickness.

### **IDEAS OF LIFE AND OF DEATH**

Some words in the bible have a double meaning, but not two meanings: corporeal life, corporeal death, spiritual life, spiritual death. There are not some "instances" involving the one sense and others involving the other sense. Throughout, even when one meaning seems very clear, "life" signifies both corporeal and spiritual life. "Death" signifies corporeal and spiritual death. The modes are various, but the two phenomena are always tied together. We cannot separate the two aspects from each other. Bodily life and death are not thinkable from the biblical point of view except in relation to spiritual life and death.

In what way are they presented together? Bodily life and death are, first, signs of what is happening on the spiritual level. They are, in addition, proximate examples of it (we would have no fear of spiritual death if by approximation we did not know what physical death was). They are pledges of the promise of spiritual life and death, a beginning of its fulfillment, to the extent that man is an inseparable unity. Finally, they are its consequences, and we are back again to the idea of the primacy of the spiritual.

Thus, after the fall, God lets man live, physically. This is a promise of eternal life—this fallen state is already the sign of the covenant, and that God does not abandon this man in this state that he is not made for.

—God condemns man to death. The sign of this death is the physical death that we can experience.

—If man lives physically, it is because God gives him a certain spiritual life. It is because all of the bonds are not broken between this man and his Creator. He continually receives this new gift of life, and he receives it from God. It is this relation therefore that produces physical life.

—If man dies physically, it is because he is one condemned to death, a sinner whose sin leads to the break with God. And because of this, he cannot survive on his own. Here again it is because he dies spiritually that he dies physically.

Now, in all this, "spiritual life" means union with God, through the grace received in faith, by means of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. "Spiritual death" means separation from God.

Once again, this is not a spiritualism: the spirit does not exist if it is not the spirit of God, and union with God does not exist if it is not established by a free act of God that reaches across all transcendences, and by means of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that brings peace between man and God. And if we say that life as a whole depends on the spiritual life, this does not mean that it is more important. It is simply based

on the following fact: God, as his name indicates in Hebrew, is the Living One, the One who has life in himself and who has it exclusively [Ex. 3:4]. Nothing lives apart from God. God is first the One who exists eternally. Thus, life comes necessarily from union with God. Everything that is separated from God dies: it cannot be otherwise, for apart from God is nothingness. It is therefore this spiritual life, this union with God, that alone can give life.

This life has a meaning: to give glory to God (Is. 38:18). Death also has a meaning: to show forth the justice of God.<sup>33</sup>

All this does not mean that faith or a correct theology are an insurance policy for good health. We will see that sickness can have very diverse meanings, and that faith is not a cure. But it teaches us to consider that there can be no life, with the health that this implies, without spiritual life, that health is not a combination of treatments but a way of living in obedience to the laws that God desired for our life. My medicine would be thus above all a hygienics, but not a naturalistic one: a hygienics in which the first act is repentance for sin—and conversion.

### **THE IDEA OF ILLNESS**

Thus we come to the essential problem of medicine, the one that is so often doctors' only preoccupation: the state of crisis that is called illness. Now, what we have to say here about illness cannot be a collection of isolated thoughts but only an outcome of what we have said to this point.

Illness essentially appears in the bible as an action of Satan, who is left free within certain limits fixed by God. This is what the prologue of Job teaches. God therefore relinquishes his creatures into Satan's hands so that Satan may exercise his power, but he can do so only up to a certain point. Satan would like to go further, to the point where he would be certain of attaining victory, but God has made the promise: "You will not be tempted beyond your strength" [1 Cor. 10:13]. As a result, the limit to Satan's action is the human strength that God knows for each one of us. This is especially how it is for sickness and suffering, which cannot go beyond our strength.

But if God lets Satan act, this is not a game, nor is it to leave to the evil one a legitimate exercise. It is because illness possesses a profound meaning. It is either to the glory of God—or else it is a sickness unto death.

In the first case, it is not unto death (John 11:4), and it can have many purposes that all lead in the end to God's glorification. In this case, its purpose may be to test and strengthen faith (Job) and thus to cause man to become decisively aware of the fact that help is in the Lord alone. Or sickness may be there only to be overcome, to bring about a miracle and lead to conversion. In this case, sickness is the means that God uses to manifest to man his sin and his deliverance (John 9:3). Or it may be the sign that spiritual sickness is healed, having no other reason than this deliverance, good news brought to man (Matt. 9:1). Or sickness may announce the coming of the Kingdom of God in a negative way, this kingdom in which sickness will be no more.

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<sup>33</sup> The French noun *justice* may be translated into English as *justice* or as *righteousness*.

The annunciation of its coming is that sickness is put in the same category as the death that has been vanquished (Matt. 11:15). Finally, sickness may be a way of affirming God's sovereignty over death and the world; thus it ought to lead to the glorification of the Lord (John 11:14). It thus enters into God's plan, as always happens. It is a means of causing God's action and mercy to burst forth in the world. And the doctor obviously should be careful to not deflect sickness from its meaning, to not keep the sick person from becoming aware of this purpose that sickness has.

But the texts offer us another hypothesis: Sickness unto death. On this subject, we must note that the idea of the suffering or sickness that purifies is completely absent from the bible. Pain in the bible is not a means of removing sin or of purifying our life. This is not the case even for Christ: it is not Christ's suffering that brought about redemption, but his death. Christ's suffering is the inevitable result of sin. "The wages of sin is death" [Rom. 6:23]—this death enters by way of sickness. In this sense, sickness is unto death. It is not a punishment, in the sense in which sin and penalty could be held in a fair balance.<sup>34</sup> It is a sanction, in the sense of an unavoidable and just consequence. As a result, sickness unto death appears to us first as one of the tangible signs of our state of sin; it is our normal condition to be sick, as it is our normal condition to be sinners. This is why the healings that Jesus Christ performed are both corporeal and spiritual. It is why the one who receives health receives at the same time pardon for sin. The healing of sickness without the forgiveness of sins is only an adjournment, a patching up, a little boost: it is not health. This deliverance from sickness has no value in itself. It can be a temporary betterment, but sickness unto death is still present and must reappear in one form or another. This remission of disease has meaning only as a sign of forgiveness—and thus it has worth only to the extent that the heart is willing to receive forgiveness at the same time (James 5:15).

As a consequence of sin, sickness is presented to us from two principal angles. It can be a sanction, or a means that God uses to turn us from sin.

—A sanction. It thus becomes an outward sign of sin, the physical mark of our impurity. This is the meaning of all the Mosaic legislation concerning leprosy (Lev. 13). Leprosy here is the type of all sickness. The one who is affected by it is characterized as impure. The remedy is a purification. But this leprosy, a sign of sin, involves as a consequence the leper's separation from others. He is, in brief, consecrated to God, confined within his disease, and his exclusion from the camp clearly marks man's powerlessness to heal this disease. Only the fulfilling of God's will is what heals it.

—A constraint that God uses to incline man's will and draw him from the path of sin. An example is the diseases that Moses released upon Egypt (Ex. 7), which were concerned with breaking the rebellious will of Pharaoh. But in fact, even a miraculous sign, even an extreme suffering, cannot break the sinful will. In such a case, sickness is then the warning of the punishment that will overtake the sinner. It is a time for

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<sup>34</sup> The image here is of a weigh scale, with sin in one pan and penalty in the other, equally balanced in weight.

reflection, in which the punishment has begun but is still uncertain, and during which a man can “turn from his evil way” [Ez. 3:18, Zach. 1:4]. The same goes for the diseases that were sent upon the Church of Corinth because they were treating the Lord’s Supper unworthily (1 Cor. 11:30). It is a case of striking the spirit of man so that he may be converted. But in reality, this conversion is what is first needed. Only afterward can the providential meaning of the disease be perceived.

Conversion is needed first . . . and this is why these two kinds of sickness are both unto death: because in both cases we begin from there, with the final condemnation that is borne upon man and his sin. It is a means of warning man about this condemnation, but a warning that will be grasped only in faith. In this case, sickness ceases to be unto death and becomes unto the glory of God. If not, it finishes out its work.

But this link between sickness and sin must not be understood in a simplistic sense. It does not mean that he who is the greatest sinner is the one who is most sick—or that sickness is the sign of a greater sin, or even of a specific, particular sin. Not at all. All are equally sinners before God—all equally deserve condemnation, death—and, as a result, sickness. All men are sick, Jesus tells us (Matt. 9:12), when he says that it is the sick who need doctors. He says this to those who *think* they are well but who actually are not. But some know that they are sick and accept healing—others consider themselves healthy and do not seek a cure.

As a result, acute sickness, what we generally call disease, is only the illustration of what ought to be our normal and permanent condition (as sinners), by virtue of condemnation (Luke 13:1ff). Thus it is by God’s grace that it is kept from us, and when it comes it should be considered as being directed not only to the one who suffers it but to everyone: as a call addressed to all, so that they may turn from their sin (Ex. 15:26).

But then, this leads to a different understanding of health; it turns what we believe upside down. We learn that the normal state is sickness, and that the exceptional, abnormal state, not inherent to our nature, is health. Left to ourselves, we will go immediately to death by the way of sickness. It is God’s hand that restores us continually to a state of relative health, which we do not deserve. Healing is thus nothing other, in every situation, than God’s merciful intervention in the course of nature. And this is why we do not know what health is.

We know how difficult it is to distinguish, medically, between health and sickness. There are only imprecise boundaries between the two, and it is extremely difficult to say where health or sickness begins. This affirmation is clearly confirmed by what the bible teaches us: what we know by the name of health is only the absence of illness. Our health is always only a preparation for death. We do not actually know what true health is, that of Adam’s before the fall. Thus, there is no man who is truly well, for even in forgiveness we live with a body of sin, a body of death promised to corruption. Whereas health, in the absolute sense, is promised only to the incorruptible body.

## **REMEDIES**



We are accustomed to a medicine that focuses directly on the pain that is manifested and wants to heal this pain in its physical aspect. Such a medicine is necessarily symptomatic: that is, it observes certain physical deficiencies and focuses on them. But we have seen that these physical deficiencies are in reality only the signs of other, more profound injuries, spiritual injuries. Thus medicine focuses only on symptoms when it attempts to treat the exclusively physical aspect of the sickness. It does not go to the root, and this is what explains the judgments that the bible brings to bear against medicine.

On the one hand, we observe the powerlessness of medicine: man is not capable by himself of healing sickness (Jer. 46:11, Hos. 5:13, etc.). He can at the very most reduce its effects, but his skill can never go far. Sometimes medicine is even presented to us as completely contrary, opposed to God's will, a sign of man's revolt against God (2 Ch. 16:12, Jer. 17:5). This happens when medicine becomes an idol, a power that we petition independently of God. In this case, medicine dresses itself up in what is not its own. It draws forth the praise and gratitude that are due only to God—it raises hope and stimulates faith. It truly takes the place of God and is for this very reason condemned. Before this idol, we hope that it will act on its own, that is, we hope that life and death belong to it, are in our hands. But this lying god has not kept its promises. The biblical affirmation that medicine is powerless without God's help is striking. We observe that man succeeds somewhat in removing suffering, but not in overcoming or reversing sickness. For if a sickness recedes, how many other forms reappear or arise for the first time? If acute illness is arrested, how much more does health in general, racial resistance, weaken? If microbial diseases seem to be conquered, how much more do nervous diseases arise, and so forth? We have placed our confidence so much in medicine, and we receive a denial: there is confidence only in God.

Does this mean that medicine should be exclusively spiritualistic? Without refuting the exaggerations of Christian Science, it is enough to note that Christian medicine cannot be spiritualistic, because man is not a pure spirit. The primary problem to pose is a spiritual problem, in general, and particular to the specific illness. But this does not exclude the material cure and physical healing. Man is a unity, let us remember.

The healing that has a spiritual effect, the forgiveness of sin, must bring among other results man's adherence to the order of nature as God desired it. In the same way that this leads the Christian to accept obedience to the laws of the State, he must know how to obey the laws of nature for his body and agree to reform his life in a way that avoids what is bad for him. God created for man a setting, some needs, and the means of fully satisfying these needs. Hygienics is thus nothing other than accepting the life that God desired man to lead, from the physical point of view as well. Thus the healing of sin attains the cause of the illness, which is always a disobedience to this natural order that God established. Of course, the symptoms of the disease, its material consequences, are not ended thereby, but the disease is attained in its reality because Satan no longer has a hold from this angle. Thus the Christian idea of sickness indeed entails a material healing and activity as well.

But our materialistic concept, most commonly, has accustomed us to thinking of treatment in materialistic and immediately utilitarian terms. Most often, treatment has only one goal: to end suffering, and this is reinforced by the conception that each individual person's importance comes from his deeds and actions. All of the extreme phenomena of each of us appear incredibly important, because we are individualistic to the extreme. We have lost the sense of life's relativity and of the individual person's integration within real communities and generations. All of this falsifies the idea of treatment. The true cure is the one that attains the roots of the illness and that acts over a more or less extended period of time, that may even act only in our descendants. The bible does not in fact do away with treatment; it teaches us first that treatment is given to the doctor by God, that it is indeed a dedicated means of caring for the body (the supreme virtue of the plant is its curative power [Ez. 47:12, Rev. 22:2]), and that treatment changes through time (James 5:15). Here we must simply admit that the bible gives humanity a role.

The bible also teaches us that certain men have a gift of healing. We will leave unresolved the question of whether the gift of healing has to do with miraculous healings or with the doctor's having a true medical gift.

And this idea of treatment is linked to the following two affirmations: that Jesus Christ is the only cure for the reality of our illnesses, that he bore our illnesses (Matt. 8:17), and that resurrection is the only real healing from this point forward (Hos. 6:1).

This therefore entails a certain attitude with regard to treatments. If they are in submission to the order of God, we need to know if the treatments that we use are consistent with the order of nature that God desired—if, for example, they do not tend to treat man as [mere] material, if they do not interfere with his nature, if they are not an attempt to encroach upon God's domain. So, when the doctor considers the treatment to apply, he must ask himself a twofold question: that of the treatment's technical value and also that of its validity before God.

#### **Translator's Notes**

## **Positions bibliques sur la medecine**

Jacques Ellul

Il peut sembler etrange que l'on aille rechercher la bible pour nous eclairer dans un domaine aussi technique que la medecine, aussi moderne. La bible ne peut nous donner, apparemment, qu'une conception archaique sur la medecine, primitive et sans autre interet qu'historique. Mais si, a la verite, la medecine est le soin de l'homme, la preservation de la sante, il faut de toute evidence savoir quelque chose sur l'homme pour le soigner. Comment saurons-nous quelque chose sur l'homme? Toute la question est la. Nous pouvons decouvrir par un inventaire rationnel d'experiences et d'observations. Nous pouvons aussi recevoir ce que Dieu nous donne dans une revelation a ce sujet.

Les deux methodes peuvent concorder. Elles peuvent aussi etre contradictoires. Mais nous pouvons facilement poser, a partir de la foi, que Dieu ayant cree l'homme et ayant inspire la bible, ce qu'Il nous dit dans la bible sur l'homme est le plus vrai. Car Dieu en sait plus sur l'homme que l'homme lui-meme. Et lorsque Dieu nous revele la realite de l'homme, c'est bien cette realite-la, et non une autre, qui est derniere, qui commande toutes les autres. Donc la bible eclaire la medecine sur ces realites dernieres de ce qui forme la vie de l'homme, et peut en consequence inspirer un developpement particulier a la medecine.

### **LA NOTION DE L'HOMME**

Que nous dit la bible sur l'homme? Beaucoup de choses que nous laisserons de cote parce qu'elles seraient sans interet immediat, ou qu'elles sont bien connues:

1. L'homme est une creature: il n'est pas un etre autonome qui possede la vie par lui-meme ou qui a quoi que ce soit par lui-meme: il est dependant dans sa totalite du createur.

2. L'homme est cree a l'image de Dieu. Mais peut-on dire que l'homme soit actuellement cette image? Non—mais il nous est toujours temoigne expressement que nous avons connu qui etait cette veritable image de Dieu: c'est Jesus-Christ (Phil. 2,6). C'est donc Jesus-Christ qui, etant la veritable image de Dieu, nous represente l'homme tel que Dieu l'a voulu et cree. C'est lui qui—quoique Dieu—est plus vraiment homme que quiconque d'entre nous. Et par consequent pour nous renseigner sur ce qu'est, et ce que doit etre l'homme, veritablement, il nous faut regarder a Jesus. C'est Lui qui donne la clef de cette realite derniere de l'homme.

3. L'homme n'est pas livre au Destin: il ne vit pas dans un monde jouet de forces aveugles, d'une mathematique du sort ; il ne vit pas de Fatalite qui domine l'evolution de l'homme, il n'y a pas de chance ou de malchance aveugle, de Fortune. La vie de l'homme est tout entiere connue, conduite et utilisee par Dieu. C'est Dieu qui y mele le bien et le mal, le bonheur et le malheur, compte tenu de l'action de Satan dont Dieu se sert et de la presence du peche.

4. Car l'homme est radicalement pecheur: dans son essence et non seulement dans ses actes. Il est tourne vers le mal. Il recherche le mal, et en definitive la mort, car malgre son horreur consciente de la mort, ses tendances profondes le poussent a rechercher la mort, comme le peche.

5. Nous nous arreterons plus longuement sur l'idee que l'homme nous est represente dans la bible comme une unite: contrairement a la pensee courante, la bible ne separe pas en l'homme deux elements: l'ame et le corps.

L'homme est considere comme une unite dans laquelle on peut deceler trois elements distincts mais non separees: le corps, l'ame (ensemble des qualites mentales et psychologiques) et l'esprit qui est, plus particulierement, le lieu de rencontre entre Dieu et l'homme. Cet esprit s'oppose au complexe ame-corps, en ce que celui-ci est purement naturel et entierement perissable. L'esprit au contraire est le don de Dieu, surnaturel. L'ame est donc, du point de vue biblique, sans valeur particuliere. L'immortalite de l'ame n'existe pas. En soi, aucun des elements constitutifs de l'homme n'est immortel.

Il ne re^oit cette vertu que par grace, en consequence du jugement. La bible n'est donc pas spiritual-iste: l'esprit lui-meme n'existe pas en dehors de Dieu, et du Dieu personnel qui est celui de Jesus-Christ.

Quant aux deux parties, ame-corps et esprit, elles sont, avons-nous dit, etroitement unies, totalement penetrees l'une dans l'autre, a un tel point qu'aucun homme ne peut faire de distinction, et separer ce qui est naturel et ce qui est surnaturel en l'homme. Dieu seul peut les separer (Heb. 4,12). Ainsi, l'on n'a absolument pas le droit de negliger l'un des elements pour dire que les autres seuls sont interessants. L'on n'a pas le droit non plus, meme pour la commodite, de faire abstraction de l'un des elements constitutifs de l'homme. Lorsque l'on envisage celui-ci, il faut le prendre dans sa totalite—parce qu'il faut le prendre tel que Dieu l'a voulu et avec l'aspect que Dieu lui a donne. Ceci montre deja que le medecin ne peut pas se borner a soigner seulement le corps, sans quoi il fait precisement cette abstraction. Et, d'autre part, sur un autre point relatif a l'homme, la bible concerne la medecine: c'est que le corps, jusqu'ici objet des preoccupations medicales essentielles, n'est pas etranger aux preoccupations de la bible. Tout d'abord, et essentiellement, c'est dans le corps que se manifeste notre attitude a l'egard de Dieu (Rom. 13,1). Le corps est donc un element de materialisation de notre « vie interieure » et, a ce titre, il doit participer a cette vie interieure. Il ne peut etre ni neglige, ni separe de la vie spirituelle. Cela d'autant plus qu'il est le temple du Saint Esprit (1. Cor. 6,19). Il n'est donc pas negligeable: point parce qu'il aurait une valeur autonome de beaute, de force ou de joie, mais parce qu'il a ete cree par Dieu pour etre son temple. Recevant de Dieu cette dignite eminente, il ne peut etre meprise par l'homme. Et c'est enfin ce corps (participant a la chair) qui est promis a la resurrection. Ni plus, ni moins que tout le reste de l'homme, il est soumis au jugement et promis a la resurrection. Il n'y a donc pas, pour la bible, une partie de l'homme noble, elevee, divine en soi, immortelle et une autre vile, cor-rompue et promise a la mort: tout est corrompu par le peche, et tout est promis au salut.

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Donc, le corps ce domaine eminent de la medecine in-teresse aussi—et combien—la foi. Il n'est pas un domaine ex-terieur. Il est la presupposition meme de l'ethique—et parce que rien de ce qui arrive au corps n'est indifferent a la foi— parce que toute action sur le corps a sa reaction sur la vie spirituelle (en raison de leur unite fondamentale), pour cela la Bible a quelque chose a nous dire sur la medecine.

### **SPIRITUEL ET CORPOREL**

L'on admet de fa?on tres generale actuellement que le cor-porel influence le spirituel. Et, de fait la bible l'admet comme nous le verrons. Mais beaucoup plus souvent, elle pose l'idee inverse: l'influence du spirituel sur le corporel. Le plus sou-vent le rapport entre les deux nous est presente de fa?on que le corporel n'apparait que comme un signe de ce qu'est le spirituel, et des lors il ne supporte que le contre coup de ce qui arrive sur le plan spirituel. Le vrai drame, la vraie action ont lieu sur un theatre ou

nous n'avons pas nos entrees, ou nous ne sommes pas a notre aise. Et ce que nous voyons, consta-tions naturellement, n'est que la pointe terminale du drame, la partie residuelle de l'action qui affleure a nos sens et prend forme pour nous, la.

Mais encore faut-il s'entendre lorsque l'on parle de spi-rituel: c'est, non pas une effusion mystique, non pas le « do-mainé inconnu », non pas l'apport de l'esprit humain, non pas l'ordre des sentiments et de l'irrationnel: c'est de fa?on tres precise le rapport entre l'homme et le Dieu de Jesus-Christ, a savoir: l'action de ce Dieu sur l'homme et l'attitude que cet homme prend en face de cette action.

La crainte de l'Eternel est la sante pour les muscles et la joie du corps (Prov. 3,7.8): c'est-a-dire que le fait qu'il y ait entre la creature et le Createur un ordre de rapport normal est ce qui peut le mieux favoriser la sante. Ce qui affaiblit le corps, c'est la volonte de vivre pour soi, en creature autonome, c'est le fait de rompre le lien avec le createur. Et ce lien normal etabli, cette attitude de crainte (il s'agit de la vie de tout homme) se traduit par une vie morale, l'equilibre du coeur, une certaine purete et c'est la un des elements essenti-els de l'etablissement de la sante (Prov. 4,20.24). Mais l'on en arrive alors a cette simplification: c'est le bien (avec un sens encore indetermine) qui preserve l'homme de la maladie—et a l'inverse: le mal attire sur le pecheur la maladie. Ce n'est pas faux, dans la mesure ou le peche engendre la mort, et cette idee simplifie inspire en partie les questions inquietes de Job qui ne comprend pas que le juste soit accable de maladies. Mais ou la chose est trop simple, c'est qu'elle tend a devenir une balance exacte du bien et de la sante ; c'est aussi de faire un lien necessaire entre les notions bien, mal, maladie, sante.

Pour le moment, ce qu'il importe de retenir, c'est que ce qui domine la vie de l'homme, ce n'est pas le rapport de l'homme et de son corps avec les choses et le monde environnant, cela n'est qu'une consequence, qu'un phenomene second ; ce qui est le phenomene premier, ce qui determine la vie de l'homme, c'est le rapport de son esprit avec l'Esprit de Dieu—avec la Sagesse—et c'est ce rapport qui conditionne aussi (entre autres choses) la sante et la maladie.

### **NOTION DE VIE ET DE MORT**

Des mots ont un double sens dans la bible, mais non pas deux sens—Vie corporelle—mort corporelle—Vie spiri-tuelle—mort spirituelle. Il n'y a pas des « cas » ou il s'agit d'un sens et d'autres ou il s'agit de l'autre sens. Partout, meme lorsque la chose semble tres claire en sens contraire, partout *vie* signifie a la fois corporelle et spirituelle. *Mort*: mort corpo-relle et spirituelle. Les modalites sont diverses, mais les deux phenomenes sont toujours lies l'un a l'autre. On ne peut separer l'un de l'autre les deux aspects. La vie et la mort corporelle ne sont pensables au point de vue biblique que par rapport a la vie et la mort spirituelle.

Dans quel ordre se presentent-ils mutuellement? La vie et la mort corporelle sont d'abord des signes de ce qui se passe dans l'ordre spirituel. En outre, elles en sont des exemples ap-proximatifs (nous n'aurions aucune crainte de la mort spiri-tuelle si par approximation nous ne savions ce qu'est la mort physique), elles en sont des gages de promesse ; un commencement de realisation dans la mesure ou l'homme est une unite

inseparable. Enfin, elles en sont des consequences: et c'est encore l'idee de primat du spirituel qui revient ici.

Ainsi: apres la chute, Dieu laisse l'homme vivre, phy-siquement: c'est la une promesse de la vie eternelle—cet etat dechu est deja le signe de l'alliance et que Dieu n'abandonne pas cet homme dans cet etat pour lequel il n'est pas fait.

—Dieu condamne l'homme a mort: le signe de cette mort, c'est la mort physique que nous pouvons connaitre.

—Si l'homme vit physiquement, c'est parce que Dieu lui laisse une certaine vie spirituelle: c'est parce que tous les liens ne sont pas rompus entre cet homme et son Createur. Il re^oit sans cesse ce nouveau don de la vie, et il le re^oit de Dieu: c'est donc ce rapport qui provoque la vie physique.

—Si l'homme meurt physiquement, c'est qu'il est un condamne a mort ; un pecheur dont le peche entraine la rupture avec Dieu. Et de ce fait, il ne peut rien subsister de lui. Ici encore, c'est parce qu'il meurt spirituellement, qu'il meurt physiquement.

Or, en tout cela, *vie spirituelle* cela veut dire: union avec Dieu, par la grace re^ue dans la foi, au moyen du sacrifice de Jesus-Christ. *Mort spirituelle*: c'est la separation d'avec Dieu.

Une fois encore, il ne s'agit pas d'un spiritualisme: l'esprit n'existe pas s'il n'est l'esprit de Dieu et l'union avec Dieu n'existe pas si elle n'est etablie par un acte gratuit de Dieu qui enjambe toutes les transcendances, et au moyen du sacrifice de Jesus-Christ qui ramene la paix entre l'homme et Dieu. Et si nous disons que la vie tout entiere depend de la vie spirituelle, cela ne veut pas dire qu'elle est plus importante: c'est simplement fonde sur le fait suivant: Dieu, comme son nom l'indique en hebreu, est le Vivant, Celui qui a la vie en soi et qui l'a exclusivement. Rien n'est vivant hors Dieu. Dieu est d'abord Celui qui existe eternellement. Donc, la vie provient necessairement de l'union avec Dieu: Tout ce qui se separe de lui, meurt: il ne peut en etre autrement, car hors de Dieu est le neant. C'est donc cette vie spirituelle, cette union avec Dieu qui seule peut donner la vie.

Cette vie a un sens: rendre gloire a Dieu (Esaie 38,18). La mort aussi a un sens: manifester la justice de Dieu.

Tout cela ne veut pas dire que la foi ou une theologie correcte sont une assurance pour une bonne sante. Nous ver-ronts que la maladie peut avoir des sens tres divers et que la foi n'est pas un remede. Mais cela nous apprend a considerer qu'il ne peut pas y avoir de vie, avec la sante que cela com-porte, sans vie spirituelle, que la sante n'est pas une combinai-son de remedes, mais une maniere de vivre selon l'obeissance aux lois que Dieu a voulues pour notre vie. Ma medecine serait donc surtout une hygiene, mais non pas naturaliste: une hygiene dont le premier acte est la repentance du peche—et la conversion.

### **NOTION DE LA MALADIE**

Nous arrivons ainsi au probleme essentiel de la mede-cine, celui qui est trop souvent la seule preoccupation des medecins: l'etat de crise appele maladie. Or, ce que nous

avons a dire ici de la maladie ne peut etre un ensemble de reflexions isolees, mais seulement une consequence de ce que nous venons de dire jusqu'ici.

La maladie apparait essentiellement dans la bible comme une action de Satan, qui est laisse libre dans cer-taines limites fixees par Dieu ; c'est ce qu'enseigne le prologue de Job. Dieu abandonne donc ses creatures aux mains de Satan pour que celui-ci exerce sa puissance, mais il ne peut le faire que jusqu'a un certain point. Satan voudrait aller plus loin, jusqu'au point ou il serait certain de remporter la victoire, mais Dieu a fait la promesse: « Vous ne serez pas tentes au-dela de vos forces ». Par consequent, la limite de l'action de Satan, ce sont les forces humaines que Dieu connait pour chacun de nous. Il en est ainsi en particulier pour la maladie et la souffrance qui ne peuvent exceder nos forces.

Mais si Dieu laisse faire Satan, ce n'est pas par jeu, ce n'est pas non plus pour laisser au malin un exercice legitime, c'est parce que la maladie possede un sens profond: ou bien la mal-adie est a la gloire de Dieu—ou bien la maladie est a la mort.

Dans le premier cas, elle n'est pas a la mort (Jean 11,4) et elle peut avoir des raisons d'etre nombreuses qui toutes se ramencent en definitive a la glorification de Dieu. Dans ce cas, elle peut avoir pour but d'eprouver et d'affermir la foi (Job) et de contraindre ainsi l'homme a prendre conscience de fa?on decisive du fait que le secours est en l'Eternel seul, ou bien la maladie peut n'etre la que pour etre vaincue: pour provoquer le miracle, et afin d'entraîner la conversion: la maladie est alors le moyen dont Dieu se sert pour manifester a l'homme son peche et sa delivrance (Jean 9,3). Elle sera alors le signe de la maladie spirituelle qui est guerie ; elle n'a pas d'autre raison que cette delivrance, bonne nouvelle apportee a l'homme (Matth. 9,1). La maladie alors annonce la venue du Royaume de Dieu de fa?on negative: ce royaume ou il n'y aura plus de maladie. Et l'annonce de sa venue, c'est la maladie classée comme la mort vaincue (Matth. 11,5). Enfin, toujours dans cet ordre d'idees, la maladie est un mode d'affirmation de la souverainete de Dieu sur la mort et sur le monde: elle doit ainsi entraîner la glorification du Seigneur (Jean 11,4). Elle entre alors dans le plan de Dieu, comme il lui arrive toujours. Elle est un moyen pour faire eclater l'action et la misericorde de Dieu dans le monde. Et le medecin doit evidemment etre attentif a ne pas detourner la maladie de son sens, a ne pas empecher le malade de prendre conscience de cette finalite de la maladie.

Mais les textes nous apportent une autre hypothese: La maladie a la mort. A ce sujet, nous devons noter que la bible ignore completement la notion de la souffrance ou de la mala-die purificatrices. La douleur dans la bible n'est pas un moyen d'effacer les peches, ou un moyen de purifier notre vie. Il n'en est pas ainsi meme pour le Christ. Ce n'est pas la souffrance du Christ qui a eu une consequence de rachat, mais sa mort. La souffrance du Christ est la consequence fatale du peche. « Le salaire du peche c'est la mort » —cette mort intervi-ent par le chemin de la maladie. En ce sens, la maladie est a la mort. Elle n'est pas une punition, au sens ou une balance equitable serait tenue du peche et de la penalite. Elle est une sanction, au sens de consequence ineluctable et juste. Par consequent la maladie a la mort nous apparait d'abord comme l'un des

signes tangibles de notre état de péché ; c'est notre condition normale d'être malade, comme c'est notre condition normale d'être pécheurs. C'est pourquoi les guérisons faites par Jésus-Christ sont à la fois corporelles et spirituelles. Que celui qui reçoit la santé reçoit en même temps le pardon des péchés.

La guérison de la maladie sans le pardon des péchés n'est qu'un ajournement, un replatrage, un coup de fouet: il n'est pas la santé. Cette délivrance de la maladie n'a pas de valeur par elle-même: ce peut être un mieux temporaire: la maladie à la mort est néanmoins présente et doit réapparaître sous une forme ou une autre. Cette remission de la maladie n'a de sens que comme signe du pardon—et elle ne prend alors sa valeur que dans la mesure où le cœur est disposé à recevoir le pardon en même temps (Jac. 5,15).

Comme conséquence du péché, la maladie se présente à nous sous deux aspects principaux: elle peut être une sanction—ou un moyen que Dieu emploie pour détourner du péché.

—Une sanction: elle devient alors un signe extérieur du péché—elle est la marque physique de notre impureté: c'est le sens de toute la législation mosaïque sur la lèpre (Lev. 13). La lèpre ici est le type de toute maladie—et ce qui caractérise celui qui en est atteint, c'est qu'il est impur—et le remède c'est une purification: mais cette lèpre, signe du péché, entraîne pour conséquence une séparation du lépreux et des autres: il est en somme consacré à Dieu, enfermé dans sa maladie et son exclusion du camp marque bien l'impuissance de l'homme à guérir cette maladie ; c'est seulement l'accomplissement de la volonté de Dieu qui la guérit.

—Une contrainte dont Dieu se sert pour plier la volonté de l'homme et l'amener à s'écarter du péché: ainsi les maladies déclenchées par Moïse sur l'Égypte (Ex. 7): il s'agit de briser la volonté rebelle de Pharaon. Mais en fait un signe même miraculeux, une souffrance même extrême ne peuvent pas briser la volonté pécheresse: la maladie est alors l'avertissement du châtiment que va encourir le pécheur, le temps de réflexion ou le châtiment est commencé mais encore en suspens, et pendant lequel l'homme peut « se détourner de sa mauvaise voie ». Il en est de même pour les maladies envoyées dans l'Église de Corinthe parce qu'on usait indignement de la Cène (1 Cor. 11,30): il s'agit par là de frapper l'esprit de l'homme pour qu'il se convertisse. Mais en réalité, il faut d'abord cette conversion. Et c'est seulement après que l'on aperçoit le sens providentiel de la maladie.

Il faut d'abord la conversion . . . et c'est pourquoi ces deux types de maladies sont également à la mort: c'est que dans les deux cas, on commence par là, la condamnation dernière portée sur l'homme et son péché. C'est un moyen d'avertir l'homme de cette condamnation, mais avertissement qui ne sera saisi que dans la foi: dans ce cas, la maladie cesse d'être à la mort et devient à la gloire de Dieu ; sinon, elle accomplit son œuvre.

Mais ce lien entre maladie et péché ne doit pas être compris dans un sens simpliste. Cela ne veut pas dire que c'est le plus pécheur qui est le plus malade—ou que la maladie est signe d'un plus grand péché, ou bien d'un péché déterminé, particulier.



Point du tout: tous sont également pecheurs devant Dieu—tous meritent également la condamnation, la mort—et en consequence la maladie. Tous les hommes sont malades, nous affirme Jesus (Matth. 9,12) lorsqu'Il dit que ce sont les malades qui ont besoin de medecins: et Il dit cela, a ceux qui se croient bien portants, mais ne le sont pas reellement. Mais les uns se savent malades et acceptent une guerison—les autres se considerent comme sains et ne recherchent pas de remede.

Par consequent, la maladie aigue, ce que nous appelons en general maladie n'est que l'exemple de ce qui devrait etre notre condition normale, permanente (en tant que pecheurs) en vertu de la condamnation (Luc 13,1 sq.) c'est par la grace de Dieu qu'elle est ecartee ainsi de nous et lorsqu'elle arrive, elle doit etre consideree comme adressee, non pas seulement a celui qui la supporte, mais a tous: comme un appel adresse a tous pour qu'ils se detournent de leur peche (Ex. 15,26).

Mais alors cela conduit a avoir une conception differente de la sante: c'est un renversement de ce que nous croyons: nous apprenons que l'etat normal, c'est la maladie, que l'etat exceptionnel, anormal, non inherent a notre nature, c'est la sante. Laissons a nous-memes, nous irons de suite a la mort par la voie de la maladie. C'est la main de Dieu qui nous restitue sans cesse dans un etat de sante relative, qui ne nous est pas du. La guerison n'est donc pas autre chose, en toute circonstance, que l'intervention misericordieuse de Dieu dans le cours de la nature. Et c'est pourquoi nous ne savons pas ce qu'est la sante.

L'on sait combien il est difficile de faire le depart, medical, entre la sante et la maladie. Il n'y a que des frontieres imprecises entre les deux et il est extremement difficile de dire ou commence la sante et ou la maladie. Cette affirmation est nettement confirmee par ce que nous apprend la bible: ce que nous connaissons sous le nom de sante, c'est seulement l'absence de maladie. Notre sante n'est toujours qu'une preparation a la mort: nous ignorons en fait ce qu'est la veritable sante, celle d'Adam avant la chute. Ainsi, il n'y a pas d'homme reellement bien portant car meme dans le pardon, nous vivons avec un corps de peche, corps de mort promis a la corruption ; alors que la sante, au sens absolu, n'est promise qu'au corps incorruptible.

### **LES REMEDES**

Nous avons l'habitude d'une medecine qui s'attache directement au mal qui se manifeste et veut guerir ce mal dans son aspect physique. Une telle medecine est necessairement symptomatique: c'est-a-dire qu'elle constate certaines deficiences physiques et qu'elle s'y attache. Mais nous avons vu que ces deficiences physiques ne sont en realite que des signes de lesions autrement profondes, de lesions spirituelles. Des lors, la medecine ne s'attache qu'aux symptomes lorsqu'elle cherche a soigner l'aspect exclusivement physique de la maladie. Elle ne va pas a la racine, et c'est ce qui explique les jugements portes sur la medecine par la bible.

D'une part, nous constatons l'impuissance de la medecine: l'homme n'est pas capable par lui-meme de guerir la maladie (Jer. 46,11, Osee 5,13, etc.). Il peut tout au plus en attenuer les consequences mais il ne va jamais loin avec son art. Parfois meme la medecine nous est presentee comme tout a fait perverse, opposee a la volonte de

Dieu, signe de la revolte de l'homme contre Dieu (2 Ch. 16,12, Jer.17,5). Il en est ainsi lorsque la medecine devient une idole, lorsqu'elle devient une puissance a qui l'on s'adresse independamment de Dieu: a ce moment la medecine se pare de ce qui n'est pas a elle ; elle attire la louange et la reconnaissance qui ne sont dues qu'a Dieu—elle suscite l'esperance et provoque la foi: elle prend reellement la place de Dieu et se trouve par la meme condamnee. Nous esperons en face de cette idole qu'elle agira par elle-meme, c'est-a-dire en fait que la vie et la mort lui appartiennent: sont entre nos mains. Or, ce dieu mensonger n'a pas tenu ses promesses: l'affirmation bib-lique que la medecine est impuissante sans le secours de Dieu eclate a nos yeux. Nous constatons que l'homme reussit en partie a supprimer la douleur mais non a vaincre ou a faire reculer la maladie. Car si une maladie cede, combien d'autres formes reapparaissent ou surgissent pour la premiere fois? Si la maladie aigue est enrayee, combien la sante generale, la resistance raciale s'affaiblissent? Si les maladies micro-biennes paraissent vaincues, combien se developpent les maladies nerveuses, etc. Nous avons mis notre confiance sur un point dans la medecine, et nous recevons un dementi: il n'y a de confiance qu'en Dieu.

Cela veut-il dire que la medecine doit etre exclusive-ment spiritualiste? Sans meme refuter les exagerations de la Christian Science, il suffit de noter que la medecine chreti-enne ne peut pas etre spiritualiste puisque l'homme n'est pas un pur esprit. Le premier probleme a poser est un probleme spirituel: general—et particulier au malade determine. Mais cela n'exclut pas le remede materiel et la guerison physique. L'homme est une unite, rappelons-le.

La guerison spirituelle en effet, le pardon du peche, doit emporter entre autres consequences une adhesion de l'homme a l'ordre de la nature tel qu'il a ete voulu par Dieu—de meme que cela conduit a accepter l'obeissance aux lois de l'Etat, de meme le chretien doit savoir obeir aux lois de la nature pour son corps et accepter de reformer sa vie de fa?on a eviter ce qui est mauvais pour lui. Dieu a cree un milieu pour l'hom-me, des besoins et le moyen de les satisfaire pleinement. L'hygiene n'est donc pas autre chose que l'acceptation d'une vie telle que Dieu a voulu que l'homme la mene, au point de vue physique egalement. Ainsi la guerison du peche atteint aussi la cause de la maladie qui est toujours une desobeis-sance a cet ordre naturel etabli par Dieu. Bien entendu, il reste que les symptomes de la maladie, ses consequences materi-elles, ne sont pas supprimees pour cela: mais la maladie est alors atteinte dans sa realite parce que Satan n'a plus de prise par ce cote. Donc la notion chretienne de la maladie comporte bien une guerison et une action materielles aussi.

Mais notre concept materialiste, le plus habituel, nous a habitues a une conception materialiste et immediatement util-itaire du remede: le plus souvent le remede n'a qu'un but: supprimer la souffrance, et ceci est renforce par la conception que chaque individu a de l'importance de ses faits et gestes: tous les phenomenes extremes de chacun de nous apparaissent invraisemblablement importants, parce que nous sommes individualistes a l'extreme, que nous avons perdu le sens de la relativite de la vie et de l'insertion de l'individu dans des communautes et generations reelles. Tout cela fausse

l'idée de remède. Le vrai remède est celui qui atteint la maladie dans ses racines, et qui agit à plus ou moins longue échéance, qui même peut n'agir que dans nos descendants. La Bible ne supprime pas le remède en effet, elle nous enseigne d'abord que le remède est donné au médecin par Dieu, et qu'il est bien un moyen consacré au soin du corps (la vertu suprême de la plante est la vertu curative (Ez. 47,22,<sup>35</sup> Apoc. 22,2), que le remède évolue selon les époques (Jac. 5,15), ici nous devons simplement admettre que la Bible est tributaire de l'humanité.

La Bible nous enseigne en outre que certains hommes ont un don de guérison: nous laissons pendante la question de savoir si le don de guérison concerne les guérisons miraculeuses, ou s'il s'agit du médecin ayant un véritable don médical.

Et cette idée de remède est liée aux deux affirmations suivantes: que Jésus-Christ est le seul remède de la réalité de nos maladies, qu'Il s'est chargé de nos maladies (Matth. 8,17)—que la résurrection est la seule guérison réelle des maintenant (Osee 6,1).

Donc ceci entraîne une certaine attitude à l'égard des remèdes: s'ils sont subordonnés à l'ordre de Dieu, il faut savoir si les remèdes que l'on emploie sont cohérents à l'ordre de la nature voulu par Dieu; si par exemple, ils ne tendent pas à matérialiser l'homme, s'ils ne sont pas une perturbation de sa nature, s'ils ne sont pas une tentative pour empiéter dans le domaine de Dieu. Ainsi le médecin au sujet du remède à employer doit se poser une double question: celle de sa valeur technique et aussi celle de sa validité devant Dieu.

#### Notes editoriales

## Commentary

Raymond Downing

A convenient and accurate way to understand medicine today is as technique, technique as Ellul defined it in 1963: "*Technique is the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency . . . in every field of human activity.*"<sup>36</sup> Ivan Illich was the first of Ellul's followers to spell out this understanding of medicine as technique and in so doing found medicine dangerous: "The medical establishment has become a major threat to health,"<sup>37</sup> his *Medical Nemesis*, published in 1976, begins. Eight years later, Arney and Bergen showed how we responded to this threat: instead of pushing back on medicine, we reinforced medical technique as a system, embracing all of its offerings as a "tyranny of harmony."<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Erreur dans le texte; la citation serait plutôt Ez. 47,12.

<sup>36</sup> Jacques Ellul, "Note to the Reader," in *The Technological Society* (New York: Vintage, 1963): xxv. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>37</sup> Ivan Illich, *Medical Nemesis* (New York: Pantheon, 1976): 3.

<sup>38</sup> William Ray Arney and Bernard J. Bergen, *Medicine and the Management of Living* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984): 161.

Ellul would likely have agreed with all of these analyses of medicine as technique, though he produced no complete analysis of medicine comparable to his studies of law, politics, economics, propaganda, and revolution—to say nothing of his three major books on technology itself. Instead, we have brief references to medicine in several of his books, and a few articles. The first was “Biblical Positions on Medicine,” (published here for the first time in English translation), which he published even before the blueprint for all of his subsequent writings in *Presence in the Modern World*.<sup>39</sup>

On careful reading, this article seems more of “biblical positions on illness” than on medicine. There is no positioning of medicine within a technological society, no exposure of its politics and propaganda, and no warnings of the dangers of medicine. Though all that came thirty years later with Illich, Ellul had a different goal in 1947. He wanted to establish the relationship that creatures have with their Creator. Illich returned to this same biblical foundation in his later writings.

This foundation is pivotal for understanding medicine itself: The human, Ellul writes, “is not an autonomous being” but rather “wholly dependent on the creator.”<sup>40</sup> And again: “Between the creature and the Creator there can be a right order of relation, and this is what can promote health best.”<sup>41</sup> Later, he expands a bit: “Left to ourselves, we will go immediately to death by the way of sickness. It is God’s hand that restores us continually to a state of relative health, which we do not deserve. Healing is thus nothing other, in every situation, than God’s merciful intervention in the course of nature.”<sup>42</sup>

It was this latter concept that Illich developed in his post-*Nemesis* writings. Referring to the medieval view that all of nature was alive, Illich says that between the fourth and fourteenth centuries, people believed that the “birthing power of nature was rooted in the world’s being contingent on the incessant creative will of God.”<sup>43</sup> (In the words of the old Spiritual, “He’s got the whole world in His hands.”) However, when people began no longer to believe in the incessant sustaining will of God, they developed tools to sustain the life and health they had previously believed was God’s realm.<sup>44</sup> Ellul calls this use of tools idolatry: “Sometimes medicine is even presented to us as completely contrary, opposed to God’s will, a sign of man’s revolt against God (2 Chr. 16:12, Jer. 17:5). This happens when medicine becomes an idol, a power that we petition independently of God. In this case, medicine . . . draws forth the praise and gratitude that are due only to God—it raises hope and stimulates faith. It truly takes the place of God and is for this very reason condemned.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016).

<sup>40</sup> Ellul, “Biblical Positions on Medicine.”

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Ivan Illich, “Brave New Biocracy.” *New Perspectives Quarterly* 11.1 (Winter 1994): 4.

<sup>44</sup> Ivan Illich and David Cayley, *The Rivers North of the Future* (Toronto: Anansi, 2005): 64-79.

<sup>45</sup> Ellul, “Biblical Positions on Medicine.”

As this attributing supernatural powers to medicine was true in Jeremiah's time, it has been repeated throughout history. The title of a 1987 book on medicine and surgery in the nineteenth century was *The Age of Miracles*.<sup>46</sup> In 2003, announcing his \$15 billion for AIDS care in Africa and the Caribbean, President George Bush called this an "age of miraculous medicines"<sup>47</sup>; half of that money would pay for those "miraculous" drugs. These miracles "raise hope and stimulate faith"; they often end up "taking the place of God." The more effective and efficient medicine becomes, the more likely we are to treat it as god.

Nevertheless, the bulk of Ellul's article is not about medicine itself: the section titled "Remedies" is less than one quarter of the article. The largest sections are extended meditations on "Ideas of Life and Death" and "The Idea of Illness." There is much to reflect on here; hopefully other commentators will. I will comment briefly only on a single aspect of this argument.

Using the story of Job, and Jesus' phrase "This sickness is not unto death" (John 11:4), Ellul considers five meanings that sickness could have if it is "not unto death" and two meanings for when it is "unto death." He is very clear that illness does have meaning. Thirty years later, in a long essay titled "Illness as Metaphor," Susan Sontag determined to strip illness of meaning. She proclaimed that "illness is *not* a metaphor," using the phrase "just a disease" throughout.<sup>48</sup> A decade later she wrote a second essay, "AIDS and Its Metaphors," proclaiming again that her purpose was "not to proclaim meaning . . . but to deprive something of meaning."<sup>49</sup> Ellul assumed meaning because he believed in the incessant creative will of God. Sontag did not.

Near the end of the article, Ellul addresses one of the many questions that might arise about how to make practical use of his analysis. He mentions, almost in passing, the "exaggerations of Christian Science." Here he is referring to the contention in Christian Science that "disease is symptomatic not of physical disorder but of underlying spiritual inadequacy [T]reatment . . . consists 'entirely of heartfelt yet

disciplined prayer."<sup>50</sup> Ellul's view is that "Christian medicine cannot be spiritualistic, because man is not a pure spirit. The primary problem to pose is a spiritual problem, in general, and particular to the specific illness. But this does not exclude the material cure and physical healing."<sup>51</sup>

Ellul, then, affirms attention to both the physical and the spiritual, but it can be difficult to get the balance right. We may be tempted to view a patient's spiritual condition mechanistically: as the patient incrementally repairs the creature-Creator

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<sup>46</sup> Guy Williams, *The Age of Miracles: Medicine and Surgery in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1987).

<sup>47</sup> George W. Bush, "State of the Union Address," 2003.

<sup>48</sup> Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York, Picador, 2001): 3.

<sup>49</sup> Sontag, 102.

<sup>50</sup> Peggy DesAutels, Margaret Battin, and Larry May, *Praying for a Cure: When Medical and Religious Practices Conflict* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999).

<sup>51</sup> Ellul, "Biblical Positions on Medicine."

relationship, we hope for a corresponding improvement in the physical symptoms. But our physical and spiritual lives are not linked like gears, with movement in one causing immediate movement in the other.

Or, we can delink the gears and try to treat each part separately. We rely on the motto “We treat, Jesus heals,” but we actually imply that our treatment will catalyze Jesus’ healing. And while doctors may tell some stories that illustrate this, there are plenty of stories that show the opposite, the first of which is Job’s. We, like Job and his friends, have trouble getting it right.

Ellul, far from resolving this dilemma, simply affirms it: “Thus the healing of sin attains the cause of the illness, which is always a disobedience to this natural order that God established. Of course, the symptoms of the disease, its material consequences, are not ended thereby..... Thus the

Christian notion of sickness indeed entails a material healing and activity as well.”<sup>52</sup>

As with most of Ellul’s writings, there is no agenda here, no program to follow, no principles that translate easily to the construction of a “Christian healthcare system.” He does not dramatically eschew the secular technologies of medicine but tells us only that “treatment is given to the doctor by God, that it is indeed a dedicated means of caring for the body.”<sup>53</sup> His task is not to eliminate medical technology but to help us see it in perspective.

Many scholars, Illich among them, view the period beginning with the close of World War II as marking a major development in medicine.<sup>54</sup> Ellul, at the dawn of this new period of medical progress, reminded us of the foundations not just of medicine but of illness itself. He must have foreseen that as medicine became more effective, we would increasingly use it without addressing “the primary problem . . . a spiritual problem.” Seventy years later, our international idolatry of medicine has proven him correct.

#### **About the Author**

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## **“Biblical Positions on Medicine” in Theological Perspective**

Frederic Rognon

In his article titled “Biblical Positions on Medicine,” Jacques Ellul nowhere cites Soren Kierkegaard (or any other author, except of course the biblical authors). And yet Kierkegaard is present “incognito” (a term dear to Kierkegaard) from the beginning

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 1-9; Arnold Relman, “The Future of Medical Practice,” <http://content.healthaffairs.org/cgi/reprint/2/2/5.pdf>; and Adele Clarke

to the end of Ellul's text, and particularly at the point where Ellul brings his argument to a decisive close. The primary implicit references to the Danish philosopher and theologian concern the distinction between "the sickness that is not unto death" and "the sickness unto death." These make tacit reference to Kierkegaard's book *The Sickness unto Death*. A summary of this book will therefore be helpful for clarifying Ellul's approach.

## JACQUES ELLUL AND SØREN KIERKEGAARD

It is beneficial to keep in mind the very definite relationship between Kierkegaard and Ellul. As we know, this relationship passes by way of Karl Barth, but when Barth moves apart from Kierkegaard, Jacques Ellul moves apart from Barth and stays close to Kierkegaard. In other words, Ellul is Barthian only when Karl Barth is Kierkegaardian. If Ellul allows himself some criticism toward Barth on the theological level (as he does with Marx on the sociological level), it is also true that Ellul is never critical toward Kierkegaard. He describes it in this way:

Normally, in my reading, the critical mechanism of thought arises right away, and I am prompted to respond, "Yes, but . . ." The authors who have had the greatest influence on me have made me think reactively. I have never followed a system. With regard to Barth himself, I always held a critical distance. There is nothing like this in my relation to Kierkegaard. With him, I just listen. I do not try to imitate, or to apply methods or concepts. I am brought back to myself in a mirror that illuminates thoughts, contradictions, exigencies, presence toward life, and presence toward death. Brought back to myself, but not at all the same as I was before reading such or such a text. Questioned. With my back to the wall, by a singular relationship that denies me any escape. I listen. I do not contest

Kierkegaard's thought, but I feel obligated to respond, to respond to another than to Kierkegaard himself.<sup>55</sup> This long citation demonstrates Ellul's intellectual and spiritual debt to Kierkegaard, which exceeded any other. This point only confirms the interest that a detour through the work of Kierkegaard can offer us.

## THE SICKNESS UNTO DEATH: AVOIDING MISUNDERSTANDINGS

To read *The Sickness unto Death* requires some care, however, due to a certain number of persistent misunderstandings that have affected the book's reception in France from the time of its first appearance.<sup>56</sup> The first misunderstanding, and the most dam-

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*et al.*, "Bio-medicalization: Technoscientific Transformations of Health, Illness, and U.S. Biomedicine," *American Sociological Review* 68 (April 2003): 161-194.

<sup>55</sup> Jacques Ellul, "Preface." In Nelly Viallaneix, *Ecoute, Kierkegaard. Essai sur la communication de la parole*. 2 vols. Paris: Editions du Cerf (col. Cogitatio Fidei), 1979, v. 1, ii-iii.

<sup>56</sup> See Helene Politis, *Kierkegaard en France au XXe sie-cle: Archeologie d'une reception*. Paris:

aging, is that the book was first translated under the title *Traite du desespoir* [Treatise on Despair]. This faulty title (faulty because the original Danish title, *Sygdommen til Døden*, literally means “the sickness unto death”) contributed in no small way to the diffusion of a particularly gloomy image of the thinker of Copenhagen. When Jacques Ellul wrote “Biblical Positions on Medicine” in 1947, only this first French translation was available to him; it was not until 1971, when volume XVI of Kierkegaard’s *Complete Works* was published in French translation in a scholarly edition,<sup>57</sup> that the correct title began to take precedence (even if the *Traite du desespoir* continues to be cited today).

These publication details must be mentioned in order to underline Ellul’s rigor, for he reads *The Sickness unto Death* carefully and describes it judiciously without being concerned with Kierkegaard’s negative reputation. For if the book indeed has to do with despair, it is described only in order to better proclaim, by contrast, the Christian hope. The title says it well, for it refers to Jesus’ words in the Gospel of John: “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.”<sup>58</sup> Those who know the bible as well as Ellul did will immediately make the connection. In everyday French, one would instead use the phrase “maladie mortelle” [terminal illness]. The unusual expression “sickness unto death” is surprising to those for whom the bible is unfamiliar, that is, the great majority of French persons in 1947 and today. Thus it opens the door to all the misunderstanding. In reality, *The Sickness unto Death* (with its subtitle *A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*) is a treatise and a meditation upon Christian hope.

Rognon, Frederic. “‘Biblical Positions on Medicine’ in Theological Perspective.” *Ellul Forum* 59 (2017): 15-17. © Frederic Rognon, CC BY-NC-SA. Translation © Lisa Richmond, CC BY-NC-SA.

## THE SICKNESS UNTO DEATH: FROM DESPAIR TO HOPE

*The Sickness unto Death* appears under a pseudonym, An-ti-Climacus. *The Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* (1846)<sup>59</sup> is signed by Johannes Climacus; he expresses the rationalist conceit, with Hegelian undertones, of rising from earth to heaven by a ladder (“climax” in Greek means “ladder”) and of accounting for the entirety of the real as a totalizing system. Anti-Climacus, who signs *The Sickness*

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Editions Kime, 2005; Florian Forestier, Jacques Message and Anna Svenbrok, *Kierkegaard en France. Incidences et resonances*. Paris: Editions Bibliotheque nationale de France, 2016.

<sup>57</sup> See Søren Kierkegaard, (*Œuvres Complètes*. Paris: Editions de l’Orante, 1966-1986, vv. I-XX.

<sup>58</sup> John 11:4.

<sup>59</sup> See Kierkegaard, “Post Scriptum definitif et non scientifique aux Miettes philosophiques,” (*Œuvres Complètes*, 1977, vv. X-XI.



*unto Death* (1849),<sup>60</sup> but also *Training in Christianity* (1850),<sup>61</sup> is Climacus' opposite; he is the witness to Christian truth, which is revealed to men by a downward movement, contrary to the upward movement of human presumption. Anti-Climacus is the one who welcomes the God of Jesus

Christ, who is himself made known through his Word.

From the outset, he states, "The sickness unto death is despair."<sup>62</sup> And he pursues the chain of identification in these terms: "Despair is sin."<sup>63</sup> But there are two kinds of despair and thus two kinds of sin: despair-weakness and despair-defiance. Despair-weakness consists in not wanting to be oneself, in fleeing from oneself into all the diversions that the world offers. Despair-defiance consists in wanting to be oneself, but all alone, without otherness, and especially without the divine otherness. Thus, paradoxically, "When we are before God or have the idea of God, and we are found to be in the state of despair, sin consists in not wanting to be oneself, or in wanting to be."<sup>64</sup> We understand from this that sin must not be understood on a moral level: "The opposite of sin is not virtue [ . . . ], it is faith."<sup>65</sup>

But if the opposite of sin is faith, and if despair consists in not wanting to be oneself, or in wanting to be, how can we conceive of despair's opposite, that is, hope? According to Kierkegaard, hope consists "in the self, being itself and wanting to be, becoming transparent and grounding itself in God."<sup>66</sup> In other words, here is the "state in which all despair is banished: the self that relates itself to itself and wants to be itself becomes transparent and grounds itself in the power that placed him there."<sup>67</sup> Thus Christian hope, the antidote for every kind of despair, amounts to making a leap of faith, falling into God who welcomes us with open arms, renouncing oneself, in order to find oneself again in the end, but by way of a detour through the divine otherness.

The primary quality that differentiates hope from despair is otherness: whether one flees from oneself or wants to be oneself, one denies the otherness of God. By contrast, if I enter into a living and trusting relationship with the God who lives and gives life, then I become truly myself and am healed of despair. For then my sickness is not "unto death"; it has as its end the glorification of God.

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<sup>60</sup> See Kierkegaard, "La maladie a la mort," (*'Eves Completes*, 1971, v. XVI).

<sup>61</sup> See Kierkegaard "L'ecole du christianisme," (*'Eves Completes*, 1982, v. XVII).

<sup>62</sup> Kierkegaard, "La maladie a la mort," *op. cit.*, 169.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.

## BIBLICAL POSITIONS ON MEDICINE: TOWARD A SPIRITUAL APPROACH TO ILLNESS

Such then is the philosophical and theological direction that Søren Kierkegaard advocates in 1849 and that is found in the background, implicitly, a century later in the text of his spiritual heir, Jacques Ellul, titled “Biblical Positions on Medicine.” How might we discern the effect that this work by the Copenhagen thinker had on this work by the Bordeaux professor, on the subject of illness?

Just as, with Kierkegaard, sin must not be understood in a moral but rather a spiritual sense, so also despair must not be reduced to a psychological mode but grasped in its spiritual dimension. Thus, from the Kierkegaardian perspective, a desperate man (spiritually speaking) may very well not know it (psychologically speaking): the flight from himself, or the frenzied affirmation of himself, hides from his own eyes his real condition as a desperate man, that is, as one who is independent of God. The sickness unto death is that which separates from God.

Jacques Ellul applies the same reasoning to illness itself. In the usual sense of the word, sickness may be “unto death” or not “unto death,” depending on whether the sick person does or does not turn toward God. This signifies that a terminal illness, that is, an illness that leads to physiological death, may very well not be “unto death” if the patient gives himself over to God during his illness. Conversely, an illness that can be cured, and from which in the end the patient is healed on the physiological level, can very well be a sickness “unto death” if this patient turns away from God during the healing process.

In his work *The Sickness unto Death*, Søren Kierkegaard rarely speaks of sickness in the physiological sense and concentrates on the question of the spiritual sickness that is despair. Yet he concentrates the two pages of the “Pre-amble,”<sup>68</sup> right after the “Foreword,” on the distinction between physiological sickness and spiritual sickness. It is in this way that he recalls the words of Jesus, in which Lazarus’ sickness “is not unto death,” even though Lazarus does die a short while afterward and Jesus then openly informs his disciples, “Lazarus has died.”<sup>69</sup> This death may very well be the result of a sickness that is “not unto death.” The sickness and death of Lazarus, as we know, will be the occasion for the glorification of God, by means of the sign of his resurrection that Jesus performs. This is why his sickness was not “unto death,” although it was fatal.

It is this decisive point that enables Jacques Ellul to pose the question of meaning: whether a sickness is or is not fatal, the essential point is that it may not be “unto death.” That is, it may be lived with God, and this may be the living and trusting bond with the God who lives and gives life, who gives it a meaning.

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 167-168.

<sup>69</sup> John 11:14.

This fundamental distinction, inspired by Kierkegaard, between the sickness “unto death” and fatal illness, sheds light on Jacques Ellul’s reflections on the problem of treatment: the therapies of the materialistic type, which treat man as material and reduce him to his physiological dimension, to a collection of atoms, may heal a curable illness, or may push back the final defeat of an incurable illness, but in both cases they may not keep it from being “unto death.” Such an orientation may lead to a therapeutic determination to succeed, or to medical exploits, but in all cases to stay alive without the spiritual orientation strips this life of all true meaning, reducing it to a physico-chemical process.

This is why Jacques Ellul ends his text by questioning the validity of this or that treatment “before God.” The only real healing, he affirms, is the resurrection, and he is careful to clarify, in order to remove every ambiguity or to avoid all misinterpretation, that this resurrection does not concern only the end of time, the judgment and salvation, but it takes place “starting now,” *hic et nunc*. We may be raised from the dead during our life if we place this life firmly within God’s care. Then hope overcomes despair, and no sickness that we undergo, not even terminal illness, is “unto death.”

## CONCLUSION

In a bible study on 1 Corinthians 15, dated 1988 and recently published,<sup>70</sup> Jacques Ellul offers a highly suggestive idea. Just as in Jewish tradition the day begins at sunset and ends with sunrise, so also death precedes life: “We begin by a life that is an actual death, and we end our life with the resurrection.”<sup>71</sup> Thus we pass from death to life when, through a new birth, we enter straightaway, during our earthly pilgrimage, into eternal life. As a result, all of the illnesses that can assail us, affect us, diminish us, and make us suffer terribly, may be seen to bestow a meaning. They may no longer be, in the strict sense, sicknesses “unto death”; they may even become, like all things in our life, signs of God’s glory.<sup>72</sup> Such is the rich Kierkegaardian heritage passed down to Jacques Ellul; such is the existential and spiritual spring that irrigates his thought.

## About the Author

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<sup>70</sup> See Jacques Ellul, *Mort et esperance de la resurrection. Conferences inedites de Jacques Ellul*. Lyon: Editions Olivetan, 2016.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>72</sup> See 1 Cor. 10:31: “Whether therefore you eat, or drink, or whatever you do, do all for the glory of God.”

# “Positions bibliques sur la medecine”: Mise en perspective theologique

Frederic Rognon

Dans son article intitule: *Positions bibliques sur la medecine*, Jacques Ellul ne cite a aucun moment Soren Kierkegaard (ni aucun autre auteur d'ailleurs, mis a part les auteurs bib-liqués bien entendu). Et cependant, Kierkegaard est present, *incognito* (terme cher a Kierkegaard), du debut a la fin du texte d'Ellul, et notamment au moment ou se noue de maniere decisive le fil de son argumentation. Les principales references implicites au philosophe et theologien danois concernent la distinction entre « la maladie qui n'est pas a la mort » et « la maladie a la mort » ; elles renvoient donc, tacitement, a l'ouvrage de Kierkegaard intitule: *La maladie a la mort* (*The Sickness unto Death*). Un parcours a travers ce livre serait ainsi susceptible d'eclairer l'approche de Jacques Ellul.

## JACQUES ELLUL ET SOREN KIERKEGAARD

Il convient en effet d'avoir presente a l'esprit la filiation tres nette entre Kierkegaard et Ellul. Celle-ci passe, on le sait, par Karl Barth, mais lorsque ce dernier s'eloigne de Kierkegaard, Jacques Ellul s'eloigne de Barth pour rester arrime a Kierkegaard ; en d'autres termes, Ellul n'est barthien que lorsque Karl Barth est kierkegaardien. S'il s'autorise des critiques envers Barth sur le plan theologique (comme envers Marx sur le plan sociologique), en revanche, Jacques Ellul n'est jamais critique envers Kierkegaard. Il l'exprime d'ailleurs en ces termes:

Habituellement, dans mes lectures, le mecanisme critique de la pensee joue aussitot, et je suis appele a repondre: “Oui, mais . . .” Les auteurs qui ont eu le plus d'influence sur moi m'ont fait penser par reaction. Je n'ai jamais adhere a un systeme. A l'egard de Barth lui-meme, j'ai toujours pris une distance critique. Ma reaction a Kierkegaard n'a rien de comparable. Ici, je suis seulement a l'ecoute. Je ne cherche pas a imiter, ni a appliquer methodes ou concepts. Je suis renvoye a moi-meme par un miroir qui rend eclatantes pensees, contradictions, exigences, presence a la vie et presence de la mort. Renvoye a moi-meme, mais plus du tout semblable a ce que j'etais avant d'avoir lu tel ou tel texte. Interpele. Mis au pied du mur, par un rapport singulier qui m'interdit toute echappatoire. J'ecoute. Je ne discute pas la pensee de Kierkegaard, mais je me sens oblige de repondre, de repondre a un autre qu'a Kierkegaard lui-meme<sup>73</sup>.

Cette longue citation atteste que Kierkegaard s'avere etre le creancier intellectuel et spirituel par excellence de Jacques Ellul. Ce point ne fait que confirmer l'interet que presente pour nous un detour par l'oeuvre kierkegardienne.

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<sup>73</sup> Jacques Ellul, « Preface », in Nelly Viallaneix, *Ecoute, Kierkegaard. Essai sur la communication*

## LA MALADIE A LA MORT: DISSIPATION DE MALENTENDUS

La lecture de *La maladie a la mort* requiert néanmoins quelques précautions, en raison d'un certain nombre de malentendus tenaces dont l'ouvrage a pu patir tout au long de sa réception en France<sup>74</sup>. Le principal de ces quiproquos, et le plus dommageable, est la première traduction du livre, sous le titre: *Traite du desespoir*. Et cet intitulé fautif (puisque le titre originel danois: *Sygdommen til Doden*, signifie littéralement: *La maladie a la mort*) n'a pas contribué pour une petite part à la diffusion d'une image particulièrement sombre du penseur de Copenhague. Or, en 1947, lorsque Jacques Ellul écrit « Positions bibliques sur la médecine », il ne dispose en français que de cette première traduction ; ce n'est qu'en 1971, lors de la publication du volume XVI des (*Œuvres Complètes* de Kierkegaard en français, dans une édition académique<sup>75</sup>, que le titre correct commencera à s'imposer (même si l'on continue aujourd'hui encore à citer le *Traite du desespoir*).

Ces données éditoriales devaient être mentionnées, pour souligner la rigueur de Jacques Ellul, qui, sans s'arrêter à la réputation déléterre de Kierkegaard, lit attentivement *La maladie a la mort* et en rend compte avec justesse. Car s'il est bien question de desespoir dans cette œuvre, celui-ci n'est décrit que pour mieux proclamer, par contraste, l'espérance chrétienne. Le titre le dit bien, puisqu'il renvoie aux paroles de Jésus dans l'évangile de Jean: « Cette maladie n'est point à la mort ; mais elle est pour la gloire de Dieu, afin que le Fils de Dieu soit glorifié par elle<sup>76</sup> ». Un fin connaisseur de la Bible comme Jacques Ellul fait aussitôt le rapprochement. En français courant, on parlerait plutôt de « maladie mortelle » ; l'expression inhabituelle « maladie à la mort » surprend ceux qui n'ont pas de culture biblique, c'est-à-dire la grande majorité des Français, en 1947 comme aujourd'hui, et ouvre donc la porte à tous les malentendus. En réalité, *La maladie a la mort* (dont le sous-titre est: *Un exposé psychologique chrétien pour l'éducation et le réveil*) est un traité et une méditation sur l'espérance chrétienne.

Rognon, Frédéric. “‘Positions bibliques sur la médecine’: Mise en perspective théologique.” *Ellul Forum* 59 (2017): 18-20. © Frédéric Rognon, CC BY-NC-SA.

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*de la parole* (2 tomes), Paris, Les Éditions du Cerf (coll. Cogitatio Fidei), 1979, tome I, pp. ii-iii.

<sup>74</sup> Voir: Hélène Politis, *Kierkegaard en France au XXe siècle: archéologie d'une réception*, Paris, Éditions Kime, 2005 ; Florian Forestier, Jacques Message et Anna Svenbro, *Kierkegaard en France. Incidences et résonances*, Paris, Éditions Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2016.

<sup>75</sup> Voir: Søren Kierkegaard, (*Œuvres Complètes*, Paris, Éditions de l'Orante, tomes I-XX, 1966-1986.

<sup>76</sup> Jean 11, 4.

## LA MALADIE A LA MORT: DU DESESPoir A L'ESPERANCE

*La maladie a la mort* paraît sous un pseudo nyme: Anti-Climacus. Le *Post Scriptum definitif et non scientifique aux Miettes philosophiques* (1846)<sup>77</sup> était signé de Johannes Climacus: il exprimait la prétention rationaliste, aux échos hegelien, de s'élever de la terre au ciel par une échelle (« climax » en grec signifie: « échelle ») et de rendre compte de l'ensemble du réel sous forme de système totalisant. Anti-Climacus, qui signe *La maladie a la mort* (1849)<sup>78</sup>, mais aussi *L'école du christianisme* (1850)<sup>79</sup>, est le contraire de Climacus: le témoin de la vérité chrétienne, qui se révèle aux hommes par un mouvement descendant, inverse au mouvement ascendant de la présomption humaine. Anti-Climacus est celui qui accueille le Dieu de Jésus-Christ, qui se fait connaître lui-même par sa Parole.

L'auteur le dit d'emblée: « la maladie a la mort est le désespoir »<sup>80</sup>. Et il poursuit la chaîne d'identification en ces termes: « le désespoir est le péché »<sup>81</sup>. Mais il y a deux formes de désespoir, et donc de péché: le désespoir-faiblesse et le désespoir-défi. Le désespoir-faiblesse consiste à ne pas vouloir être soi, à se fuir soi-même dans tous les divertissements que le monde propose. Le désespoir-défi consiste à vouloir être soi, mais tout seul, sans alterité, et notamment sans l'alterité divine. Ainsi, paradoxalement, « le péché consiste, étant devant Dieu ou ayant l'idée de Dieu, et se trouvant dans l'état de désespoir, à ne pas vouloir être soi, ou à vouloir l'être »<sup>82</sup>. On comprend bien ici que le péché ne doit pas être compris sur un plan moral: « le contraire du péché n'est nullement la vertu (. . .), c'est la foi »<sup>83</sup>.

Mais si le contraire du péché est la foi, et si le désespoir consiste à ne pas vouloir être soi, ou à vouloir l'être, comment concevoir le contraire du désespoir, c'est-à-dire l'espérance? Celle-ci consiste, selon Kierkegaard, « en ce que le moi, étant lui-même et voulant l'être, devient transparent et se fonde en Dieu »<sup>84</sup>. En d'autres termes, voici « l'état d'où tout désespoir est banni: le moi qui se rapporte à lui-même et veut être lui-même devient transparent et se fonde en la puissance qui l'a posé »<sup>85</sup>. Ainsi l'espérance chrétienne, antidote à l'égard de toute forme de désespoir, revient à faire le saut de la

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<sup>77</sup> Voir: Søren Kierkegaard, « Post Scriptum definitif et non scientifique aux Miettes philosophiques », (*Œuvres Complètes*, Paris, Editions de l'Orante, tomes X-XI, 1977).

<sup>78</sup> Voir: Søren Kierkegaard, « La maladie a la mort », *Œuvres Complètes*, Paris, Editions de l'Orante, tome XVI, 1971.

<sup>79</sup> Voir: Søren Kierkegaard, « L'école du christianisme », (*Œuvres Complètes*, Paris, Editions de l'Orante, tome XVII, 1982).

<sup>80</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, « La maladie a la mort », *op. cit.*, p. 169.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 231.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 233.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 285.

foi, a plonger en Dieu qui nous accueille les bras ouverts, a renoncer ainsi a soi-meme, pour finalement se retrouver soi-meme, mais grace au detour par l'alterite divine.

Le principal critere discriminant entre le desespoir et l'esperance, c'est l'alterite: que l'on se fuit soi-meme ou que l'on veuille etre soi-meme, on nie l'alterite de Dieu ; tandis que si je rentre en relation vivante et confiante avec le Dieu vivant et vivifiant, alors je deviens reellement moi-meme et je suis gueri du desespoir. Car alors ma maladie n'est pas « a la mort », elle a pour finalite la glorification de Dieu.

## **POSITIONS BIBLIQUES SUR LA MEDECINE: VERS UNE APPROCHE SPIRITUELLE DE LA MALADIE**

Telle est donc l'impulsion philosophique et theologique que promeut Soren Kierkegaard en 1849, et qui se trouve a l'arriere-plan, sur un mode implicite, un siecle plus tard, du texte de son heritier spirituel, Jacques Ellul, intitule: *Positions bibliques sur la medecine*. Comment deceler l'incidence de l'oeuvre du penseur de Copenhague sur celle du professeur de Bordeaux, au sujet de la maladie?

De meme que, chez Kierkegaard, le peche ne doit pas etre compris dans un sens moral, mais spirituel, de meme le desespoir ne doit pas etre reduit a un mode psychologique, mais apprehende dans sa dimension spirituelle. Ainsi, dans la perspective kierkegaardienne, un homme desespere (sur un plan spirituel) peut tres bien ne pas le savoir (sur un plan psychologique): la fuite a l'egard de lui-meme, ou l'affirmation forcenee de lui-meme, lui cachent a ses propres yeux sa reelle condition d'homme desespere, c'est-a-dire independant a l'egard de Dieu. La maladie a la mort est celle qui eloigne de Dieu.

Jacques Ellul applique le meme raisonnement a la maladie proprement dite. La maladie, au sens courant du terme, peut etre « a la mort » ou ne pas etre « a la mort »: selon que le malade se tourne ou non vers Dieu. Cela signifie qu'une maladie mortelle, c'est-a-dire une maladie qui conduit vers une mort physiologique, peut tres bien ne pas etre « a la mort » si le patient s'en remet a Dieu au cours de sa maladie. Inversement, une maladie curable, et dont le patient finit par guerir sur un plan physiologique, peut tres bien etre une maladie « a la mort » si ce patient se detourne de Dieu tout au long du processus therapeutique.

Soren Kierkegaard, dans son ouvrage *La maladie a la mort*, parle peu de maladie au sens physiologique, et se concentre sur la question de la maladie spirituelle qu'est le desespoir. Il consacre neanmoins les deux pages du « Pream-bule »<sup>86</sup>, juste apres l'« Avant-propos », a l'articulation entre maladie physiologique et maladie spirituelle: c'est ainsi qu'il rappelle la parole de Jesus, selon laquelle la maladie de Lazare « n'est pas a la mort », alors que, pourtant, Lazare meurt peu de temps apres ; et Jesus annonce alors ouvertement a ses disciples: « Lazare est mort »<sup>87</sup>. Ainsi la mort peut tres bien

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<sup>86</sup> Voir: *ibid.*, pp. 167-168.

<sup>87</sup> Jean 11, 14.

etre la consequence d'une maladie qui « n'est pas a la mort ». La maladie et la mort de Lazare, on le sait, seront l'occasion de la glorification de Dieu, par le biais du signe de sa resurrection operee par Jesus. C'est pourquoi sa maladie n'etait pas « a la mort », alors meme qu'elle etait mortelle.

C'est ce point decisif qui permet a Jacques Ellul de poser la question du sens: qu'une maladie soit mortelle ou non, l'essentiel est qu'elle ne soit pas « a la mort », c'est-a-dire qu'elle soit vecue avec Dieu, et que ce soit ce lien vivant et confiant avec le Dieu vivant et vivifiant qui lui donne un sens.

Cette distinction fondamentale, d'inspiration kierkeg-aardienne, entre la maladie « a la mort » et la maladie mor-telle, eclaire les reflexions de Jacques Ellul sur la problematique des remedes: les therapeutiques de type materialiste, qui materialised l'homme, et le reduisent a sa dimension physiologique, a un ensemble d'atomes, peuvent guerir une maladie curable, ou faire reculer l'echeance finale d'une maladie incurable, mais dans les deux cas elles ne peuvent l'empecher d'etre « a la mort ». Cette orientation peut conduire a l'acharnement therapeutique, ou a des exploits medicaux, mais dans tous les cas le maintien en vie sans orientation spirituelle depouille cette vie de tout sens veritable, en la reduisant a un processus physico-chimique.

C'est pourquoi Jacques Ellul termine son texte en interrogeant la validite de tel ou tel remede « devant Dieu ». La seule guerison reelle, affirme-t-il, est la resurrection ; et il prend soin de preciser, afin de lever toute ambiguite ou d'eviter tout contresens, que cette resurrection ne concerne pas seulement la fin des temps, le jugement et le salut, mais qu'elle a lieu « des maintenant », *hic et nunc*. Nous pouvons ressusciter au cours de notre vie si nous placons resolutement celle-ci sous le regard de Dieu. Alors l'esperance prend le pas sur le desespoir, et aucune des maladies que nous endurons, y compris les maladies mortelles, n'est « a la mort ».

## CONCLUSION

Dans une etude biblique a propos de 1 Corinthiens 15, en date de 1988 et recemment publiee<sup>88</sup>, Jacques Ellul expose une idee fort suggestive: de meme que, dans la tradition juive, le jour commence au coucher du soleil et s'acheve avec la montee du soleil et le plein jour, de meme la mort precede la vie: « Nous commencons par une vie qui est une veritable mort, et nous achevons notre vie sur la resurrection »<sup>89</sup>. Nous passons donc de la mort a la vie lorsque, par la nouvelle nais-sance, nous entrons d'emblee, au cours de notre pelerinage terrestre, dans la vie eternelle. Des lors, toutes les maladies qui peuvent nous assaillir, nous affecter, nous diminuer, nous faire terriblement souffrir, peuvent se voir conferer un sens. Elles ne peuvent plus etre, a strictement parler, des maladies « a la mort » ; elles peuvent meme devenir, comme toute chose dans notre

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<sup>88</sup> Voir: Jacques Ellul, *Mort et esperance de la resurrection. Conferences inedites de Jacques Ellul*, Lyon, Editions Olivetan, 2016.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.



vie, des signes a la gloire de Dieu<sup>90</sup>. Tel est le riche heritage kierkegaardien transmis a Jacques Ellul, telle est la source existentielle et spirituelle qui irrigue sa pensee.

## A propos de l'auteur

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## Commentary

Richard Stivers

Jacques Ellul's article on illness, health, and medicine is remarkable. It repudiates the common view about the primary causes of illness and health and calls into question the glory of modern medicine. I will comment on the concept of spirit and how it relates to the body and soul (mental and emotional life) complex, and on the attempt of modern medicine to bring spirit under its aegis.

For a long time we have been aware of how our emotional state affects our body, and vice versa. We speak about psychosomatic illnesses or about how readily one can somatize emotional distress. Then too we are aware of the toll that stress takes on bodily health. We are comfortable with the idea of a body-mind or body-soul complex, disputes about which part is dominant notwithstanding. Neglected is spirit or self as Soren Kierkegaard defines it. Ellul has clearly drawn upon Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Anxiety and The Sickness unto Death* in this regard.<sup>91</sup>

Ellul maintains that body, soul, and spirit form a unity whose inner workings only God knows and controls (without diminishing Christian freedom). What scripture does reveal to us, however, is that spirit is the primary factor. As Ellul indicates, life and death have a double meaning, because spiritual death and bodily death, on the one hand, and spiritual life and physical life, on the other hand, are intimately related. Our relationship with God (whether or not we are aware of it) is the basis of our existence. God created us and sustains our existence and maintains a relationship with us that is spirit or self. Strictly speaking, spirit or eternal self involves a consciousness of God's relationship to us, but for those who are unconscious of the relationship, spirit or self remains dormant. Nevertheless, God sustains the relationship, no matter what we understand and do.

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<sup>90</sup> Voir: 1 Corinthiens 10, 31: « Ainsi, soit que vous mangiez, soit que vous buviez, soit que vous fassiez quelque autre chose, faites tout pour la gloire de Dieu ».

<sup>91</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*. Trans. Reidar Thomte (Princeton: Princeton Uni-

For Kierkegaard, the sickness unto death is despair, a sickness of the spirit, an anxiety without hope. In *The Concept of Anxiety*, he maintains that we consciously or unconsciously regard our relationship to God ambiguously: We are caught, we can neither control the relationship nor dismiss it. This ambiguity breeds anxiety.

Sin is despair and despair is sin, so writes Kierkegaard: Sin is a state or condition rather than occasional, discrete offenses. Despair and sin stand in dialectical relationship rather than being separate entities. Despair is part of sin, and every sinner is in despair. No one is without some despair.

Unconscious despair entails ignorance and distraction. Ignorance because one has not heard the Good News of the Gospel, and distraction because culture, which is based on idolatry, distracts us from the truth of Jesus Christ. No distraction, however, can mitigate the pangs of despair over our relation to God. As Kierkegaard observes, despair is “deep in the heart of happiness.”<sup>92</sup>

Despair increases as the consciousness of spirit or self increases. There are two major forms of despair in which a consciousness of having a spirit or self is present. The first he refers to as a despair of weakness—not wanting to become the self that God expects. The other is a defiant despair—wanting to become the self that one desires. In addition, there is a despair over one’s sins and a despair over ever being forgiven one’s sins. For those who have heard the Good News, one either despairingly chooses a state of sin or accepts the gift of faith—a self grounded transparently in God. Hence faith is the opposite of despair.

Despair and sin have a profound influence on the health of the body and soul because, as previously indicated, body, soul, and spirit form a unity. The omission of spirit in medical treatment is catastrophic. Repentance and conversion are essential for the health of the spirit and for one’s overall health. To suggest this to a physician today would surely bring disbelief or ridicule.

Toward the end of the article, Ellul mentions that scripture reveals the potential of medicine to become an idol and thus to “encroach upon God’s domain.” As medicine has become part of the technological system, it actively promotes a cure for everything, including aging. It is utopian and thus religious in its belief in science and its veneration of technology.

The capitulation of religion to medicine is indicated by the following example. One of my teachers in graduate school (a rabbi) was studying the relationship between Protestant ministers, Catholic priests, and Jewish rabbis, on the one hand, and Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers, on the other hand. The question was whether the helping professionals with religious beliefs were willing to refer clients with spiritual issues to the appropriate religious leader. At the same time, were the religious leaders willing to refer members of their congregation with “secular” problems (emotional and social) to a helping professional? (Notice how

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versity Press, 1980), *The Sickness unto Death*. Trans. Alastair Hannay (New York: Penguin, 1989).

<sup>92</sup> Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, 55.

spiritual was separated from emotional and social in the research.) Not surprisingly, he discovered that the helping professionals *never* referred patients or clients with spiritual problems to a religious leader, because of the assumption that a spiritual problem was only an emotional problem. By contrast, religious leaders were more than eager to refer members of their congregation to helping professionals. Equally revealing was the number of religious leaders who aspired to obtain a degree in one of the helping professions, to make them better able to offer advice to their members in need. Can we not say that for both groups, spiritual problems had been reduced to emotional problems and that religion was reduced to a subjective choice one made? If religion becomes in Kierkegaard's words a "quack doctor," how can it compete with the technologically driven helping professions?<sup>93</sup>

A number of critics have pointed out the deleterious impact of modern medicine on the overall health of the patient. Ivan Illich (*Medical Nemesis*), William Arney and Bernard Bergen (*Medicine and the Management of Living*), Ray Downing (*Biohealth*), Nortin Hadler (*The Last Well Person*), Ronald Dworkin (*Artificial Happiness*), and Richard Stivers (*Shades of Loneliness*), among others, have made criticisms that range from overtreatment, creating chronic patients, systemic iatrogenesis, biological reductionism, and the neglect of social factors, to the totalitarian direction of medicine to control every aspect of life.<sup>94</sup>

Medicine has become part of the "happiness industry," not just the health industry. Health and happiness are two of the chief mythological values of technological utopianism. The storyline is that science and technology will lead us to a state of perfect health and complete happiness in this world. The myth contradicts everything scripture teaches us about the world, sin, illness, and death. Medicine is now in the vanguard of an aggressive attack upon God, wisdom, and spirit.

In *Artificial Happiness*, anesthesiologist Ronald Dworkin argues that our culture is preoccupied with artificial happiness. He identifies four ways of obtaining artificial happiness: psychotropic drugs, alternative medicine, intensive exercise, and spirituality. Real happiness, he claims, is earned by assuming responsibility for our actions, by effort, and by concern for others. Artificial happiness is happiness on the cheap—a superficial, transitory mood. Artificial happiness covers over and compensates for widespread loneliness and unhappiness.

Most telling is the tendency of medicine to appropriate spirituality. First, spirituality had to be separated from religion and then become an end in itself. Second, spirituality had to be reduced to a biochemical phenomenon. Since medicine had asserted that

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<sup>93</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination, Judge for Yourself!* Trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 80.

<sup>94</sup> Ivan Illich, *Medical Nemesis* (New York: Pantheon, 1976), William Arney and Bernard Bergen, *Medicine and the Management of Living* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), Raymond Downing, *Biohealth* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), Nortin Handler, *The Last Well Person* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), Ronald Dworkin, *Artificial Happiness* (New York: Carroll and Graff, 2006), Richard Stivers, *Shades of Loneliness* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004).

feelings were biochemical at bottom, spiritual feelings were part of medicine's domain. Dworkin states that "the medical profession now controls all three dimensions of life—the body, the mind, and the spirit."<sup>95</sup>

Scripture teaches us that our relationship to God is the most important factor in our overall health. Modern medicine teaches us that nothing is more important than the health and happiness of our bodies. Modern medicine aspires to rival God in the control of illness and health, but ends up an empty idol.

#### **About the Author**

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## **Sin as Addiction in Our "Brave New World"**

Richard Stivers

We know from scripture that humans sin, are born in sin, and are in bondage to sin. Biblical ideas of sin have a hard time being recognized today, however. Liberal Christianity has de-emphasized sin or reduced it to injustice and inequality. Conservative Christianity has tended to equate sin with personal immorality. In either instance, the truth about sin has been diminished. As Søren Kierkegaard reminded us, sin is not merely a matter of discrete sins but of an orientation, a way of life. Furthermore, scripture makes sin a spiritual matter, not just a moral issue. Idolatry is the worst sin.

To overcome sin we must contest various evil powers as well as our own desires. In *If You are the Son of God*, Jacques Ellul argues that one of the meanings of sin is that of an external power that influences or even controls us.<sup>96</sup> The evil powers that scripture reveals to us do not have an independent existence; they exist only in and through their relations to us. But they are real! There is no principle of evil nor an evil god. In a sense, the evil powers are our unintended creation. Money and political power, for example, are evil powers. Money and politics are not evil in themselves but in the spiritual value we attribute to them.

Scripture indicates that sin is both individual and corporate. The very concept of the "world" suggests as much. Cultures are anchored by a sense of the sacred, that is, by that which is experienced as absolute power, reality, and meaning. Examples of the sacred include nature, the tribe, money, and the nation state. The socially constructed sacred (tacitly, not consciously) provides both meaning and the basis for control in society. All social institutions obtain cultural authority as a result. *Exousia* refers to a spiritual power that the social group employs beyond that which it receives from its cultural mandate. The social group thus becomes more than the sum of its parts, spiritually and not just psychologically. But *exousia* refers to a material power as well.

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<sup>95</sup> Dworkin, *Artificial Happiness*, 215.

<sup>96</sup> Jacques Ellul, *If You Are the Son of God*. Trans. Anne-Marie Andreasson-Hogg (Eugene, OR:

All members of the group are motivated by covetousness and the will to power, which are the source of sin. The social group provides an absolute identity for the individual and excites the individual's desire through its internal competition for wealth and power. Hence the group is held together in part by the negative unity of sin. Social institutions do not fully control the will to power, for, as Max Weber noted, the exercise of power invariably exceeds the limits that cultural authority imposes on it. This excessive power (*exousia*) is both material and spiritual, power and value, human and alien. Sin is, in turn, both internal and external, individual and collective.

Scripture is replete with figures of speech, especially metaphors. God, for instance, is king, fortress, shepherd, and so forth. A metaphor is not to be taken literally, of course; it entails a comparison. What is less well known is compared to what is better known: God is compared to a fortress. No one metaphor is sufficient, for each metaphor reveals different aspects of the phenomenon. To say that "love is a rose" suggests that love blooms and fades, is fragrant, and is capable of inflicting pain. "Love is a journey" implies that love is not static and that the movement may be more important than the final destination. Unlike the logical concept, metaphor never permits us to pretend to grasp the phenomenon as it is in itself. The numerous metaphors about God are a warning not to claim to define and know God as He is. We apprehend God by comparison.

Often neglected in discussions of metaphor is the status of the better-known term. For metaphor to be vital, the better-known term must be common. The metaphorical comparison necessitates reflection on both terms. Consequently, we learn more about what we ordinarily take for granted, the better-known term. This will become apparent as we examine the following metaphors of sin.

The most prevalent metaphor for sin in scripture is sin is bondage or slavery. John, Paul, and Peter refer to sin this way. Jesus says, "Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin" (John 8:34). Paul states, "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1). Peter proclaims, "They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption; for whatever overcomes a man, to that he is enslaved" (2 Pet. 2:19). Slavery was widespread in the Roman world, and it was well understood that it takes away secular freedom. In attempting to understand sin, which destroys Christian freedom, the early Christians employed the metaphor that "sin is slavery." In doing so, they make us reflect on the *institution* of slavery.

In *The Ethics of Freedom*, Jacques Ellul suggests that "sin is alienation" is the metaphor that best resonates with our experiences today.<sup>97</sup> Ellul was not a Marxist, but he nonetheless employed Marx's concept of alienation. Under industrialized capitalism, the worker was alienated from his work, that is, he lost ownership and control

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Wipf and Stock, 2014).

<sup>97</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom*. Trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), ch. 1.

over the process of work and the product. His work became merely a means of profit for the capitalist, who had made him a “wage slave.” Because work was central to Marx’s view of the human being, self-alienation followed alienation from work. To be alienated means to be possessed by another. Ellul’s book was published in 1975, and parts of it were written in the 1960s. He understood that technology had become a more important factor than capitalism in the organization of society. Consequently, he applied the concept of alienation in a new way to demonstrate that in replacing human experience with objectified expertise, technology was itself alienating.

I think that today, however, another metaphor is more appropriate: “Sin is addiction.” Before examining addiction as a metaphor for sin, I should point out that all three metaphors, enslavement, alienation, and addiction, suggest being possessed by a person or force. Karl Barth once said that rather than say, “I have faith,” I should say, “Faith has me.” The three metaphors for sin suggest that I should say, “Sin has me,” rather than, “I sin.” In addition, all three metaphors reveal something about the larger society. To be enslaved makes manifest the institution of slavery; to be alienated reveals the institution of industrialized capitalism; to be addicted uncovers the technological system.

I will not attempt to define addiction in scientific terms. Is it physical, psychological, or both? Are there degrees of addiction? Instead, I will employ the term in its colloquial sense: something we can’t seem to stop doing even though it’s not necessary for our survival. Or a compulsion from which we can’t or don’t want to escape. Most people associate addiction with drugs and alcohol. Increasing numbers of people talk about addiction to social media, but the list of addictions keeps growing.

Julian Taber, who is a therapist to gambling addicts, developed the Consumer Lifestyle Index/Appetite Inventory.<sup>98</sup> It attempts to be a comprehensive list of addictions. The range of addictions is enormous: gambling for money, lying, laxatives, shopping, petty theft, sugar-based foods, tobacco products, exercise, talking for talking’s sake, religious activity, work for the sake of being busy, trying to get attention for its own sake, self-help groups, and so forth. The obvious conclusion is that anything can become addictive. In “The Acceleration of Addictiveness,” Paul Graham argues that technological progress brings more addictiveness.<sup>99</sup> Technological progress creates ever more products and services to which we may become addicted. Addiction to technology is the necessary result of technological progress. My point is not that addiction is omnipresent but that more of us are perceiving it this way. Talk of addiction brings in more conversationalists every day.

I will discuss addictions to machine gambling, video games, and social media in order to examine the metaphor that sin is addiction. We spend more money on casino gambling than on music, movies, and sports events together. Most of the gambling occurs with slot machines and video poker. One hundred and fifty-five million Amer-

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<sup>98</sup> Cited in Natasha Schull, *Addiction by Design* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 242-43.

<sup>99</sup> Paul Graham, “The Acceleration of Addictiveness.” [www.paulgraham.com/addiction.html](http://www.paulgraham.com/addiction.html). Accessed 12 November 2013.

icans play video games and spend more than twice as much on them as they do on movie tickets. Soon virtually everyone will have a smartphone or similar device to use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other social media. Not all players and users are addicts, but much has already been written about the heavy use of these technologies as if it were an addiction.

Enslavement, alienation, and addiction all have sociological contexts. In the former, the context is an institution, in the latter, an entire social environment—technology. Following Jacques Ellul, by “technology” I mean both machines and nonmaterial technologies such as bureaucracy, advertising, and propaganda. Beginning in the eighteenth century, material and nonmaterial technologies advanced together. Nature and human society were increasingly brought under technology’s purview. With the advent of the computer, it became possible to coordinate major technologies to form a system at the level of information. Technology has thus become a system. Human society now opens to two environments nature and technology.

Modern technology shattered the unity of culture. Technology supplants experience and meaning; it is solely about the most efficient (powerful) means of acting. Society is organized at the level of technology but disorganized at cultural and psychological levels. Culture is randomly created and fragmented in its meaning and purpose as a creation. The result is a plethora of moralities and art and entertainment styles. The lack of cultural unity makes psychological fragmentation inevitable: we are reduced to being role players who create multiple images for ourselves and others.

Technological growth has been accelerating for over 150 years, although not evenly across the various sectors. Moreover, there appears to be no purpose or end to it. Implicit in the growth of technology is the mandate “If it can be done, it must be done.” The traditional tension between what is and what ought to be has been superseded by that between what is and what is possible. Consequently we have only limited moral control over the employment of technology. We have become as fatalistic about technology as so-called “primitive” people were about nature. Hence we have an irrational faith in technology.

Technology has an impact on the individual’s psyche just as great as its influence on culture. Technology directly and indirectly provokes a need for ecstasy. The very point of addiction is to create a continuous ecstatic state. Ecstasy is an altered state of consciousness, an escape from the rational self. Ecstasy is a kind of high that can be achieved by rapid, repetitive movement, continuous loud music, drugs, and alcohol, for example.

Cultural anthropologists have a category of religion they call “ecstatic religion.” It includes rites organized to produce an ecstatic state in the participants. Such rites may involve orgies, drunkenness, and violence. Victor Turner maintains that the rites designed for ecstasy bring about a communion of equals, a *communitas*, whereby status differences and power relationships are temporarily set aside.<sup>100</sup> A feeling results of one

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<sup>100</sup> Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977).

in all and all in one. Some have extended the meaning of ecstatic communion to include communion with machines. Today we have technology to help us achieve ecstasy.

Technological progress has increased the pace of life: we do more in less time. Speed has become an end in itself. Time urgency entails a compulsion to do as many things as rapidly as possible, including a preoccupation with time, rushed speech and eating, driving too fast and angrily, waiting impatiently, and feeling irritable and bored when inactive. Concurrently, we suffer from time scarcity. Family life and leisure mimic the speed of the workplace. With mother and father both working and the children in a plethora of organized activities, parents have to become efficiency experts. Tourism and vacations typically involve stuffing as many activities as possible into the shortest period of time.

Speed itself can produce a mild ecstatic experience. Milan Kundera observes that “speed is the form of ecstasy the technical revolution has bestowed on man.”<sup>101</sup> We internalize technological stimuli. Wolfgang Schivelbush refers to this as the “stimulus shield.”<sup>102</sup> We adjust to and normalize the ways that technology alters our sense of time, place, speed, sight, and sound. Each time a faster mode of transportation was introduced, people had to adjust to it, and eventually the previous mode seemed hopelessly slow. Humans internalized the speed of the train, for example, and later, when given a choice, they rejected the horse and buggy. Today we internalize the speed of faster computers and are impatient when forced to use slower ones. We come to resemble the faster technology that stimulates us: we act by reflex, not reflection.

Technology creates a need for ecstasy as an escape mechanism. Anthropologist Roger Caillois observed that the more extensive and intensive the social controls in a society, the more exaggerated the ecstatic response.<sup>103</sup> We cannot tolerate living in a social world that is too ordered. Never before have humans lived with so many rules—technical, bureaucratic, and legal. The proliferation of administrative laws, bureaucratic norms, and technical rules that accompany each new technology makes it impossible for anyone to be aware of them, let alone remember them. We feel the pressure to escape them in irrational ways: drugs, alcohol, sex, sports, gambling, and so forth. A Columbia University psychiatrist found that the harder college students (especially males) studied during the week, the more they felt the need to escape the rational order of obtaining good grades by giving themselves over to instinctual desire and temporarily losing their conscious selves.<sup>104</sup>

Technology indirectly produces loneliness from which an escape is necessary. Christian psychiatrist J. H. van den Berg demonstrated that the loss of a common morality beginning in the eighteenth century in the West resulted in human relationships be-

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<sup>101</sup> Milan Kundera, *Slowness* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 2.

<sup>102</sup> Wolfgang Schivelbush, *The Railway Journey* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

<sup>103</sup> Roger Caillois, *Man and the Sacred*. Trans. Meyer Barash (New York: Free Press, 1959). See also Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*. Trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Knopf, 1964), chapter 5.

<sup>104</sup> Herbert Hendin, *The Age of Sensation* (New York: Norton, 1975).



coming vague and dangerous.<sup>105</sup> A common morality in society meant that one could trust people even if one did not especially like them. The decline in trust makes everyone a potential enemy. Loneliness ensues. Van den Berg argues that loneliness is the nucleus of psychiatry, and that all psychiatric disorders are intertwined because all patients share the same existence. For many of us, loneliness does not result in a fullblown psychiatric disorder, but the number of Americans in therapy, self-help groups, and on drugs for depression is legion.

Loneliness manifests itself in many ways, some of which conceal the loneliness. One of them is the need to talk incessantly, sometimes to anyone who will listen, about trivial matters. I can't be lonely if I am talking to people! With the advent of email and social media, we can be in communication with others anytime we feel the need. The result is the ecstasy of communication. The speed by which information is transmitted from person to person produces a mild ecstatic state.

If technology creates a need for ecstatic release, it also produces the means to achieve ecstasy. Machine gambling is a prime example. In *Addiction by Design*, Natasha Schull interviews gambling addicts and discovers that what they most crave, even more than winning, is the "zone," in which "time, space, and social identity are suspended in the mechanical rhythm of a repeating process."<sup>106</sup> In other words, a state of ecstasy. Gamblers enter the zone when their actions and the functioning of the machine become indistinguishable. Schull borrows the term "perfect contingency" to describe the sense that addicted gamblers have of a perfect alignment between their actions and the machine's response. They prefer "sameness, repetition, rhythm, and routine."<sup>107</sup> Slot machines and video poker are the most popular gambling formats. As gamblers develop a tolerance for the technology (stimulus shield), the games become faster and more complex. For instance, in video poker, Triple Play Draw Poker allows players to play three games at once and make three times as many bets. Triple Play has given way to Five Play, Ten Play, Fifty Play, and even Hundred Play Poker.

Video game addicts too desire to merge with the machine, to achieve communion with it. In *God in the Machine: Video Games as Spiritual Pursuit*, Liel Leibovitz, himself a video game player, describes how reflex replaces cognitive awareness the greater one's skill and mastery becomes. His experience is mainly with the World of Zelda. Repetition is the foundation of play, from the "ballet of thumbs" to returning to the same play section without stop and with little if any variation. The spiritual pursuit that Leibovitz claims is the deeper rationale for playing video games is ecstasy. If ecstatic religion is a legitimate category of religion, then video games are a subcategory. In defense of his interpretation, Leibovitz argues that video games teach one the joy of learning to love the game and designer above all, of giving up "all other ways of

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<sup>105</sup> J. H. van den Berg, *The Changing Nature of Man*. Trans. H. F. Croes (New York: Norton, 1961).

<sup>106</sup> Schull, *Addiction by Design*, 1-27.

<sup>107</sup> Schull, *Addiction by Design*, chapter 6.

being in the world” and of “understanding one’s place in the world.”<sup>108</sup> He calls this a kind of Augustinian condition. I am not arguing that his interpretation is correct but only that he points out how seriously we should take the pursuit of ecstasy through our technologies.

The social media are not ostensibly about communion with a machine but with other people. We must remember, however, that every technology that permits us to communicate with others mediates the relationship. Social media “addicts” appear to spend less time servicing their addiction than do gambling and video game addicts. Nonetheless, a large number of social media users admit that they cannot give up their devices, if only for a day. In the smartphone industry, it is commonly thought that people check their phones at least 150 times a day. Some are even bedeviled by phantom ringing or vibrating phones. One third of Americans claim they would rather give up sex than their cell phones. But is this really about communion with others and creating a community?

In *Alone Together*, Sherry Turkle discovers that the community of one’s friends, say, on Facebook, is both fragile and enslaving. On social media, people are role players, presenting a self to others that will be most accepted and admired. The relationships established in social media networks are purely aesthetic and superficial. Only face-to-face moral relationships are deep and truly passionate, Kierkegaard has noted. Indeed, the more time one spends on Facebook, the more lonely one feels. Turkle observes that many young people prefer texting someone to talking to her. The reason is that a call involves more commitment than a text. A call could prove unpleasant and demanding.<sup>109</sup>

The social media intensify the urge to conform to the group. Turkle discovered that some young people believe that everything they do in public will end up on Facebook or its equivalent. This leads to “anticipatory conformity.” She also claims that the social media are producing “group feelings,” or ecstatic communion.<sup>110</sup> Elias Canetti terms a group that becomes a unified whole the “open crowd,” the truest expression of the crowd phenomenon.<sup>111</sup> Within the open crowd there is a sense of absolute equality, because all divisions among people are momentarily obliterated. The ecstasy that ensues from the use of the social media is not communion that establishes a community, but communion that creates an open crowd, always poised to become a mob. There is no freedom and love in the crowd. Because they wear the mask of love, the social media are the most pernicious of the addicting technologies.

Because we internalize technological stimuli (stimulus shield), we develop a tolerance for them and demand that they be even more intense. This is a classic problem in the acceleration of addiction. The technology industry is accommodating; it designs these technologies to be ever more addictive.

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<sup>108</sup> Liel Leibovitz, *God in the Machine* (Conshohocken: Templeton, 2013), 125.

<sup>109</sup> Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), chapter 10.

<sup>110</sup> Turkle, *Alone Together*, 262, 177.

<sup>111</sup> Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*. Trans. Victor Gollancz (New York: Seabird, 1978), 16-17.

Those who design information and communication technologies and technological products design them to be addictive. In *Hooked*, Nir Eyal discusses in detail how to make products habit-forming.<sup>112</sup> The author has a background in the video game industry and advertising and has taught courses on applied consumer psychology at the Stanford Graduate School of Business. His book is a manual on how to make technologies and products attractive and addictive. He makes no pretense that it is not about manipulating the consumer.

In his model of how to “hook” the consumer, the “trigger” is what sets the behavior in motion. “External triggers” contain information with directions about what to do next. Advertising and word of mouth can motivate the consumer to require a new app for her smartphone, for example. Eyal maintains that the key to creating addiction is the “internal trigger.” Associating a product with desire or fear appears to be the supreme internal trigger. The strongest emotional triggers are visual images. Eyal mentions that the internal trigger for Facebook is the fear of missing out, and, for Instagram, the fear of losing a special moment. The design of variable rewards is essential. Research has indicated that the anticipation of a reward, rather than the reward itself, motivates users. One receives a reward on occasion but not constantly. Those cherished images of family and friends are received only intermittently.

In *Addiction by Design*, Natasha Schull explores in great detail how the machine-gambling industry probes the psyche of the addict as an aid in designing gambling machines. Addicted gamblers want to play multiple hands or games as rapidly as possible without interruption. Variable rewards are built into the software of the machine to increase with the frequency of the smaller separate bets that gamblers prefer to make. Gamblers can thus enter “the zone” more quickly and stay there longer. Video game designers use a similar psychology to make their games more addictive.

We have entered a new phase of technological progress, in which there is a conscious effort to make us addicted to technology. This is nothing less than an intentional technological totalitarianism. Early on, we were only dimly aware of the totalitarian nature of the technological system. The technological system has now reached a stage in which experts openly discuss the desirability of the total psychological control of humans. Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* almost perfectly anticipates today’s technological totalitarianism. In his 1932 novel, Huxley talks about “conscriptio[n] by consumption.”<sup>113</sup> We are free, but only as consumers. In his dystopia, freedom is redefined as happiness. In this society, moral relationships are prohibited—no families or close friends—but only transitory, aesthetical ones. Perhaps his most brilliant insight was that pleasure was the chief agent of control. Sex, “soma” (an all-purpose drug for any psychological discomfort), and “the feelies” (cinema with full sensory stimuli) were the main obligatory pleasures. Huxley saw that group therapy would reinforce the controls technicians had established. Are we not in a brave new world with all our pharmaceuticals, self-help

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<sup>112</sup> Nir Eyal, *Hooked* (New York: Penguin, 2014).

<sup>113</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1932), 33.

groups, social media, advertising, public relations, propaganda, experts on every aspect of life, culture reduced to its lowest level—entertainment—and widespread family dissolution?

What does addiction tell us about individual and corporate sin? Addiction takes possession to its zenith. Slavery and alienation both entail possession but not to the same extent. The metaphor of addiction demonstrates as well that pleasure is the key to sin's control over us. We love our sin. Addiction reveals the accelerating nature of sin: it is dynamic. We quickly sink deeper into sin. Finally, addiction reveals the totalitarian nature of sin. Sin wants all of us, all the time. These ideas are explicit or implicit in scripture but not in the form of a single metaphor if only because addiction as we know it did not exist then.

Earlier I suggested that a metaphor makes us reflect on the better-known term, not just the lesser-known term. "Sin as slavery" tells us how the institution of slavery takes away our freedom or enslaves us. "Sin as alienation" informs us how industrialized capitalism strips away our freedom or alienates us. "Sin as addiction" instructs us about how the technological system eliminates our freedom or makes us addicts. Each metaphor invites us to reflect on the specific ways that the world, as the place of sin, controls us.

My point is not that gambling, playing video games, and using social media are evil in themselves but rather that *exousia* are at work in our social institutions with the intent of turning us into idolators. In our world, idolatry is best understood as addiction to technology.

#### **About the Author**

Richard Stivers is Distinguished Professor of Sociology Emeritus, Illinois State University.

## **Review of Andre Vitalis, *The Uncertain Digital Revolution* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2016), 118pp.**

Jeff Shaw

Andre Vitalis is an emeritus professor at the University of Bordeaux, and his newest book, *The Uncertain Digital Revolution*, is one of many examinations of the impact that various technologies have had on the human condition and on contemporary society. Vitalis has also taught at the University of Nantes and the University of Rennes. He has been a consultant to the National Commission for Informatics and Civil Liberties, and to the Council of Europe, thus bringing the experience that he has gained in the classroom to the public forum. He brings an interdisciplinary approach to his work, and *The Uncertain Digital Revolution* presents the reader not only with his own thinking but also with ideas and suggestions from a number of philosophers who will certainly be familiar to readers of the *Ellul Forum*, such as Ivan Illich and Jurgen Habermas.

*The Uncertain Digital Revolution* is not a book about Ellul *per se*, but the book itself is an example of a style of inquiry that one finds in Ellul's work. Chapters such as "Security over Liberty" and "Digitalization and Revolution" give the reader an opportunity to engage with ideas from a scholar who has approached these important topics with the Ellulian dialectic at the forefront. Jacques Ellul himself is mentioned in the book, but this is Andre Vitalis's own evaluation of the digital phenomenon. Vitalis notes, "Ellul, known for his technical analyses, has always paid great attention to IT by progressively making successive evaluations as the phenomenon has advanced" (100). Vitalis takes this successive evaluation and continues with it, leading the study of this critical component of *technique* and advancing it in the same spirit as one would have found from Ellul or McLuhan.

A short book, *The Uncertain Digital Revolution* is highly recommended to Ellul scholars and those with an interest in his work, as well as to general readers. One will come away with an appreciation for the pros and cons of the rapid strides that digital technologies have had and continue to have in areas such as privacy and security. Andre Vitalis has written extensively on this topic, and I highly recommend his work to those seeking to think critically about the human condition in the twenty-first century.

#### **About the Author**

Jeff Shaw is Adjunct Professor in the humanities department at Salve Regina University in Newport, Rhode Island. He is the author of *Illusions of Freedom: Thomas Merton and Jacques Ellul on Technology and the Human Condition*, published by Wipf & Stock.

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For the Critique of Technological Civilization  
Jacques Ellul, November 29th, 1944. Official identity photo, Municipal Council of  
Bordeaux archives privees famille Ellul / © Jerome Ellul

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# Editorial

Jeff Shaw

Welcome to the 60th edition of the *Ellul Forum*. This issue addresses two topics central to Ellul's thought—dialectics, and the homogenization of much of society, and the human condition as well. Authors Kevin Garrison and Richard Kirkpatrick provide their views on these two important topics, and we invite your comments and responses in the form of additional articles for publication in future editions of the *Forum*. Perhaps these articles will provide readers with a framework for constructing their own arguments for presentation at the next IJES conference in 2018. Please mark your calendars for this event, which will take place June 28-30, 2018 at Regent College in Vancouver, Canada. Speakers will include Walter Brueggemann, Frederic Rognon, David Gill, and Iwan Russell-Jones. You will not want to miss this event, and we hope that it builds upon the enthusiasm generated at the Berkeley conference last year.

For more information about the conference, please go to [www.ellul.org](http://www.ellul.org). For registration information, go to <http://ellul-2018conference.weebly.com>. The cost is \$120 for regular registration and \$60 for student registration (includes banquet). The theme of the conference is "Jacques Ellul and the Bible: A Cross-Disciplinary Exploration."

Jacques Ellul is best known as one of the premier voices of the 20th century analyzing the emergence, characteristics, and challenges of the "technological society"—the growing and seemingly irresistible dominance of technological tools, processes, and values over the whole of life and the whole of the world. But the Bordeaux sociologist simultaneously produced almost as many works of biblical study and reflection as he did works of sociology. In these studies, Ellul delivered brilliantly creative insights as



well as provocative challenges to traditional theology. All serious students of Ellul, whether members of faith communities, like Ellul (in the French Reformed Church), or not, like his colleague and best friend Bernard Charbonneau, have found interaction with his theological writings an essential complement to the study of his great sociological works. This conference will seek a multi-perspectival hearing of scripture, stimulated by Ellul's works.

If you would like to submit a proposal for a presentation paper on Ellul's engagement with the bible, contact [dgill@ethixbiz.com](mailto:dgill@ethixbiz.com) by the first week of October.

Jeff Shaw, Managing Editor

## Jacques Ellul's Dialectical Theology: Embracing Contradictions about the Kingdom in the New Testament

Kevin Garrison

### ABSTRACT

Jacques Ellul frequently uses "dialectics" as a tool for biblical understanding. Though Ellul expounds on his idea of a "dialectical theology" at different moments in his large collection of works, he rarely gives a clear view of how and where dialectics are present in the New Testament, specifically as it relates to the idea of the "kingdom of heaven." In order to make Ellul's ideas about theology more accessible to people unfamiliar with dialectics, this article attempts to do four things: 1) *define* Ellul's idea of dialectics, 2) explore *why* dialectics are necessary for understanding the bible, 3) identify *where* several of these dialectics occur in the New Testament, and 4) explain *how* they are relevant to contemporary Christians and Ellulian scholars.

### INTRODUCTION

Most Christians reject the idea of contradictions in the bible, especially individuals from traditions that hold to the ideas of biblical literalism or the inerrancy of scripture.<sup>114</sup> The very word "contradiction" suggests that what God has spoken ("diction") has been refuted by oppositional statements ("contra"), and many Christians find it difficult to believe in a God who cannot provide a consistent narrative across multiple time periods and authors. However, an entire theological tradition exists which argues that there *are* contradictions in the bible and also attempts to understand how the paradoxes that emerge from those contradictions can enrich our understanding of theology. Called "dialectical theology," it is a tradition most often and most clearly associated with writings of Soren Kierkegaard, Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, and, most importantly for this essay, Jacques Ellul (1912-1992), the French sociologist most famous

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<sup>114</sup> Jacob Van Vleet, *Dialectical Theology and Jacques Ellul: An Introductory Exposition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016), 49.

for his books *The Technological Society*<sup>115</sup> and *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*.<sup>116</sup>

In this essay, I want to use Ellul's writings to provide both Christians and Ellulian scholars with a shorthand understanding of dialectical theology that can potentially challenge and enrich their readings of the bible, especially by looking at the New Testament idea of the "kingdom of heaven." For those interested in a much more detailed analysis of Ellul's dialectical theology, I recommend Jacob Van Vleet's 2016 publication *Dialectical Theology and Jacques Ellul*.<sup>117</sup> Or for those with time, the best source for understanding Ellul is to read Ellul himself. However, Ellul wrote more than 50 books in his lifetime and hundreds of articles, and more importantly, he rarely provides insights into his methods of inquiry—the so-called master keys that unlock the doors to the complexity of his thinking. As such, this essay is designed to accomplish several things: 1) *define* Ellul's idea of dialectics, 2) explore *why* contradictions and dialectics are necessary for understanding the New Testament, 3) share *where* several of these dialectics occur, and 4) explain *how* they are relevant for study. In the final section, I hope to share insights into how Ellul's dialectical theology has personally challenged my wife and me to re-think commonplaces in Christianity.

#### DIALECTICS

First, though, what is a dialectic? Dialectics has a rich philosophical history. In Greek philosophy, a dialectic is closely associated with a dialogue—a method of discovering truth as a group of individuals discuss, argue, and debate ideas. Plato's philosophy was expounded in written dialogues, such as his famous work the *Republic*,<sup>118</sup> where Socrates (via the Socratic method) attempted to serve as an intellectual gadfly who pestered the populace with questions designed to challenge them. More recently in 19th-century Germany, dialectics was re-envisioned as a method for discovering truth via a logical method. Called a Hegelian dialectic, truth emerges not from dialogue but from a thesis encountering an anti-thesis and then creating a synthesis that emerges from the two oppositions. Subsequent philosophers, such as Karl Marx and Soren Kierkegaard, used Hegel's dialectic to create entire philosophical systems that could be applied to even history itself. For instance, Marx's work in the *Communist Manifesto*<sup>119</sup> was heavily influenced by dialectics, and his idea of material dialectics argued that the working class would eventually rise against the ruling class in a dialectical struggle, and the end result would see progress in social history.

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<sup>115</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*. Trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Vintage Books, 1964).

<sup>116</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*. Trans. Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York: Vintage Books, 1965).

<sup>117</sup> Van Vleet, *Dialectical Theology and Jacques Ellul*.

<sup>118</sup> Plato, *Republic*. Trans. Benjamin Jowett (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2000).

<sup>119</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (New York: Vintage, 1998).

Garrison, Kevin. “Jacques Ellul’s Dialectical Theology: Embracing Contradictions about the Kingdom in the New Testament.” *Ellul Forum* 60 (2017): 3-10. © Kevin Garrison, CC BY-NC-SA.

Ellul was heavily influenced by Marx; he first read Marx at the age of 17, and he “plunged into Marx’s thinking with incredible joy.”<sup>120</sup> However, Ellul’s understanding of dialectics takes a radical departure from both Marx and most philosophical traditions. Two years after reading Marx, Ellul had a “very brutal and very sudden conversion”<sup>121</sup> to Christianity, and for the rest of his life he was unable to reconcile the two opposing systems: Christianity and Marxism. In fact, Ellul argues that his understanding of dialectics emerged from his struggle to be both a Christian and a Marxist. He writes that “I was sometimes torn between the two extremes, and sometimes reconciled; but I absolutely refused to abandon either one.”<sup>122</sup> This lived-world tension—how can one serve both Jesus and the man famous for claiming that religion was an opium?—heavily influenced Ellul’s writings. He frequently wrote sociological books that have a counterpart in theological books, such as *The Technological Society*,<sup>123</sup> which describes the problem of *technique*, and *The Ethics of Freedom*,<sup>124</sup> which describes potential responses.

What makes Ellul’s understanding of dialectics unique is that he thinks it is a mistake for a synthesis to always emerge out of a dialectical struggle. Instead, dialectics work best when the thesis and antithesis remain in tension, when someone claims two statements that cannot both be. Ellul writes of the “positivity of negativity”—that is, “if the positive remains alone, it remains unchanged: stable and inert. A positive—for example, an uncontested society, a force without counterforce, a man without dialogue, an unchallenged teacher, a church with no heretics, a single party with no rivals—will be shut up in the indefinite repetition of its own image.”<sup>125</sup> Saying “no” or introducing a “negation” into a positive will radically transform a situation via a subsequent dialectical struggle. Ellul rejects the idea of progress—that a synthesis must always emerge; simply challenging the positive with a negative will transform “the situation,”<sup>126</sup> and that is enough. The result of dialectics is to take contradictory statements and live out the tension rather than trying to resolve the contradiction with a synthesis.

Most importantly, Ellul used his understanding of dialectics to inform his understanding of biblical exegesis, building on the work of Karl Barth and Søren Kierkegaard’s exegetical methods. Ellul went so far as to claim that the “concept of

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<sup>120</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Perspectives on Our Age: Jacques Ellul Speaks On His Life and Work*. Ed. William H. Vanderburg; Trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Seabury, 1981), 5.

<sup>121</sup> Ellul, *Perspectives on Our Age*, 14.

<sup>122</sup> Ellul, *Perspectives on Our Age*, 15.

<sup>123</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*.

<sup>124</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom*. Trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976).

<sup>125</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Jacques Ellul: Interpretative Essays*. Ed. Clifford Christians and Jay Van Hook (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 295.

<sup>126</sup> Ellul, *Jacques Ellul: Interpretative Essays*, 296.

contradiction [without synthesis] is specifically a biblical concept.”<sup>127</sup> Most Christians already assume some level of dialectical thought. Consider one of the more common examples: the *Incarnation*. The Incarnation is a contradiction that remains in an unresolved dialectical tension: how can Jesus, who became human, still be God? As the Nicene Creed states, Jesus is both “very God of very God” but also “was made man.”<sup>128</sup> The tension is necessary, however. To claim Jesus as only God would place him in the realm of the transcendent. To claim Jesus as only man would place him as unable to answer the problem of human sin—how can a man, alone, undo what Adam’s transgression did, without that man also being divine? The two images together give a fuller perspective of the infinite range of God.

When consistently applied to the bible, dialectics (as a method of interpretation) transforms Christianity from questions of orthodoxy (i.e., the correct interpretation) to a series of personal challenges to the church. It is worth quoting Ellul at length. He writes that a biblical dialectic “makes man’s relation to God not a repetition, a fixity, a ritual, a scrupulous submission, but a permanent invention, a new creation of the one with the other, a challenge, a love affair, an adventure whose outcome can never be known in advance.”<sup>129</sup> With this passage, Ellul brings back the mystery of God. The miraculous. The tension. The challenges. The impossibilities. Paul Tillich in his article on dialectical theology argues that a better term is “paradoxical” rather than “dialectical,”<sup>130</sup> but the end result is largely the same: dialectics and paradoxes embrace contradictions and tensions in the bible rather than looking for logical reconciliation. The resulting dialectical struggle pits one idea against a competing idea for the sake of freedom, truth, understanding, and faith.

#### CONTRADICTIONS

The “inerrancy of scripture” and “biblical literalism” traditions have heavily influenced modern biblical exegesis; therefore, before looking at several examples of biblical dialectics, it would be worthwhile to establish why the fear of biblical contradictions is unfounded.

First, to claim that the bible can have no contradictions provides a *logical* standard of measurement that the bible itself does not suggest. Theology—the *logos* or logic of God—assumes that we can understand God logically. However, logic is a human creation, not a biblical interpretation standard. That is, the law of non-contradiction states that if A is equal to B, then to claim that A is also NOT equal to B would be a logical contradiction. In our lived-world experiences, the law of non-contradiction is a necessity, for contradictions are called dishonesty, equivocation, lying, or deception. Humans cannot state, simultaneously, things such as, “Please close the door. Don’t close the door,” without causing inconsistencies in communication.

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<sup>127</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*. Trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 253.

<sup>128</sup> Nicene Creed, <https://www.ccel.org/creeds/nicene.creed.html>.

<sup>129</sup> Ellul, *Jacques Ellul: Interpretative Essays*, 299.

<sup>130</sup> Paul Tillich, “What is Wrong with the ‘Dialectical’ Theology?” *Journal of Religion* 15.2 (1935):

However, this does not mean that God himself adheres to the law of non-contradiction. Isaiah tells us that God's "thoughts are not your thoughts," (Isa. 55:8),<sup>131</sup> a claim that C. S. Lewis replicates when he claims that Aslan isn't a "tame lion."<sup>132</sup> Similarly, Peter wrote that "with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day" (2 Pet. 3:8). Human logic does not necessarily apply to God. Therefore, when we encounter biblical "tension," Ellul argues that we should not search for a way to relax it and "add words aiming at a *logical* reconciliation,"<sup>133</sup> because the bible is "paradox" and "mystery," not "*logical*, organized thought."<sup>134</sup> If anything, we should expect that a God who miraculously inserts himself into history via the person of Jesus would far surpass any attempt to place him into the finite (and logical) mind of humans.

Secondly, analyzing contradictions via dialectical theology does not mean that we get bogged down in questions of scientific and historical accuracy, such as debating the discrepancies among the gospels regarding Jesus' death and resurrection. Instead, dialectical theology exhibits a concern for a *big-picture* interpretation of the bible. For Ellul, the Old and New Testaments are not primarily history, science, literature, a morality, or a book of wisdom. Rather, the bible is a challenge to its readers. The bible is unified by writers who record moments when God speaks and then narrate how those words work to reshape individuals and societies. The bible, from the early patriarchs to the judges to the kings to the prophets to the arrival of Jesus (God's word made flesh), shares how ordinary people encounter the word of God and then are changed, oftentimes radically. Genesis begins with God speaking the world into existence. Adam encounters God's voice in a garden, Moses encounters it in a flame, and Elijah in a still voice on the wind. Ezekiel hears it as rushing waters, Job experiences it as a thunderous roar, and Jesus begins his ministry after experiencing the voice of God in the form of a dove. For Ellul, it matters little how accurate the historical details are, or the representation of scientific knowledge. Rather, what matters is that the bible shares God speaking and humans responding. Today, when we read the bible, we participate in the tradition of the feast of tabernacles (Deut. 31:10-11) where we hear the word of God being spoken again. And again. And those words are then allowed to work on individuals and groups of individuals to change them, *regardless* of the historical accuracy of the claims.

Thirdly, the bible frequently *does* contradict itself. In fact, several contradictions define the Christian life and are taught in the modern church: the Incarnation (Is Jesus man, or God?), the Trinity (How can God be both one and three?), the process of salvation (Is it faith, or works?), living in the world (How does the Christian live

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127-45.

<sup>131</sup> All biblical quotations are from the New International Version.

<sup>132</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (New York: Collier, 1980), 180.

<sup>133</sup> Jacques Ellul, *What I Believe*. Trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 38. Emphasis added.

<sup>134</sup> Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 25. Emphasis added.

in the world, but not be part of the world?), prayer (Are we supposed to pray, or does the Spirit intercede?) and so on. Or consider another simple example: Jesus is described both as the “lion of the tribe of Judah” and as a “sacrificial lamb.” These metaphors provide us with competing images. A lion is a predator; a lamb is the prey. A lion is wild and untamed; a lamb is an agricultural product, subservient to human needs. A lion is powerful; a lamb is powerless. A lion is the king of beasts; a lamb is used in sacrifices. To describe Jesus in these two competing images provides us with an irreconcilable problem: Which is it? For Ellul, the answer is always: both.

**A DIALECTICAL KINGDOM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

In this section, I would like to focus on a single dialectic that is shared in the New Testament: the idea of the *kingdom of heaven*. As we’ll see, the New Testament embraces several contradictory views of 1) the kingdom, 2) the kingdom’s subjects, 3) the King, and 4) the King’s return. As seen below, in Table 1, dialectical theology embraces these contradictory images, recognizing (as the circle implies) that we can never rest in one interpretation over the other. In the four subsequent sections we will explore each of these four contradictions, and in the conclusion I will share a personal example of how we can utilize these contradictory images to re-think our day-to-day experiences.

<b>New Testament Contradictions</b>	<b>Interpretation 1</b>	<b>Interpretation 2</b>
<b>1) Views of the Kingdom</b>	Absence: Near	Presence: Here
<b>2) Views of the Kingdom’s Subjects</b>	Limited Salvation	Absence: Near
<b>3) Views of the King</b>	God as Judge: Lion	Absence: Near
<b>4) Views of the King’s Return</b>	Not Yet	Absence: Near

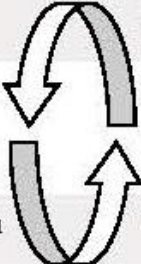


Table 1: Dialectical Interpretation of the Kingdom of Heaven

New Testament Contradictions	Interpretation 1	Interpretation 2
1) <i>Views of the Kingdom</i>	Absence: Near	Presence: Here
2) <i>Views of the Kingdom's Subjects</i>	Limited Salvation	Absence: Near
3) <i>Views of the King</i>	God as Judge: Lion	Absence: Near
4) <i>Views of the King's Return</i>	Not Yet	Absence: Near

### 1) Conflicting Views of the Kingdom

Ellul begins his discussion of Christianity in *The Presence of the Kingdom*<sup>135</sup> where Jesus began his preaching: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near” (Matt. 4:17). Most of Jesus’ messages, sermons, parables, teachings, and prayers include a discussion about this kingdom. The Sermon on the Mount begins with the kingdom belonging to the poor in spirit and the persecuted. The Lord’s Prayer invokes the coming of the kingdom. The 12 disciples are called to preach that the kingdom of heaven is near. The disciples quarrel about who is greatest in the kingdom. The parables begin with the injunction of “the kingdom of heaven is like . . .” The end of the age is equated with the nearness of the kingdom. Jesus is called the king of the Jews.

What are we to make of this overwhelming discussion of a kingdom? The searchers for the “historical Jesus,” such as James Tabor,<sup>136</sup> understand the prevalence of the word “kingdom” by arguing that Jesus and John the Baptist were partners in the insurrection that would overthrow the earthly kingdom of the Romans. But this is too simple, for Jesus claims that his kingdom is not of this world. Or, also according to the proponents of the “historical Jesus,” perhaps the abundant mentioning of the kingdom is just an editorial preference of its authors. But again, this is insufficient as an explanation, because all four gospels contain frequent discussions of the kingdom—even John’s gospel, the one most in opposition to the other three, tells Nicodemus that he must “see” (John 3:3) and “enter” (John 3:5) the kingdom of God by being born again. And most damaging to the “historical Jesus” claims comes from the fact that in the descriptions of the devil’s temptation of Jesus, the devil offers “all the kingdoms of the world” (Matt. 4:8), and Jesus, if his mission was to re-take the kingdom for Israel, ironically refuses to take these kingdoms. And he does this *prior* to beginning his ministry. If Jesus’ goal was to simply overthrow the Roman empire, then he should have accepted the devil’s gift and saved himself months of persecution and eventually death.

So what, then, is this kingdom? Of primary importance, as already stated, is that Jesus begins his ministry in opposition to the kingdoms of the world. Before he preaches

<sup>135</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom*. Trans. Olive Wyon (Colorado Springs: Helmers and Howard, 1989).

<sup>136</sup> James Tabor, *The Jesus Dynasty* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006).

the nearness of *his* kingdom, he rejects outright the offer from devil to take authority and command over all of the *earthly* kingdoms. As Ellul says, “When Satan promises Jesus that he will give him these kingdoms, he is not lying. He can do so. He is the prince of this world. While it is true that all authority comes from God, it is also true that every manifestation of power is an expression of the might of Satan.”<sup>137</sup> The kingdom of heaven is “not of this world” (John 18:36). If it was, then Jesus would have taken the offer from Satan and become the king of our current cities, governments, peoples, nations, empires, and rulers. But he doesn’t.

More importantly, the kingdom is described exclusively in similes in the parables. The kingdom of heaven is *like* a mustard seed. The kingdom of heaven is *like* a treasure hidden in a field. The kingdom of heaven is *like* a net that was let down into a lake and caught all kinds of fish. Jesus does not give clear and precise descriptions of what the kingdom looks like, as if this kingdom could be described literally. This is important, for Jesus has already established a clear break of his kingdom from the world’s kingdoms, and to then give a precise definition of his kingdom in terms of human language would be to equate the kingdom to *this* world—the very thing he has rejected. So figurative language is the only recourse, the only way to describe heaven’s kingdom while still connecting to our lived-world experiences.

But perhaps most intriguing about the kingdom is how it is set in terms of an opposition, a dialectic of *absence* and *presence* (see Table 1). The kingdom is sometimes “near” (Matt. 4:17), and other times it is “in your midst” (Luke 17:21). It is sometimes something people should “seek” (Matt. 6:33), and other times it is something the disciples will “see” (Matt. 16:28). It is sometimes something to “enter” (Matt. 18:3), and other times it is “upon you” (Luke 11:20). Ellul bases most of his understanding of the New Testament on this dialectic, where “the whole deployment of the existence of the people of God (the church) and individual Christians is dialectic in the constant renewal of promise and fulfillment. The kingdom

of heaven is among you, in the midst of you, or in you, but it will also come at the end of the age.”<sup>138</sup>

## 2) Conflicting Views of the Kingdom’s Subjects

A similar dialectic is revealed when attempting to determine *who* is a member of the kingdom of heaven: is the kingdom inclusive, or exclusive? *Universal* to all, or *limited* to some (see Table 1)? And how is a subject supposed to enter the kingdom—via human choice, or the grace of God?

Consider the question of choice. In Acts, Peter pleads with the crowd to “save themselves” (Acts 2:40) and 3,000 individuals “accepted his message” (Acts 2:41). But just a few sentences later, Luke claims that “the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). These passages present an obvious tension: Who is in charge of salvation? Is it God who adds to the numbers, or is it the people

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<sup>137</sup> Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom*, 55.

<sup>138</sup> Ellul, *What I Believe*, 38.



who are commanded to save themselves? And later, Acts 10:44 states that “The Holy Spirit came on all who heard,” and then, only three verses later, claims that “They have received the Holy Spirit” (Acts 10:47). Again, the contrast is to be noted. Who is in control—the person, or the Spirit? The verb “came” suggests that salvation is an act of God, freely chosen in relationship to his people, offered as a gift. The verb “received” implies a human action, freely chosen *in spite* of the gift.

More importantly, the bible suggests two possibilities in regard to who will be saved: the all, or the few. The verses in support of *universal salvation* are numerous, and Ellul was a proponent of universal salvation. God is “all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28). “Every knee shall bow” (Rom. 14:11). Jesus died “once for all” (Rom. 6:10). But the verses that support *limited salvation* are just as numerous. “The one who believes in me will live” (John 11:25). Only “those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Rev. 21:27) will enter the New Jerusalem. When Jesus is asked, “Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?” (Luke 13:22), he replies that many “will try to enter and will not be able to” (Luke 13:24).

M. Eugene Boring makes the tension between universal and limited salvation clear in his essay “The Language of Universal Salvation in Paul.”<sup>139</sup> All the numerous attempts to rationalize Paul’s thinking about salvation have largely failed. It is impossible to reconcile the fact that Paul thought dualistically, with competing images about the work of Christ. As he writes, “Paul has statements of conditional, limited salvation, and statements of unconditional, universal salvation. Neither of these can be reduced to the other. Neither is what he ‘really’ thought. Neither should be subordinated to the other.”<sup>140</sup>

### 3) Conflicting Views of the King

The messages surrounding God and his expressions—the Spirit and the Son—are similarly confusing. Who is God? Who is the King? Who is the one that Christians worship, pray to, bow down to, and accept as Lord?

The simple answer is that, from a dialectical perspective, we don’t know. Our images are juxtaposed. We have already discussed the confusion about Christ as a lion and a lamb and the confusion of Jesus as a man or as the son of God (the Incarnation). Yet consider another—Jesus claims that he has not “come to bring peace to the earth,” but a “sword” (Matt. 10:34), yet the Messiah is also called the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6), and Paul calls us to “let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts” (Col. 3:15). How can Christ be both a peace-bringer and peace-destroyer? How can the one who brings salvation also bring an instrument for *war* and *destruction*?

Consider yet another tension. Should God be worshiped as one who is to be loved, or as one who is to be feared? The bible tells us: both. The early church in Acts was “God-fearing” (Acts 9:31), and the source of motivation for preaching the gospel comes

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<sup>139</sup> M. Eugene Boring, “The Language of Universal Salvation in Paul.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105.2 (1986): 269-92.

<sup>140</sup> Boring, “The Language of Universal Salvation in Paul,” 291.

when Christians “fear the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:11). Yet we also know that God is love, and that “love drives out fear” (1 John 4:18). Such makes no sense. How can one both *fear* God AND *love* him simultaneously?

There is no easy way to reconcile these competing images of Christ. As Boring makes clear, Paul himself is largely inconsistent in providing a single image of God and his work. As previously discussed regarding universal or limited salvation, the only clear way to reconcile the disparate views of Christ is to recognize that there are multiple, competing images of who God is. For Boring, in one view, God is viewed as *Judge*—the one who places responsibility on humans, who judges action and inaction, commands Christians to minister, share the good news, and to act in accordance with the Spirit rather than human nature. In the other view, God is viewed as *King*—the one who places responsibility on himself to save, gives grace freely, and completes the whole of salvation through the death of Christ (see Table 1).

These competing views, though, are quite necessary. Boring writes that

the limited salvation statements proceed from, and conjure up, the image of *God-the-judge* and its corollary, human responsibility. Without these statements, the affirmation of universal salvation could only be heard as a fate; evangelism loses something of its urgency, and Paul’s hecklers would be justified in saying that we can and even should go on sinning because it magnifies God’s grace (see Rom. 3:5-8, 6:1). The universal-salvation statements proceed from, and conjure up, the image of *God-the-king*, who finally extends his de jure gracious reign de facto to include all his creation. Without these statements, Paul’s affirmations of a salvation limited to Christian believers must be heard as affirming a frustrated God who brought all creation into being but despite his best efforts could only salvage some of it, and as claiming that it does not ultimately matter that Christ has come to the world if the apostle or evangelist does not get the message announced to every individual.<sup>141</sup>

Essentially, these two conflicting views—God-as-Judge and God-as-King—do not need to be reconciled, leastwise not logically. Neither should the other conflicting views of God-as-Lion vs. God-as-Lamb, or God-as-Peace-Destroyer vs. God-as-Peace-Bringer, or God-as-Feared vs. God-as-Love, or God-as-Man vs. God-as-God.

#### 4) Conflicting Views of the King’s Return

A final dialectic emerges with the question of *when* Jesus will return to set up his kingdom: Has it happened *already*, or *not yet* (see Table 1)?

Perhaps most intriguing is the passage from Luke 21. The disciples are curious about the “end times.” They want to know what the signs will be before the temple is dismantled. Jesus goes on an extended narrative of well-known apocalyptic situations—wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, pestilences, fearful events, great signs from heaven, persecutions, men will faint from terror, the heavenly bodies will be shaken. These fearful events are not left unresolved, however. Jesus immediately calms them by saying that “when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom

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<sup>141</sup> Boring, “The Language of Universal Salvation in Paul,” 291. Emphasis added.

of God is near” (Luke 21:31). Such is an ironic statement: after the signs have been fulfilled, the message of Jesus hasn’t changed—the kingdom is near. Such flies in the face of most apocalyptic interpretations which favor a time period breakdown (i.e., dispensationalism, or premillennialism, or postmillennialism). After all the signs have been fulfilled, we return to the beginning, the first message, the first claim of Jesus that “the kingdom is near.” We don’t hear the reassurance of the rapture message. We don’t hear that the antichrist has been born. We simply return to what is already known.

Ellul refers to the tension between the presence/absence of the kingdom as the tension between the “already and the not-yet.” Building on George Eldon Ladd’s<sup>142</sup> work on inaugurated eschatology, Ellul argues that the “end times” have *already* happened, but are *not yet* fulfilled.

Consider the first part—the *already*. We are *already* “seated” in “the heavenly realms in Jesus Christ” (Eph. 2:6). *Already*, we “have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly.... You have

come to God” (Heb. 12:2). *Already*, there are many antichrists and the spirit of lawlessness is already at work. *Already*, we are in “the presence of God” and “in view of his appearing and his kingdom” (2 Tim. 4:1). *Already*, Christ has come, for “if we love . . . God lives in us” (1 John 4:12).

However, the verses that support the *not yet* are just as numerous. We are *not yet* to be “easily unsettled or alarmed” by reports that “the day of the Lord has already come” (2 Thes. 2:2). *Not yet*, for in “just a very little while, ‘He who is coming will come and will not delay’” (Heb. 10:37). *Not yet*, for we must “be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord’s coming” as “the Judge is standing at the door!” (Jas. 5:7, 9). *Not yet*, for we are commanded to “look forward to the day of God and speed its coming” where “we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth” (2 Pet. 3:12, 13).

Furthermore, in eschatology, we see a tension between the already and the not yet in terms of Christians’ new and old bodies. *Already*, “he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy” (Heb. 10:14), but not yet, for I have not “already been made perfect” (Phil. 3:12). *Already*, anyone in Christ is “a new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17), but *not yet*, for “what we will be has not yet been made known” (1 John 4:4). *Already*, “you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26), but *not yet*, for “we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons” (Rom. 8:23). *Already*, “in him, we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21), but *not yet*, for “we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope” (Gal. 5:5). *Already*, “you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ” (Gal. 3:27), but *not yet*, for “meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling” (2 Cor. 5:2). *Already*, we are transformed by “the renewing of our minds” (Rom. 12:2), but *not yet*, for Christ

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<sup>142</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974).

“will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body” (Phil. 3:21). *Already*, “you will come to understand fully” (2 Cor. 1:14), but *not yet*, for only “then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (1 Cor. 13:12).

Therefore, the most common interpretations of the “end times” don’t quite stand up to scrutiny—the typical view of such famous series like *Left Behind* ignore the complexities of the text—yes, there is a rapture; yes, there is a tribulation; yes, there is a millennial reign; and yes, there is a judgment. But how? Are these claims literal or metaphorical? And when? Will the return of the king happen soon or in the distant future? These questions tend to lose some of their importance when juxtaposed against the other half of the scriptures—that Jesus has *already* inserted himself in human history, brought access to the kingdom, provided new bodies, clothed people in righteousness, and taken them to heaven to be seated next to him. But then we look around us and realize: but *not yet*.

Conclusion: Dialectical Theology in Practice, Living the Contradiction

When we read the bible dialectically, we should feel somewhat dismayed. I frequently do. Such also explains why reading Ellul, as David Gill writes, “may infuriate you.”<sup>143</sup> Very little about the Christian life makes easy and *logical* sense upon close examination. So what to do? Why are these dialectics important?

To answer this question, let us recall the story of Abraham—specifically, the moment at which he becomes the “man of faith” (Gal. 3:9)—when he decides to sacrifice his son. This moment is discussed at length by Søren Kierkegaard in his 1843 book *Fear and Trembling*.<sup>144</sup> Abraham is told to leave his family and go to the land of Canaan. God promises Abraham that, “To your offspring I will give this land” (Gen. 12:7). Through the years, God continually reaffirms his promise that he will be given a child through Sarah. And then, after Abraham is 100 years of age, the promise finally comes true, and Isaac is born.

And then, the *absurd* happens. God commands Abraham to sacrifice Isaac as a burnt offering. God has, in the previous chapter, told Abraham that it is Isaac who fulfills the covenant between God and Abraham—it is Isaac who will become a great nation. And now, Isaac shall die. God has, in all human logic, *contradicted* himself. Isaac, as dead, cannot fulfill God’s promise, yet Abraham does the most unexpected thing of all: he doesn’t argue, question, or attempt to rationalize the command (as anyone in the 21st century would—anyone who has killed their children and blamed it on “God told me so” is rightly labeled “insane”). Instead, he does the exact opposite. He gets up early the next morning (as if killing his son is something that cannot wait), travels for three days (who among us would drive for three days to kill our child?), and tells his son that God will provide the lamb (effectively, he lies to his child). And he even goes to the extreme measure of actually reaching for the knife before the angel intervenes and gives a ram in Isaac’s stead. The absurdity of this story cannot be articulated with

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<sup>143</sup> David Gill, “Jacques Ellul: The Prophet as Theologian.” *Themelios* 7.1 (1981): 4-14.

<sup>144</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, Trans. Walter Lowrie (Radford, VA: Wilder, 2008).

any clarity. It is impossible to ponder a man's killing his own child—especially a child of God's promise—without any questioning or back-talking or rationalizing or crying. Yet the author of James tells us that at that moment, the “scripture was fulfilled,” because “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness” (Jas. 2:23).

For Ellul and dialectical theology, such is the only choice that we have available to us. When God doesn't make sense, do we dumb down the message, ignore part of his words, and attempt to make it accessible to all? Or do we accept the contradictions as are, embrace them, and believe God against everything that makes sense? The subsequent dialectical struggle reveals truth in a way that resolving the tension does not.

Consider a personal example of a dialectical struggle that emerged from reading the New Testament: the question of *tithing*. We know that it is “hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19:23). But such prompts the question of how much money a person should give in order to enter the kingdom: some, or all?

On the one hand, the bible often claims that we should give *all* we have. Jesus tells the rich man, “You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me” (Luke 18:22). Or when the poor widow places two copper coins into the temple treasury, Jesus praises her, saying, “She, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on” (Mark 12:44). Or in another example, both Ananias and Sapphira are killed for withholding from the church part of the sale of a piece of property. On the other hand, we simply *cannot* give everything we have. Timothy says that “anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim. 5:8). Or Paul says that “the one who is unwilling to work shall not eat” (2 Thes. 3:10). Or Timothy commands “those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth” (1 Tim. 6:17), but not to stop being rich.

These two competing images about money and possessions—give all, keep some—serve as a dialectic that offers us a truth that the two images, alone, cannot. Specifically, it reveals a challenge to transcend the power of money. Ellul claims in *Money and Power* that the “Christian attitude toward the power of money is what we will call ‘*profanation*.’ To profane money, like all other powers, is to take away its sacred character,”<sup>145</sup> and we do that via the act of *giving*. That is, if money is ultimately an earthly expression of power—power over people, power over objects, power over worrying about the future—then the biblical dialectic suggests that we transcend that power by giving it away. Ellul claims that giving is “one act par excellence which profanes money by going directly against the law of money, an act for which money is

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<sup>145</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Power and Money*. Trans. LaVonne Neff (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), 109. Emphasis in the original.

not made.”<sup>146</sup> Giving keeps us from the love of money, from greed, from an abundance of possessions, from treasure on earth. When we give, we establish that the power of money does not hold sway over us. The extreme, then, of giving everything completely eliminates its power, though we fully recognize that we also need money to live, to eat, to sleep.

For my wife and me, this dialectic has been quite freeing and challenging, both. During the early part of our marriage, we focused on what most Christians focus on: tithing ten percent of our income, which provided us with an easy number to apply, and it matched up with the Old Testament calls for the firstfruits to be offered to the priests. However, the challenge of the New Testament is to give as a way to desacralize money, to dethrone it as an earthly power, to recognize that money is not a part of the kingdom of heaven. Tithing is one way of diminishing money’s power, but tithing can easily subvert the message of the bible by focusing on giving as a commandment rather than giving as a way of demonstrating love for others. That is, it became too easy for us to claim: We gave our ten percent to the church this month, thus we did the right thing, rather than carefully attending to the power of money in our lives. Each month, now, we are *challenged* to seek out new ways to give and share our worldly possessions with others, not just with the church but with everyone who is in need. Each month is a resultant Ellulian dialectical tension: an invention, a creation, a challenge, an affair, an adventure.

The only way to respond to the dialectical tensions of the bible is by living them out—much like Abraham did. Much like my wife and I have tried to do. Much like Ellul tried to do. Just as Abraham is the man of faith, so must Christians be. Faith is the living out of the contradictions. Faith is claiming the *already* in the face of the *not yet*—claiming the unseen over the seen. Christians must always act as if everything depends upon them—the kingdom of heaven is near, the Judge is at the door, the human is called to action, the ambassador of Christ is on the move, and Christians must always be advancing toward the kingdom that cannot be seen, toward a work that is never complete, and toward a God that is to be feared. But Christians must never forget that while they must act as if salvation depends upon them, they must remember also: Christ has already come, his work is complete, “it is all finished,”<sup>147</sup> the kingdom is already upon them, they have already been saved by his death, they can rest in heavenly places, knowing that the King of love has given people freedom, hope, and eternal security.

But, not yet.

About the Author

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<sup>146</sup> Ellul, *Power and Money*, 110.

<sup>147</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Politics of God and The Politics of Man*. Trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley

## Social Propaganda and Trademarks

Richard L. Kirkpatrick

Trademarks are pillars of social propaganda and the technical system. In his vast body of work, Jacques Ellul seems not to have analyzed trademarks as such, but he did discuss at length commercial advertising—"the driving force," he said, of the technical system.<sup>148</sup> Trademarks *are* advertising and the prime features *of* advertising,<sup>149</sup> so Ellul's discourse on the one illuminates the other.

First, Ellul distinguishes "social propaganda" from "vertical propaganda." The latter is mere deliberate agitation by demagogues, all too familiar a phenomenon. Social propaganda is, however, according to Ellul, "much more subtle and complex." "Stabilizing and unifying," it is an integrative propaganda of conformity "made *inside* the group (not from the top)." It "springs up spontaneously; it is essentially diffuse;

it is based on a general climate, an atmosphere that influences people imperceptibly without having the appearance of propaganda; it gets to man through his customs, through his most unconscious habits. It creates new habits in him; it is a sort of persuasion from within. As a result, man adopts new criteria of judgment and choice, adopts them spontaneously, as if he had chosen them himself. But all these criteria are in conformity with the environment and are essentially of a collective nature. Sociological propaganda produces a progressive adaptation to a certain order of things, a certain concept of human relations, which unconsciously molds individuals and makes them conform to society.<sup>150</sup>

Every word of this description applies to trademarks, as shown below. Social propaganda also has an "alienation" effect that paradoxically complements its integrative function towards the same end, "reinforcing the individual's inclination to lose himself in something bigger than he is, to dissipate his individuality, to free his ego of all doubt, conflict, and suffering—through fusion with others . . . blending with a large group . . . in an exceptionally easy and satisfying fashion. . . . [Propaganda] pushes the individual into the mass until he disappears entirely."<sup>151</sup> In sum, social propaganda is "total" and induces in people unforced conformity or habituation by tranquilizing emotional effects.

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(Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 192.

<sup>148</sup> E.g., Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*. Trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), ch. 18, "Advertising." See p. 349.

<sup>149</sup> *Gilson on Trademarks* 1:03[4] ("The trademark owner ordinarily makes every effort to convert its mark into a motivating symbol and advertising tool that communicates the desirability of its product. Trademarks function through advertising to create a market for products, and consumers are induced to try a product through the created appeal of the advertised mark"); *McCarthy on Trademarks* 3:12 (Advertising); Restatement (Third), Unfair Competition, § 9, comment c (1995).

<sup>150</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*. Trans. Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York: Vintage, 1965), 64. See Ellul, "The Obstacles to Communication Arising from Propaganda Habits." *The Student World* 52.4 (1959): 401-10.

<sup>151</sup> Ellul, *Propaganda*, 169.

Next, and more importantly, the social propaganda of trademarks utilizes all available media to support the “technical system.” That is the ensemble, “the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency . . . in every field of human activity.” It too is a spontaneous order, not imposed “from above.”<sup>152</sup> While displayed on the material productions and operations of the technical system, trademarks are ultimately symbols in consumers’ minds. There they are manipulated as psychological techniques to order, form, and conform human behaviors. Ultimately, trademarks, when managed to a point of optimal efficiency, become autonomous, self-directing functions of the technical system.

Trademarks began as something very different and in some ways opposite from what the technical system has made them. The contrast clarifies somewhat our current milieu; we take it for granted and are so immersed in it, as in a cloud, that we do see it whole.

In the old days, proprietary “brands” simply indicated ownership, e.g., of livestock; “guild marks” indicated products of certain regulated craftsmen; etc. Such traditional uses long antedate the technical system. An article published in 1927, partly quoting H. G. Wells, described the traditional model of product sales based on the *personal reputation* of the seller. For example, everything a neighborhood grocer sold was “from stocks of his own buying and his own *individual reputation* . . . . And the oilman sold his own lamp oil, and no one asked where he got it [The] signboard of an inn . . . symbolized to the

hungry and weary traveler a definite smiling host, a tasty meal from a particular cook.”

Yet even a century ago, the new trademark regime already was pervading the market. Corporations “were reaching their hands over the retail tradesman’s shoulder, so to speak, and offering their goods in their own name to the customer.”<sup>153</sup> The process of “reaching over the shoulder” was the first step in the abstraction of trademarks—from the personal to the impersonal and to anonymity. Now defined by federal statute, a trademark indicates “the source of the goods, even if that source is unknown.”<sup>154</sup>

One of the most conspicuous and emblematic types of trademark is the franchise mark. It is the “cornerstone” or “central element” of the franchise, a business method now omnipresent.<sup>155</sup> The franchise model for fast-food services supplanted the old individuated tavern with a “*definite smiling host*” and “a *particular cook*.” “Boniface” was a happy expression current in H. G. Wells’s day for the jovial innkeeper. In contrast,

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<sup>152</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*. Trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Vintage, 1964); *The Technological System*. Trans. J. Neugroschel (New York: Continuum, 1980); *The Technological Bluff* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990).

<sup>153</sup> Frank Schecter, “The Rational Basis of Trademark Protection.” *Harvard Law Review* 40.6 (1927): 813, 818-19 (quoting in part H. G. Wells at n. 21; emphasis added and in original).

<sup>154</sup> 15 U.S.C. 1127 (emphasis added).

<sup>155</sup> *McCarthy on Trademarks* 18:65.



the franchise now routinely presents customers with anonymous, “front-line service providers” who “put on a happy face” in compliance with “integrative display rules.”<sup>156</sup>

McCarthy summarizes the role of trademarks and the psychological conditioning process that escorted consumers from the tavern boniface to the faceless franchise service provider:

In a cottage-industry economy where there is considerable variance in quality between each soup maker and between each batch, individual customer experimentation is necessary. In a relatively nondeveloped, localized and close-knit society, this may be possible. In a developed, mobile and urban economy, trademarks are essential to reduce the costs of finding a level of quality and price that the consumer desires, according to his or her individual tastes.<sup>157</sup>

As another commentator explains:

From the English Middle Ages up to the American Nineteenth Century, and even beyond, most businesses were local in nature. Consumers knew the tradesmen with whom they dealt, and they were familiar with the locations, employees and reputations of many of the manufacturers of the products they purchased. However . . . explosions of population, communications, transportation and technology placed the consumer at a substantial distance from the manufacturer. The consumer no longer knew about the manufacturer, which might have its offices, production facilities and employees on the other side of the world.. He

found, however, that if he purchased a trademarked product from far away and was satisfied with its quality, he could rely on the trademark in future purchases to obtain the same level of quality.<sup>158</sup>

Interestingly, both commentators associate the transformation of trademarks with mere material enlargement of the marketplace, technological advances in communication and travel, etc. No doubt, they had their part. But why did such developments not simply multiply the number of sole propri-etors—little cottage businesses, shopkeepers, and bonifaces, each using a personal name or insignia on the signboard hanging over the front door? Might not the intellectual or psychological aspects of the transformation have been its predicates rather than accidental by-products, i.e., the sociological phenomenon of technique intervened as the cause, not a consequence, of the revolution in the function of trademarks?

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<sup>156</sup> Such rules are designed to create “affiliation” between the customer and the business. Personnel are recruited, selected, and retained in part on the basis of being willing and able to display this “positive affect.” (There is, of course, a technical term for the technical effort: “Emotional labor.”) D. Wagner et al., “Driving It Home: How Workplace Emotional Labor Harms Employee Home Life” 67 *Personnel Psychology* 487 (2014); J. Allen et al., “Following Display Rules in Good or Bad Faith?: Customer Orientation as a Moderator of the Display Rule-Emotional Labor Relationship.” *Psychology Faculty Publications*, Paper 90 (2010).

<sup>157</sup> *McCarthy on Trademarks* 2:5.

<sup>158</sup> *Gilson on Trademarks* 1:03.

"McDonaldization," as Ritzer has explained, is "the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world." The chief principles of McDonaldization are Efficiency, Calculability, Predictability, and Control.<sup>159</sup> While Ritzer finds their roots in Max Weber's conception of instrumental rationality,<sup>160</sup> he acknowledges that Ellul "has much in common" with Weber.<sup>161</sup> Prevailing constructs of trademarks touch all the chords of efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control. Ellul, however, reaches over these attributes or symptoms of the system to expose its underlying nature and true power.

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A trademark owner is obligated by law to "*control* the nature and quality of the goods . . . with which the mark is used."<sup>162</sup> Here, "quality" is not necessarily excellence but merely a characteristic of the product. The "actual quality of the goods is irrelevant: it is the control of quality that a trademark holder is entitled to maintain."<sup>163</sup> The "control" symbolized by the mark guarantees predictable consistency of product everywhere, every time it is purchased.<sup>164</sup> The "source" indicated by a mark is not necessarily its actual *maker*; it is the "source of control" of the product's consistency. The mark, detached, as it were, from the seller and the product maker, indicates the source or power that controls the maker.<sup>165</sup>

It is revealing that much of the discourse about this trademark function cites fast-food franchises as exemplars—McDonaldization indeed. "The cornerstone of a franchise system must be the trademark or trade name of the product."<sup>166</sup> Franchises sym-

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<sup>159</sup> George Ritzer, "The McDonaldization of Society." *Sage* (8, 2014), 1, 14-16; see Ritzer, ed., "McDonaldization: The Reader." *Sage* 3 (2009).

<sup>160</sup> Ritzer, "The McDonaldization of Society," 30-31.

<sup>161</sup> George Ritzer, "The Technological Society: Social Theory, McDonaldization and the Prosumer," in H. Geronimo et al., eds., *Jacques Ellul and the Technological Society in the 21st Century* (New York: Springer, 2013), 35.

<sup>162</sup> 15 U.S.C. 1127 (emphasis added).

<sup>163</sup> *El Greco v. Shoe World*, 806 F.2d 392, 395 (2d Cir. 1986).

<sup>164</sup> *McCarthy on Trademarks* 3:10. Common usage and the legal definition of a trademark as a "symbol" (of goodwill) seem to invite comparison to Ellul's extensive discourse on the relationship of symbols and the technical system. The "symbolic" function of trademarks in the technical system is, however, incommensurate with Ellul's grand civilizational conception of symbols as ways that humankind relates to the natural world and apprehends reality. Killing or co-opting symbolism in this wide sense, the technical system, according to Ellul, symbolizes nothing but itself. See Ellul, *The Technological System*, 177; also Ellul, "Symbolic Function, Technology, and Society," *Journal of Social and Biological Structures* 210 (1978); and Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*. "What symbols are necessary are produced out of technique itself. Television or advertising offer abundant symbols of technique but those come from the very working of technique itself." Jacques Ellul, *The Empire of Non-sense: Art in the Technological Society* (2014) quoted in David Lovekin, "On the Symbol in the Technical Environment: Some Reflections," *Ellul Forum* 57 (2016). If the word "symbol" opens a wrong door in this context, then trademarks are better termed "signals" as discussed herein.

<sup>165</sup> *McCarthy on Trademarks* 3:4.A (emphasis added).

<sup>166</sup> *McCarthy on Trademarks* 18:65; see 3:10.

bolized by marks are gigantic exercises of control, featuring dictionary-sized contracts and manuals specifying, and inspectors scrutinizing, every aspect of operations and service in the minutest detail. Of course, “calculability,” another element of the ensemble, is critical to the operational efficiency and profitability of the franchise—demanding inventories of every bean, itemized accounting to the penny, units produced, units sold, units employed, and so on.

The “control” symbolized by trademarks guarantees “predictability.” The authorities are unanimous. “The point is that customers are entitled to assume that the nature and quality of goods and services sold under the mark at all licensed outlets will be consistent and predictable.”<sup>167</sup> “[T]he quality level, whatever it is, will remain consistent and predictable among all goods or services supplied under the mark.”<sup>168</sup> “Trademarks [are] indications of consistent and predictable quality assured through the trademark owner’s control over the use of the designation.”<sup>169</sup> “Every product is composed of a bundle of special characteristics. The consumer who purchases what he believes is the same product expects to receive those characteristics on every occasion.”<sup>170</sup>

Trademarks also answer the fourth principle: efficiency, the key to the technical system. According to economists, trademarks “promote economic efficiency.”<sup>171</sup> “Trademarks are indispensable for the efficient provision of products with the wide range of variety and quality combinations demanded in a modern economy.” Interests include efficient communication reducing “search costs,” efficient allocation of resources, rational decisions resulting in efficient choices by consumers.<sup>172</sup> In this realm, trademarks “serve as a means of communication between otherwise unknown or anonymous producers and their prospective customers.”<sup>173</sup> The trademark “makes effective competition possible in a complex, impersonal marketplace by providing a means through which

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<sup>167</sup> *McCarthy on Trademarks* 18:55 (emphasis added); 2:4 (“predictable quality of goods” and “reliability”); 14:11 & 19:90-91 (certification mark reliability).

<sup>168</sup> *McCarthy on Trademarks* 3:10 (emphasis added).

<sup>169</sup> Restatement (Third) of Unfair Competition 33 cmt b (1995) quoted in *Eva’s v. Halanick*, 639 F.3d 788, 790 (7th Cir 2011) (emphasis added); see *Barcamerica v. Tyfield*, 289 F.3d 589, 595 (9th Cir 2002) (“customers are entitled to assume that the nature and quality of goods and services sold under the mark at all licensed outlets will be consistent and predictable”).

<sup>170</sup> *Societe Des Produits Nestle v. Casa Helvetia*, 982 F.2d 633 (1st Cir. 1992). “An important ingredient of the premium brand inheres in the consumer’s belief, measured by past satisfaction and the market reputation established by Borden for its [canned milk] products, that tomorrow’s can will contain the same premium product as that purchased today.” *Federal Trade Comm’n v. Borden*, 383 U.S. 637, 649 (1966) (Stewart, J., dissenting).

<sup>171</sup> Landes & Posner, “The Economics of Trademark Law,” 78 *Trademark Rep* 267 (1988); Landes and Posner, “Trademark Law: An Economic Perspective” 30 *Journal of Law and Economics* 265 (1987); see *McCarthy on Trademarks* 2:3.

<sup>172</sup> Economides, *Economics of Trademarks*, 78 *Trademark Rep* 523 (1988).

<sup>173</sup> Restatement (Third) of Unfair Competition 9, comment c (1995).

the consumer can identify products which please him and reward the producer with continued patronage.”<sup>174</sup> In the marketplace, trademarks are, in a word, “signals.”<sup>175</sup>

A related function of trademarks is to symbolize the “goodwill” of the business with which it is used.<sup>176</sup> Goodwill, or, brand equity, is an intangible property of a peculiar kind. It resides *in customers’ minds*, their favor towards the business symbolized by its mark. If customers like a product, goodwill leads them to future purchases, guided by the brand, of the same product.<sup>177</sup> “The strongest brands in the world *own a place in the consumer’s mind.*”<sup>178</sup>

In 1942, the new trademark system was rapidly taking form, but enough of the old regime remained to reveal by contrast what was happening to a keen observer, in the position, so to speak, of one standing on a beach and watching a tidal wave approach. Such was Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter. He explained in a trademark case:

The protection of trademarks is the law’s recognition of the psychological function of symbols. If it is true that we live by symbols, it is no less true that we purchase goods by them. A trademark is a merchandising short-cut which induces a purchaser to select what he wants, or what he has been led to believe he wants. The owner of a mark exploits this human propensity by making every effort *to impregnate the atmosphere of the market with the drawing power of a congenial symbol*. Whatever the means employed, the aim is the same—to convey through the mark, in the minds of potential customers, the desirability of the commodity upon which it appears. \* \* \* The creation of a market through an established symbol implies that people float on a psychological current engendered by the various advertising devices which give a trade-mark its potency.<sup>179</sup>

This passage sounds the same themes and wording as Ellul’s description of social propaganda, quoted above. The same ideas appear in a later judge’s explanation of the fast food restaurant trademark model:

A person who visits one Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet finds that it has much the same ambiance and menu as any other. A visitor to any Burger King likewise *enjoys a comforting familiarity* and knows that the place will not be remotely like a Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet (and is sure to differ from Hardee’s, Wendy’s, and Applebee’s too). The trademark’s function is to tell shoppers *what to expect*—and whom to blame if a given outlet falls short. The licensor’s reputation is at stake in every outlet, so it invests to the extent required to keep the consumer satisfied by

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<sup>174</sup> Smith v. Chanel, 402 F.2d 562 (9th Cir. 1968).

<sup>175</sup> C. Greenhalgh & M. Rogers, *Innovation, Intellectual Property, and Economic Growth* (Princeton 2010), 40.

<sup>176</sup> See 15 U.S.C. 1060.

<sup>177</sup> McCarthy 2:17; Kirkpatrick, *Likelihood of Confusion in Trademark Law*, 2d ed. (2016), xxii.

<sup>178</sup> Tushnet, “Gone in Sixty Milliseconds: Trademark Law and Cognitive Science,” 86 *Tex. L. Rev.* 507, 513 (2008) (emphasis added).

<sup>179</sup> *Mishawaka v S.S. Kresge*, 316 U.S. 203, 205, 208 (emphasis added).

ensuring a repeatable experience.<sup>180</sup>

Trademarks are limitless. Virtually anything can be a trademark if it has inherent or acquired distinctiveness symbolizing goodwill in the minds of consumers.<sup>181</sup> Trademarks include not only distinctive logos and slogans, but also spokespersons, characters, colors, sounds, scents, and “trade dress”—the configuration of products, product features, product packaging, product containers, store decor, etc. Trade dress is the total image of a product and may include features such as size, shape, color or color combinations, texture, graphics, or even particular sales techniques.<sup>182</sup> As Justice Frankfurter observed, trademarks globally “impregnate” the atmosphere. Unlike patents and copyrights (different species of intellectual property having limited terms of legal protection), the exclusive legal rights of the trademark owner are perpetual as long as the brand continues to sell.

Trademarks are a universal phenomenon. Over 24 million marks are actively registered now throughout the world in some 200 countries and other jurisdictions.<sup>183</sup> If the number seems extraordinarily high, consider the alternative. As explained by the economists, trademarks are informational short-cuts; without these simple signals, the average purchaser would be inundated with even more unmediated information than already inundatory, as Ellul says, in “a world . . . that is astonishingly incoherent, absurd, and irrational, which changes rapidly and constantly for reasons [one] cannot understand.” People “cannot stand this; [they] cannot live in an absurd and incoherent world.” Being “engulfed in information,” they are “in desperate need of a framework within which to classify information.” “Information, therefore, must be condensed, absorbable in capsule form.” Trademarks answer the need: they are encapsulated information. The fact that there are 24 million of them demonstrates the immensity of the *Totality* of the system and the incomprehensibly vast volumes of information the ensemble produces.<sup>184</sup> The global spread of marks also demonstrates “a technical phenomenon completely indifferent to all local and accidental differences.”<sup>185</sup>

It remains true that trademark law is basically national in character. There is no worldwide trademark law as such. There is, however, accelerating global convergence of the applied principles of trademark law, and international treaties (e.g., the Paris

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<sup>180</sup> *Eva’s v Halanick*, 639 F.3d 788, 790 (7th Cir 2011).

<sup>181</sup> Excluded from trademark status are words that are generic names of products, and product shapes or features that are functional. These exclusions do not detract from the efficiency of the technical system, but enhance it.

Producers are free to copy words and product designs that cannot serve the function of unique source identification. The unfettered competition, it is thought, increases overall output, lowers prices, and enhances quality.

<sup>182</sup> *McCarthy on Trademarks* 8:4.

<sup>183</sup> The number of registrations was provided to me by Thomson Reuters, one of the leading international trademark search companies.

<sup>184</sup> Ellul, *Propaganda*, 145-46; “Information and Propaganda,” *Diogenes*, (5/18, June 1957), 61-77. Ellul’s 1973 book draws passages and ideas from his 1957 article.

<sup>185</sup> Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 406.

Convention, the Madrid Protocol, the European Union) are facilitating transnational trademark registration and protection on an enormous scale—all tending toward a *Unified* global system in fact if not in law. Commercially developed countries all officially recognize trademark counterfeiting as wrongful, and even the ones that in fact blink at it at least pay respect to the law and enforce it from time to time with highly publicized displays of the destruction of seized counterfeits. As countries develop economically and grow their own legitimate businesses, they fully enter the trademark system where genuine marks are protected and counterfeiters prosecuted.

A complementary function of trademarks is to erase the traditional effects of geography on product characteristics. The descriptions quoted above of the old regime recognized *variety* as something naturally to be expected in the same type of product found from one place to another. The franchise substitutes uniformity for variety across all geographic territories. One of the most powerful legal features of a United States trademark registration enables the registrant to eliminate confusingly similar junior marks in remote territories as the franchise expands. Thus, federally registering a mark is one of the first orders of business for franchisors and any other entrepreneurs intending to expand geographically under its mark, as almost all hope to do. Trademark law is so comprehensively flexible, however, that if the qualities of a product (e.g., cheese or wine) reputedly depend on the geographic locale of production, the place name may acquire exclusivity at law as an appellation of origin or geographic indication (e.g., Roquefort cheese or Napa wine). All certified producers in the area may use the appellation, but each invariably adds to the label its own unique brand, which functions in the usual way.

Trademarks, being property rights or rights of exclusion, have the protections and force of law, thus act as powerful engines of social propaganda and the technical system. Trademarks are so important to the system that the law brooks no interference with them. A confusingly similar mark, in particular, distorts the trademark information signal and the owner's sole control of the branded product. To suppress infringements, trademark law fields battalions of enforcement mechanisms that have evolved far beyond "fraud," a legal term rooted in the antiquated economy based on personal reputation. Traditional fraud in trade was deliberately palming off inferior product under a spurious brand, actually deceiving the customer. From this simple beginning, trademark infringement law has sprawled unrecognizably. Now, infringement means causing "*likelihood* of confusion," that is, a probability, anything over 50 percent. Actionable confusion is a state of mind of "appreciable" numbers of persons, but as few as 15 percent of potential customers will suffice. The trademark owner need not prove that the infringer intended to deceive, nor prove that any customer in fact was deceived or confused. "Likelihood" is all. The products need not be the same (competitive), only "related" in consumers' minds. In a breathtaking inversion, a claim for "unfair competition" may be brought by a plaintiff who *does not compete* with the defendant. Infringement does not require confusion as to source, but may extend to confusion about sponsorship or approval of the product. The marks need not be the

same, only confusingly similar, often a highly subjective judgment. Relevant confusion is not limited to purchasers, but extends to potential purchasers, influencers of purchase decisions, and in some cases the general public. Actionable confusion need not occur at the point of sale, but may occur before or after sale, e.g., by those who merely observe the infringing mark. Relevant confusion may be “subliminal.”

An even more powerful legal enforcement mechanism protects famous marks from “dilution”—“blurring” or “tar-nishment” of the brand in the minds of relevant persons. Of course, “likelihood of confusion” and “dilution” are extremely vague concepts considered by some to be inherently biased in favor of trademark owners. Verdicts and judgments must be based on inferences or guesses about the “likely” state of mind of a mass market of consumers. It logically follows from the “rationality” of the system that infringement is considered from the perspective of the “reasonable person,” a legal fiction. Penalties for trademark infringement, dilution, counterfeiting, and cybersquatting include injunctions, damages, statutory damages, lost profits, disgorgement of profits, unjust enrichment, punitive damages, and attorney fees. Awards may be trebled to deter future infringement.<sup>186</sup> Criminal counterfeiting is subject to fine or imprisonment or both. The relative ease of stating a plausible infringement claim, and the high cost of defense, are *in terrorem* mechanisms that generally suppress anything that might come close to owners’ marks. Behind trademarks, as behind every technique, lies *Power*.

While maintenance of control and of distinctiveness are the principal rationales for the aggressive legal enforcement of trademarks, social propaganda as a technique in the service of efficiency is the true, hidden driver of the system. In Ellul’s thought, it is elementary that “veracity and exactness are important elements in advertising.”<sup>187</sup> Trademarks displayed in advertising are a kind of “rational propaganda” used to promote products together with “technical descriptions or proved performance.”<sup>188</sup> “False designations of origin” and “false or misleading representations of fact” impermissibly disrupt the informational signals that are supposed to guide consumers accurately and with optimal efficiency.<sup>189</sup>

While touring this iron cage of calculability, control, efficiency, etc., we have repeatedly encountered a seemingly discordant factor: human feelings—in particular, needs for comfort, stability, ease, satisfaction, congeniality, avoidance of risk and of unpleasant surprises, etc., all enabling people to “float” on the psychological current (Frankfurter’s phrase). The “reasonable person” is a fiction of law and economics; real people are the targets of integrative propaganda. More, perhaps, than economists and lawyers, brand managers are attuned to the emotional needs of people for brand structure. In Ellul’s phrase: “the more comfortable . . . the better it works.” For the consumer, trademarks as social propaganda “artificially soothe his discomforts, reduce his tensions, and place him in some human context.” Thus, there is “the need for propaganda”; without

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<sup>186</sup> Richard Kirkpatrick, *Likelihood of Confusion in Trademark Law*.

<sup>187</sup> Ellul, *Propaganda*, 53-4, 56-7.

<sup>188</sup> Ellul, *Propaganda*, 84.

<sup>189</sup> 15 U.S.C. 1125(a).

it, one “experiences the feeling of . . . facing a completely unpredictable future.” As discussed, predictability is one of the fundamental imperatives of the trademark system, not only for material goods, but also for the psychological comfort of the consumer, who is able to move in “a familiar universe to which he is accustomed.”<sup>190</sup>

Brand resonance “is characterized in terms of *intensity* or depth of the psychological bond that customers have with the brand.”<sup>191</sup> In an extraordinary mirror-effect, brands “may take on personality traits or human values and, like a person, appear to be ‘modern,’ ‘old-fashioned,’ ‘lively,’ or ‘exotic,’” because “consumers often choose and use brands that have a brand personality *consistent with their own self-concept*.” Word of mouth is one of the strongest kinds of “advertising”; consumers become “brand evangelists or ambassadors.” It follows that a “brand community” arises “in which customers feel a kinship or affiliation with other people associated with the brand.”<sup>192</sup> On the other hand, many people, perhaps most, are “involuntarily and unconsciously” drawn into the “psychological collectivization.”<sup>193</sup> They float on the current. Either way, brands as social propaganda integrate them into the technical system.

\* \* \*

This brief survey of trademarks as a form of integrative social propaganda shows the basic characteristics of the technical system as identified by Ellul, including Unity, Universality, Totalization, all in the service of Power.<sup>194</sup> Two related characteristics remain: Automatism and Self-Augmentation. Ellul takes us into the core of the system.

Understood as functions of social propaganda and technique, trademarks are deterministic—self-directing. Once a technique is refined to optimal efficiency, it is no longer subject to choice. “It obeys its own determination, it realizes itself.”<sup>195</sup> True to this imperative, “trademarks have a self-enforcing feature. They are valuable because they denote consistent quality, and a firm has an incentive to develop a trademark only if it is able to maintain consistent quality.”<sup>196</sup> Trademark owners have a legal duty to “police” their marks at the risk of losing their unique distinctiveness.

Trademark law’s likelihood-of-confusion requirement is designed to promote informational integrity in the marketplace. By ensuring that consumers are not confused about what they are buying, trademark law allows them to allocate their capital *efficiently* to the brands that they find most deserving. This, in turn, incentivizes manufacturers to create robust brand recognition by *consistently* offering good products and good services, which results in more consumer satisfaction. That is the virtuous

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<sup>190</sup> Ellul, *Propaganda*, 73, 76, 143, 187.

<sup>191</sup> Konrad Keller, *Strategic Brand Management: Building, Measuring, and Managing Brand Equity*, 4th ed. (Pearson, 2013) (emphasis in original).

<sup>192</sup> *Id.* at 87, 92-93.

<sup>193</sup> Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 406-07.

<sup>194</sup> *Supra*, n. 4.

<sup>195</sup> Ellul, *The Technological System*, 141.

<sup>196</sup> William Landes & Richard Posner, “The Economics of Trademark Law,” 78 *Trademark Rep* at 271.



cycle envisioned by trademark law, including its trade-dress branch. As stated [by the U.S. Supreme Court]:

In principle, trademark law, by preventing others from copying a source-identifying mark, reduces the customer's costs of shopping and making purchasing decisions, for it quickly and easily assures a potential customer that *this* item—the item with this mark—is made by the same producer as other similarly marked items that he or she liked (or disliked) in the past. At the same time, the law helps assure a producer that it (and not an imitating competitor) will reap the financial, reputation-related rewards associated with a desirable product. The law thereby encourages the production of quality products, and simultaneously discourages those who hope to sell inferior products by capitalizing on a consumer's inability quickly to evaluate the quality of an item offered for sale. It is the source-distinguishing ability of a mark . . . that permits it to serve these basic purposes.<sup>197</sup>

The circularity of this reasoning matches that of the system. Trademarks reinforce themselves. Business people have a choice whether to adopt Trademark A or Trademark B, but to adopt *a* trademark they must; there is no debate or discussion whether to do so. The system is pervasive and immersive, like the “atmosphere.” Entire fields of brand psychology and brand management—supported by innumerable statistical consumer surveys and focus groups—are devoted to the study of “authority brands, solution brands, icon brands, cult brands, lifestyle brands,” and so on.<sup>198</sup> Trademarks especially serve the personal craving for predictability and consistency, while avoiding at all costs variance and unwanted surprise. Ellul teaches that people are drawn “into the net of propaganda,” which “is exceptionally efficient through its meticulous encirclement of everybody.”<sup>199</sup>

H. G. Wells's picture of the old days is erased or reversed: the personal guarantee of the neighborhood grocer becomes the impersonal guarantee of an anonymous source of control of products distributed in a mass market. Product quality defined as excellence becomes quality defined as a mere characteristic, be it however so poor. Consumers choose brands to define themselves, and they find in brands responsive humanoid personalities. Consumers who wish a change from an accustomed brand will select a new brand, itself promising consistency and predictability. The brand on a product is branded—burned and seared, as it were—into the minds of consumers, who literally “identify” with it. In the technical system described by Ellul, the predictable consistency of the product has its counterpart in the consistent predictability of the human.

#### About the Author

Richard L. Kirkpatrick is a lawyer and practices trademark law. The views herein are his own and not attributable to his law firm or its lawyers or employees. Richard

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<sup>197</sup> *Groenveld v Lubecore*, 531 F3d 1, 12-13 (6th Cir 2013), quoting *Qualitex v Jacobson*, 514 U.S. 159, 163-64 (1995), quoting in part *McCarthy on Trademarks* 2:01 (emphasis added and in original).

<sup>198</sup> Stefania Salviolo & Antonio Marazza, *Lifestyle Brands: A Guide to Aspirational Marketing* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

<sup>199</sup> Ellul, *Propaganda*, 9-10, 64-5, 74-6, 79-81, 84.

L. Kirkpatrick is also author of “Ellul, Machiavelli, and Autonomous Technique,” *Ellul Forum* 56 (2015), republished in Jeffrey Shaw, *Jacques Ellul on Violence, Resistance, and War* (Pickwick, 2016).

## **Review of Doug Hill, *NotSo Fast: Thinking Twice About Technology* (University of Georgia Press, 2016) 221 pp.**

David W. Gill

Gill, David W. Review of *Not So Fast: Thinking Twice about Technology*, by Doug Hill. *Ellul Forum* 60 (2017): 18-19. © David W. Gill, CC BY-NC-SA.

Doug Hill is a journalist and independent scholar who has studied the history and philosophy of technology for more than 25 years. His work has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Boston Globe*, *Atlantic*, *Salon*, *Forbes*, *Esquire*, and his blog “The Question Concerning Technology” (<http://thequestion-concerningtechnology.blogspot.com>). Over the past 50 years I must have read more than 100 books on technology and its impacts on individuals, organizations, communities, businesses, schools, nations, and the world. Jacques Ellul, Albert Borgmann, Langdon Winner, Carl Mitcham, and many others have probed the technological depths—or the specifics of various technological domains or problems—but we always need helpful introductions that are comprehensive in scope, deeply researched, and written in an accessible, illuminating style. The late Neil Postman did this in his *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (1992). And now Doug Hill’s *Not So Fast: Thinking Twice About Technology* will serve well as today’s essential introduction to the subject. I can’t recommend it highly enough.

We all experience how pervasive are today’s technological devices. There is no escape. Communication media, transportation, entertainment, manufacturing, robotics . . . we are totally surrounded, invaded, dominated. Much of this is welcome and positive, of course. My wife’s hip and shoulder replacements are incredible gifts. I value Facebook for helping me stay in touch with over 1,000 of my former students and colleagues from across the globe. But Doug Hill steps back and helps us see the shape and nature of the “forest” when often we only see the “trees” and not the overall pattern, linkages, and commonalities. His discussion proceeds in five stages.

In Part One, Hill shows how technological optimism and technological concern (sometimes fear, resistance, criticism) have long coexisted. Today’s technological optimists, evangelists, and dreamers, such as Ray Kurzweil, Jeff Bezos, Elon Musk, and Nicholas Negroponte, represent a tradition going back through Henry Ford, Frederick Taylor, and Francis Bacon to some of the ancients. And all along there have been critics, questioners, and prophets, from Theodore Roszak and Wendell Berry to Martin

Heidegger, Henry David Thoreau, the Luddites, and many classical thinkers and commentators. “Ambivalence” is an appropriate term for recognizing that technology has its positive up-side—but comes with downside trade-offs, hidden costs, unpredictable consequences, and cumulative effects. Getting some long-term historical perspective on technology is really essential for both creators and users.

In Part Two, Hill asks, What exactly is “technology?” It is not just “applied science.” It is not just machines, tools, and devices. Not just IT. A “narrow, internalist” definition focuses on things, objects, hardware, and engineering stuff. The “broad, externalist” school views not just all of that but also the “users and the broader social and political contexts in which they’re used” (49). For Jacques Ellul, perhaps Hill’s favorite philosopher of technology, it is about “technique”—the broad system and milieu driven by the search for effective, efficient “means.” It is not just about tools but about a method (rational, scientific, and quantitative) approaching all of life. Science itself, today, depends on (not precedes) technology for its means and achievements. Hill argues that the basic “nature” of technology is to be expansive, rational, direct, aggressive, controlling, and linked or converging with other technologies. Traditional moral values of “good” and “evil/bad” are replaced by “success” and “failure” in the technological milieu. We could add “speed,” “predictability,” “replicability,” and “power” to that list of core technological values. Technology today is not quite “fate” or deterministic, but it moves ahead autonomously, with little or no human or moral resistance apparent. Technological problems require and lead to further technological responses, more and “better” technology. A major challenge we face today is to be so absorbed in (and overwhelmed by) all of our particular technologies that we fail to see the whole. We take for granted the atmosphere in which we live and breathe. Hill quotes the old joke about a fish being asked, “How’s the water?”—and replying, “What’s water?”

In Part Three, Hill explores human relations in an era of technology. Rather than toward *quality* (a combination of caring and attention), our technology inclines us toward distraction and disengagement. This affects our human interrelationships but also our relationship to our machines and to our work (including the loss of craftsmanship, participation, and attention, alongside huge productivity gains). Another characteristic is *absorption*—excessive focus, even addiction to our technologies. Hill worries also that we are being drawn into a *dreamworld* of virtual reality that blinds us to flesh-and-blood reality. The borders between reality and technological fantasy are increasingly blurred. How does such a citizenry make good political choices? Finally, Hill warns us about the tendency toward *abstraction*—distance from the subjects, products, and impacts of our actions. Medical machines and instruments can provide amazing assistance to doctors and nurses—but they can also create distance. The doctor knows the test results but not the actual patient. Distant targets of drone warfare are abstractions, easier to kill thoughtlessly. How does technology in its various forms affect the way I relate to my colleagues, friends, and loved ones? How does it affect my work, play, and rest? These fundamental questions must be faced and discussed, and Hill’s book is a provocative, thoughtful opening statement for such reflection and discussion.

In Part Four, Hill discusses the ways technology crosses traditional boundaries between humans and machines and between humans and animals. There is no doubt that environments affect and modify humans. The food we eat modifies us. Exercise modifies our muscles and organs. Prostheses can improve our lives. Nicholas Carr's *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (2010) shows how our brain physiology and chemistry is modified by information technology. Some of the technological impact on humans is intentional, some unintentional. The technological dreamers such as Ray Kurzweil dream of intentionally, radically merging humans and machines. Do we just watch passively as these efforts and experiments proceed? So too, the boundaries between humans and animals have been crossed, but are there limits or guidelines?

Finally, in Part Five, Hill cautions about leaving our future to risk-taking gamblers. He recalls how high-profile technology leaders Norbert Wiener and Bill Joy came to have second thoughts and express great caution about the vast destructive potential of advanced technology. Every technological development entails risk as it amplifies effects and links together with other technologies. We, the public, are the guinea pigs impacted by these risks. Shouldn't we have some say about experiments that could have catastrophic impacts on our lives? Techie hubris, even arrogance, combined with (1) a desire for career power, wealth, and fame, (2) a general lack of broad education in history and the humanities, and (3) an absence of real membership in responsible, accountable human community beyond the tech world . . . leads to risk on a catastrophic scale.

In conclusion, Hill asks not for a rejection of technology but for appropriate restraint and caution and for some reconsideration of our purposes and ends in life, not just as individuals but as professions, as societies and nations. What are the Ends we wish to pursue and achieve and in light of which our technological research and development must be judged? As Ellul often said, our technological Means have taken over and become the End. They are uncritically accepted and self-justifying. Thoreau warned that we could become "tools of our tools." Hill's book title means everything in this argument: "not so fast"! Yes, let's keep moving; there are many positive achievements, and promises of more. But slow down and take seriously some "second thoughts" and opinions as we proceed. The stakes are too high not to do so.

*Not So Fast* is a joy to read because it is such beautiful writing—but I don't just mean beautiful as literary artifice. It is a content-rich page-turner, drawing readers forward in a life-enhancing "thought experiment": What if we looked at our various technologies that have changed our lives (so positively in many cases—and so frustratingly and aggravatingly in others) as a whole ensemble? What if we tried to see what all these technologies have in common and how they join together as a system with a kind of philosophy and set of common values? What if we dipped back into history to see the origin and development of our technological world and could hear from the past and the present, from those who loved and promoted technology and from those who resisted, worried, and cautioned about it? Hill pulls it off and walks

us through this thought experiment. He doesn't go down every byway possible. For me, two additional questions are (1) how might faith traditions such as Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism provide constructive guidance and community leverage vis-a-vis technology, and (2) how best can we prepare for a rapidly arriving world of automated joblessness, the vastly increased wealth disparities that come with it, and the personal and social chaos of a world without (adequate) work? But this is asking too much of Hill's already abundant argument. Get it, read it, then form a book discussion group around it. Make it an assigned reading in your courses. *Not So Fast* was published by a smaller academic press and could be overlooked, so let's get the word out to our networks.

About the Author

David Gill is the president of the International Jacques Ellul Society.

## Jacques Ellul on Violence, Resistance, and War

Jason Hudson

Jacques Ellul's dialectical method embraces the tension between necessity and freedom. In conversations about violence and war, the extreme dialectical poles are idealistic pacifism and pragmatic justification. *Jacques Ellul on Violence, Resistance, and War*, edited by Jeffrey Shaw and Timothy Demy, enters into this tension by bringing together a collection of essays that engages with Ellul's work from a variety of perspectives: theological, philosophical, practical, historical, and existential. When read as a complete work, however, it provides a holistic vision of Ellul's thinking and some of the ways scholars and practitioners have sought to interject possibility and freedom into our violent world of necessity.

In the first chapter, David Gill commends Ellul's work on violence and insists on its enduring relevance. His essay, "Jacques Ellul on Living in a Violent World," prepares the reader to navigate those that follow, by introducing Ellul's dialectic approach. Gill assures readers that the essays that follow will not articulate a rational ethic of violence that might be universally applied. Rather, he explains, Ellul invites readers to understand the nature of violence as a necessity and to live a particular style of life that creatively introduces possibility into situations that are otherwise closed and determined.

Chapter two, "Calvin, Barth, Ellul, and the Powers That Be," examines Ellul's exegesis of "the powers" in scripture against those of John Calvin and Karl Barth. Ellul's reading of the biblical *exousiai*—powers and authorities—is essential to his anarchism, nonviolence, and dialectical thinking. In this chapter, David Stokes shows how Calvin and Barth endorse state power, as either an actual or a potential representative of God's action in the world. Ellul, in contrast, identifies the state as a power, an *exousiai*, that is disarmed and put to open shame by Jesus Christ. This nuance, then, relativizing

state power, allows Ellul the space to see the state as a necessary power that makes life possible but also a power that must be transgressed for the sake of freedom.

Andrew Goddard, in chapter three's essay, "Ellul on Violence and Just War," examines how Ellul challenges the just-war tradition by including war in his treatment of violence. Goddard outlines Ellul's Christian realist approach to violence. First, Ellul acknowledges that violence is unavoidable and necessary for the survival of the state. Yet he also seeks to be realistic about the nature of violence, that it has its own logic and is never fully under human control. Despite its necessity, Christians who use violence must do so without an easy conscience but must acknowledge their own violence as a sign of their lack of freedom. Finally, Goddard imagines a middle way, a "chastened form of just war thinking" that might emerge from Ellul's critique when taken as a challenge to just-war theory rather than a complete repudiation.

In chapter four, Andy Alexis-Baker analyzes the theory of just policing from an Ellulian perspective. Against those who tout just policing as an alternative to just war, Alexis-Baker convincingly argues that policing as we know it is a modern invention rooted in post-Civil War efforts to control newly freed slaves (in the south) and the vices of the working classes (in the north). Alexis-Baker shows that just policing is likely to produce worse outcomes than just war. Finally, he highlights one Colombian community whose approach to security demonstrates the possibilities of balancing security with human dignity.

Chapters five and six are case studies that seek to apply an Ellulian framework to specific cases of violence. In chapter five, "Cultural Interpretation of Cyberterrorism and Cybersecurity in Everyday Life," Dal Yong Jin examines the increasing importance of cybersecurity in the face of emerging cyberterrorism. In chapter six, "The Nigerian Government's War Against Boko Haram and Terrorism: An Ellulian Communicative Perspective," Stanley Uche Anozie examines the Nigerian government's propaganda war with the terrorist group Boko Haram. On the surface, chapters five and six seem to be weak points in the collection as they apply Ellul in problematic ways. However, the strength of these essays is that they highlight the difficulty of bringing Ellul's thought into the reality of extremely complex situations. Moreover, in reality, Ellul has inspired some to pacifism and anarchism and has moved others to use violence in desperation against technology's determinism.

Chapter seven, "Ellul, Machiavelli, and Autonomous Technique," considers how Machiavelli prefigures Ellul's conception of technique, particular regarding ends and means. In his essay, Richard Kirkpatrick shows that for Machiavelli, the ends are the subjects and objects—governors and governed—are flattened out, or hollowed, as all become means in an autonomous march to nowhere. In a passage that pointedly reminds the reader of today's political reality, Kirkpatrick highlights, via Machiavelli's Ferdinand, how in the absence of ends spectacle is used to control or appease subjects through confusion and fascination. Despite this essay's interesting and well-argued

connections between Ellul and Machiavelli, the reader is left to make the connections between the essay and violence and war.

In chapter eight, Jeffery Shaw considers how Ellul and Thomas Merton compare on propaganda as a form of violence. Though other chapters have addressed propaganda, Shaw helpfully situates violence and propaganda within Ellul's concept of technique. This important step opens the door for readers to begin thinking about how the treatment of violence in this volume might illuminate thinking about other areas of technique. Finally, Shaw shows Merton to be more optimistic about human attempts to transcend technique through asceticism.

Peter Fallon continues the theme of propaganda as violence in chapter nine, "Propaganda as Psychic Violence." Fallon's contribution is a rigorous examination of Ellul's thought in this area. He seeks to delineate why propaganda counts as a form of violence within Ellul's definitions. To do so he examines the phenomenon of the happy, though psychologically determined, propagandee who is conditioned to love her captor. Finally, he considers how Ellul's theological work opens possibilities for revolution, the transgression of deterministic technology, propaganda, violence, etc.

In his dubiously named chapter ten essay, "Technology and Perpetual War: The Boundary of No Boundary," David Lovekin continues to explore the boundaries of how Ellul's conception of violence can be framed. With concern for the philosophical nature of Ellul's work, Lovekin examines the nature of the same and the other within the dialectic. Violence, he argues, results from the dissolution of space between sign and signified that is necessary for dialectic. Against the hubris of violence that seeks to subsume the other into the self, Lovekin seeks a wholeness that allows a plurality of differences to exist in necessary dialectical tension.

Finally, Mark Baker concludes the collection with his personal reflection on encountering Ellul's work while experiencing a disenchanting conflict in El Salvador, titled, "My Conversion to Christian Pacifism: Reading Jacques Ellul in War-Ravaged Central America." This essay offers a fitting conclusion, as the reader may feel a bit like Baker, grasping for a way to make sense of a phenomenon that we see and experience around us—and in us—daily. His narrative style allows Baker to approach Ellul's treatment of violence, which, given its placement in the collection, should be well covered territory, through a fresh lens. His essay brings a simplicity and clarity to many of the ideas previously discussed. By discussing his conversion, he makes a compelling case for those who are still clinging to the myths of redemptive violence or trapped in the hopelessness of necessity.

#### About the Author

Jason Hudson is a PhD student at Cliff College, UK, and an adjunct professor at Cincinnati Christian University. His current work seeks to bring the thought of Jacques Ellul and Wendell Berry to bear on contemporary problems and questions, particularly within Western evangelicalism.

# Pursuing the Spiritual Roots of Protest: Merton, Berrigan, Yoder, and Muste at the Gethsemani Abbey Peacemakers Retreat

Chris Staysniak

From November 18 to 20, 1964, the renowned writer and Catholic monk Thomas Merton hosted a small retreat on the grounds of his Gethsemani Abbey Trappist community. While in terms of gender and race the group was quite homogenous, it still was a remarkable ecumenical gathering of 14 men that included some of the leading prophetic peacemaking voices of the day. In addition to Merton himself, there was A. J. Muste, at that point a living legend among labor, antiwar, and civil-rights organizing circles; Mennonite pacifist scholar John Howard Yoder; the dynamic duo of the “Catholic Left,” brothers Dan and Phil Berrigan; and Catholic Worker activists Tom Cornell and Jim Forest. The gathering also entailed several other Catholic and Protestant peace organizers, such as the Presbyterian John Oliver Nelson and Methodist Elbert Jean. While they did not have the same national name-brand recognition as some of the other participants, they too were critically important fixtures of the intertwined civil rights and antiwar movements that fueled the period’s unparalleled social ferment. For three days this group converged in Kentucky to explore how they might better ground their peacemaking efforts in a world awash in violence as they explored and probed the retreat’s theme, “The Spiritual Roots of Protest.”

This unique gathering has, until now, largely relegated to passing references and footnotes. But through meticulous archival research, Gordon Oyer has recovered these proceedings in *Pursuing the Spiritual Roots of Protest*. Oyer, himself of Mennonite background, stumbled upon mention of the retreat while reading Yoder’s writings. From this obscure starting point, he has painstakingly recovered the rich conversations at this extraordinary retreat from an array of diaries, transcripts, marginalia, and other archival sources.

At face value, a book about three days’ worth of advanced theological conversations does not sound like a riveting narrative. But Oyer’s study makes for a very compelling read about these men of great action taking time to unpack their own ideas, beliefs, and motivations in a thoughtful effort to more deeply and spiritually sustain their peacemaking activities. We need little reminder that these exchanges from over half a century ago are still valuable today. As Oyer writes, “They raised essential, timeless questions we would do well to ask ourselves 50 years later. They also helped model the mutual support required for people of faith to embark on and sustain active, resistant, nonviolent protest against the cultures of domination that human civilization seems destined to evoke” (xvii). Like all good prophets, their warnings, for better and for worse, resonate with a certain timelessness. The interplay of ideas and thinkers, both those present like Muste, Yoder, the Berrigans, and Merton, and those not, like



Massignon and Ellul, is rich. At times one must read quite closely to follow all of these threads, but ultimately Oyer deftly weaves them together.

Readers of this journal will be interested to know that while he was not physically present at this gathering, Ellul still enjoyed considerable influence over it. As Oyer ably demonstrates, in drawing up the agenda and preliminary themes for the conversation, Merton drew heavily from Ellul's *The Technological Society* (as well as from the French scholar and pioneer of Catholic-Muslim interfaith dialogue, Louis Massignon). In Ellul's writings, Merton found a kindred spirit as by the mid-1960s he began to devote serious thought and reflection to the place of technology in modern life, particularly when it came to the tools of death and destruction, and the increasingly normalized assertions by U.S. policymakers that national security was bound in technological superiority. In Ellul's work, Merton found a powerful and extensive ideas that helped complement and advance his own thinking.

Throughout much of chapter three, Oyer explores Merton's reading of *The Technological Society* in detail. As Merton wrote, among other reflections, "I am going on with Ellul's prophetic and I think very sound diagnosis of the Technological Society. How few people really face the problem! It is the most portentous and apocalyptic thing of all, that we are caught in an automatic self-determining system in which man's choices have largely ceased to count" (61). On further reflection he walked back some of his initial response, ultimately finding Ellul to be "too pessimistic" (61), though this conclusion probably would have been revisited had he read more of Ellul's opus of published pieces, particularly his theological work (a characteristic of Ellul's writing that Oyer acknowledges later). But as Oyer shows, Ellul's writings struck a deep chord in Merton, and, as such, helped shape the initial discussions of this remarkable retreat.

Staysniak, Chris. Review of Pursuing the Spiritual Roots of Protest: Merton, Berri-gan, Yoder, and Muste at the Gethsemani Abbey Peacemakers Retreat. *Ellul Forum* 60 (2017): 22-22. © Chris Staysniak, Cc BY-NC-SA.

Oyer ends the book with a thoughtful epilogue that asks how these questions of the spiritual roots of protest, technology, and how one can be sustained over the long haul of peacemaking in a war-ridden world. He, like those at the Gethsemani retreat, offers no concrete answers. But in itself, *Exploring the Spiritual Roots of Protest* is a rich read that provides theological and intellectual manna for those who look to take a stand today against the forces of militarism, unchecked capitalism, environmental degradation, and an ethos that puts the individual above all, with costs the entire global community must ultimately pay. The conversations of *The Spiritual Roots of Protest* indeed remain relevant, and for that reason this book is a worthwhile read for all those who feel that prophetic tug towards peacemaking efforts to help heal our broken world.

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*"[T]he criterion of my thought is the biblical revelation, the content of my thought is the biblical revelation, the point of departure is supplied by the biblical revelation, the method is the dialectic in accordance with which the biblical revelation is given to us, and the purpose is a search for the significance of the biblical revelation concerning ethics.*

*"This rigor in no wise implies that this is a book for Christians. To the contrary, I would expect all its value to come from a confrontation... Every man in our decaying Western civilization is asking questions about the rules of his life. Still less, finally, is the biblical revelation limited to the narrow circle of the elect. It speaks first about all the others. "*

**-Jacques Ellul To Will & To Do: An Ethical Research for Christians (1969)**

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## From the Editor

The special focus of Issue 36 of The Ellul Forum is Jacques Ellul's use of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. The quotation that graces our cover, from the beginning of Ellul's introduction to ethics, *To Will and To Do*, provides a typical sample of Ellul's passion for the message of the Bible. And yet, as the quotation makes clear, Ellul never thought the Bible was simply for the edification of some holy club withdrawn from the world.

Although Ellul published many studies of biblical themes and passages, he remains much better known for his sociological critique of technique (and its implications for politics, economics, social change, communications, etc.) than for this side of his work. But, just as we don't fully understand Kierkegaard's philosophical works without his edifying discourses (and vice versa), the living dialectic between Ellul's theological and sociological works cannot be ignored.

Ellul's biblical studies are always provocative at the same time they are extraordinarily learned. Many of his readers attest to an experience of finding themselves in disagreement with Ellul on various points—and yet naming him the most helpful, illuminating Bible teacher they ever knew. It is almost impossible to ever view a biblical text the same way after Ellul gets done with it. The secret? Ellul gets us to a place where we can truly hear the text, where the living word comes through the forms of the written word.

We are honored to have a wide range of contributors in this issue, several for the first time. These authors come from very different places but all have an informed, critical appreciation of Ellul's biblical studies. Both older and younger scholars are represented, clergy as well as laity, Christian and otherwise. Their articles and reviews range across many different studies by Ellul. We have also included reviews of theological and biblical studies by four of Ellul's own favorite discussion-partners and fellow students of theology and Scripture: Claude Tresmontant, Gabriel Vahanian, Alphonse Maillot, and Andre Chouraqui.

After volunteering to "guest edit" this issue for our intrepid Editor, Cliff Christians, I can only say "welcome back" to Cliff. He and Darrell Fasching before him have performed an awesome service to us all these past 18 years as editors of The Ellul Forum. I can hardly wait to have only my "Associate Editor" and "publisher" hats on again.

David W. Gill, Associate Editor IJES@ellul.org

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## Jacques Ellul as a Reader of Scripture

by Anthony J. Petrotta

*Re-view of Jacques Ellul, Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes (Eerdmans, 1990), translated by Joyce Main Hanks from La Raison d’Etre: Meditation sur l’ecclésiaste (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1987).*

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When I started my studies at Fuller Seminary nearly thirty years ago, I took an elective class, “The Ethics of Jacques Ellul,” taught by David Gill, then finishing his Ph.D. studies on Ellul across town at USC. At that time I was taking classes mostly in Semitic Languages and wanted to go on in Old Testament studies. Ethics and theology were “recreational” reading for me. I had some interest in Ellul since a friend was urging me to read his books and the class fit my schedule. I managed to talk Professor Gill into allowing me to write a paper on Ellul’s hermeneutics and he enthusiastically—as David often does!—accepted my proposal.

I found Ellul to be not only a sociologist, ethicist, and theologian, but somebody who had a deep interest in the biblical text and was conversant with the field. I found that a number of his concerns about interpretation were also being voiced by prominent biblical theologians (in particular, Brevard Childs).

Now, a generation later and with all that has gone on in the field of biblical studies, how does Ellul stand as an exegete, as a reader of Scripture?

I want to center my thoughts on Ellul as a reader of Scripture by looking at *Reason For Being*, his “meditation” on Ecclesiastes. Ellul says that Ecclesiastes is the book of the Bible that he has explored more than any other book. It is a book he read, meditated upon, and taught for more than fifty years. I also want to compare what Ellul has said against two more recent (and more traditional) commentaries on Ecclesiastes: Ellen Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs* and Michael Fox, *Ecclesiastes*.<sup>200</sup>

Ellul begins by reflecting on his reason and method for writing *Reason For Being* in his “Preliminary, Polemical, Nondefinitive Postscript,” which, of course, appears as

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<sup>200</sup> Ellen F. Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000). Michael V. Fox, *Ecclesiastes* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004). These commentaries are not randomly chosen. They are commentaries in a more traditional sense than Ellul’s study, but both authors are writing for lay people, pastors, and rabbis, and I know both to be very good readers of Scripture.

Chapter One, an instance of paradox that fits with Ecclesiastes' program of throwing contradictions together for the effect and truth they create. This chapter is very instructive; he reveals a lot about *how* he reads, and by implication, reveals some of what he considers the shortcomings of commenting upon Scripture in the modern sense of the term (Ellul *is* polemical).

Ellul is keenly aware that he is not going about his task as an academician might. He has not compiled an extensive bibliography and he has not interacted with the literature on Ecclesiastes during his writing of *Being*. That is not to say, though, that he has not done the requisite work for writing an informed book on Ecclesiastes. Over the years he has read important studies on Ecclesiastes, and he notes those. More importantly, he “slogged” through the Hebrew text and *nine* other translations as he was writing. After writing *Being* he went back and read through the literature again on Ecclesiastes and though he saw no reason to change what he had written, he did check his thoughts against others who also have studied and written on the book. His reactions to these “historians and exegetes” he put in footnotes after the manuscript was completed.

Ellul says: “This approach seemed to me to be consistent with Ecclesiastes: once you have acquired a certain knowledge and experience, you must walk alone, without repeating what others have said” (p. 3).

I'm not sure that Ellul has “walked alone,” at least in this sense: he has read the studies by those who have spent a lifetime reading Ecclesiastes (Pedersen, von Rad, among others). But I think his point is well taken. Ellul has absorbed the thoughts of others *into his thoughts*, arranged them, and set them down through his own extensive—and slow! (“slogged”)—reading of the text itself. Ellul is not simply writing what he “feels” but what he has experienced as a reader; his experience of the text itself involves listening to those who have read the text and written through their knowledge and experience. Ellul is in a company of readers, but writing out of his own voice. The distinction is important because he thus steers clear of merely reflecting the studies or opinions of others or lapsing into a pietism.

In an important footnote, Ellul spells this approach out a bit more by invoking the Jewish tradition of four kinds of interpretation: literal, allegorical, homiletical, and the “seed of life, from which new mysteries of meaning continually spring up.” He believes that Qoheleth (the Hebrew term for the “preacher” and the name of Ecclesiastes often used in Jewish writings regarding this book) has given us a text where “new mysteries of meaning spring up, with or without new scientific methods” (p. 7). Here quite clearly Ellul points to what he considers the limits of modern commentary and hints at why he writes without those aids ready at hand. Ellul recognizes that however important philological and historical research is, and he clearly values these researches, a text is brought to life as readers open themselves to the forms and thought of the book, and then respond thoughtfully.

The point that reading a text is more than simply understanding the words on the page is worth belaboring a tad. Nicholas Lash talks of “performing” Scripture, of taking

the marks on the page and making them alive in our life much as a musician takes the notes of a sonata and realizes them in a recital. “The performance of scripture is the life of the church”<sup>201</sup>. Ellul does not use this language, but it is implicit in his reading. In his discussion of this point, Lash similarly adheres to the importance of the historical-critical method, but also its limitation. Ellul and Lash (and others) see the reader doing more than making critical notes on a biblical text; as readers of Scripture, we move beyond simple comment to truths that must be lived out in our lives.

It is worth noting that both Davis and Fox make similar assertions about the role of interpretation. Fox, interacting with the tradition of Jewish *midrash*, recognizes that one role of an interpreter is to draw out “the fullness of meaning potential” in a passage (Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, p. xxii)<sup>202</sup>. Davis speaks of the medieval practice of “chewing” on the words of scripture. She wisely writes, “We are now a society that ‘processes’ words rather than one that ponders them” (Davis, *Proverbs*, p. 3). They are, however, more restrained in their comments than Ellul, as we shall see, but this is an editorial constraint I suspect, more than an authorial one.

An example might help show how the subtle differences between Davis, Fox, and Ellul play themselves out. Ecclesiastes 12: 12-14, the “epilogue” to the book, poses problems. For one, Qoheleth is spoken of in the third person and no longer in the reflective first person that we find throughout most of the book (e.g., Ecclesiastes 1:13-14). There are also interpretive problems, what certain words mean in this context, and what they refer to beyond simple translation of a term.

Davis, Fox, and Ellul all agree that these verses are not a “pious” conclusion that is tacked on to an otherwise radical book, as has often been a line of interpretation with the rise of historical criticism<sup>203</sup>. Rather, these words are in keeping with the scope of the book; fearing God and God’s judgment are not alien to the book. Fox cites Ecclesiastes 3:17 and 11:9 on the judgment of God and 5:5 and 7:18 on the fear of God. In adopting this approach, all three are trying to come to terms with the complexity of the book as a literary document, but also the complexity of the thought of Qoheleth.

To what, however, do the words “they were given by *one shepherd*” refer? The translation is transparent (there is nothing ambiguous about the words). But to whom do they refer? We find different ways of explaining the “one shepherd” in Davis, Fox, and Ellul. Davis appeals to the shepherd as a moral authority, one who “goads” the sheep to new pastures where they will thrive and not overgraze the very ground that feeds them. She goes on to ask who might fulfill this role in our society. She answers, “Few teachers or clergy, or even fewer politicians” (Davis, *Proverbs*, p. 226). She reflects on the role advertising has had on our attention to words and how slogans, euphemisms,

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<sup>201</sup> Nicholas Lash, “Performing the Scriptures,” in *Theology on the Way to Emmaus* (London: SCM, 1986), p. 43.

<sup>202</sup> *Midrash* refers to both ancient Jewish writings on Scripture and to a method of interpretation.

<sup>203</sup> See, for example, G.A. Barton, *Ecclesiastes* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908). Barton calls the whole section a “late editor’s praise of Qoheleth, and the final verses as a “Chasid’s [a pious person’s] last gloss” (p. 197).



and so forth have curtailed our ability to grapple with the complexity of truth, and to change our way of thinking and acting. These reflections, I think, would delight Ellul, though it is not the line of interpretation that he takes with this passage.

Fox has a rather lengthy discussion of “shepherd.” In the traditional interpretations of the rabbis, the term almost always referred to God. Even, Fox informs us, the words of someone as unconventional as Qoheleth derive from God, say the rabbis. The rabbis often have this “extraordinary openness” to different interpretations of *Torah*. Fox questions this interpretation, however. Rather, the metaphor of shepherd usually refers to protecting and providing, not the giving of words. The words of the wise are not, in Fox’s view, like that of law or prophecy. Fox settles on “sages” (not God) prodding people; hence the warning that follows: be careful, sages can overwhelm you with all their ideas (vs. 12). This interpretation is similar to Davis in saying that the “shepherd” are the sages, not God, but differs in that Davis is lamenting the lack of sage advice in our society, whereas Fox focuses on the warning of endlessly listening to other people’s advice. Ellul, I think, would find this last part sage advice from Fox, but again, this is not the approach that he takes.

Ellul goes in another direction. He focuses on the words “all has been heard,” and interprets this line in two ways and at considerable length. First, God has heard all and “collects” these words, for which you will be judged (citing Matthew 12:37). Second, all has been heard, we cannot go beyond the words of Qoheleth; we have reached “Land’s End.” From this interpretation, the injunction to fear God and keep his commandments is all that need be said, and Ellul reflects on what “fear-respect” and “listeningobedience” mean for the Christian. It is from these two poles that “the truth and being of a person burst forth” (p. 299).

However, in a footnote (presumably written after Ellul’s initial meditation on the text), Ellul draws upon a doctoral dissertation by Jacques Chopineau who ties the phrase *one* shepherd to Ps 80:1, “O Shepherd of Israel, hear . . . “ and interprets the reference to God (as in the traditional interpretation). Ellul admits that he “spontaneously wanted” to interpret these words as a reference to God (and, hence, God’s revelation), but felt “uncertain” and therefore did not mention that in the reflection proper (p. 291-2, n. 56).

Ellul then goes on in the footnote to reflect on this interpretation<sup>204</sup>. If God is the *true* shepherd (“one”; Hebrew *‘echad*), then this ties and contrasts with Abel/*hevel* (“vanity”), Abel being a shepherd also. God, the true shepherd, is the opposite of *hevel*/vanity. The book is thematically structured around the various vanities, but God is opposite by giving us his commandments, which constitute the “whole person” when we live by them. Chopineau, thus, gives Ellul further support for his interpretation of the Epilogue as a whole, that fearobedience, the encounter with God, and our listeningobedience liberates our whole being. God as the One Shepherd gives us the

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<sup>204</sup> It is not clear to me if this reflection is part of Chopineau’s interpretation or Ellul carrying it forward in his own inimitable way. I suspect the latter.

commandments. In this respect Ellul goes beyond both Davis and Fox, though Davis might be more sympathetic to the revelatory nature of the shepherd/sage and the connection with the commandments.

Davis, Fox, and Ellul agree that fear of God and keeping commandments are the sum of the teaching of Ecclesiastes. Davis concludes her comments by invoking the *Book of Common Prayer*: “Therefore, orienting our lives toward the commandments enables us, ‘while we are placed among things that are passing away, to hold fast to those who endure’” (Davis, *Proverbs*, p. 228; the citation comes on p. 234 of the *Book of Common Prayer*). Ellul would quite agree, and Fox says, “The book allows readers to probe the ways of God and man, wherever this may lead, so long as we make the fear of God and obedience to the Commandments the final standard of behavior” (Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, p. 85).

To answer my question at the beginning, how does Ellul stand the test of time, the answer, I think, is that he stands rather well. Granted, in picking Davis and Fox I am perhaps not being entirely fair since they are both interested in writing for the laity and clergy of the Church and Synagogue, but that is Ellul’s audience as well.

Ellul lingers more in his reflections than either Davis or Fox. His is, after all, a “meditation” and not a commentary in the narrow sense. Ellul, though, stays close to the text, the Hebrew text in this case. Even in his “gutlevel” interpretation of “shepherd” as God, he relegates his comments to a footnote; he is fully aware that this interpretation is not universally accepted, but still in consonant with critical possibilities (a point that Fox makes more sharply than Davis).

I do find it a bit curious that Davis and Fox do not entertain the shepherd-God connection more than they do. That the shepherd is described as “one” seems suggestive in a book that uses words carefully and even “playfully” in the sense that Qoheleth wants to tease the reader to consider that the obvious and the not obvious can occupy the same space. Certainly God as the shepherd is not obvious or necessary; but the fact that commentators have long split on this issue keeps it as a live option to consider. Curiously, Barton notes the options and says that since “shepherd” is usually an epithet of God, it is “probably so here” (*Ecclesiastes*, p. 198).

A final note on my reading of Ellul this time. In my journey as a reader of Scripture, I have found that good readers of Scripture are often those who have honed their skills as readers generally, not just those who are trained to do exegesis in the narrow sense that is taught in books on exegesis for seminary students. What I mean is that a good reader is one who is not just a technician, but one who has, as Proverbs teaches, learned to “acquire skill, to understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles” (Proverbs 1: 5b-6). Ellul weaves into his

meditations thoughts and interactions with biblical scholars (Christian and Jewish), as we should expect, but philosophers, anthropologists, novelists, poets, and so forth. Ellul’s reading experiences are wide and that is why he can bring his experiences to the task of writing on Scripture, and write with the depth and thoughtfulness that he does.

Ellul's skill as a reader comes out again in his "Preliminary, Polemical, and Non-definitive Postscript." Ellul objects to commentators that *must* find a "formal, logical coherence" in Ecclesiastes. This text is not like any other; scholars treat works on Roman law with more "congeniality" than many biblical scholars treat Ecclesiastes. The scholars would have a "purer, more authentic text" than the one we have received in Scripture (I think Ellul has his tongue firmly in cheek at this point!)<sup>205</sup>.

Ellul does not say it this way, but the issue at stake is *receiving* this text as a Hebraic text, I think, and not as a Western text. However much Qoheleth may be interacting with Greek philosophical thought, he is still very much a Hebrew and employs Hebrew forms and Hebrew "logic." The ability to receive a text as it is written is a skill that most of us need to develop as readers of the Bible, especially since our current translations often go out of the way to obscure the differences between the world of biblical texts and our world<sup>206</sup>. We need to learn the language, structure, forms, conventions, and so forth before we can become competent readers of Scripture<sup>207</sup>.

The end of the matter is this: Ellul is a model reader for all of us, though he would be disappointed if we merely repeated what he has taught us and not built upon his work.

## Ellul on Scripture and Idolatry

by Andrew Goddard

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One of the distinctive features of Ellul's theological work is his conviction that it is Scripture that enables us to see the world aright. Rather than "demythologizing" the Bible, the Bible is the means by which God "demythologizes" our world. The classic example of this approach is undoubtedly his canonical, Christocentric study of the city in Scripture, *The Meaning of the City* (Eerdmans, 1970), but the same approach underlies his approach to many other phenomena. This article provides a brief introductory overview of how Ellul's reading of some biblical texts shapes his understanding of idols and idolatry and how, in turn, that understanding leads to a critique of certain attitudes to the Bible and explains the heart of his biblical hermeneutic<sup>208</sup>.

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<sup>205</sup> See pp. 6-16, *Being*, for a fuller treatment of Ellul's objections to some of the critical stances by biblical scholars.

<sup>206</sup> Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*. (NY: Schocken, 1995), is a wonderful counter example to the trend to be "contemporary."

<sup>207</sup> I am thinking here not so much of form-criticism but Hebraic rhetorical forms of narrative and poetry. Form criticism often becomes reductionist rather than illuminating the poetic elements in a psalm, for example.

<sup>208</sup> For a fuller discussion of this, on which this article partially draws, see my forthcoming article

Ellul's biblical discussion of idols and idolatry is not as thorough and focussed as his study of the city but it is particularly in *The Ethics of Freedom* and *The Humiliation of the Word* that we find his interpretations of key texts in - as one would expect from Ellul - both Old and New Testaments. Of particular interest is one Pauline text that shapes his account of the idols in relation to the powers<sup>209</sup>. On first glance, we Christians may want to treat idols and powers as synonymous terms and it must be admitted that Ellul himself (here, as in many other areas) is not always consistent and does not always strictly follow his own distinctions that he draws from the biblical text. Nevertheless, when he is careful, he does distinguish his understanding of these two phenomena and he does so because he believes Scripture does so.

The crucial biblical text for Ellul is Paul's discussion of food offered to idols in 1 Corinthians 8, especially verses 4 to 6. There the apostle writes, "Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that 'no idol in the world really exists,' and that 'there is no God but one.' Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as in fact there are many gods and many lords—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist."

Ellul takes great care in his analysis of this text, drawing attention to the paradox that Paul here seems to say both (a) that no idol really exists and (b) that there are many gods. Rather than dismiss Paul's statements as incoherent and confused, Ellul seeks to clarify why Paul affirms both these statements. He claims that gods exist in the following sense: "They are part of the powers that claim to be allpowerful or salvific, etc, and that attract people's love and religious belief. They exist. And they pass themselves off as gods" (*The Humiliation of the Word* (Eerdmans, 1985), p 89). Thus Ellul believes that in order to understand the text and the world we have to see that the language of 'gods' is equivalent to (or, perhaps better, a subset of) the category of the powers. As a result, Ellul insists - against the demythologizers and with such writers as Caird, Berkhof, Wink and Stringfellow - that there are real, spiritual powers and forces which influence human lives and societies. These, we learn from Scripture, set themselves up as powerful and redemptive and, by being viewed as such by humans, they stand as a challenge to the one true God.

In his interpretation of Scripture on the powers, Ellul rejects the Bultmannian demythologization project (that dismisses the language of powers as a worldview we must now reject in the light of modern knowledge) but he also refuses to embrace the common popular evangelical and fundamentalist belief in traditional demons that is often understood as the main alternative. Instead he moves between two other ways of interpreting this biblical language of "gods" and "powers." At times he views them as "less precise powers (thrones and dominions) which still have an existence, reality, a

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in Stephen Barton (ed), *Idolatry in the Bible, Early Judaism and Christianity* (T&T Clark, 2005).

<sup>209</sup> The powers are a subject on which Ellul wrote much more extensively and which, particularly through the work of Marva Dawn, have become prominent in recent Ellul studies.

nd... objectivity of their own.” Here they are seen as authentic, spiritual realities which are independent of human decision and whose power is not constituted by human decision. At other times - particularly in his later writings - the powers are viewed more as “a disposition of man which constitutes this or that human factor a power by exalting it as such” (*The Ethics of Freedom* (Eerdmans, 1976), p 151) and so “not objective realities which influence man from without. They exist only by the determination of man which allows them to exist in their subjugating otherness and transcendence” (*Ethics*, pp. 151-2).

Ellul’s concern in this understanding is to avoid the idea of powers or demons doing their own work apart from human beings. He therefore stresses that the powers find expression in human works and enterprises. It is this important link between the spiritual powers and the material world, especially of human works, that helps us to understand his view of idols. “The powers seem to be able to transform a natural, social, intellectual or economic reality into a force which man has no ability either to resist or to control. This force ejects man from his divinely given position as governor of creation. It gives life and autonomy to institutions and structures. It attacks man both inwardly and outwardly by playing on the whole setting of human life. It finally alienates man by bringing him into the possession of objects which would not normally possess him” (*Ethics*, pp 152-3).

These powers are the false gods that Paul says in 1 Cor 8 really exist. But what are “idols” and why does Paul say that they do not exist? The key feature of idols - in contrast to the powers to which they are linked - is that they are visible and material entities. Although this would seem to give them a more substantial existence, Ellul argues that idols do not exist because “the visible portrayal of these powers which is perceived by the senses, has no value, no consistency, and no existence” (*Humiliation*, p. 89). Any idol is really just “a natural, social intellectual or economic reality.” It is strictly a material object under human control. Ellul therefore believes that Scripture distinguishes false gods from idols because the latter are simply “a creation of man which he invests with a value and authority they do not have in themselves” (*Ethics*, p. 156). Idols, according to Scripture, are simply part of the visible created reality and though linked to the gods or spiritual powers they are to be distinguished from them.

In explaining how it is that, in Paul’s words, “no idol in the world really exists,” Ellul gives the example of money. He claims that money as a power (Mammon) certainly exists. However, a banknote - the material means by which the power works - strictly does not exist because “it is never anything but a piece of paper” (*Humiliation*, p. 89). Here we see a central paradox: idols seek to make the invisible false gods and powers visible and concrete but by this very fact of seeking to mediate a spiritual power in the material world they do not themselves exist. We may today think of the Nike Swoosh, the McDonalds Golden Arches or other symbols and logos as contemporary idols which

on their own are meaningless and powerless but are mediators of some of the global powers of our age<sup>210</sup>.

Faced with them we need to remember that idols are not only part of the ancient biblical world but still a reality in our post-modern “secular” world and to recall Ellul’s judgment based on Paul’s words: “They exist neither as something visible and concrete (since in this sense they are really nothing) nor as something spirituals (since they cannot reach this level). They have no kind of existence precisely because they have tried to obtain indispensable existence beyond the uncertainty of the word” (*Humiliation*, p. 89).

Idols therefore, according to Scripture, lack existence per se and are the attempt by humans to domesticate and bring into the visible, material world the invisible spiritual powers that do exist. “Idols are indispensable for mankind. We need to see things represented and make the powers enter our domain of reality. It is a sort of kidnapping. False gods are powers of all sorts that human beings discern in the world. The Bible clearly distinguishes these from the idol, which is the visualization of these powers and mysterious forces . . . Things that can be seen and grasped are certain and at our disposition. It is fundamentally unacceptable for us to be at the disposition of these gods ourselves, and unable to have power over them. Prayer or offering cannot satisfy, since they provide no sure domination. If, on the contrary, a person makes his own image and can certify that it is truly the deity, he is no longer afraid. Idols quiet our fears” (*Humiliation*, pp. 86-7).

This linking of idols to the material or visual, as distinct from the spiritual powers, leads to the second emphasis in Ellul’s interpretation of the biblical witness: the priority of listening over seeing.

Ellul reads the narrative of humanity’s primal rebellion in Genesis 3 as demonstrating the significance of this - the spoken word is doubted and visible reality is taken as the source of truth (see *Humiliation*, pp. 97ff). The same problem is repeated within God’s people Israel. Here Ellul’s interpretation of the narrative of the golden calf (Exodus 32) is of crucial importance. It also illustrates that, although (as in relation to 1 Cor 8) Ellul can take great care and wrestle with the literal or plain sense of the biblical text he is also willing to offer a more spiritual interpretation in order to discern Scripture’s message. Thus, drawing on a study of Fernand Ryser (a French translator of two of the great influences on Ellul’s theology and biblical interpretation - Barth and Bonhoeffer), he highlights that a source of the gold for the calf is the Israelite’s ear-rings (v2). He quotes Ryser, “Aaron dishonours the ear; it no longer counts; now just the eye matters. Hear the Word of God no longer matters; now seeing and looking at an image are central. Sight replaces faith” (*Humiliation*, p. 87). It is this attempt to argue for a biblical basis for the priority of the word and hearing over the material image and sight that is a central theme of *The Humiliation of the Word* as a whole and of its exegesis of key biblical passages.

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<sup>210</sup> I am grateful to Alain Coralie for his work on Nike Culture that has helped me make this

Finally, Ellul's claim for a biblically based prioritization of hearing over seeing must also be applied to the Bible itself. Although Scripture and biblical interpretation play a central part in Ellul's theology and ethics he is clear that Scripture, as a permanent, written record has the ambiguity of all written words. Drawing on the biblical narrative of Moses breaking the stone tablets (Exodus 32.19), Ellul is adamant that this challenges a common Christian attitude to the Bible for the Bible "is never automatically and in itself the Word of God, but is always capable of becoming that Word - and as a Christian I would add: in a way denied to all other writings" (*Living Faith* (Harper & Row, 1983), p 128).

Rather, than treating the Bible as a visible divine word Ellul insists that "The destruction of this single, visible, material representation of God ought to remind us continually that the Bible in its materiality is not the Word of God made visible through reading. God has not made his Word visible. The Bible is not a sort of visible representation of God's Word must remain a fleeting spoken Word, inscribed only in the human hear . . ." (*Humiliation*, p. 63).

Of course, as Ellul acknowledges elsewhere, God has in fact made his Word visible but he has done so uniquely in the person of Jesus Christ and it is, therefore, Christ the incarnate Word who is the key to the Scriptures.

Ellul, therefore throughout his interpretation of biblical texts works with a thoroughly theological and Christo-centric hermeneutic and a relative disregard for the tools of historical-critical study<sup>211</sup>.

Ellul's biblical interpretation of some texts relating to idols and idolatry demonstrates that although Scripture plays a central role in his theology, his theological interpretation of those texts also makes him aware of the danger that Scripture may itself become an idol, a means of escaping the spoken Word of the living God. Ellul therefore challenges us to take Scripture seriously but not ultimately seriously, for ultimate seriousness is to be paid to the Word become flesh to whom Scripture - the Word written - bears witness and it is the living Word not the dead letter that is to be our concern. As a result, Christians are called to participate in a believing and attentive listening to hear the Word of God address us in and through the words of Scripture and to be confident that that Word is one which liberates us from the powers and un.masks all our idols as simply "the works of our hands".

## If You Are the Son of God

by Andy Alexis-Baker

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connection.

<sup>211</sup> For Ellul's fullest account of hermeneutics see his "Innocent Notes on 'The Hermeneutic Question'" in Marva Dawn's translation and commentary on a number of Ellul articles, *Sources and Trajectories* (Eerdmans, 1997), pp 184-203.

*Review of Jacques Ellul, Si tu es le Fils de Dieu: Souffrances et tentations de Jesus. Paris: Centurion & Zurich: Brockhaus Verlag, 1991. 110 pp.*

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*Si tu es le Fils de Dieu: Souffrances et tentations de Jesus (If You Are the Son of God: The Sufferings and Temptations of Jesus)* is probably one of Jacques Ellul's least read works. A search through the WorldCat database indicated that only fifteen libraries worldwide own a copy. When I went to the Notre Dame library, which has a copy, I found it snug in the shelf, with crisp clear pages, as if it had never been moved since initial shelving, let alone read by a single soul. Perhaps this is partially due to the fact that this work has never been translated into English. I have taken up that task and have completed a version and hope to get it published before long. I will be using my own English translation when I quote Ellul in this review.

Having lived with this work for some time now, I am convinced that it is one of Ellul's most important works. First, this book is his most extended meditation on the life and work of Jesus Christ. Second, this particular meditation on the sufferings and temptations of Jesus provides some rather unique biblical interpretations that add a lot to our understanding. Finally, this book makes a great introduction to Ellul's thought. All of the themes found in his other works are found here: technique, arguments for a kind of biblically based anarchism, placing Jesus at the center of every thought, personalism, etc.

The book is divided into three parts: Introduction; Sufferings; Temptations. At the outset of the book, Ellul claims that Christians have not retained the "total life and teachings of Jesus, the reality: He suffered." This can be seen for example in the way we recite and write down the Creed. We say that, "He suffered under Pontius Pilate" (p. 9). But Ellul claims that this is a distortion of the Latin construction and theologically unsound. The Latin construction is: "He suffered; under Pontius Pilate he was crucified." This reading brings out the fact that Jesus was the Suffering Servant throughout his life. Our version makes suffering a momentary event for Jesus, that is salvific in and of itself.

But Ellul's purpose in this meditation is not to create a "theology of suffering." For Ellul it is not a question of us participating in Jesus' sufferings, but of Jesus participating in ours. A theology of suffering leads to a kind of "morbid orientation" in Christianity: we focus on the gore of the cross and make Jesus into an ethereal creature who could endure great suffering, suffering which in and of itself saves us.

For Ellul, salvation comes through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus in its entirety. So he directs most of his attention to the life of Jesus and the ways he suffered throughout his life. He focuses on the way Jesus suffered because of rejection, being the object of ridicule, and the ways in which he suffered through the normal pain of living, such as hunger. For Ellul it is important that Jesus experienced and lived a truly human experience.



Suffering is fundamentally changed by Jesus in two ways. First, when we suffer we can know that we are not alone in our suffering any longer. Lest we think Ellul is engaging in some sentimentality, he likens this knowledge to a friend who stays at the death bed of another and holds their hand until they pass. This is an act of profound mercy and comfort. God is that friend at our death bed.

The second way suffering is actually changed by Jesus' actual sufferings is that suffering is no longer a condemnation but a fact of material forces and absurdities. Jesus took on the real significance of suffering so that we no longer have to live in the shadow of eternal damnation. Our suffering takes on a temporal aspect, some of which we can overcome but some of which we must learn to live with and become more like Jesus.

Ellul's meditation on Jesus' temptations is just as insightful and relevant. All temptations boil down to two main categories as revealed in the Gospels: Covetousness, or greed, and lust for power. These two temptations are bound up with one another. We can only overcome them by a radical reading of the Gospel and following Jesus' way of "non-power."

For Ellul, all temptation is about humanity tempting God. We tempted Jesus precisely because he was the son of God: He had power and an ability to increase his earthly power; therefore we demanded that he use it. In doing so we tempt the God of love not to be the God of love anymore, but a God of terrible violence.

This book provides a welcome correction to many theological and popular meditations on Jesus and his suffering and temptation. Theologians are loathe to remember that Jesus refused to take power to rule over others, and that he demanded that his disciples do likewise. Ellul does not shy away from this aspect of Jesus but points out that it is central to his mission. It might be helpful to put Ellul in dialogue with a friendly reader such as John Howard Yoder who also examines the three temptations of Jesus in the desert in terms of their political and economic significance.

Yoder wrote that "all the options laid before Jesus by the tempter are ways of being king" (*The Politics of Jesus* (Eerdmans, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1994), p. 25). For Yoder, Jesus' temptation was to set up a kind of welfare kingdom, in which he would rule as a benevolent head of state. But Ellul, goes farther than Yoder does, and examines this temptation in terms of techniques of production. Since Jesus had the ability to satisfy his hunger, we therefore demand that he use his power for himself. Thus Jesus is tempted to prove his divinity in the same way we today "prove" our own divinity: through production. We think we are divine because we are able to transform raw materials to satisfy needs that are also created. "By the miracle of production humanity *proved* that it was divine!" (p. 73). So the temptation for Ellul is both Yoder's welfare king, and also a temptation to power that is godlike and therefore religious.

Likewise, Ellul goes beyond Yoder when he examines the way in which Jesus is tempted to political power. Yoder comments that the temptation to "bow" before Satan is a discernment of the idolatrous nature of state politics. Ellul makes a similar claim but in much more stark terms: "all those who have political power, even if they use it

well . . . have acquired it by demonic mediation and even if they are not conscious of it, they are worshippers of *diabolos*” (p.76).

Ellul provides helpful corrections to popular understandings of the sufferings and temptations of Jesus as well. Mel Gibson’s recent film, *The Passion*, perhaps exemplifies popular treatments of the sufferings of Jesus: a fixation on gore and a view of suffering as salvific in and of itself. Jesus is thereby reduced to an entertaining and momentary event, who is less than God but not quite human. Ellul’s entire work provides a correction because he examines Jesus entire life rather than just the passion narratives. How much did Jesus suffer when his own family misunderstood him? How much must Jesus have suffered when his own disciples repeatedly tempted him to power, misunderstood him, and finally left him alone and abandoned? Ellul examines in detail how Jesus experienced physical, moral and psychological sufferings throughout his entire life. The cross was merely the culmination of a life of suffering and temptation.

I cannot resist mentioning one point in his treatment on suffering that brought up contemporary images for me. In his reflection on the way Jesus was ridiculed and mocked, Ellul points out that the soldiers who mocked him at his arrest, put a veil (a hood) over his head and then proceeded to punch him, all the while taunting him to do a superfluous miracle...to simply tell them which one just hit him, knowing he could not see. The images of Iraqis in American-run prisons in Iraq immediately comes to my mind. “When we are tempted to make fun of our fellow people, we should always remember that Jesus was the object of mockery” (p. 55).

This is a valuable book. It deserves more attention than it has heretofore been given: this work deserves and needs an English translation. This book might introduce Ellul’s thought to a wider Christian audience, and provide a powerful tool for dialogue with others for those of us who believe Ellul’s works are still of contemporary importance.

## Ellul’s Apocalypse

by Virginia W. Landgraf

*Re-view of Jacques Ellul, Apocalypse: the Book of Revelation (Seabury Press, 1977), translated by George W. Schreiner from L’Apocalypse: architecture en mouvement (Desclee, 1975).*

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Jacques Ellul’s eschatology deserves to be better known, because it offers an alternative to some popular eschatologies which seem to negate either the truth of God’s love for humanity and creation in Jesus Christ or the reality of God’s judgment. However, the style in which Ellul’s commentary on Revelation is written may be forbidding to a newcomer. (A more prosaic exposition of some of his eschatological beliefs is avail-

able in *What I Believe*). It could be termed “prismatic,” because he tosses up multiple meanings for a given symbol depending on the angle from which it is viewed. The French subtitle, “architecture in movement,” indicates that the five sections into which he divides the book - of seven churches, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls, and seven visions of the new creation, framed by doxologies - are in dynamic relationship with each other.

Appropriately, the book is written not as a verse-by-verse commentary from beginning to end, but starting at the middle, where he thinks that the meaning of the work and person of Jesus Christ are shown “as in silhouette.” The sections on either side - of the church with its Lord, of the meaning of history as revealed only by Jesus Christ, of divine judgment (yet executed by the Son of Man!) as stripping human beings of their works, and of the new creation - are inexplicable without this core. He presumes that the author of Revelation meant to write “a theological book” which is “a Christian book,” saying that the relative absence of Jesus Christ in this section shows precisely God’s non-power in history. One may doubt that such a move makes exegetical or theological sense. Yet the vision of eschatology which follows is worth wrestling with, because it is more compelling than some others which have either popular Christian or secular currency.

*First*, Ellul’s eschatology can provide a healthy antidote to premillennialist eschatologies which emphasize the “rapture” of the church away from the earth and God’s destruction of creation. Such an eschatology seems to go against both the love of God shown in Jesus Christ and the Noachic covenant. Often these theologies are associated with a belief in Revelation as a chronological prophecy of future events. By contrast, Ellul sees Revelation as expressing a recurring dialectical movement of witness, judgment, and new creation, made possible by the atonement achieved by Jesus Christ. The catastrophes in Revelation are not primarily inflicted by God upon humanity but arise because of creation’s shocked reception of the news that God has become human and because people are so bound up with works and powers and principalities which are destroyed by God’s judgment. The church and Israel (the two witnesses) are separated from the world not to escape worldly tribulation in a physically removed heaven but to witness to God’s truth within a world which rejects them. The New Jerusalem is not a substitute for the old creation but God’s assumption of those human works which are fit to enter it (a motif which Ellul developed earlier in *The Meaning of the City*).

*Second*, Ellul’s doctrine contrasts with an eschatology of human progress, whereby human beings incrementally build up God’s kingdom on earth and derive meaning and optimism from this task. Whether in the Christian form of “postmillennialism” or as a secular doctrine of progress, this kind of belief seems to contradict the reality of radical evil. Advances in healing power may be accompanied by advances in killing power, and so forth. Ellul rejects a doctrine of progress and disconnects hope from optimism (a theme he took up in *Hope in Time of Abandonment*). He sees Revelation as “the unique example . . . of the meaning of the work of humanity and, equally, of its

nonmeaning.” There is no sure way to know which human works will go into the New Jerusalem. But that is not to say that they should not be done; he compares them to eating, which should be done, but is still “strictly relative.”

History, Ellul believes, does not reveal any meaning by itself. This revelation must be provided by Jesus Christ, who comes from outside this history to reveal the catastrophes that would have had to occur upon the world if he had not taken God’s judgment upon himself. Only because witnesses to the Word of God testify to something from beyond the play of forces in history can they introduce freedom into history. Similarly, Ellul distinguishes hope (contrary to visible evidence) from optimism about the products of human effort. (This contrast reflects his distinction between truth, communicable by the Word, and reality, manifested by visible evidence, which he treated most fully in *The Humiliation of the Word*). It is precisely because God seems to be absent in the central section of Revelation (punctuated by the seven trumpets) that Ellul can call this a section expressing hope. The “pessimistic” stance of Ellul’s sociological works, which often show vicious cycles that seem closed in terms of worldly developments (of technique, politics, religiosity,

revolutions, etc.), does not contradict this hope but rather provides a context for it.

*Third*, Ellul’s theology provides relief from belief systems (whether religious or secular) that try so hard to be non-judgmental that they cannot acknowledge the existence of personal or structural sin in the world. When these kinds of doctrines predominate among Christians, they often take the form of ignoring eschatology entirely, perhaps seeing Revelation as a book whose catastrophic visions are strictly the result of historical persecutions. This kind of theology does justice neither to prophetic calls for repentance and promises of liberation throughout the Bible, nor to persons’ and systems’ real needs for repentance and redirection, nor to the impossibility of achieving the repentance needed without God’s action. Against this impasse, Ellul strictly distinguishes judgment from condemnation. Judgment is an expression of God’s love and is liberation, because human beings will be stripped from the works by which they have tried to save themselves and the powers which enslave them. The spirit of rebellion against God and trying to save oneself, the subordinate powers which it breeds (political power, sexual lust, etc.), and the historic incarnations of these powers (such as political empires) will be condemned. But all of the people and some of their works (without the people’s previous relationship of idolatry vis-a-vis their works) will be taken into the New Jerusalem. He sees mentions in the text of people left outside the new creation as referring to their *previous conditions* as idolaters, fornicators, etc., not to the people themselves. (Ellul believes in universal salvation, but he identifies this belief as a “conviction,” not a “doctrine” - meaning that his position on what the church should teach as doctrine is perhaps closer to what George Hunsinger calls “reverent agnosticism” with regard to salvation - universal salvation is possible, but the decision belongs to God).

*Fourth*, Ellul's thought contradicts any tribalism or theology of political conquest, whereby the people on "God's side" will win over "God's enemies" and establish the kingdom of God on earth politically. Such a doctrine - rarely held so simplistically by serious Christian thinkers (e.g., careful liberation theologians) as their ecclesiastical opponents would have us believe - risks denying the universality of sin, the universality of God's love, and the limits of the ability of external structures to change the heart. Not only does such a doctrine raise some of the same problems as the doctrine of progress treated above, but in Ellul's thought, *all* people are in need of judgment. *No* human beings can be presumed to be condemned. God may surprise us by taking some works which we frowned upon as good religious or political people into the New Jerusalem (which is not an excuse for license in things which do not build up - cf. Ellul's dialectic between "All things are permitted" and "Not every thing builds up" in *The Ethics of Freedom*). In fact, according to Ellul, it is as non-power that God enters history and introduces freedom into history. Political conquest can never bring freedom. Empire building, by whatever side, is not the way to defeat the "axis of evil" but feeds into it. (The absolute contrast between freedom and love, on the one hand, and power, on the other hand, does raise problems which will be addressed below.)

*Fifth*, Ellul's doctrine of judgment breaking into history contrasts with simplistic popular misunderstandings of Christian eschatology which one might label "creeping works-righteousness" even if they are not based upon external works. In these schemas, God keeps a balance and rewards people after death based on various criteria: their works, or right beliefs (faith as works), or perhaps right religious experiences (although any of these might be alternatively seen as gifts within this life from an arbitrary God who rewards some people and not others). By contrast, for Ellul, works do not save, either in this life or the next. Faith is witness to the living God and a relationship venturing forth with this God, and it is not reducible to a set of static beliefs (although, despite his contrast between belief and faith in *Living Faith*, one can analyze Ellul's beliefs about God and find that they do have cognitive content - which he seems to have admitted by writing *What I Believe*). God's decision to seem particularist in choosing Israel and the church is not a matter of saving some and not others, but of revealing God's self to some so that they can witness to others. And the new creation is not something to be hoped for only beyond death but may break into our life here and now, although it is not presumed to be a completed process in this life. Jesus Christ has already won the victory, and it is that from which we are to live; yet we are still in a world which, by visible evidence, is in bondage to the spirit of power and its consequences.

Thus a sketch of Ellul's eschatology can be drawn by means of contrast (for the full prismatic treatment, which is rewarding not only as an intellectual but also a devotional exercise, read the book). It should take its place with serious Christian alternatives to the popular eschatologies listed above. Yet its attractive features do not mean that it does not have problems. One searches in vain for a systematic resolution of the already and the not yet. Is it in the future? Ellul denies that the sequence in

the book of Revelation is meant to be chronological, so the new creation does not occur at some future end time. Does it occur after death? Ellul might dismiss such a presumption, or even the wish for such a resolution, as speculation not provided for by the biblical witness. A more problematic issue for this-worldly ethics is the absolute contrast between love and freedom (which are of God, and of witnessing to God's Word in the world) and power (which is rebellion against God and enslaves both its exercisers and their victims). As this essay is being written, physical, technical power is badly needed to restrain flood waters on the United States' southern coast. It may be true that God appears in history as non-power, but does that mean that God never wants technical power to be exercised? Is there not a third option between love which can only witness, waiting for a free response, and power which crushes - something akin to artistic creation respectful of one's materials? (The argument that human beings should have built in a way more respectful of wetlands' capacity to act as flood buffers comes to mind.) Such are the questions raised by Ellul's treatment of the Apocalypse. Nevertheless, we are all in his debt for a beautiful, provocative book.

## Is God Truly Just?

by Patrick Chastenet

*Re-view of Jacques Ellul, Ce Dieu injuste...? Theologie chretienne pour le peuple d'Israel (Paris: Arlea, 1991; Reedition Poche/Arlea, 1999)*

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"For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all."  
(Romans 11:32)

Why, if God determines everything, would He punish those forebears he himself created to serve as witnesses to his wrath? If God, exercising his sovereignty as he thinks best, "saves" some and "rejects" the others, how can we accept that those foreordained to be irresponsible should suffer damnation? If God is good, He can do no evil; if he allows evil to be done, he is not good.

But can we really measure out God's goodness or justice? God is "arbitrary," just as love is "arbitrary." To claim that God is "unjust" would imply that there are values over and beyond the values of he who was characterized by Kierkegaard as the "Unconditioned One," the "Wholly Other": God, in other words, is not God.

The Bible, however, makes plain that what is good is wrought by God alone —as Jacques Ellul, the nonconformist Protestant theologian, reminds us in the last book

he was to publish during his lifetime. Making full use of all his finely-honed dialectical skills, he develops a masterly analysis of three of the most neglected and misunderstood chapters 9-11 of Paul's Epistle to the Romans.

In *Ce Dieu injuste ...?* Ellul does not forget that he is also –perhaps even primarily – a historian and sociologist. His exegesis, in sum, eschews the purely intellectual exercise. What Ellul sketches out here amounts, instead, to a Christian theology for the people of Israel, in which he confronts the spiritual roots of anti-Semitism: a highly useful project indeed when we realize that certain sectors of the Catholic Church have still not relinquished their old demons.

What has become of the Jewish people? Has it been cast aside ever since the coming of the Messiah? No! Far from being deicidal, the people of Israel serves as the bearer of God in Jesus Christ. The chosen people remains the “chosen” people. This, however, does not mean “saved,” but specially “set apart to bear witness,” to confirm that the God of the Bible is One, that he is the Lord of the Ages, and that his love is the only truth. Israel's vocation, therefore, is to live out, in accordance with the Law, a historical adventure whose goal is the desire to change the world.

There have, however, been three errors: (1) The Jews have mistakenly considered that the Torah embodies God's will and justice, though God himself refuses to be imprisoned within any text. His justice is not some perfect recompense for “pious deeds,” nor can his will ever be fully known. (2) Though entrusted with proclaiming that God's liberation includes everyone, they forgot just how universal this message was. (3) The Jews reserved the Revelation, Covenant and Election for themselves alone.

Hence the “temporary, partial” rejection of Israel which, found wanting in the divine plan to broadcast God's will to set all people free, was replaced by Jesus Christ, the ultimate “remnant of Israel.” Whereas the Torah itself is set aside for the Jewish people, Jesus Christ, the Torah's fulfillment, is a gift offered to all people. However, even if it still refuses to consider the Lord as the “Eternal One,” Israel–chosen by God for its weaknesses and not its virtues–is not guilty, according to Ellul.

It was, indeed, the “fall” of the Jews which was to bring about the salvation of pagans. “There, where sin abounded, grace abounded even more.” Isaac and Ishmael, Moses and Pharaoh, the “Yes” and the “No”: each complements the other. Israel is always both simultaneously chosen and rejected: the “positivity of negativity,” as it were, inasmuch as such disobedience serves God's ultimate design. If most Jews have not recognized the Messiah in Christ, it is so that all shall know divine grace and election.

The onus now is on the church to stir up Israel's jealousy by proclaiming an ethic of human liberation. But, as Ellul has previously demonstrated, as long as Christians continue preaching morality, dogmatics, constraint and austerity, instead of salvation, joy, freedom and love, the Jews can legitimately refuse to recognize in Jesus the Son of God.

The Holocaust must force us to undertake a radical rethinking of the whole of Christian theology, condemned to remain a very rickety construct if Israel is left out.

Ellul goes on to conclude by establishing a link between Judaism and the end of time: the Jewish people is, "willingly or unwillingly, the wedge lodged within humanity's heart of oak, and it will stay right there until that selfsame heart of oak has been changed into a heart of flesh."

## Dieu et-il injuste?

by Patrick Chastenet

*Jacques Ellul, Ce Dieu injuste...? Theologie chretienne pour le peuple d'Israel (Paris, Arlea: 1991; Reedition Poche/Arlea, 1999).*

« Car Dieu a enferme tous les hommes dans i'infideiite afin de faire misericorde a tous » (Rom. XI, 32).

Si Dieu decide de tout, pourquoi punirait-Il ceux qu'Il a crees d'avance pour temoigner de sa coiere? Si Dieu - absolument libre dans sa souverainete - "sauve" les uns et "rejette" ies autres, comment accepter que de teis irresponsabies soient damnes? Si Dieu est Bon Il ne peut faire ie Mai, s'Il iaisse faire ie Mai c'est qu'Il n'est pas Bon.

Mais pouvons-nous juger de ia bonte ou de ia justice de Dieu? Dieu est "arbitraire" exactement comme i'amour est arbitraire... Pretendre que Dieu est "injuste" signifierait qu'ii existe des vaieurs au-dessus de ceui que Kierkegaard nomme precisement *l'Inconditionne*; ce qui reviendrait a dire que Dieu n'est pas Dieu !

La Bibie nous montre que ie Bien c'est uniquement ce que Dieu fait, rappeiie Jacques Eiiui qui tente de sortir de cette serie de contradictions iogiques par une pensee diaiectique deja soiidement eprouvee (Cf. notamment *La raison d'etre. Meditation sur l'Ecclesiaste*, Paris, Seuii, 1987, reedition Seuii, 1995). Ce theiogien protestant non conformiste a consacre ie dernier iivre publiie de son vivant a i'analyse des trois chapitres (IX, X, XI) de i'Epitre de saint Paui aux Romains ies plus ignores ou ies plus mai compris.

Eiiui dans ce texte n'oubiie pas qu'ii est aussi -et peut-etre avant tout- historien et socioiogue. Son exegese a donc fort peu a voir avec un simpie exercice inteiiectuei. Il s'agit ni plus ni moins dans ce texte d'esquisser une theologie chretienne pour ie peupie d'Israei et de combattre ies racines spiritueiies de i'antisemitisme. Projet particuliere-ment utiie iorsque i'on sait que certains secteurs de i'Egiise cathoiique n'ont toujours pas renonce a ieurs vieux demons.

Que devient donc ie peupie juif depuis i'avenement du Messie? Est-ii rejete? Loin d'etre decide, Israei est ie peupie porteur de Dieu en Jesus-Christ. Le peupie eiu reste ie peupie "eiu". Ce qui ne veut pas dire "sauve" mais « mis a part pour temoigner ». Sa mission est d'attester, que ie Dieu biblique est unique, que ce Dieu est maitre de i'Histoire et que son Amour constitue ia seuie verite. Ainsi ia vocation d'Israei est de vivre seion ia Loi une aventure historique caracterisee par ie desir de changer ie monde.



Mais trois erreurs ont été commises: 1) les juifs ont confondu la Torah avec la justice et la volonté de Dieu, or Dieu ne se laisse pas enfermer dans un texte. Sa Justice n'est pas l'exacte retribution des "œuvres" et Sa Volonté est impossible à connaître dans son entier 2) chargés de la proclamation du Dieu libérateur pour tous, ils ont oublié l'universalité de leur message 3) les juifs se sont appropriés la Révélation, l'Alliance et l'Élection.

D'où le rejet « temporaire et partiel » d'Israël qui a déçu le projet divin de transmettre Sa volonté libératrice à tous, et son remplacement par Jésus-Christ: l'ultime reste d'Israël. Alors que la Torah est réservée au seul peuple juif, Jésus-Christ est un don offert à tous les hommes, autrement dit la Torah accomplie. Malgré cela les juifs refusent toujours de considérer le Seigneur comme l'"Éternel". Choisi par Dieu pour ses faiblesses et non pour ses vertus, Israël n'est pas coupable selon Eïlül.

La "chute" des juifs a en effet permis le "sauveté" des païens. « La où le péché a abondé, la grâce a surabondé. » Isaac et Ismaël, Moïse et Pharaon, le "oui" et le "non", vont de pair. Israël est toujours et en même temps le peuple élu et rejeté. On peut alors parler de "positivité de la négativité" dans la mesure où cette désobéissance même sert le dessein ultime. Si la majorité des juifs n'a pas reconnu le Messie en Christ, c'est pour permettre à tous les hommes de connaître la grâce et l'élection.

Il revient donc à l'Église, aujourd'hui, de susciter la jalousie d'Israël par une éthique d'homme libre. Or, comme il avait déjà montré (Eïlül *La subversion du christianisme*, Paris, Seuil, 1984 ; réédition Paris, La Table Ronde/ La petite vermine, 2001), tant que les chrétiens prêcheront une morale, une dogmatique, une contrainte, une austerité en lieu et place du sauveté, de la joie, de la liberté et de l'amour, les juifs pourront légitimement refuser de reconnaître le Fils de Dieu en Jésus.

La Shoah doit nous conduire à penser autrement toute la théologie chrétienne, théologie à jamais bancaire sans Israël. Et l'auteur de conclure en établissant un lien entre le judaïsme et la fin de l'Histoire: qu'il le veuille ou non, le peuple juif « est le coin enfoncé dans le cœur de chêne du monde et il y restera jusqu'à ce que le cœur de chêne soit changé en cœur de chair ».

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# Ellul's God's Politics

by Chris Friesen

*Re-View of Jacques Ellul, The Politics of God and the Politics of Man (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), translated by G. W. Bromiley from Politique de Dieu, politiques de l'homme (Paris: Nouvelle Alliance, 1966).*

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Once a person has tasted some of Jacques Ellul's biblical interpretation, he or she looks to another of his studies with the expectation, Okay, he's going to crack this text open for me. He's going to think through it as far as anyone can and press beautiful new meanings out of it, some of which will become lodged in my own imagination as the actual Word of God contained in this or that biblical passage. Yes, I'm going to have to read and re-read to keep pace with the surge of his rhetoric, and I'm going to raise an eyebrow here and there, sometimes even become downright annoyed, but in the end he's going to win me over to many of his interpretations because of the vibrant God-and neighbor-loving place at which they arrive.

In all these respects, *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man* does not disappoint. It is in fact a classic example of Ellulian hermeneutics. The same familiar features are here: the non-negotiable (though not un-nuanced) high view of the text's origin and authority, the trans-canonical reasoning, the robust Christocentrism, the constant thrust of existential application. Jacques Ellul takes the Bible as a richly-intertwined, self-illuminating unity of divine revelation intended to speak concrete direction to the desires, decisions, and actions of individuals and communities today the same as ever; with Jesus Christ, and God's saving work in Jesus Christ, as primary interpretive key.

Ellul's essential method of study in this volume, an idiosyncratic commentary/meditation on the Old Testament book of Second Kings, is outlined in an early footnote: "We shall adopt the simple attitude of the believer with his Bible who through the text that he reads is ultimately trying to discover what is the Word of God, and what is the final meaning of his life in the presence of this text" (p.12). Readers are advised to listen for some polemical tone in and around that statement. Ellul had little patience for either the methodological dogmas of historical and form criticism or the orthodoxy of skepticism embodied in Rudolf Bultmann's program of demythologization. Thus, although he gives the nod here and there to historical approaches and has clearly enriched his own store of knowledge by them, Ellul in the main handily sets aside a scientific orientation as he does his own critically incorrect work of extemporizing (so it seems) on the narrative as if his life, and ours, depended on it.

The particular aspect of life's meaning that Ellul as believer constantly chews on is the possibility for authentic action in this world on the part of both individual Christians and the gathered church. What is to be done? How is it to be done, and why? What can it accomplish? What is the world's typical mode of action, especially in its politics? What is God's? If God in Christ has already done everything, what is

left to do? What is life for, anyway? These are the questions that drive Ellul's "simple" turning to the text of Second Kings in *The Politics of God/Man*. (Incidentally, for a consideration of similar issues from a secular, sociological perspective, an inquirer should turn to this book's antecedent companion volume, *The Political Illusion* [Knopf, 1967]).

The introduction of *Politics* identifies the primary revelatory significance of Second Kings as twofold. Firstly, as "the most political of all the books of the Bible," Second Kings specially demonstrates the interventions of God in, and the judgment of God upon, human politics (defined by Ellul as, properly, "the discharge of a directive function in a party or state organism"). Secondly, Second Kings displays a live-action, historical elaboration of the old problem of human freedom within and over against divine sovereignty. The main body of Ellul's work investigates these two elements, politics and freedom, in a selective study of major personalities in Second Kings, which, for its part, presents a theo-historical narrative of Israel and Judah's international relations from the death of Ahab to the Exile, in counterpoint with the activity of the prophets Elijah and Elisha.

Ellul reflects deeply upon the careers of Naaman, leprous general of Aram; Joram, abdicating and faithless king in besieged Samaria; Hazael, scourge of Israel; Jehu, genocidal "religious cleanser"; Ahaz, pragmatic political deal-maker; Rabshakeh, Assyrian propagandist; and finally Hezekiah, paragon of prayerful humility. Interspersed throughout the virtuosic demonstration of paradigm-oriented hermeneutics (type three of ethicist Richard Hays' four modes of appeal to Scripture; cf. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* [HarperCollins, 1996]) are reflections on the crucial role of the prophet within and beside the maelstrom of political events, as well as dense excurses on themes such as the ultimate salvation of those undergoing judgment in earthly life ("They are put outside God's work but not his love" [p. 54]), the problem of Christian efficacy ("We have simply to be... a question put within the world and to the world" [p. 141]), and the role of the supernatural in history ("All other miracles receive their significance from this. that God enters into the life of man even to the point of this death" [p. 186]). The book concludes with a brief "Meditation on Inutility" that flirts with the pessimism of which Ellul is prone to be accused but ultimately issues in an encouraging affirmation of the true character of Christian freedom.

Of particular interest in the series of personality studies is the chapter on Jehu, both for its occasional hermeneutical fragility (e.g. the attribution of Jehu's whole murderous career to the supposed unauthorized modification of Elisha's message by an intermediary) and for its poignant relevance to our own time. "[Jehu] is a man of God, but he uses all the methods of the devil" (p. 99), judges Ellul. "He wants to do what God has revealed but he confuses what God has shown will come to pass with what God really loves" (p. 115). Indeed, we meet in Jehu the prototype of religious voluntarism who substitutes his own efficient means for God's, who "uses prophecy in the interest of politics while pretending to use politics in the service of prophecy."

Notwithstanding Ellul's convincing reading of the man, however, Jehu's adventure poses a significant interpretive challenge for Ellul because of his equally strong convictions about both biblical authority and violence. Ultimately, his attempt to insulate Elisha and God from specific responsibility for Jehu's purges retires to a daring theodicy, in what is one of the most memorable passages in the book: "When Jehu fulfilled the prophecy, it was on God himself that his violence fell. It was God whom he massacred in the priests of Baal, none of whom was a stranger or unimportant to God, since the Father had numbered all the hairs of their heads too. All the violence of Jehu is assumed by Jesus Christ... It is in this way and in these conditions that Jehu does the will of God. In his zeal for God, it is God himself that he strikes" (p. 110).

How does Ellul resolve the focal issue of his study, that is, the question about the interaction of human and divine freedom? Does the God of Second Kings boss people and history around? In paraphrase, the richly-argued sequence of positive and negative character paradigms comes together to communicate the following: God does indeed act (God's "politics"!) within human history, but not in a coercive manner and rarely even in an obviously supernatural manner. Rather, God relies on a whole nexus of real human decisions taken in the presence of his sometimes ambivalent and always contestable word (which, for its part, can be transmitted by the humblest of folks). Many human acts done according to purely human calculations (e.g. the reconnaissance of the Syrian camp by the four lepers) accomplish "just what God had decided and was expecting," while many others, particularly those which aim for assured results and appear most successful (e.g. Ahaz' adoption of an Assyrian altar) accomplish nothing at all and are swallowed up in the crushing fatality of history. Nevertheless, "in this medley, this swarm, this chaos, this proliferating incoherence of man, there is a choice that is God's choice" (p. 70); and so, like Elisha and Naaman and Hezekiah, we must make it, accepting the humble means of the kingdom and leaving the results to the Holy Spirit.

Particularly for the Christian this choice has become authentically possible. For through the once-for-all-time, redounding Event of the cross, Jesus Christ has shattered fatality and set in motion the power and possibility of true freedom within the course of history. A preminent sign of its appropriation, surprisingly enough, will be the apparent uselessness of actions subsequently undertaken. Ellul avers, "To be controlled by utility and the pursuit of efficacy is to be subject to the strictest determination of the actual world" (197). By contrast, "To do a gratuitous, ineffective, and useless act is the first sign of our freedom and perhaps the last" (p. 198). Thus, in the teeth of a world that values only the measurable accomplishment, Christians perform their childlike acts of prayer and witness with the joy of unconcerned, freely chosen obedience, living out a love that does not seek "results." Life exists to provide scope for this freedom in love.

To whom would I recommend this book? I should confess that, in terms of my own ongoing sojourn as a believer trying to discover the final meaning of his life in the presence of the Bible, it was an interesting time to read both Second Kings and

Ellul's meditation on it. I found myself continually distracted by critical concerns in my preliminary study of the Old Testament chapters: Who wrote these things down? When and why? How did they come to know or conceive of the events and explanations they related? Underneath my fitful deconstructive speculation ran the unspoken question, What can be trusted in all this? What is really true here? I realize these are the typical and chronic symptoms of that modern affliction, "looking at the beam" (cf. C. S. Lewis's "Meditation in a Toolshed"), but it seems to happen all by itself. Nevertheless, forthwith Ellul comes along and says, by his own example, Look *along* the beam. The story itself can be trusted. The story is true. As a heuristic discipline, give the narrative the benefit of the doubt, taking it on its own terms. In its movement "we are in the presence of life itself at its most profound and most significant. We must not let it slip away from us" (p. 16). In this way Ellul refocuses one's literary attention to a depth of field closer to the surface of the text, making the narrative itself sharp for real-time signification.

That being said, I do have a persevering critical question. That is, If God really deals with human beings in the way Ellul describes (and I believe that God does), then did not the same flexibility, the same tolerance for error, the same non-coerciveness, the same incomprehensibly humble willingness to adapt to human choice and preference and to assume human attempt and aspiration, obtain for those human beings who spoke and inscribed the words of human language which have become our Scripture? Saying so would not be to imply that those words can't limn our faith and practice reliably, can't witness to capital-T truth and capital-D doctrine; but it would be to imply that the absolute non-negotiable of Revelation which often gives Ellul's interpretive debate a certain punch might need to be held a little more loosely. Is there authentic Christian faith that takes the Bible less as an unbreakable rock and more as a kind of river or wind or vegetable garden? What does such faith look like in practice? I'm not exactly sure, but I realize that Jacques Ellul acts as a kind of helpful tether on my leg as I wander out and back trying to find examples.

I need to tie up my earlier question: Who should read *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*? Remember, one doesn't pick up one of Ellul's biblical studies for a careful reconstruction of historical and redactive contexts or a catalogue of alternative critical perspectives autographed with his own judicious vote; one picks it up to see just what variety of narrative details will get caught in his widely-flung, imaginative hermeneutical net and how he will gut, fillet, and fry them up in a vigorous flurry of argument that never fears to imply, "Thus saith the Lord." Therefore to "Who should read?" I would answer, in partial echo of Ellul himself, both Evangelical deists who fancy themselves saving souls from eternal hell while the Father files his nails in the study, and all manner of other good-hearted people strung out on too much responsibility for establishing the shalom of the kingdom. I would also answer, Bible-olatrous theocrats pulling strings to get the right flags saluted in the public squares of villages local and global. And I would especially suggest, people like me, who may experience Holy Scripture's Word-of-God-ness as a variable phenomenon and who are

always deeply grateful when a flaming mind like Jacques Ellul's takes the text and reveals revelation in it once again.

## Judging Ellul's Jonah by Victor Shepherd

*Re-view of Jacques Ellul, The Judgment of Jonah (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), translated by G. W. Bromiley from Le Livre de Jonas (Paris: Cahiers biblique de Foi et Vie, 1952).*

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Repeatedly Jacques Ellul's *Judgment of Jonah* reflects his characteristic love/grief relationship with the church, the church's lack of discernment, and an ecclesiastical agenda that finds the church somnolent, feckless and desultory. As sad as he is scathing, Ellul notes, "A remarkable thing about even the active Christian is that he (*sic*) never has much more than a vague idea about reality. He is lost in the slumber of his activities, his good works, his chorales, his theology, his evangelizing, his communities. He always skirts reality. . . .It is non-Christians who have to waken him out of his sleep to share actively in the common lot" (p.31).

More foundationally, *Judgment* exudes Ellul's characteristic conviction concerning the pre-eminence of Jesus Christ. While the book of Jonah is deemed "prophetic" among Jewish and Christian thinkers, Ellul understands prophecy strictly as an Israelite pronouncement fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

As readers of Ellul know from his other books (e.g., *Apocalypse* and *The Political Illusion*, commentaries on the books of Revelation and 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings respectively), Ellul has little confidence in the expositions of the "historical-critical" guild of exegetes insofar as their preoccupation with speculative minutiae blinds them to the substance of the text; namely, the word that God may wish to speak to us through that text. . Unlike many in the the professional exegetical guild, Ellul sees Jesus Christ present in the Older Testament. Ellul regards the guild's preoccupation with the history of the formation and transmission of the text as a nefarious work wherein the guild "dissects Scripture to set it against Scripture".(p.74) Exegetes often deploy their "expertise" just as the Bible describes the tempter in both the Garden of Eden and the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness—undermining its status as God's word. In light of this it's no surprise that only three-quarters' way through *Judgment* Ellul left-handedly admits that the book of Jonah was "rightly composed to affirm the universalism of salvation" (p.77), when exegetes customarily insist that the sole purpose of the book of Jonah was to protest the shrivelling of post-exilic Israel's concern, even to protest the apparent narrowness, exclusiveness and concern for self-preservation found in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

If what is crucial to most is peripheral to Ellul, then what is the epicentre of the book of Jonah? It is certainly not a compendium of moral truths, let alone a test of credulity (which test Christian apologetics paradoxically attempts to eliminate by finding rational explanations for the miracle of the great fish). Neither is the book an extended allegory; nor even an instance of the prophetic literature found in Scripture since the book shares few of the concerns of the prophetic books (e.g., no prophetic address is spoken to Israel) while features of the book aren't found in prophetic literature (e.g., the books named after Jeremiah and Amos don't feature biographical portrayals). The core of the book lies, rather, in its depiction of Jonah himself as a figure, a type, of Christ. Having argued for this position, Ellul brooks no disagreement: "If one rejects this sense, there is no other." (p.17)

As *Judgment* unfolds it reflects the major themes of Ellul's social and theological thought as well as aspects of his own spiritual development. With respect to the latter, Ellul's understanding of Jonah's vocation mirrors his own self-effacing, autobiographical statements in *In Season, Out of Season* and *What I Believe*: "Everything begins the moment God decides to choose... We can begin to apprehend only when a relation is set up between God and us, when he reveals his decision concerning us" (p21).

As for characteristic aspects of Ellul's thinking, *Judgment* re-states and develops them on every page. For instance, those whom God summons are freed from the world's clutches and conformities in order to be free to address and spend themselves for a world that no longer "hooks" them even as the same world deems them "useless" to it. In this regard Ellul writes of Jonah, "The matter is so important that everything which previously shaped the life of this man humanly and sociologically fades from the scene..Anything that might impel him to obey according to the world has lost its value and weight for him" (p..21). In other words, any Christian's commission at the hand of their crucified Lord is necessary *and sufficient* explanation for taking up one's work and witness.

While vocation is sufficient explanation for taking up their appointed work, Christians cannot pretend their summons may be ignored or laid aside, for in their particular vocations *all* Christians have been appointed to "watch" in the sense of Ezekiel 33. Disregarding one's vocation is dereliction, and all the more damnable in that the destiny of the world hangs on any one Christian's honouring her summons: "Christians have to realize that they hold in their hands the fate of their companions in adventure" (p.35).

Readers of Ellul have long been startled at, persuaded of, and helped by his exploration of the "abyss," the virulent, insatiable power of evil to beguile, seduce, and always and everywhere destroy. (See *Money and Power* and *Propaganda*). Ellul's depiction of evil in terms of death-as-power - rather than in terms of "a kind of lottery...turning up as heart failure" (p.51) - finds kindred understanding and exposition in the work of William Stringfellow and Daniel Berrigan.) The "great fish" *sent* to swallow Jonah (God uses evil insofar as he is determined to punish) is a manifestation of such power.

While in the "belly of the great fish" Jonah is subject to God's judgment upon his abdication as he is confronted defencelessly with the undisguised horror of the abyss.

Awakened now to his culpable folly, Jonah understands that even as he is exposed to “absolute hell”(p.45) he hasn’t been abandoned to it. At no point has he ceased being the beneficiary of God’s grace. *Now* Jonah exclaims, “Thou hast delivered me” - i.e., *before* the “great fish” has vomited him to safety. Deliverance for all of us, Ellul herein announces characteristically, occurs when we grasp God’s presence and purpose for us (and through us for others) in the midst of the isolation that our vocation, compounded by our equivocating, has brought upon us. Percipiently [new word?] Ellul adds, “[T]he abyss is the crisis of life at any moment.”(p.52)

Typically Ellul points out ersatz means of resolving the crisis: we look to “technical instruments, the state, society, money, and science. idols, magic, philosophy, spiritualism..As long as there is a glimmer of confidence in these means man prefers to stake his life on them rather than handing it over to God.”(p.57) While these instruments can give us much, they can’t give us the one thing we need in the face of the all-consuming abyss: mercy. No relation of love exists between these instruments and us; they merely possess us. The person who “loves” money, for instance, is merely owned. The crisis is resolved incipiently when we “beg in any empty world for the mercy which cannot come to [us] from the world.”(p.58) The crisis is resolved definitively as we hear and heed the summons to discipleship and thereafter obey the one who can legitimately (and beneficently) claim us inasmuch as he has betaken himself to the abyss with us.

Here Ellul’s Christological reading of the book of Jonah surfaces unambiguously: “The real question is not that of the fish which swallowed Jonah; it is that of the hell where I am going and already am. The real question is not that of the strange obedience of the fish to God’s command; it is that of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and my resurrection.”(p.63)

Just because the book of Jonah is a prolepsis of Jesus Christ, the book is full of hope. To be sure, signs of grace come and go in all of us - even as grace never disappears. (Recall the gourd given to provide shade for Jonah, even as the gourd soon withered.) While God’s people frequently and foolishly clutch at the sign instead of trusting the grace therein signified, the day has been appointed when the sign is superfluous as faith gives way to sight and hope to its fulfilment. At this point the “miracles” that were signs of grace for us will be gathered up in “the sole miracle, Jesus Christ living eternally for us”.(p.67)

The note of hope eschatologically permeating the book of Jonah (and Ellul’s exposition of it) recalls the conclusion to *The Meaning of the City*. There Ellul invites the reader to share his vivid “experience” of finding himself amidst a wretched urban slum in France yet “seeing” *the* city, the New Jerusalem. While Ellul’s “exegesis” of the book of Jonah will be regarded as idiosyncratic in several places, its strength is its consistent orientation to the One who remains the “open secret” of the world and of that community bound to the world. For decades Ellul’s own life illustrated a statement he made in *Judgment* concerning the prophet Jonah: “Everything circles around the man who has been chosen. A tempest is unleashed”(p.25). Ellul’s writings indicate *passim*



that as much characterizes all who discern their vocation and pledge themselves to it without qualification, reservation or hesitation.

# In Review: Tresmontant, Vahanian, Mailot, & Chouraqui

## Claude Tresmontant, *The Hebrew Christ: Language in the Age of the Gospels*

(Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1989); Trans. By Kenneth D. Whitehead from *Le Christ Hebreu: La*

*Langue et l'Age de Evangiles* (Paris: O.E.I.L., 1983).

Reviewed by John L. Gwin

John Gwin lives in Beloit, Wisconsin, where he does some building security and maintenance work while pursuing his interests in language and culture.

By the fall of 1990 I had read and admired Jacques Ellul for perhaps 20 years and had occasionally corresponded, asking questions about his works and related topics. He graciously responded, often taking the time to answer my questions. With the buildup for the Gulf War nearing completion, and concerned that it might lead to a world war, I decided to take a week off work, and bought a cheap, night flight, round trip ticket to Paris.

An interesting side note to this, which reflects poorly on me, but favorably on JE, is that after I bought my ticket, I wrote to him of my plans and asked if I might visit him. He responded by return mail, "No, do not come. My wife is ill, I am busy with preparation for a conference that weekend, and with the hierarchy of the protestant denomination that has closed our little congregation. Can you please rearrange your visit for another date." My ticket, being non refundable, I quickly wrote him back asking if I might attend the conference, but for the whole month preceding my scheduled departure. I heard nothing. I chose to take the flight anyway, and arrived at about 8AM on a Thursday in Paris. I made my way to the little Librairie Protestante which was going out of business, and they so kindly, without charge, made several long distance calls. One was to Prof. Ellul to arrange for me to attend the conference on "Man and the Sacred" at the Andre Malraux Center in Bordeaux. The second call was to Dr. Brenot, chairman of the conference. "We have around 1000 signed up for the 800 openings. What's one more?" was his generous verdict.

At the conference I met a number of very kind and gracious people. At the book table on Sunday, the last day of the conference, Prof. Ellul invited me to meet with him the following day. During our 2-hour visit at his home, professor Ellul spoke with me at

length. He introduced me to his wife, who had recently had a stroke. He also gave me copies in French of two books of his, *L'Impossible priere, La genese aujourd'hui*, and a copy of his friend Bernard Charbonneau's book, *Je fus, essai sur la liberte*, for which he had arranged the printing. Professor Ellul also recommended that I get a copy of a new book by Claude Tresmontant, entitled *Le Christ hebreu*. While in Bordeaux, I picked one up at the Librairie Mollat. I worked through it in the next few months, and located by library loan a copy of Tresmontant's retroversion and notes of *L'Evangile de Jean*. I was delighted by what I found.

Contrary to that which is taught in Sunday School, and in New Testament classes in college and seminary, Tresmontant presents an alternative hypothesis as to the origins of the gospels that makes such perfect sense that I wonder why I had never heard it before.

We know that those who first heard Jesus of Nazareth included at least a few scribes, and Pharisees. Why have we assumed that no one took notes? According to the teachings of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century form critical school in Germany, a long oral tradition of 40 or 50 years preceded the step of setting pen to papyrus or parchment to record the memorable words of this most unusual rabbi. Does it not tax the imagination to think of the People of the Book waiting years before actually writing something down! The prevalence of anti-Semitism in Europe of that time provides a perhaps, more or less, unconscious motive for impugning the accuracy of the writing of the gospels and epistles, and the belief in a long oral tradition removing the written record farther from its Source could serve this end.

Tresmontant presents evidence for the hypothesis that the gospels were written first, and early, in Hebrew and almost simultaneously, and literally, into Greek. This was done, not esthetically to please the Greek ear, but literally, to accurately convey the original meaning to the Diaspora readers no longer fluent in Hebrew.

Jean Psichari, Professor of Greek in the Ecole des Langues Orientales Vivantes, himself of Greek origin, described the literal Greek rendering of the Septuagint as very different from the normal Greek of that time. In his *Essai sur le Grec de la Septuagint* he writes, "It is not just the syntax, it is not only the word order that follows Hebrew use. The style itself is perpetually contaminated. It is not Greek."

Tresmontant has proposed that the translators of the Gospels into Greek of the First Century AD used essentially the same Hebrew/Greek lexicon used by the translators of the Hebrew Scriptures into the Greek of the Septuagint. He proposes that the Gospels were derived from notes of Jesus' talks taken during or shortly after they were spoken, and later assembled into collections by various members of His audience, and almost immediately translated into Greek for the Diaspora.

Tresmontant, in four separate volumes translates in reverse the Greek of each of the gospels into Hebrew using the corresponding Hebrew words from which the Greek of the Septuagint was translated and then into French using the insights and meanings gleaned in the process. The wealth of meaning restored to, and depth of insight into long familiar as well as difficult passages; the great amount of information restored to

the sacred text, and even the accuracy of words used to translate are all part of what is gained in this process

Tresmontant compares the effect of this uncovering of the Hebrew meaning to uncovering a work of art. "If you put the Venus de Milo beneath a covering, it is difficult to see her form. Passing from the modern (French or English) translations to the originals, that is of the Greek Gospels is a first uncovering. When one uncovers the Hebrew that one finds beneath the Greek translation, one has made a second discovery. The equivalent of the living woman who sat as model for the Venus de Milo" (*Le Christ hebreu*, p. 36).

Several years ago, I found that *Le Christ Hebreu* had been published in English in 1989, the year before I visited Prof. Ellul, as *The Hebrew Christ* (trans. Kenneth D. Whitehead; Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press).

Tresmontant has done a remarkable work of service both to the world of biblical scholarship and to all those interested in the content of the gospels and related writings. His *Evangile de Matthieu: Traduction et Notes*, is also available in English as *The Gospel of Matthew, Translation and Notes* (Front Royal, VA: Christendom Press, 1986). A volume containing his French versions of all four gospels was published by F.X. De Guibert/ O.E.I.L. but is now out of print,

In at least two of Tresmontant's other major works, *Essai sur la pensee hebraique*, and *L 'histoire de l'universe et le sens de la creation*, he compares and contrasts Greek and Hebrew philosophy, and posits that the predominant and continuing dualism of Western (Greek) thought includes a total misunderstanding of the Hebrew ideas of creation, incarnation, freedom, etc. The former philosophy, fostering an ongoing devaluation of the physical world seen as illusory, evil, "descended" from and a shadow of the "Ideal" and resulting in a more or less low-level depression, frustration, and lack of hope for anything new and "creative" in the future. The latter, Hebrew revelation, with its understanding of all things as "created" and declared to be "good" by a transcendent Creator, gives life an ongoing "real" meaning and content and hope of a future completely new and unexpected.

In *The Hebrew Christ*, Tresmontant mentions several other authors, including John A. T. Robinson, whose *Redating the New Testament* is "absolutely decisive" in its argument for the earlier dating of the New Testament texts, and Fr. Jean Carmignac, whose *Naissance des evangiles* (Paris: O.E.I.L., 1984; ET: *Birth of the Synoptics*, Franciscan Herald Press, 1987) presents arguments also supporting the Hebrew origins of the NT.

While translating the Dead Sea Scrolls, Jean Carmignac frequently noticed connections with the New Testament. Upon completion of the translation he had so many notes of correlations that he thought of making a commentary on the NT in light of the Dead Sea documents. Beginning with the Gospel of Mark, and in order to more easily compare the Greek Gospels to the Qumran Hebrew, he began on his own to re-translate Mark into Qumran Hebrew. He became convinced of Mark's derivation from a Hebrew original. Not knowing Hebrew well enough to be incapable of making errors, and so that competent scholars would not dismiss his effort, he had to assure himself

that no errors of Hebrew usage got by him. To do this he decided to compare his work of retroversion with many other translations of the NT into Hebrew, beginning with Delitsch's of 1877. Carmignac also began editing and publishing a multi-volume series of Hebrew translations of the New Testament. He died in October of 1987 hoping that this work would be taken up by others.

All this seems to be an example of certain Catholic theologians paying close attention to the Scriptures in ways that perhaps many Protestant theologians, taking these Scriptures for granted, had not considered. This is reminiscent of the favorable reception by many Roman Catholic theologians of the work of Karl Barth, especially his enormous *Church Dogmatics*. And in a similar vein, I am grateful for Karl Barth's reminder in his *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, that no age is ever "dead." "There is no past in the Church, so there is no past in theology. 'In him they all live. '... The theology of any period must be strong and free enough to give a calm, attentive and open hearing not only to the voices of the Church Fathers, not only to favorite voices, not only to the voices of the classical past, but to all the voices of the past. God is the Lord of the Church. He is also the Lord of theology. We cannot anticipate which of your fellow-workers from the past are welcome in our own work and which are not. It may always be that we have especial need of quite unsuspected (and among these, of quite unwelcome) voices in one sense or another."

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## **Gabriel Vahanian, *Anonymous God* (Aurora, Colorado: The Davies Group, 2001)**

Reviewed by Darrell J. Fasching

Professor of Religious Studies, University of South Florida, Tampa; founding editor of *The Ellul Forum*.

From his earliest best seller at the beginning of the 1960s, *The Death of God*, through *God and Utopia* (1977) to his most recent *Anonymous God* (2001), to name three of his many books over the last forty years, Gabriel Vahanian's message has become consistently clearer, more forceful and more poetic. In the first we learned of our "cul-

tural incapacity for God” in a scientific and technological civilization. In the second we learned that biblical faith is capable of migrating from one cultural world to another in its journey toward a new heaven and a new earth. This journey of faith can carry us beyond the death of God through its utopian capacity to transform human selfunderstanding, whether that understanding is in terms of nature (ancient & medieval), history (modern) or technology (postmodern).

Now in *Anonymous God* (translated by Noelle Vahanian), Gabriel Vahanian teaches us how to be poets, speaking a new language of faith, a technological utopianism. *Anonymous God* is both a translation and revision of his 1989 book *Dieu anonyme, ou la peur des mots* (Desclee de Brouwer, Paris 1989). It is a fearless poetic exploration of the utopianism of our humanity in trinitarian terms, unfolding in four densely packed stanzas (or chapters) over one hundred and fifty-five pages. Chapter One explores the iconoclasm of language in relation to technology and the utopianism of faith. Chapters Two, Three and Four show how this iconoclasm of the word—in which we live, move and have our becoming—is one yet three as we move from “Language and Utopia: God” to “Salvation and Utopia: The Christ” to “Utopianism of the Body and the Social Order: the Spirit.”

”The Bible,” says Vahanian, “is not a book to be read but to read through” like a pair of glasses (xv). The task is not to accommodate our selves to some foreign and long gone cosmology that asks us to choose the past over the future but to see in our present world in a new way, in an iconoclastic way that will allow us to invent our humanity anew. Whether we are speaking of the ancient, medieval, modern or post-modern worlds - the world is always in danger of becoming our fate—a prison from which we can escape only by changing worlds. The task today is to do for our technological civilization what those of the first century’s eschatologically oriented biblical communities did for theirs, open one’s world to an “other” world, a new world rather than “another” world. In any age, we can only be human, Vahanian seems to say, when we have the imagination, courage, ingenuity and grace to invent ourselves anew and so end up changing the world to facilitate our humanity rather than giving up and seeking to change worlds. This biblical eschatological task is the utopian heritage of the West - “eschatology prevails over cosmogony, even over cosmology. And, in short, utopia prevails over the sacred” (xviii).

As human beings, our capacity for technology is given with out capacity for language, which is to say, for God. Faith has no language of its own (27) and so in every age must iconoclastically appropriate what is available, whether it be the medieval language of metaphysics, the modern language of history or the postmodern language of technique. The advent of technological civilization, Vahanian seems to say, in important ways makes this task easier rather than more difficult. For far from being totally alien to the eschatic orientation of Christian faith, technological civilization has a greater affinity with it than either the medieval language of metaphysics or the modern language of history, for technology like eschatology shares the utopian orientation toward making all things new. And utopia is not some impossible ideal but the iconoclastic possibility

of realizing the impossible, of reinventing one's humanity in any world, especially a technological one.

This utopianism is predicated on an understanding that always and everywhere –in the beginning is the word and the word is God. God is given with our capacity for language. God is the God who speaks. We do not claim language, language claims us. “We do not speak for God but are spoken for” (2). Metaphor is not one type of language, language is metaphor - using and yet contesting established meanings to invent the new, and so give birth to a language without precedent. Such language unleashes the utopian possibilities of the human that body forth into culture, making all things new.

Prophecy, *poesis* and *techne* are but three faces of the same capacity, the capacity to invent our humanity and in the process reinvent the world as a new creation - the word made flesh. Being “spoken for,” Vahanian tells us, we must “speak up.” We must speak up prophetically to change the world, and yet must do this poetically. The poet, as the ancient Greek language testifies, is a wordsmith, someone who has the *techne* (technique or skill) “to make or do.” Our humanity comes to expression in and through the word, and is not so much natural or historical, or even technological, as it is utopian –a new beginning that encourages us not to change worlds but to change the world.

This “good news” is not news reserved for some sacred saving remnant but rather given once for all. It is good news for the whole human race. All language, says Vahanian, presupposes otherness. The appeal to any god who excludes others is an appeal to an idol. Whenever and wherever language is iconoclastic, there is no other God than the God of others. Indeed, being “in Christ” is just having this God in common so that Christ “is the designation of our common denominator instead of only the Christian’s mere Jesus” (91).

For Vahanian, the God of the biblical tradition is a God who can neither be named or imaged and so remains always “anonymous” - the God of others and the God for others. And so for him, “Christ is much less a believer’s Christ than he is a Christ for the unbeliever” (82), for every person whose flesh is claimed by the iconoclasm of the word that makes the invention of our humanity ever and again possible as the “worlding” of the word - the Word made flesh in the structures of our world (87). When the word is made flesh the kingdom of God draws near and God reigns, all in all.

For Vahanian eschatology prevails not only over cosmogony, cosmology and the sacred but also over soteriology. Far from being a religion of salvation, he argues, Christian faith liberates us from obsession with salvation, to embrace our new humanity and new creation, here and now. Christ cannot be reduced to Jesus any more than Jesus can be identified with God. For Vahanian, Jesus is no half-god-half-man but rather, as the Council of Chalcedon insisted, without confusion or mixture Christ is where the radical alterity of God and humanity meet, giving both the words “God” and “human” their authentic meaning (97). “God is the measure of humanity even as our humanity is the measure of God” (96).

When the church assumes its iconoclastic and utopian vocation as body of Christ it becomes the “the laboratory for the kingdom of God,” desacralizing both the world

and religion. As such its liturgy or “public work” invites both believer and unbeliever to bring to this new world their talents. The public work of the church is to create jobs that hallow and therefore desacralize the social order, and so further social justice by making the invention of our humanity once more possible. Even as the church once created monasteries, hospitals and universities that transformed the human landscape, so today, far from being asked to reject or escape our technological civilization, the church, is called to embrace those “skills and crafts through which the human being is being human” (134) and so demonstrate that even (or especially) in a technological civilization our humanity can be reinvented. The biological process of evolutionary hominization, says Vahanian should not be confused with the utopian project of humanization. Indeed, only by continual reinvention, he suggests, can we really be human.

This is not a book for the theologically timid who only want to think “orthodox” thoughts and so betray the tradition by repeating it instead of continuing it. To repeat the tradition is to bring it to an end and make it seem as if our only option is to “change worlds.” But Abrahamic faith is, after all, a setting out on a journey without knowing where we are going (Hebrews 11: 8). Vahanian’s iconoclasm overturns everything in such a way as to make possible the tradition’s continuance and in the process encourages us to change the world instead of abandoning it.

The theologically adventurous will find this a book rich with insight. From this perspective, I have only one quibble with Vahanian’s poetic adventure - he is more convincing in what he affirms than in what he sometimes denies. His occasional comparative reflections are not nearly as nuanced as those aimed at Christianity. He tells us, for instance, that “the Western tradition is beckoned by the utopian paradigm of religion, in its Greek as well as in its Hebrew (Judeo-Christian) version. While for Eastern religions the spiritual life aims at exchanging worlds, the West, for its part, came and still comes under the preview of

21 a diametrically opposed approach which aims at changing the world” (xvii-xviii).

Later in his argument he makes this observation specifically with reference to Buddhism. Such large contrasts ignore the profound shift from an “otherworldly” to a “this worldly” orientation that came fairly early with the shift from Theravada to Mahayana Buddhism and is also typical of Neo-Confucianism in China. To make his claim work, even for Western religion, Vahanian has had to elevate the eschatological strand and reject the soteriological within Christianity, but he does not seem to see similar strategies at work in other traditions. For example, I think one could argue that Thich Nhat Hanh’s “socially engaged Buddhism” does in its own way for Buddhism what Vahanian does for Christianity.

*Anonymous God* is an extraordinary poetic work of metaphorical transformation. The words are all familiar and yet what is said is quite unfamiliar, new and unprecedented. In a typical book, one might expect the author to offer one, two or possibly three new insights per chapter. In this book one finds one, two or three per paragraph. The poetic density therefore is at times overwhelming. One feels the need to stop fre-



quently and come up for air, lest one get dizzy from an overload of insight. It is a book that is best read slowly and then revisited if you wish to avoid the vertigo that comes with having everything that seems so familiar rendered unfamiliar too suddenly. The final outcome of that patience - -startlingly illumination of the new world that surrounds us –makes it all worth while.

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The IJES (with its francophone sister-society, L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul) links together scholars and friends of various specializations, vocations, backgrounds, and nations, who share a common interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), long time professor at the University of Bordeaux. Our objectives are (1) to preserve and disseminate his literary and intellectual heritage, (2) to extend his social critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) to extend his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

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## **A Review of Les Dix Commandments Aujourd'hui & Le Decalogue**

Andre Chouraqui, *Les Dix Commandments Aujourd'hui: Dix Paroles pour reconcilier l'Homme avec l'humain*

(Paris: Robert Laffont, 2000).

Alphonse Maillot, *Le Decalogue: Une Morale pour notre temps*

(Paris: Librairie Protestante and Geneve: Labor et Fides, 1985).

Reviewed by David W. Gill

President, International Jacques Ellul Society

In my recent book *Doing Right: Practicing Ethical Principles* (InterVarsity Press, 2005), the two authors with the most citations in my author index were Alphonse

Maillot (37 citations) and Andre Chouraqui (34 citations). *Doing Right*, part two of my introduction to Christian ethics, is structured around the Decalogue, seen through the lenses of the double Love Commandment and the biblical calls to justice and freedom. I see the Ten Commandments as the ten basic ways to love either God or a neighbor (“made in God’s image and likeness, therefore...”), the ten basic principles of justice, and the ten fundamental guidelines in a life of freedom.

During my 1984-85 sabbatical in Bordeaux I actually started working on this project (sidetracked a lot by other projects for fifteen years but picked up again with passion and attention during a study leave in Bordeaux the first half of 2000—there’s something about Bordeaux and ethical research, I have to conclude!). I shared some of my early chapter drafts with Jacques Ellul during our Friday afternoon meetings at his home that year. I specifically remember him urging me to start acquiring and studying the writings of Alphonse Maillot. In subsequent years, Ellul also mentioned Andre Chouraqui to me. These authors became two of the three most important modern sources for my understanding of the ethics of the Decalogue (the other was Czech theologian Jan Milic Lochman).

Alphonse Maillot (1920-2003) was a pastor and theologian in the Reformed Church of France. He published several biblical commentaries, including three volumes on the Psalms, a major study of Romans, and a brilliant little work on the Beatitudes.

*Le Decalogue: Une morale pour notre temps* begins with Maillot rejecting the simplistic and false association of the Decalogue with a legalistic attitude. “We forget that legalism was not created by the Decalogue but by the listener . . . Above all we forget the liberating character of the Decalogue: promise, future, and joy. The Torah (I reject the term ‘Law’) is not only holy and just, it is *good*. Good for us. It is this liberating goodness of the Decalogue, expressed in particular by the first commandment, that I don’t find very often among the commentators” (pp. 7-8; my translation).

Among Maillot’s emphases as he works his way through the Decalogue: this is guidance addressed to laity, not just clergy; there is no separation between the religious or worship side of life and one’s affairs out in the world—and Maillot warns against a too-strict division of two table in the Decalogue, something that has always seemed misguided to me as well; despite an initial impression of negativity (“Thou shalt not”), the Decalogue opens up a hundred positives for every negative; while the Decalogue is given to the Covenant people liberated from Egyptian slavery, and it must never be imposed on those around us, the message is for “all who have ears to hear”; the first command (“no other gods before me”), is the critical foundation—the next nine spell out the implications of have Yahweh as God.

In discussing the command against idols and images Maillot shows how far-reaching are its implications—rejecting our theological and philosophical images of God as much as our physical ones, and warning against viewing people through images and stereotypes. It is a question of life and vitality being replaced by narrow, lifeless substitutes, for God or for others.

In every discussion, Maillot shows his grasp of the historical and linguistic issues but then he takes his readers to the heart, the essential message, of each commandment, both in its negative and positive reach. His discussions and applications are brilliantly insightful and even exhilarating. I never got to meet Maillot in person but I did have the pleasure of reaching him by telephone at the retirement home where he spent the last years of his life, and thanking him for his extraordinary gifts to his readers.

In February of 2000, taking a short break from my work in Bordeaux, on a visit to Sarlat, east of Bordeaux, I was surprised to see in the window of a little book store the title *Les Dix Commandements Aujourd'hui*. This is not a popular theme of retail books in France (or the USA!). I was further surprised and pleased to see that it was written by Andre Chouraqui, whose name I knew thanks to Ellul.

Chouraqui (born 1917 in Algeria) studied law and rabbinical studies in Paris and worked with the French Resistance during WWII. He settled in Jerusalem in 1958 and served as an advisor to David Ben-Gurion (1959-63) and later in the 60s as elected Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem under Teddy Kollek. Chouraqui is the only person to have published original translations of the Hebrew Bible, New Testament, and Koran. He is the author of many other books.

*Les Dix Commandements* is a remarkable study by any measure. Chouraqui was friends with Rene Cassin, the primary editor of the UN Declaration of Universal Human Rights and dedicated this book to him. Chouraqui says that we need a declaration of universal human *duties* to go along with the *rights*—and the Ten Commands serve that purpose. Chouraqui reviews how each of the ten has been interpreted and applied in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—and how each could help us today. The Decalogue should be a helpful foundation for common understanding and reconciliation. This is a brilliant and wise contribution.

## News & Notes

— JEAN-FRANCOIS MEDARD

Professor Jean-Francois Medard died on September 23, 2005, at the age of 71. Medard was a student of Jacques Ellul and later a colleague at the Institute for Political Studies at the University of Bordeaux. He was an expert in sub-Saharan African history, politics, and culture, as any bibliographic or web search will quickly show. He was the founding president of the local “association Jacques Ellul” and, more recently an active member of the Association Internationale Jacques Ellul. The conversation and debate were animated and the welcome warm for legions of visitors to the home of Jean-Francois and his wife Burney over the years. Our sincere condolences go to Burney and the family.

— JACQUES ELLUL, PENSEUR SANS FRONTIERES

A collection of articles from the fall 2004 colloquium at Poitiers on Jacques Ellul’s thought and its continuing importance, ten years after his death is now available for

purchase from Editions l'Esprit du Temps, BP 107, 33491 Le Bouscat Cedex, France. Send 21 euros plus 5 euros for shipping and handling.

Edited by Patrick Chastenet, the collection includes “Jacques Ellul’s Ethics: Legacy and Promise” by David W. Gill, “Some Problems in Ellul’s Treatment of Propaganda” by Randall Marlin, “Peut-on lire sans trahir” by Didier Nordon, “La Technique et la chair” by Daniel Cerezuelle, “Jacques Ellul et la décroissance” by Alain Gras, “L’Idee de revolution dans l’oeuvre de Jacques Ellul” by Liberte Crozon, “Le Droit technicien” by Claude Ducouloux-Favard, “Critique de la Politique dans l’oeuvre de Jacques Ellul” by Patrick Chastenet, “L’historicite de l’ere technologique: convergences et differences entre Ellul et Illich” by Jean Robert, “La Pensee juridique de Jacques Ellul” by Sylvain Dujancourt, and other essays. This is an essential volume for students of Ellul’s thought.

— WIPF & STOCK TO PUBLISH ELLUL SERIES

Wipf & Stock Publishers (199 W. 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Suite 3, Eugene OR 97401, USA) has recently published the first two volume of their project “Ellul Library” series. Patrick Chastenet’s interviews of Ellul are now available as *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology, and Christianity* (Wipf & Stock, 2005) after being expensive, unavailable, or very difficult to find for several years. Marva Dawn’s translation and edited introduction to *Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul That Set the Stage* has also been reprinted by Wipf & Stock (previously published by Eerdmans).

The IJES is working with our friends at Wipf & Stock to return as many Ellul books into print as possible. Stay tuned for further announcements.

— DOES YOUR LIBRARY SUBSCRIBE TO THE ELLUL FORUM?

Does your library subscribe to The Ellul Forum? Princeton Seminary, the University of South Florida, and Wheaton College all have ongoing subscriptions (among others). But what about Penn State? Cal Berkeley? Notre Dame? Illinois? Scranton? Ohio State? Fuller Seminary? What about your school library? Your alma mater?

Many schools have a standard form for faculty members to submit a request that the library subscribe to a publication. Another strategy would be to donate a subscription for two or three years to help them get the habit.

— ☒ **Hommage a Jacques Ellul**

Dominique Ellul, with the help of Jean-Charles Bertholet, has now published a beautiful little 100 page volume entitled *Hommage a Jacques Ellul*. The occasion was a conference in May 2004, ten years after Ellul’s death. Included are reflections on Ellul’s importance by Michel Leplay, Michel Bertrand, Sebastien Morillon, and Jean Coulardeau. Yves Ellul provides some introduction to Ellul’s long—and long-awaited—ethics of holiness, on which manuscript Yves has been working for several years. Brief testimonials are included from Jean-Francois Medard, Alphonse Maillot, Andre Chouraqui, Elizabeth Viort and others. For more information contact:

*diffusion.ellul@wanadoo.fr.*

## Resources for Ellul Studies

[www.ellul.org](http://www.ellul.org) & [www.jacques-ellul.org](http://www.jacques-ellul.org)

Two indispensable web sites

The IJES/AIJE web site at [www.ellul.org](http://www.ellul.org) contains (1) news about IJES and AIJE activities and plans, (2) a brief and accurate biography of Jacques Ellul, (3) a complete bibliography of Ellul's books in French and English, (4) a complete index of the contents of all 36 issues of *The Ellul Forum*, and (5) links and information on other resources for students of Jacques Ellul. The new AIJE web site at [www.jacques-ellul.org](http://www.jacques-ellul.org) offers a French language supplement.

### **The Ellul Forum CD: 1988-2002**

The first thirty issues of *The Ellul Forum*, some 500 published pages total, are now available (only) on a single compact disc which can be purchased for US \$15 (postage included). Send payment with your order to "IJES," P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705 USA.

Back issues #31 - #35 of *The Ellul Forum* are available for \$5 each (postage and shipping included).

### **Cahiers Jacques Ellul**

*Pour Une Critique de la Societe Technicienne*

The annual journal, *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*, is edited by Patrick Chastenet and now published by Editions L'Esprit du Temps, distributed by Presses Universitaires de France; write to Editions L'Esprit du Temps, BP 107, 33491 Le Bouscat Cedex, France. The theme of Volume 1 was "L'Annees personnalistes" (cost 15 euros); Volume 2 was on "La Technique" (15 euros); the current Volume 3 focuses on "L'Economie" (21 euros). Next year's volume 4 will focus on "La Propagande" (21 euros). Shipping costs 5 euros for the first volume ordered; add 2 euros for each additional volume ordered.

**Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works** by Joyce Main Hanks. Research in Philosophy and Technology. Supplement 5. Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 2000. xiii., 206 pages. \$87. ISBN: 076230619X.

This is the essential guide for anyone doing research in Jacques Ellul's writings. An excellent brief biography is followed by a 140-page annotated bibliography of Ellul's fifty books and thousand-plus articles and a thirty-page subject index. Hank's work is comprehensive, accurate, and invariably helpful. This may be one of the more expensive books you buy for your library; it will surely be one of the most valuable. Visit [www.elsevier.com](http://www.elsevier.com) for ordering information.

### **Alibris—used books in English**

The Alibris web site ([www.alibris.com](http://www.alibris.com)) lists thirty titles of used and out-of-print Jacques Ellul books in English translation available to order at reasonable prices.

### **Librairie Mollat—new books in French**

Librairie Mollat in the center of old Bordeaux ([www.mollat.com](http://www.mollat.com)) is an excellent resource for French language books, including those by and about Ellul. Mollat accepts credit cards over the web and will mail books anywhere in the world.

**Used books in French:  
two web resources**

Two web sites that will be of help in finding used books in French by Jacques Ellul (and others) are [www.chapitre.com](http://www.chapitre.com) and [www.livre-rare-book.com](http://www.livre-rare-book.com).

**Reprints of Nine Ellul Books**

By arrangement with Ingram and Spring Arbor, individual reprint copies of several Ellul books originally published by William B. Eerdmans can now be purchased. The books and prices listed at the Eerdmans web site are as follows: *The Ethics of Freedom* (\$40), *The Humiliation of the Word* (\$26), *The Judgment of Jonah* (\$13), *The Meaning of the City* (\$20), *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man* (\$19), *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes* (\$28), *The Subversion of Christianity* (\$20), and *The Technological Bluff* (\$35). *Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul* translated by Marva Dawn is also available (price unknown).

Have your bookstore (or on-line book dealer) “back order” the titles you want. Do not go as an individual customer to Eerdmans or Ingram/Spring Arbor. For more information visit “Books on Demand” at [www.eerdmans.com](http://www.eerdmans.com).

**Ellul on Video**

French film maker Serge Steyer’s film “Jacques Ellul: L’homme entier” (52 minutes) is available for 25 euros at the web site [www.meromedia.com](http://www.meromedia.com). Ellul is himself interviewed as are several commentators on Ellul’s ideas.

Another hour-length film/video that is focused entirely on Ellul’s commentary on technique in our society, “The Treachery of Technology,” was produced by Dutch film maker Jan van Boekel for ReRun Produkties (mail to: Postbox 93021, 1090 BA Amsterdam).

If you try to purchase either of these excellent films, be sure to check on compatibility with your video system and on whether English subtitles are provided, if that is desired.

**Issue #62 Fall 2018**

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# The Ellul Forum

Number 62 Fall 2018

J'ai poursuivi mon rêve au cœur d'étranges villes  
~~de~~ <sup>de</sup> fleurs de faits et des traces de ciment.  
 Tout est naturel et simple et mon rêve ~~est~~ <sup>est</sup> fils  
 devant des yeux tout faits par sens - ceux d'adultes -  
 un futur - tout s'éclaircit et le ciel devient rouge  
 Rouge a vrai dire éblouissant rouge sur la cité  
 Et le ciel en plus un seul des oiseaux ne bouge  
 semble un sol un quelq'irrogne immense à laquelle  
 L'irrogne, est a moi? L'Honneur? (Et le grand H)  
 La machine? Le fluide? au point de vue le ciel?  
 Je ne sais - je vois et je marche et remonte  
 Cette découverte comme un ombon au miel  
 un rêve sans ciel? quelle plaisanterie  
 Je veux bien m'accrocher aux "civilisations"  
 Mais j'ai elles ~~de~~ <sup>de</sup> comment donc ~~de~~ <sup>de</sup> fleurs mêmes flétries  
 quelque chose d'humain - pas une déception  
 cependant le bas - très bas (un glas d'âme)  
 un gouffre tout seul se trouve dans un feu clair  
~~Et~~ <sup>Et</sup> dans une vibration dense - tout remue -  
 le mur de maître blanc - ~~et~~ <sup>et</sup> d'écrite ~~de~~ <sup>de</sup>

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**About**

Jacques Ellul (1912-94) was a French thinker and writer in many fields: communication, ethics, law and political science, sociology, technology, and biblical and theological studies, among others. The aim of the *Ellul Forum* is to promote awareness and understanding of Ellul's life and work and to encourage a community of dialogue on these subjects. The *Forum* publishes content by and about Jacques Ellul and about themes relevant to his work, from historical, contemporary, or creative perspectives. Content is published in English and French.

**Subscriptions**

The *Forum* is published twice a year. Annual subscriptions are \$40 usd for individuals/ households and \$80 usd for institutions. Individual subscriptions include membership in the International Jacques Ellul Society, and individual subscribers receive regular communications from the Society, discounts on IJES conference fees, and other benefits. To subscribe, please visit [ellul.org](http://ellul.org).

**Submissions**

The *Forum* encourages submissions from scholars, students, and general readers. Submissions must demonstrate a degree of familiarity with Ellul's thought and must engage with it in a critical way. Submissions may be sent to [ellulforum@gmail.com](mailto:ellulforum@gmail.com).

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## Editor's Letter

Welcome to the newly reinvigorated *Ellul Forum*. With this issue, the International Jacques Ellul Society relaunches the *Forum* as a printed journal, published twice yearly and mailed to subscribers. Subscription to the *Forum* is via membership in IJES. To subscribe / become a member, please visit [ellul.org](http://ellul.org). Back issues will continue to be made available freely at our website but after a delay of some months.

The essays published in this issue by A. F. Moritz and Kelsey L. Haskett are based on their respective presentations at our Ellul and the Bible conference that was held in June 2018 in Vancouver, British Columbia. These scholars pay welcome attention to Ellul's poetry, a relatively underexplored area of his work.

Frederic Rognon's article is also based on his presentation at the conference. It addresses a fundamentally important question: How did Ellul read the Bible, and what can his manner of Bible reading offer us today? Daniel Cerezuelle's explication of Ellul's

concept of technique was originally written as the foreword to *The Technological System* reprinted by Wipf and Stock in 2018. It not only describes the evolution of Ellul's thought on this central theme but also reveals that Ellul and Bernard Charbonneau developed their ideas about technique very early in their lives.

Book reviews serve to bring attention to some of the many interesting works currently being published on themes relevant to Ellul's thought. We provide two reviews in this issue, by J. Peter Escalante and Jonathan A. Tomes. We express our gratitude to Lemon Press Printing for its assistance in producing this issue.

"Editor's Letter." *Ellul Forum* 62 (Fall 2018): 3.

## Jacques Ellul's Apocalypse in Poetry and Exegesis

A. F. Moritz

Although not published until 1997, Jacques Ellul's booklength poem *Oratorio: The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* was written in the 1960s (publisher's jacket copy), and thus it seems to antedate the composition of his 1975 exegetical work *The Apocalypse: Architecture in Movement*. Both works center on the relationship of the human word to God's Word and the struggle of the best speech amidst babble and falsehood; together they throw great emphasis on the centrality of these themes in Ellul's thought. The poem presents in a white-hot fusion the dialectical ideas, including those regarding the word and communication, that become a basis of Ellul's exegesis of the Apocalypse of John.

We can see this in two essential and related elements of *Oratorio*: the image of the mendicant, and the idea of the presence of the end in the beginning and throughout history. In Ellul's poem, the wandering beggar is the Word of God in the world, powerless unless it is received, constantly appealing for love. Similarly, the end that is already present in history is the Word that needs and begs to be heard. This idea of the end in the beginning, which is Ellul's radical eschatology, is expressed both in the mendicant and in the very structure of *Oratorio*, which in turn mirrors the structure of the Apocalypse as Ellul analyzes it. Both poems—for so Ellul terms the Apocalypse (259)—use a symmetrical form to symbolize that the basic structure of history is the hidden presence of the Eternal in Time, which makes an appeal, as the mendicant does, eschewing power until a response of love shall be given.

Throughout *Oratorio* the mendicant appears in various guises and is particularly expressive of the humility and humiliation of the word, which is everything—creation and salvation—yet which is nothing if not received.

The wandering beggar who constantly knocks, constantly appeals, is made fundamentally identical by Ellul's poetry with the hiddenness of eternity in time and of glory in failure. For Ellul, the end that is in the beginning is not a goal or place but a living, overlooked person always coming toward us. The obscurity of Ellul's beggar combines in a single image the Second Person, and poetry, and the intellectual, around

the theme that powerlessness is love's only power, because the word is its only possible means.

The figure of a poor wanderer appears in the poem variously as beggar, as pilgrim, as an absent outcast merely implied by a human sob or plea, and even as the white horseman of the Apocalypse. The white horseman is for Ellul the word of God, and in "Part One" of *Oratorio* this horseman speaks and calls himself a pilgrim, becomes a pilgrim:

And I will be the hand stretched out for alms  
the gaze of the defeated one begging to live the step of the condemned man  
who stumbles and pleads and I will be the cry of all people dying . . . (19)

This is echoed at the end of "Part Two: The Horse of War," where the white horseman suddenly appears again, must wander all the roads, and becomes a beggar who "knocks at your door, trying your refusal." As "Part Two" concludes, the poet transforms this "vagabond of the end of the world" back into "the white horseman [who] triumphs in his misery" (60).

In the opening of "Part Five," the poem's last part, this vagabond figure is the pilgrim, as earlier, but here he is also, for the first time, the Wandering Jew:

Trudge, O pilgrim, all through the aged times of history  
Haggard, O Wandering Jew, trudge through the newborn times . . .  
Can you find any other trace in the dreary past than the horses' iron prints  
engraved in the clay the broken bones of the Farnese marbles and the  
printed witnesses of a divided word? (81)

In this figure Ellul converges Christ the Word with humanity seen in Christ. That is, humanity is here symbolized in its best possible representative within the reality of the broken world: the one who hungers and thirsts for justice and truth, the one who relentlessly searches and appeals, the one who is truly poor. For Ellul's poem, Christ is well depicted as the Wandering Jew, the one forbidden to rest, as in the legend, and forced to walk undyingly through the painful world. Although Ellul transforms the legend such that the Wandering Jew is not cursed by Christ but is Christ, nevertheless the Wandering Jew remains also exactly the figure of the legend: the Word of God in submitting to what man has decided submits all human beings to it, by enduring it in powerless love and refusing to end it by power. Thus, as we shall see, the Wandering Jew as Christ, at the poem's end, is a symbol deepening the vision of the very beginning of *Oratorio*.

At first, "Part Five" sounds the dark note of the triumph of the three horsemen who bring tribulations ("The horses' gallop has ringed life in / there is nothing beyond their seduction / war and blood-passion . . . // Power that pleases our desiccated heart" [81-82]). Then, the second section of "Part Five" is an appeal; the beggar is reduced to his sob:

O Lord Sabaoth of the subtle ear, discern this sob this moan suffocating in these tumbled ruins and rolling barrages this sob, this moan of the human heart and all creation . . .

But you don't bridle the wandering horses and put an end to the adventure  
Why do you wait so long to judge, disappointing so much hope (87)

In the fourth section of "Part Five," God speaks and addresses himself to the sorrowing, yearning voice that has sung the previous sections, calling the singer a "Seer / Voyant" (89). God speaks and includes this seer among those "to whom this fog," human history, "serves only in that it divulges the single Light." God says,

Listen to them singing—I hear and grasp the song better than you—  
"what good is this retinue and array  
what good is this glory  
what good are these twistings and turnings  
when a name, a single name, satisfies our memories  
when a day, a single day, satisfies our love?" (91)

Here we find a meta-poetry, in which Ellul imagines God quoting but transforming to a greater clarity and a greater music all that his poem and his life's work have seen and expressed. In this way the poet and intellectual are taken up and affirmed in the powerless power of the word. "Part Five," and thus *Oratorio* as a whole, ends in a one-page section that returns to the

homeless beggar [who] roams the borders of History and raps at the door  
seeking alms  
the beggar the presence unacceptable at all times raps at every door, a  
tireless knocking  
and stretches out a hand for grace, bread, a piece of fruit, mysterious pulsing  
sun (94)

These lines, which are nearly but not quite the last in *Oratorio*, lay strong emphasis on an Ellulian cluster of themes: human exclusion, the basic and underlying glory of existence, and the duty of the one who must bear witness and ask for love, must ask that there be love. It is history—human exclusion—that seems impregnable. *Oratorio* gives full attention to the nightmare of history, and, following it, *The Apocalypse: Architecture in Movement* affirms that "the world is going to belong to the autonomy of humans." But also as in *Oratorio*, this is because of "the decision of God to adopt . . . the way of nonpower, of incognito, of humility, of the renunciation of his power in order to be nothing more than love" (79, translation altered). In face of human autonomous recalcitrance, "the sole victory of God is the fact of his word... He has no other weapon" (109), and

without this Word of man [“who bears witness”], there is no Word of God either. The Word of God falls in the void if there is not an ear to hear it. And the Lord evokes that ear . . . (103)

Hearing and responsiveness are key, for the “end” is not a time or a goal but a person who acts and communicates. Ellul calls God the one who “comes, but he embraces all, the totality of time and events,” and states that

The future is not an emptiness of time, indeterminate, unknown: the future is that which comes; it is filled (like our past) with the presence and action of the one who traverses this future toward us from the end of time. (101-02)

This concept of one who comes and who embraces the totality of time and events, expressed conceptually in the later exegetical work, is already present in every aspect of *Oratorio*'s form, whether we examine the details of its verse or its overall structure. Looking first of all at the verse, we see Ellul immediately start with the end in the beginning. The opening eight lines present an origin story with the timelessness of archetypal myth but express it in a way that is also a concrete, if allusive, analysis of the historical genesis of human violence and the way it is interlaced with an ever-present activist hope of peace. The opening lines, like the whole poem, portray this interlace as the structure of time and history and of any ordinary earthly moment in our lives.

The first two lines set out the end and beginning of human existence and the history that connects them:

Blood poured out when history was closed  
and the beginning of the world was a clenched fist . . . (9)

This asserts that violence, and perhaps sacrifice, was in the beginning of history, and also at the end. The moment “when history was closed” was and is “the beginning of the world.” When history became exclusion supported with violence, the result was spilled blood . . . and this is human history. The beginning of our world was the clenched fist of exclusion, threat, and violence, and so it remains. The syntax makes the “whens” of beginning and end the same. If this “when” seems momentarily to belong to a timeless myth-time, and if it seems to determine a fate, that doesn't last long, not even to the end of the sentence, for the continuation is something unexpected, an irruption of freedom and beauty into the scene:

Blood poured out when history was closed and the beginning of the world was a clenched fist, uncontrollable measure of the delight of loving where freedom alone opens its rose . . .

No sooner do we learn that the beginning was already the disastrous end, the mutual destructive violence of beings closed to each other, than we find out that this very same reality was a measure of love's delight, where lonely freedom dwells and opens a rose.

The rose, symbol of beauty, sexuality, freshness, and renewal, is made a symbol of the same history that has just received the opposite characterization. With the rose, the verb tense abruptly, “illogically,” switches to the present. Freedom causes the beginning and end to be transformed in the now; their fear and horror are subsumed in the opening rose and the delights of love.

Thus, end and beginning are so fused that they are revealed to be one thing. Ellul’s full opening passage continues this procedure and confirms this reading:

Blood poured out when history was closed and the beginning of the world was a clenched fist, uncontrollable measure of the delight of loving where freedom alone opens its rose and freedom alone demanded total love.

Love alone was free and the blood flowed before creation—from which nothing had been excluded—sang for its first and its final recourse.

Here we find that freedom was alone in the beginning, that it alone can open the rose of creativity, that it demanded total love. This idea has two elements. Firstly, a demand requires a scope for action. Time, history, and progress are implied: a direction and meaning for time. Time and history are given as possibility, and their use for love is enjoined. Love demands a work of transformation, by which the beginning and end of clenched fist and spilled blood will no longer be the beginning and the end. Ellul’s line “et la liberte seule exigeait tout amour” means that freedom both demanded to be loved and demanded of all things that they love. The second element is expressed in the verb “exigeait,” “demanded”: the past tense now returns, showing that freedom’s “now” has transformed the past, creating a new origin from which a going-forward is now possible.

“Love alone was free” begins a second sentence, occupying lines six to eight. The personified freedom that was acting in lines four and five is revealed to be “Love.” Ellul fits his sentence into the three verse lines in such a way as to convey that the spilled blood was also, and first, Love’s blood, and it flowed temporally before and spatially in view of the creation. Thus, the word “creation” is made to mean at once the human creation of violently spilled blood and an anterior, more fundamental creation that subsumes it, a creation in which the spilled blood is already transformed into Love’s self-sacrifice. Love was free, the lines tell us, and its blood poured “before” creation, that is, in its view. But the syntactical jolt at the turn of lines seven and eight stresses the sense of “prior to”: Love was alone, and was free and gave its blood prior to the moment when creation sang for deliverance from the violent history it had just constituted itself as.

Turning from particular verses to the poem’s totality, we find that Ellul has given *Oratorio* a symmetrical form, consonant with his visionary sense of the perennial total presence of the end in the beginning, with the disregarded word being the real presence of freedom, life, and peace. The poetic form he creates resembles the one he perceives in the Apocalypse as analyzed in *The Apocalypse: Architecture in Movement*. That book’s major point concerning structure is that the Apocalypse is best understood from the center outward, five sections arranged around the third central section,

which he calls the “keystone,” Apocalypse 8-14:5. Ellul finds that the Apocalypse is a progressive narrative and argument, a vision of history, but simultaneously, through its symmetrical aspect, it expresses the eternal. He finds this dual structure to be one with the poem’s meaning. He writes that

The Apocalypse does not describe a moment of history but reveals for us the permanent depth of the historical: it is, then, one could say, a discernment of the Eternal in Time, of the action of the End in the Present. (24)

The structure of *Oratorio*, developed years earlier, is strictly symmetrical and embodies this same meaning. The book is in five parts, the central three parts concerning the three horsemen of the Apocalypse (6:3-8) that in Ellul’s view are destructive yet constrained to be ultimately beneficent by God’s plan. The central section, “Part Three: The Black Horse,” is the longest and most complex and concerns the horse that Ellul aligns closely with his analysis of technique, politics, the state, and human self-deception and self-aggrandizement. It is flanked by “Part Two: The Horse of War” and “Part Four: Death,” which mirror. This structure corresponds to the poem’s vision of history, which can be summarized in three points: 1) War is the most horrible expression of death but not the whole of it. 2) Death is the ultimate reality of human works; it is their end but also stands at their origin and is constantly present within them. 3) The basic reality of death is the rejection of God, the self-assertive pride endemic to human works. The poem’s symmetrical structure places the last point, the basic one, in the central position.

On either side of these three parts lie “Part One: The Word of God,” in which the Word is largely represented as the white horseman of Apocalypse 16:2 and 19:11, and “Part Five,” untitled, which can be characterized by a phrase from it: “morning comes, / borne by the First, the horseman of the dawn.” These two parts, like Parts Two and Four, mirror each other. In Part One, the Word of God must set out on its painful course through human history. In Part Five, there is a more complete revealing of the Word’s permanent success and agony and of its way of existing for us in history. Part Five focuses on the accomplishment of what is announced as plan in Part One and becomes crisis and death in Parts Two, Three, and Four. It’s important to keep in mind, though, the constant and extreme paradoxical interminglings of Ellul’s verse. Anyone will be bewildered who expects a pure presentation in each section of one stage, the discourse then moving on to the next stage. There is scarcely an exultant line that does not contain its charge of deathliness and desperate challenge; there is scarcely a cry of despair that does not imply hope and the redeeming if hidden action of divine love.

True poetry always comes up against the inexpressible, and perhaps most essentially here, where the task is to see the hidden in the obtrusive, the eternal in time. *Oratorio*’s final stanza sings a visionary future in which suddenly the three terrifying horses gallop away and vanish and the permanently present reality always advancing toward us is indeed fully here:



All you who so often felt their hatred  
and shivered at their hoof beats, you frail catkins of the green ash tree, look—look,  
the morning comes,  
borne by the First, the horesman of the dawn  
at last known by all who come to open and to close the black doors of fate  
to give the Beggar's glory back into his hands. (94)

This great final passage can be compared with lines from *The Apocalypse: Architecture in Movement* that describe God's ever-present eternity in concepts that catch up the poem's glancing and profound images of nature—the fruit, the mysterious pulsing sun, the spring catkins of the ash tree likened to human beings and to the coming of dawn and of a beautiful horse:

The eternity of God is not an immobility; it is a perpetual beginning, a newness always being born, an absence of custom, necessity, destiny; an absence of repetition... And eternity is a spring gushing

with non-predetermined instants, always fresh, new, surprising. . . . That is what our text calls Life . . . a love that does not wear out, . . . always as full, as stirring, as surprising as on the first day. (216, translation altered)

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## Ellul's City in Scripture and Poetry

Kelsey L. Haskett

In the summer of 2017 I had the privilege of visiting the Ellul family at their home outside Bordeaux and of examining some of Jacques Ellul's archives with them, in particular a number of handwritten poems that had never been published. As a professor of French literature I was drawn to the poems and eager to help with transcribing them into typewritten form and then translating them into English. The first four poems that we reviewed were poems Ellul had written to accompany the publication of his book *The Meaning of the City* but that the editor had declined to publish at the time. It is evident from our current vantage point that these poems not only enhance the substance of Ellul's book, but that their very personal meaning also sheds light on the author himself, who dared to expose his emotions and experiences in a way that reveals both his profound engagement with this topic and, indeed, a part of his inner life that he may not have divulged elsewhere. While the book explains theologically the essential concepts of Ellul's city, it is in the poems that he explores his own experience

of living in the city, with a parallel unfolding of themes. Anyone reading these poems without being familiar with the book would certainly be surprised, if not perplexed, by the vehemence of the author in his condemnation of the city. Although his verse is metaphorically very graphic and convincing in conveying the failure of the city to meet human needs, the reasons for his consistently negative stance are not fully revealed in the poems themselves. It is only when they are read in conjunction with the book that the basis for the poet's attitude is disclosed. Thus, I would like to briefly review the major themes of the book pertaining to an understanding of the poems, before turning to the poems themselves.

Haskett, Kelsey L. "Ellul's City in Scripture and Poetry." *Ellul Forum* 62 (Fall 2018): 15-26. © Kelsey L. Haskett, CC BY-nc-ND.

*The Meaning of the City*, as a theological work, analyses the role of the city as portrayed throughout the Bible, with tremendous scope and originality—with the city's development being used as a metaphor for the trajectory of humankind, from its rejection of God to its final redemption through Christ. Instead of focusing first on humanity's origins in the Garden of Eden, Ellul begins with man's revolt against God and its manifestation in the building of the first city by the first murderer, Cain, thereby conferring on the city from the outset the notion of spiritual rebellion that Ellul sees as its root. Condemned to be a fugitive and a wanderer for the sin of having killed his brother, Cain flees from the presence of the Lord and builds a city, in an attempt to end his wandering and establish a secure place, a home, which in fact he never finds. For Ellul, "The seed of all man's questings is to be found in Cain's life in the land of wandering" (3). His relationship with God now broken, he finds no comfort in the mark of protection God puts on him. Ellul affirms,

The city is the direct consequence of Cain's murderous act and of his refusal to accept God's protection. For God's Eden he substitutes his own, for the goal given to his life by God, he substitutes a goal chosen by himself—just as he substituted his own security for God's. Such is the act by which Cain takes his destiny on his own shoulders, refusing the hand of God in his life. (5)

Ellul sees in Cain's creation of the city the beginning of all civilization. He goes on to elucidate the origins of basically all the significant cities in the Bible, stating that, "All the builders were sons of Cain and act with his purpose" (10). Tracing the steps of Nimrod and other builders, he examines the multiple purposes of the city as it develops, including the role of Nineveh as an agent of war, Pharaoh's cities as economic strongholds, and Babylon as the synthesis of civilization, showing that there are spiritual powers behind each of these. Spiritually speaking, the kings of Israel fare no better than their pagan counterparts, despite having been chosen by God. Beginning with Solomon, they succumb to their desire for power and riches and put their confidence elsewhere than in the Lord when they decide to build their cities. The central problem the city represents for Israel, according to Ellul, is the clash between the spiritual power of the city and the spirit of grace that God wants to bring to bear

upon the city. There is a fundamental opposition between the Lord and the city, and a “consciousness . . . of the city as a world for which man was not made” (42).

*The Meaning of the City* thus provides the theological underpinnings for Ellul’s depiction of the city in his poems. For Ellul, “The city is cursed. She is condemned to death because of everything she represents” (47). Ellul cannot do otherwise but reject the city in his poetry, just as he sees God doing in his theology. The reason for this divine rejection, Ellul maintains, is that “[i]nto every aspect . . . of the city’s construction has been built the tendency to exclude God” (53). This would seem all the more so in the modern city, where natural beauty has been replaced by lifeless artifice, and human agency by technological progress. Before touching on the final destiny of the city, as it unfolds at the end of Ellul’s book, let us now turn to the poems Ellul wished to incorporate into his exegesis of the city, considering not only their poetic value, meaning, and relation to the book, but in particular their revelatory value as it applies to Ellul’s life, emotions, and personal spiritual journey, as a man living in the city, like most of us are compelled to do.

## Ellul’s City in Poetry

### Poem 1 - Lights over the City

I followed my dream in the heart of strange cities  
Amid cast-iron flowers and cement tree trunks.

Everything is natural and simple and my dream rushes Past hearts completely mass-produced—hearts made of magnets.

A button—everything lights up and the sky becomes red Red that is truly astonishing—red over the city And this sky where not a single bird still moves

Seems to be a piece of ground where some enormous drunk has vomited The drunk, is it me? Man? (with a capital M)

The Machine? The fluid? or perhaps heaven?

I do not know—I see and continuously chew on

This discovery like a honey-filled candy

A dream under heaven? What a joke

I certainly want to hang on to “civilizations”

But let them produce flowers, even faded ones Something human—not excrement

However over there, very far away (a bell tolls) A man alone finds himself in a bright fire And a dense vibration—everything purrs The walls of white marble—of gray everite A rough cement ground and the opal window panes with a faint glimmer coming from the rust-colored copperware. Everything purrs—and vibrates—strange pale coloring Which slowly coats and then swallows everything.

In the middle, without a sound—without moving—without life Black transformers crouched down every evening strive—without passion (a man watches them closely) And without knowing why—to flood the black sky.

”Lights over the City” is a very personal poem, as the first-person pronouns “I” and “my” immediately reveal. We begin with the poet following his dream, which turns out to be more a nightmare, as it thrusts him into the heart of the city, where all is false, just like the hearts of the people who live there. The industrial forms of cast-iron and cement that replace the natural vegetation in the city’s landscape reflect, in fact, the inhabitants’ hearts made of magnets. Forged in the hardest of materials, incapable of expressing true emotion or individuality, these hearts have all come out the same, and their force of attraction is anything but human. Ironically everything appears to be natural and simple, as if it has always been this way; it is only the poet who is not duped by what he sees.

In the sky, a simple button turns everything to red, and through artificial illumination, alluded to in the title, nature is once again obliterated; and just as there is no natural vegetation in the city, there are no birds flying in the sky. The metaphor used to describe the sky is as repulsive as the poet can possibly make it: it is nothing but an ugly stretch of ground, entirely vilified by the vomit of an enormous drunk.

Through this and the other images in the poem, the senses of the reader are attacked by the portrait of the city that emerges: the stench of vomit fills our nostrils like the foulness of the pollution that blankets the modern city; visually speaking, everything is artificial—from the industrially made imitations of plants and trees to the red, electric light; on a tactile level, everything is hard and cold, including people’s hearts; and the absence of birds moving in the sky, while suggesting the death of nature, reinforces the sense of immobility in this stifling atmosphere.

These impressions of the city are followed by the poet’s interrogations as to the source of the vile substance that now transforms the sky—not only destroying the natural canopy of light but figuratively, one might add, obscuring our dreams of truth and beauty, freedom and dignity, and highlighting the city’s failure to produce anything of worth for humanity. Does the responsibility lie with the individual, the society, the technological world we have created, or elsewhere? the poet ponders. While not rejecting human civilization outright, he nevertheless condemns in the strongest possible terms our modern relinquishment of all that is human for the sake of a society that produces nothing but dung, nothing but a betrayal of all that we are.

The last verse of the poem depicts again a presumably red light, a bright fire, now accompanied by the dense vibration of an electrically charged environment permeating the whole cityscape. Everything is swallowed up by the strange pale coloring that fills the atmosphere, emanating from black transformers crouched down in the night like beasts in the jungle, flooding the black sky with their abnormal light. An absence of passion typifies this electrically controlled world, overseen nevertheless by man, and evoking once again the city dwellers’ hearts of magnets, suggesting now the possibility of electromagnets, running on electricity and manipulated by its current, reinforcing

the absence of the human and the power of technology in this strange city humankind has built for itself.

## Poem 2 - Streets

Oh streets, empty streets, streets muddy with people and mud!  
Streets that swallow up women, drunkards, and madmen  
Streets I so often walked  
And where for a long time I searched  
In vain  
Something that was me  
Ah, streets! Polished and mundane levelers  
Where I must walk at the same pace, at the breakneck speed  
Of everyone, of all!  
Of all those who are not crazy!  
And I am  
All that which is not me!  
Neither I! Nor you, nor anyone, nor even (not even) shame  
Draws attention in the street which comes, goes, descends, and rises Because it's  
all the same  
From the marvelous awakening of the rooster  
Until evening when I sleep—  
Everything is meaningless in the street, especially life  
Everything is hidden under a respectable veil, and envy  
Shakes amiably, callously, the hand  
Of vice, only to choke tomorrow  
And at daybreak  
Reappear around me  
Ah, streets, I hate you in my heart, great swallower of souls  
Breathing your skillful, artificial, and shameful flame into uneven walkers of your  
polished paving stones into walkers that your paving stones render polished too,  
And empty, just like me

In Ellul's second poem, "Streets," he opens up on an even more personal level, situating himself in the city in a very tangible way. Like the "strange pale coloring" in the previous poem, the streets swallow up the passers-by, especially the vulnerable. The poet's familiarity with these streets is accompanied by a sense of alienation that runs throughout the poem, although it is not technology that alienates him this time but the superficiality of the people who walk the streets and the absence of meaning that characterizes their lives. The poet seeks his identity in streets he cannot relate to, although the reader may sense they are simply a catalyst for his intense self-searching that will never find answers here, having little to do, in reality, with the streets themselves.

The pressure to conform is revealed in the second verse, where the poet is reduced to the common level of the masses, advancing at the same pace as they, unable to maintain a distinct identity, and turning into something he knows is not he. Nothing stands out in the crowd, either positively or negatively, because “everything is meaningless in the street, especially life.” The poet’s existential crisis is lived in the street, heightened by the banality and the pretense of the people around him, arousing his hatred for all that is false, all that is polished and artificial in society. The streets are also a “swallower of souls,” because everyone has, in effect, sold their soul to the mediocrity of the city, renouncing a higher way and ending up empty, just like the poet. This emotional poem, replete with exclamation marks, evidently reflects a time in his life when Ellul was searching for truth and meaning and when nothing on the human level could satisfy his deepest longings, least of all the activities of the city played out in the lifeless streets he was obliged to travel.

### Poem 3

In the stench of urine and gasoline and sewers  
And in the horrible drama of my  
tempted soul  
And in the obscure words, remarks thrown up  
To heaven, of hatred, fury,  
love

I saw randomly and wretchedly  
Against the sky reeking of factories and vices  
Two naked, straight, and harsh branches of winter  
In the shape of a cross—a star in the background was looking on—

For the first time a ray of hope appears in the third poem, standing out against the vileness of the city, portrayed once again by images that irritate our senses. The poet himself is in the throes of a personal drama, as his soul wrestles with temptation—but this time he throws up some reckless words to heaven, the prayer of a desperate man, and in the midst of his hopelessness appears a sign: the symbol of the cross, etched across the sky by two lifeless branches but infused with hope by the star looking on, signifying through the verb an animate being, a Being who cares and who sees our plight.

### Poem 4

Light on the eyes, light in the sky  
nothing rumbles or passes by disturbing the light and the serenity of things is first  
before all-powerful and all-existential  
rustling of a leaf in the sun that envelops it  
smothering of the soul in the hands of the living God bitter sorrow endured within  
the trembling fulfillment of the eyes covered with light  
I only knew this in a brutal world  
chaos of crushing iron, stone, and steel

where the flowers and fruit are forged from the abnormal

where abstraction escapes and the deformed creates intoxicated with the averagely hideous city what is the despair that came looking for me what grandeur in this destiny that oppressed me what madness in the passions, actions, thoughts—all shameful?

You alone, you know, oh God who was seeking me despite myself, against myself, who came and loved me for the sake of your love, your will, your very name and who knew how to find within my feeble cowardice the pure gold that you yourself put in the mud

In the mud of the city with narrow windows where nothing is seen but a star-shaped lamp as false as virtue, as mediocre as vice where nothing is disclosed to astonished eyes

of the clear light purely poured down from your heaven, oh my God

Thus you found me—you loved me so much that despite my fury and my taste for suicide despite my strong desire to no longer be lucid I had nothing left but a single port—all others being closed by you yourself Lord who directed this struggle—it was to recognize at last that this fall, mortal, dreadful, to the chasm that you open was the only view that you cover from my eyes

Oh last judgment!

last day that we live in the city of men!

city of factory smoke, of offices

that open at eight o'clock and smell of stale tobacco city of hospitals where the patient is a number city of prisons where the drama is words

Oh last judgment that descends in silence on this man walking among other men

This final poem represents a drastic change in tone for the poet. Artificial light now changes to God's pure light, as he relates a spiritual experience that has radically transformed his life. Having opened the door a crack to the hope of the cross in the previous poem, he now throws it wide open, flooding the first verse with light. In lines slightly reminiscent of Blaise Pascal's "Memorial," in which he begins the description of his dramatic conversion experience with the exclamation "Fire," Ellul focuses on the light that has opened his eyes to the truth of the gospel: "Light on the eyes, light in the sky / nothing rumbles or passes by disturbing the light." Serenity and nature replace the negative emotions and images of the previous poems, turning the "bitter sorrow endured within the trembling" to the "fulfillment of the eyes covered with light." Just as the personal God Pascal discovers at the time of his conversion is not the God of "philosophers and scholars," Ellul's God is not, first and foremost, "all-powerful and all-existent" but rather a loving God who seeks out the individual and guides him into his light.

This discovery has not come easily for the poet. Having endured in the "brutal world" of the city the "chaos of crushing iron, stone, and steel where the flowers and fruit are forged from the abnormal," he realizes nonetheless that God was seeking him, despite his thoughts and actions, despite himself, and indeed against his own natural tendencies to reject God. It is God's love, described here in the most tender of terms,

that made all the difference for Ellul, winning him over in the midst of his painful emotions, including suicidal thoughts and a desire to escape from reason, maybe even into madness. He understands that God was searching within his frail frame of dust the “pure gold” God himself had placed there, seeing both his eternal value and his rich potential in this life. He knows it was God who directed his struggle and led him to Himself and has protected him from the dreadful consequences of the Fall that he will never see, being covered by God’s love. This last thought leads Ellul to a sudden consciousness of the day of judgment, coming to end life in the city, or the world, where ordinary lives are being lived out in total oblivion to their current degradation or impending doom. The last two lines, somewhat surprising, suggest to me the poet’s awareness of human destiny, which abruptly descends on him with the grim realization that there are others in this world who have not yet seen the light and whom he cannot forget as he goes about living in their midst. His description of God’s love and grace throughout the poem seems too poignant for us to think that he now fears judgment for himself, I would submit, but points rather to his quickened sense of responsibility for the rest of humanity who have yet to experience this love.

My interpretation of these lines is reinforced by a chapter in *The Meaning of the City*, which, after an extensive discussion of God’s condemnation of the city throughout the book, opens with the following words: “But it is in these cities we must live” (72). Ellul then quotes Jeremiah’s injunction to the captives of Israel being carried off to Babylon: “But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare will you find your welfare” (Jer 29:7). God will carry out his own judgment, contends Ellul, but he asks us to participate in the life of the city and to seek her welfare, praying for her and warning her of judgment. It is with this in mind that I read the concluding lines of Ellul’s last poem, where the awareness of the coming judgment falls upon the poet who knows, in the end, that he must reach out to the city.

I believe this poem is particularly significant in that it expresses in a very intimate way what Ellul was reluctant to discuss throughout the rest of his work. In *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology, and Christianity*, he does provide some insight into his conversion in his conversation with Patrick Chastenet, saying of his encounter with God,

I knew myself to be in the presence of something so astounding, so overwhelming that it entered me to the very center of my being. That’s all I can tell you.... Afterwards I thought to myself, “You have

been in the presence of God.” (52)

He also asserts that he has “never written about [his conversion] and ha[s] no intention of doing so,” but adds, “As I have already explained for my poems, they give away too much about me” (53). It is only through his poetry, then, that Ellul is able to overcome his scruples and invite his readers into his private world.

Before concluding his book, Ellul examines the role of Jerusalem in the world and the watershed moment of Christ’s coming in history, presenting finally the miracle of



the New Jerusalem, the heavenly city that transcends all that exists in the world. God does not restore his original order at the end, explains Ellul, but creates another, where he makes all things new. Man wanted to create a city where God would be excluded, but God will create a city where he will be all in all. It is here that Christ's final victory will be realized and where God himself will fulfill all the hopes of his people.

As we study the poems Ellul has produced to accompany this book, we see a progression from the themes of dehumanization and alienation to a gradual revelation of hope and finally transcendent love. In tandem with the book, the poetic themes of depersonalization, degradation, and despair are intersected by a ray of hope that converges with the poet's search for something more. While the book devotes a chapter to the transformation Christ's life brought to the world, Ellul's final poem relates the transformation of his own inner life through his encounter with Christ, powerfully contrasted with his earlier poems and concluding with his return to the needs of the city and a realization of his new role. His poetry does not develop the latter themes of the book, because it stops with his own personal story. But through his poetry he opens up his life in a way that makes his theology come alive and convinces us that it has much more to do with his own personal reality than with theory and exegesis alone.

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## The “Analogy of Faith”: What Does It Mean? Why, and What For?

Frederic Rognon

As a diligent reader of the Bible, Jacques Ellul placed scriptural revelation at the heart of his work, and in particular, his ethical works. It is thus that he can write,

The criterion of my thought is biblical revelation; the content of my thought is biblical revelation; my point of departure is furnished by biblical revelation; the method is the dialectic according to which biblical revelation is given to us; and the objective is the search for the signification of biblical revelation for ethics.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Le Vouloir et le Faire. Une critique theologique de la morale* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, [1964] 2013), 19.

Ellul's ethical thought is thus "scripturo-centric," conferring a singular status on the biblical text. How, in effect, did Jacques Ellul read the Bible? And in what manner is his reading original, singular, and capable of renewing current interpretations?

To respond to these questions, we will proceed in four steps. First, we will indicate the critique that Ellul addressed to exegesis. Next, we will present the core principles of the Ellulian approach to the Bible. In the third step, we will pause on the method *par excellence* recommended by the professor from Bordeaux: "the analogy of faith." And we will conclude with four examples of biblical texts interpreted according to the analogy of faith.

## Critique of Exegesis

Ellul addresses lively critiques toward historical-critical exegesis as well as structural exegesis. He does not consider them to be false or vain, as they are doubtless exact and useful for the nature of the science, but they do not take one step towards the ultimate. Certainly, they are in the service of exactitude, but they say nothing on the subject of truth and do not permit it to be glimpsed but perhaps hide it.<sup>2</sup>

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It is thus the tension between Reality and Truth that is invoked here to disqualify scientific and technical exegetical methods, a tension that recurs throughout the Ellulian oeuvre. Ellul particularly reproaches these methods for stripping the biblical text of any spiritual dimension and reducing it to nothing more than a text like any other (similar to a work of Homer or Plato). To treat the Bible like an inert object would be like surgeons forgetting that the patients on whom they are operating are alive, performing a dissection or an autopsy instead of an operation that would save them.<sup>3</sup>

This accusation recalls Soren Kierkegaard's polemical and sarcastic charge against those who pretend to read a love letter with an arsenal of dictionaries, concordances, and encyclopedias.<sup>4</sup> Now, the Bible is a love letter, sent by God to his readers, to touch their hearts and address the most intimate areas of their existence.

Ellul equally critiques the marxist exegesis that was fashionable in the 1970s, and notably that of Fernando Belo, who purported "to read Mark via Marx."<sup>5</sup> The professor from Bordeaux catalogs the innumerable historical errors that permit Belo to integrate

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<sup>2</sup> ———, *Sans feu ni lieu. Signification biblique de la Grande Ville* (Paris: La Table Ronde, [1975] 2003), 17.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Jacques Ellul, *Ethique de la liberte*, vol. 1 (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1975), 210.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Soren Kierkegaard, "Pour un examen de conscience recommande aux con-**The "Analogy of temporains"** (1851). *ttuvres Completes*, vol. 18 (Paris: Editions de l'Orante, **Faith**" 1966), 83-87.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Fernando Belo, *Lecture materialiste de l'evangile de Marc. Re'cit, pratique, ideologie* (Paris: Le Cerf, 1974), 18.

the gospel into the marxist schema<sup>6</sup> and particularly reproaches him for performing a materialist and political reduction of a text that, precisely, refuses any materialist interpretation of life.<sup>7</sup>

What, then, is the alternative that Jacques Ellul proposes to these exegetical impasses?

## The Core Principles of the Ellulian Approach to the Bible

If Ellul refuses the scientific approach to the Bible, it is in order to oppose it to meditation inspired by Kierkegaard. This latter approach amounts to considering biblical revelation as addressing the very existence of the subject. But in this regard, he inverts the contemporary perspective, notably in Protestant milieus, that consists in opening the Bible each time that we seek a response to our questions (whether ethical, social, or existential). Ellul clearly does not conceive of the Bible as a recipe book, nor even as a book of responses to our questions. The Bible is not a book of responses but a book of questions, which God poses to the believing reader.<sup>8</sup> If we come to the Bible with questions, these will find no response here; instead, they will undergo a displacement, a decentering, and we will come away from the Bible with our questions renewed and with new questions posed to us.<sup>9</sup> It is therefore up to us to respond to them, that is, to be responsible in assuming our responses.

The Bible is thus a book that directs man to his freedom and responsibility. A believer's reading is a listening, since faith is revitalized in silence.<sup>10</sup> The Bible poses us three principal questions.<sup>11</sup> It poses a confessional question, "Who do you say that I am?"<sup>12</sup> an ethical question, "What have you done with your brother?"<sup>13</sup> and an ex-

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Jacques Ellul, *L'ideologie marxiste chretienne. Que fait-on de l'evangile?* (Paris: La Table Ronde, [1979] 2006), 113-53.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Ellul, *L'ideologie marxiste chretienne*, 148-50.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Ellul, *Ethique de la liberte*, 1:203, 2:164, 181-82; *La foi au prix du doute: « encore quarante-jours... »* (Paris: La Table Ronde, [1980] 2015), 147-52; « Karl Barth et nous », *Bulletin du Centre protestant d'etudes* 37:4-5 (June 1985): 5-12 (here, 7); *La Genese aujourd'hui*, with Francois Tosquelles (Le Collier: Editions de l'AREFPPI, 1987), 214; *Mort et esperance de la resurrection. Conferances inedites de Jacques Ellul* (Lyon: Editions Olivetan, 2016), 53; *Les sources de l'ethique chretienne. Le Vouloir et le Faire, parties IV et V*, introduction and notes by Frederic Rognon (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2018), 57-58; Gilbert Comte, « Entretien avec Jacques Ellul: "Je crois que nous sommes dans une periode de silence de Dieu" », *Le Monde* (8 novembre 1977): 1-2 (here, 2).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Ellul, *Ethique de la liberte*, 2:164; *La Genese aujourd'hui*, 214.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Ellul, *La foi au prix du doute*, 151-55.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Ellul, *La foi au prix du doute*, 135-37.

<sup>12</sup> Matt 16:15, Mark 8:29, Luke 9:20. The range of Peter's responses could support the Ellulian reading of the Bible as a book of questions. The responses can thus vary from one person to another, but also with one person according to their stage in life.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Gen 4:9-10a. More specifically, the text says, "The Lord said to Cain, 'Where is your brother Abel?' He replied, 'I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?' Then he said, 'What have you done?'"

istential question referring to our quest, “Who are you looking for?”<sup>14</sup> We are thus interrogated and invited to give a confessional response, an ethical response, and an existential response, by the word and by our life. Cain, for his part, refuses to respond to the question of God and thus assume his “responsibilities.”<sup>15</sup> We often pose questions to the Bible or about the Bible; too often, we forget to receive the questions that the Bible itself poses to us.<sup>16</sup> Instead of posing questions to the Bible, as the believer ordinarily does, and instead of posing questions about the Bible, as the exegete does, with both cases starting from extra-biblical concerns, at risk of instrumentalizing revelation, it is a matter of letting the Bible pose questions to the world and to believers. It is thus a matter of having a freedom as robust toward the assumptions of the world as it is toward the given revelation.<sup>17</sup>

## “The Analogy of Faith”

The royal method that Ellul proposes, in order to escape both literalism and textual critique, is that of the “analogy of faith.” This expression comes to us from the apostle Paul, who employs it only once (it is thus a *hapax*) in the epistle to the Romans<sup>18</sup>:  $\text{Kara } \tau^{\wedge} \nu \text{ } \acute{\alpha} \nu \alpha \text{ZoY}^{\wedge} \text{av } \text{T}^{\wedge} \text{g } \text{nicTsmc}$  in Greek, *fidei analogia* in Latin. It is situated in a passage dedicated to different qualities that are given to different people in the heart of the Church: prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, generosity, direction of the community, mercy.<sup>19</sup> The analogy of faith is attached to the persona of the prophet:

Since we have different gifts, according to the grace that has been accorded to us, let the one who has the gift of prophecy exercise it according to the analogy of faith.<sup>20</sup>

John Calvin borrowed this Pauline expression in his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*<sup>21</sup> (in his exegesis of Rom 12:6) and in several places in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.<sup>22</sup> In his commentary, Calvin pleads in favor of a broad conception of prophecy, understood not as the gift of predicting the future but as a right intelligence of Scripture and a capacity to explain it clearly. It is thus to seek to accord all doctrine taught from Scripture with the foundations of the faith.<sup>23</sup> In *Institutes of the Christian*

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<sup>14</sup> John 20:15.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Ellul, *Ethique de la liberte*, 2:181-12.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Ellul, *Ethique de la liberte*, 1:203.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Ellul, *Ethique de la liberte*, 1:205.

<sup>18</sup> Rom 12:6b.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Rom 12:4-8.

<sup>20</sup> Rom 12:6.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Jean Calvin, *Commentaires de Jean Calvin sur le Nouveau Testament*. Vol. 4, *Epitre aux Romains* (Aix-en-Provence / Fontenay-sous-bois: Editions Kerygma / Editions Farel, 1978), 292-93.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Jean Calvin, *Institution de la religion chretienne* (Aix-en-Provence / Charols: Editions Kerygma / Editions Excelsis, 2009): « Au roi de France », xxx ; book iv, chap. xvi, §4, 1252; book iv, chap. xvi, §8, 1256; book iv, chap. xvii, §32, 1321.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Jean Calvin, *Commentaires de Jean Calvin sur le Nouveau Testament*. Vol. 4, *Epitre aux Romains*, 292-93.

*Religion*, Calvin mentions the analogy of faith beginning in his address to the king of France that introduces the work. Against his adversaries who accuse him of turning the Word of God from its true meaning, the Reformer recalls this:

When St. Paul wanted every prophecy to be conformed to the analogy and likeness of faith, he gave a most certain rule for testing every interpretation of Scripture (Rom 12[:6]). Now if our teaching is measured by this rule of faith, we have the victory in hand.<sup>24</sup>

In the main body of this voluminous treatment, John Calvin has recourse to the concept of the analogy of faith on the subjects of the baptism of children and the communion meal. Infant baptism is not explicitly affirmed in the Bible, but a silence does not imply a censure; otherwise, women would not be permitted to take communion. On the other hand, there is a question of the baptism of entire families; it is thus conforming to the analogy of faith that we can lay biblical foundations for the baptism of children.<sup>25</sup> By the same token, the Reformer defends his comprehension of the mystery of the holy supper based on the methodological principle of the analogy of faith.<sup>26</sup> According to Calvin, the analogy of faith thus consists in interpreting Scripture by Scripture, allowing Scripture to interpret itself: to dig deeply into each text to make it cohere with the other texts of the Bible. Ellul joins Calvin in his understanding of this rule of reading, while still slightly demarcating his own position. In the second part of *To Will and To Do*,<sup>27</sup> posthumously published in French and currently under translation into English, the professor from Bordeaux devotes long passages of his writing to the analogy of faith.<sup>28</sup> Following Karl Barth, while polemically disagreeing with him, Ellul begins by clearly distinguishing the *analogia fidei* from the *analogia entis*, a concept that is situated at the base of natural theology in the style of Thomas Aquinas.<sup>29</sup> His critique directed towards Barth consists in saying that the theologian from Basel ceded to the temptation that he denounced himself (of resorting to the *analogia entis*). Ellul then distances himself from Calvin in limiting the analogy of faith to the exercise of prophecy in the strict sense, in place of making of this rule a very general principle for the interpretation of all biblical texts.<sup>30</sup> He nevertheless understands the prophet's mission as being properly ethical—that is, as consisting

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<sup>24</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion: 1541 French Edition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 8. For the French, see Calvin, *Institution de la religion chretienne*, xxx. (Translator's note: my own translation of the French varies slightly: "When Paul declared that all prophecy ought to be interpreted according to the analogy and the similitude of faith (Rom 12:6), he pronounced a rule sure to apply to all interpretation of Scripture. If then our doctrine is examined according to this measure of faith, we have the victory in hand.")

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion: 1541 French Edition*, 1252, 1256.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion: 1541 French Edition*, 1321.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Ellul, *Les sources de l'ethique chretienne. Le Vouloir et le Faire*, parties IV et V.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Ellul, *Les sources de l'ethique chretienne*, 287-311.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Ellul, *Les sources de l'ethique chretienne*, 281-85.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Ellul, *Les sources de l'ethique chretienne*, 292.

of enunciating an ethic, under the inspiration of the Spirit, and in guaranteeing its objectivity by confronting it with Scripture:

If, then, prophecy consists in this formulation of a moral here and now, inspired by the Spirit of God, departing from and relating to Holy Scripture, we understand that the analogy of faith in question here effectively concerns the interpretation of biblical texts, and that is a matter of a guarantee of objectivity.<sup>31</sup>

This does not prevent Ellul from implicitly positioning himself close to the broad conception of Calvin in applying this method to numerous texts, in which he believes he discerns an ethical intention: “There cannot be a formulation of a moral for Christians based on the deep comprehension of ethical texts unless the analogy of faith can be applied,” he declares.<sup>32</sup> He defines the analogy as “a relation between elements of different natures or dimensions”<sup>33</sup> but also as “the comprehension of the *reason*”<sup>34</sup> for this relation. The interpretation of Scripture therefore consists in understanding the gap between biblical revelation and the contemporary moral of an era, in order to reproduce the same gap in our own milieu, without adopting in a literal manner a statement that is outmoded today. It is the work of salvation accomplished by Jesus Christ that constitutes the objectivity of the very heart of revelation. The entire Bible points to Jesus Christ and designates him as Lord and Savior. Consequently, Jesus Christ must be the constant in relation to which the analogy of faith must be established.<sup>35</sup> And if a passage of the biblical corpus seems to depart from the image and the face of the God of love that Jesus has revealed to us, it must be worked on, to the point of discerning what can be made consistent with this kernel of revelation.

## Examples of Applying the Method of the Analogy of Faith

We will take four examples of difficult biblical texts that the method of the analogy of faith will allow us to clarify, by hearing them in echo with other texts, in a harmonious symphony. We present them by relying on Ellul’s commentary but also by extending it beyond what Ellul wrote concerning these texts.

### Qoheleth / Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes is the biblical book that Ellul loved the most: “There is probably no other text in the Bible that I have so probed, from which I have received so much—

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<sup>31</sup> Ellul, *Les sources de l’éthique chrétienne*, 293.

<sup>32</sup> ———, *Les sources de l’éthique chrétienne*, 297.

<sup>33</sup> ———, *Les sources de l’éthique chrétienne*, 297.

<sup>34</sup> ———, *Les sources de l’éthique chrétienne*, 297.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Ellul, *Les sources de l’éthique chrétienne*, 308-11.

that has affected me and spoken to me so much.”<sup>36</sup> He therefore devoted a work of meditation to Ecclesiastes, *Reason for Being*<sup>37</sup>—a book that he considered to be the conclusion to the whole of his work.<sup>38</sup> For his study, our author affirms to have chosen a path that inverts the academic method, departing from the Hebrew text itself and not from commentaries.<sup>39</sup> He similarly refuses to consider the Bible as equal to any other literary text, since it is the bearer of revelation.<sup>40</sup> That is why Ellul seeks a textual coherence beyond apparent contradictions: for example, between “all is vanity (including wisdom)” and “seek wisdom (because it comes from God).” And he orients this coherence in a dialectical movement between “Reality” and “Truth.” The Reality is that all is vanity, and the Truth is that everything is a gift of God. Reality prevents the Truth from being an evasion, while the Truth prevents Reality from being hopeless.<sup>41</sup>

All commentators of Ecclesiastes have been disconcerted by the absence of a logical plan and have generally searched to identify different authors and different editorial layers. According to Ellul, the coherence does not come from a plan but from a weave, like a threading of reflections that become entangled, echoing one another. The dialectic between vanity and wisdom finds its end in God: wisdom makes the vanity of everything apparent, but wisdom is itself vanity, and yet vanity is overtaken by wisdom. And nevertheless, the book of Qoheleth does not end in this immanent circle, because of the reference to God, which is central and decisive because it ties together the dispersed factors. The contradictions are not gross errors of forgetfulness, as the exegetes say, but one of the keys of the book: “The principle of non-contradiction is a principle of death. Contradiction is the condition of a communication.”<sup>42</sup> The work of Kierkegaard was decisive for Ellul’s discernment of the dialectical movement at the heart of the book of Qoheleth. And it is equally in reference to the Danish thinker that our author finally pleads in favor of a subjective and intuitive approach:

above all, to let oneself be seized by the beauty of the text, to receive it first of all in emotion and silent listening as with music, and to allow one’s sensitivity, one’s imagination, to speak before wanting to analyse and “understand.”<sup>43</sup>

Ellul synthesizes his approach by a spiral schema,<sup>44</sup> thanks to which we can traverse the apparent contradictions of the book of Qoheleth in following the movement of the text. We are not dealing with a book written by three authors: the one, skeptic and disillusioned, seeing in all things only vanity; the second, rich with experiences, considering a wisdom without God as an art of living with realism and lucidity; and

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<sup>36</sup> Jacques Ellul, *La raison d’être. Méditation sur l’Ecclesiaste* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1987), 11.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Ellul, *La raison d’être*.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Ellul, *La raison d’être*, 13-14.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Ellul, *La raison d’être*, 11. This remark betrays deep prejudices as to the exegetical methods taught and practiced in the faculties of theology.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Ellul, *La raison d’être*, 16-18.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Ellul, *La raison d’être*, 42.

<sup>42</sup> Ellul, *La raison d’être*, 52.

<sup>43</sup> ———, *La raison d’être*, 323.

<sup>44</sup> ———, *La raison d’être*, 40.

the third, who confesses his faith in God. It is a matter here of one author, who departs from vanity (1:1-11), responds to it with wisdom (1:12-18), but falls again into vanity since wisdom itself is vanity (2:1-11). This vicious circle finds its opening in God (who appears for the first time in 2:24); it is “before God” that everything takes on meaning, because everything is a “gift of God” (3:10-17; 5:17-19); therefore, “fear God” (5:6). And God has the last word (12:10-13). It is indeed a matter of applying the method of the analogy of faith, for God is the beginning, the center, and the end of the Bible, all converges toward him, and consequently every text that would seem to neglect him can be clarified if we dig to the point that, finally, we find God therein.

## The Parable of the Wedding Party<sup>45</sup>

Our second example will be that of the parable of the wedding party.<sup>46</sup> We are within a parable of the Kingdom. These parables of the Kingdom are spread all along the Gospel of Matthew, from chapter 13 until chapter 25, with each one giving us an image of the Kingdom of heaven: “The Kingdom of heaven is like ” Like a man, a mustard seed, yeast, a hidden

treasure, a merchant, a net, a king. Here, in our parable, the Kingdom of heaven is similar to a king. This king organizes a wedding feast for his son. Once the feast is put in place, he sends his servants to call those who were invited. These invitees were thus aware of the invitation, they knew that the wedding feast was going to take place and that they were invited. And yet, they make excuses and decline the invitation, too occupied with their fields and commerce. The invitees seize the servants, insult them, and kill them. So the king takes his vengeance by making them perish. Then he tells his servants to go and invite everyone they can find, in the streets and crossroads: “wicked and good,” the text specifies. Wicked and good, all are invited. This seems to be a first decisive element.<sup>47</sup> And the wedding hall is full of guests. Now, one man has not worn his garment for the wedding feast. Only one in the whole crowd: this is a second determining element.<sup>48</sup> The king asks him how he entered, and he remains silent. So the king says to his servants, “Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” The king behaves in the manner of a tyrant. Ought we therefore identify the king with God, as is often done? Must we identify the indifferent guests with believers who are a bit too lukewarm, and the poorly dressed guest as the unbeliever, the incredulous one, the infidel, the one who does not live according to the gospel, as we often do? Must we therefore see in this parable a means of terrorizing bad believers by threatening them with hell, as has

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. Jacques Ellul, *On Freedom, Love, and Power*, comp., ed., and trans. Willem H. Vanderburg (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 188-95.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Matt 22:1-14, Luke 14:16-24.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Ellul, *On Freedom, Love, and Power*, 191.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Ellul, *On Freedom, Love, and Power*, 191, 194.



often been done? Is this the image of the Father that Jesus came to reveal to us, when he addressed himself to us in an uncoded manner outside of the parables?

Let us therefore reconsider the elements that constitute the point of the text: wicked and good share the feast, and only one is thrown into the darkness, punished and tormented. Even the indifferent guests are not thrown into the darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. They are killed, they are dead, but they are not submitted to these torments. Nothing is told us about what happens to them after their death. There is only one here who is condemned, expelled, tormented for all. Who is this one if not Christ himself? This man who is thrown out, without a wedding garment, it is Jesus himself! This man who stays silent when interrogated and threatened, it is Jesus, who remained silent before Pilate! All the others are clothed in a wedding garment, the wicked and the good, everyone! For it is Jesus who took on himself our faults and was condemned for us, in our place! This is what the apostle Paul says to the Corinthians in a text just as enigmatic and scandalous: “The one who knew no sin, God made him become sin for us, so that we could become in him the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21). He did not become a sinner; he became sin! And he paid for us. He was cast into torment, weeping and gnashing of teeth: he “descended into hell,” as the Creed says. All this was done for us. And this is consistent with the whole of the gospel message, according to the analogy of faith.

So then, we might say: But this God is cruel, who casts his son into torment! It is here that I see the whole interest of believing in the Trinity. If we believe that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, if Jesus Christ is none other than God, God as the Father is God and as the Holy Spirit is God, then this is not a god who cruelly casts a man, *a fortiori* his son, into torment. Let us not be prisoners of a literal or allegorical reading of the parable, according to which a king expels a guest. The king does not represent the Father; he represents the Kingdom, since it is the Kingdom of heaven that is like a king. No, according to the trinitarian faith, it is God as Jesus Christ who gives himself fully for us: it is a gift of self and not the sacrifice of someone else. God gives himself fully to suffering and torment, to weeping and gnashing of teeth, so that we who are sinners may be freed, saved from these troubles. And this is in coherence with the whole of the gospel message, according to the analogy of faith.

The parable ends thus: “For many are called, but few are chosen.” Here again, the formula is strange. The parable has just told us that the wedding hall was full of guests, yet the lesson of the parable consists in telling us that there are many called, but few chosen. We thus cannot reasonably identify the guests, who are innumerable, with the chosen, who are very few. Perhaps the guests are the called rather than the chosen. This final formula cannot signify that very few will be saved at the end of time.<sup>49</sup> “Few are chosen” can mean, by euphemism: “none are chosen, not one chosen.” This formula signifies thus that we are not worthy of being saved, not one among us, but that Jesus alone has paid so that we might be saved. This formula signifies the infinite love of the

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. Ellul, *On Freedom, Love, and Power*, 193-95.

Father without which we can do nothing by ourselves. And this, too, is in coherence with the whole of the gospel message, according to the analogy of faith.

## The Parable of the Judgment<sup>50</sup>

Our third example is that of the parable of the Judgment. This text poses a certain number of problems. It seems to go against the idea of salvation by grace and to defend the idea of salvation by works. Moreover, it raises the question of hell<sup>51</sup>: those who have accomplished works of mercy (the sheep) will be blessed and will enter into the Kingdom, and those who have not accomplished these works (the goats) will be cursed and will go into eternal fire. For those who have given food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty, those who have welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, visited the sick and the prisoner, have served Christ himself. They therefore have the right to eternal life. But those who have not done all this have not served Christ. And consequently, they will go to eternal punishment.

But there is a small detail here that has too often gone neglected: the sheep are all surprised to learn that they have served Christ in serving their neighbor; by the same token, the goats are all surprised to learn that they have not served Christ in not serving their neighbor. They discover this only after the fact. Thus they are unaware, at the moment of their encounter with their neighbor, that Christ identified himself with the littlest person, that he was, literally, this little one. In other words, those who appear in Matthew 25 have not read Matthew 25! And for good reason! This effect of surprise is the first decisive element. For we see thus that the sheep have acted in this manner not in order to be saved but because they let their hearts speak. The attitude of the sheep, like that of the goats, was linked not to salvation but to the capacity or incapacity to love the neighbor in distress. It is the opening or closing of the heart that is in question here, the opening or closing of the heart before the concrete situation and the immediate needs of the littlest one there is, quite simply.

It is in this manner that a second small detail, still more decisive, must be noticed. First of all, what the Son of Man really says to the goats is that “in the measure where (εἰς ὅσον) you have not done this for one of these little ones, it is for me that you have not done it.” It is a question of one of these little ones. This means that it suffices to neglect one little one, only one, to be damned! Even if you help 99 little ones, if you leave one of the hundred aside without regarding them, you are damned! But this signifies therefore that we are all damned, for we have all neglected our neighbor at least once. We are all condemnable. This is the logic of the Law of the First Testament: it suffices to have broken one of the 613 commandments of the Torah, all while having

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. Matt 25:31-46.

<sup>51</sup> Ellul points out that there is no question of hell except in the parables, because these are not lessons of doctrinal teaching. Cf. Jacques Ellul, *Ce que je crois* (Paris: Grasset, 1987), 257-58; *On Freedom, Love, and Power*, 157.

accomplished the other 612, to have sinned against the entire Torah. But now if we look at what is said to the sheep, we observe that the same thing is said—the same, but inverted—on the subject of the sheep: “In the measure where you have done this for one of these little ones, it is for me that you have done it.” This means that it suffices to have served one little one, only one, to be saved! Now, we have all helped our neighbor at least once. Even one time! Thus, we are all saved! Or more precisely, we are all at once condemned and saved, or rather, condemnable and acquitted, for we are all, every woman and man among us, simultaneously goat and sheep. Each one of us is at once a goat and a sheep.

It is here that the point of our text is situated: in this paradoxical knot between what we have not done, even if only once, and what we have done, even if only once. In our condemnation, which we all merit, and our salvation, which none of us merits but which is offered to all. And this paradox invites us to turn towards grace. All condemnable, we cannot live except by the grace of God. And in this, this text echoes in every gospel, in the epistles, and in the whole of the New Testament, according to the analogy of faith. For this parable is made to bring us to commit ourselves into the hands of grace.

## Men and Women<sup>52</sup>

Our fourth and final example concerns what the apostle Paul says about women and to women. Generally, we have an image of Paul as a conservative phallocrat, which we illustrate by citing the famous formula, “Wives, be submitted to your husbands!”<sup>53</sup> But how can we understand this injunction, which contradicts the liberating work of Christ for women, these first witnesses of the resurrection, which is to say, the first witnesses of what is at the very heart of our faith<sup>54</sup> (which is absolutely unique among all religions), and which contradicts even the word of Paul that affirms that “there is neither man nor woman”?<sup>55</sup> How may we interpret this verse according to the analogy of faith? First of all, Paul does not say, “Wives, be submitted to your husbands!” We must return to the preceding verse, to read, “Be submitted to one another!”<sup>56</sup> And verse 22 continues, “In the same fashion, wives, towards your husbands!” Thus, wives are invited to do regarding their husbands what everyone does (men included!), one to another, at the heart of the Church. Additionally, Paul addresses husbands, saying, “Husbands, love your wives!”<sup>57</sup> employing the verb *aYanetv*, which does not designate conjugal love but unconditional love, the love with which God loves us. And there is

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<sup>52</sup> Cf. Jacques Ellul, *La subversion du christianisme* (Paris: La Table Ronde, [1984] 2011), 122-24; *The Subversion of Christianity*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1986), 78-79.

<sup>53</sup> Eph 5:22.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Ellul, *La subversion du christianisme*, 120; *The Subversion of Christianity*, 77.

<sup>55</sup> Gal 3:28.

<sup>56</sup> Eph 5:21.

<sup>57</sup> Eph 5:25a.

a further addendum to this addendum: “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself for her!”<sup>58</sup> Thus, Paul asks of men something much more demanding than he asks of women: to be ready to give their life for their wife.<sup>59</sup> And this is in coherence, according to the analogy of faith, with what biblical revelation says about women and about relations between men and women, including Paul, who affirms in the first epistle to the Corinthians, “The body of the woman belongs to her husband.”<sup>60</sup> This conforms completely to the mentality of the era, but he hastens to add, “and the body of the husband belongs to his wife.”<sup>61</sup> This is absolutely inconceivable, unheard of, revolutionary, subversive, both in Paul’s time and today: complete equality between men and women, even in bed. The method of the analogy of faith allows us to see that Paul, far from being a frightful misogynist, is a man of the avant-garde.

## Conclusion

Throughout these four examples, chosen from among many others, Jacques Ellul invites us to rediscover the Bible as a love letter from God to men, including in its most enigmatic aspects. Such is the potential for the renewal of traditional readings that the method of the analogy of faith offers us.

## « L’analogie de la foi » : qu’est-ce que cela signifie? Pourquoi et en vue de quoi?

Frederic Rognon

Rognon, Frederic. « “L’analogie de la foi” : qu’est ce que cela signifie? Pourquoi et en vue de quoi? ». Ellul Forum 62 (Fall 2018): 43-57. © Frederic Rognon, CC BY-NC-ND. 43

Lecteur assidu de la Bible, Jacques Ellul a placé le don scripturaire au cœur de son œuvre, et notamment de son œuvre éthique. C’est ainsi qu’il peut écrire:

Le critère de ma pensée est la révélation biblique ; le contenu de ma pensée est la révélation biblique ; le point de départ m’est fourni par la révélation biblique ; la méthode est la dialectique selon laquelle nous est faite la révélation biblique ; et l’objet est la recherche de la signification de la révélation biblique sur l’Éthique<sup>62</sup>.

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<sup>58</sup> Eph 5:25.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Ellul, *La subversion du christianisme*, 123; *The Subversion of Christianity*, 79.

<sup>60</sup> 1 Cor 7:4a.

<sup>61</sup> 1 Cor 7:4b.

<sup>62</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Le Vouloir et le Faire. Une critique théologique de la morale* (1964), Genève, Labor et Fides, 2013<sup>2</sup>, p. 19.

La pensee ethique de Jacques Ellul est donc « scripturo-centree », tout en con-ferant a la Bible un statut bien singulier. Comment, en effet, Jacques Ellul lit-il la Bible? Et en quoi sa lecture est-elle originale, singuliere, et susceptible de renouveler les interpretations courantes?

Pour repondre a ces questions, nous procederons en quatre temps. Nous indiquerons tout d'abord quelles sont les critiques que Jacques Ellul adresse a l'exegese. Nous presenterons ensuite les grands principes de l'approche ellulienne de la Bible. Dans un troisieme temps, nous nous arreterons sur la methode par excellence que preconise le professeur de Bordeaux: « l'analogue de la foi ». Et nous terminerons avec quatre exemples de textes bibliques interpretes selon l'analogie de la foi.

## Critique de l'exegese

Jacques Ellul adresse de vives critiques a l'encontre de l'exegese histori-co-critique comme de l'exegese structurale. Il ne les considere pas comme fausses ou vaines, car elles sont sans doute exactes et utiles pour le jeu de la science, « mais elles ne font pas avancer d'un pas vers l'ultime. Elles servent assurément l'exactitude mais ne disent rien au sujet de la verite, et ne per mettent pas de l'entrevoir mais peut-etre la cachent »<sup>63</sup>. C'est donc la tension, recurrenente tout au long de l'oeuvre ellulienne, entre la Realite et la Verite, qui est ici convoquee pour disqualifier les methodes exegetiques de type scientifique et technique. Jacques Ellul leur reproche tout particulierement de depouiller le texte biblique de toute dimension spirituelle et de le reduire a n'etre qu'un texte comme un autre (a l'instar d'une oeuvre d'Homere ou de Platon). Prendre la Bible comme un objet inerte, c'est ressembler a un chir-urgien qui oublierait que le malade qu'il opere est vivant, pour le dissequer ou pratiquer une autopsie au lieu d'une operation qui le sauverait<sup>64</sup>.

Ce grief rappelle la charge polemique et sarcastique de Soren Kierkegaard contre ceux qui pretendent lire une lettre d'amour avec un arsenal de dic-tionnaires, de concordances et d'encyclopedies<sup>65</sup>. Or, la Bible est une lettre d'amour, envoyee par Dieu a son lecteur, qu'elle touche au creur et au plus intime de son existence.

Jacques Ellul critique egalement l'exegese marxiste, en vogue dans les an-nees 1970, notamment celle de Fernando Belo, qui pretendait « faire lire Marc par Marx »<sup>66</sup>. Le professeur de Bordeaux inventorie les innombrables erreurs d'ordre historique qui ont permis a Belo de faire entrer l'evangile dans le schema marxiste<sup>67</sup>, et lui reproche tout

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<sup>63</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Sans feu ni lieu. Signification biblique de la Grande Ville* (1975), Paris, La Table Ronde (coll. La petite Vermillon n°191), 20032, p. 17.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Jacques Ellul, *Ethique de la liberte*, Geneve, Labor et Fides (coll. Nouvelle serie theologique, n°27+30), 1975, tome 1, p. 210.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Soren Kierkegaard, « Pour un examen de conscience recommande aux con-temporains » (1851), *ttuvres Completes*, Paris, Editions de l'Orante, volume XVIII, 1966, p. 83-87.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Fernando Belo, *Lecture materialiste de l'evangile de Marc. Recit, pratique, ideologie*, Paris, Le Cerf, 1974, p. 18.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Jacques Ellul, *L'ideologie marxiste chretienne. Que fait-on de l'evangile?* (1979), Paris, La

particulierement d'operer une reduction materialiste et politique d'un texte qui recuse precisement toute interpretation materialiste de la vie<sup>68</sup>.

Quelle est donc l'alternative que propose Jacques Ellul a ces impasses ex-egetiques?

## Les grands principes de l'approche ellulienne de la Bible

Si Jacques Ellul recuse l'approche scientifique de la Bible, c'est pour lui opposer la meditation d'inspiration kierkegaardienne. Celle-ci revient a considerer la revelation biblique comme ce qui s'adresse a l'existence meme du sujet. Mais a ce propos, il inverse la perspective courante, notamment en milieu protestant, qui consiste a ouvrir la Bible chaque fois que l'on cherche une reponse a nos questions (ethiques, sociales ou existentielles). Jacques Ellul ne con^oit evidemment pas la Bible comme un livre de recettes, mais pas meme comme un livre de reponses a nos questions. La Bible n'est pas un livre de reponses, mais un livre de questions, que Dieu pose au lecteur croyant<sup>69</sup>. Si nous entrons dans la Bible avec des questions, celles-ci n'y trou-veront pas reponse, elles y subissent un deplacement, un decentrement, et nous ressortons de la Bible avec nos questions renouvelees et de nouvelles questions qui nous sont posees<sup>70</sup>. C'est alors a nous d'y repondre, c'est-a-dire d'etre responsables en assumant nos reponses.

La Bible est donc un livre qui renvoie l'homme a sa liberte et a sa respons-abilite. La lecture croyante est une ecoute, puisque la foi se ressource dans le silence<sup>71</sup>. La Bible nous pose principalement trois questions<sup>72</sup>. Elle nous pose une question confessante: « Qui dites-vous que je suis? »<sup>73</sup>, une question ethique: « Qu'as-tu fait de ton frere? »<sup>74</sup>, et une question existentielle quant a notre quete: « Qui cherches-tu? »<sup>75</sup> Nous sommes donc interroges, et invites a donner une reponse confessante, une reponse ethique et

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Table Ronde (coll. La petite Vermillon n°246), 20062, p. 113153.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 148-150.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Jacques Ellul, *Ethique de la liberte, op. cit.*, tome 1, p. 203 ; tome 2, p. 164, 181-182 ; *La foi auprix du doute: « encore quarante jours... »* (1980), Paris, La Table Ronde (coll. La petite Vermillon n°404), 2015[3], p. 147-152 ; « Karl Barth et nous », *Bulletin du Centre protestant d'etudes*, 37e annee, n°4-5, juin 1985, p. 5-12 (ici p. 7) ; *La Genese aujourd'hui* (avec Francois Tosquelles), Le Collier, Editions de l'AREFPPI, 1987, p. 214 ; *Mort et esperance de la resurrection. Conferences inedites de Jacques Ellul*, Lyon, Editions Olivetan, 2016, p. 53 ; *Les sources de l'ethique chretienne. Le Vouloir et le Faire, parties IV et V*, Introduction et notes de Frederic Rognon, Geneve, Labor et Fides, 2018, p. 57-58 ; Gilbert Comte, « Entretien avec Jacques Ellul: "Je crois que nous sommes dans une periode de silence de Dieu" », *Le Monde*, 8 novembre 1977, p. 1-2 (ici p. 2).

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Jacques Ellul, *Ethique de la liberte, op. cit.*, tome 2, p. 164 ; *La Genese aujo-urd'hui* (avec Francois Tosquelles), Le Collier, Editions de l'AREFPPI, 1987, p. 214.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Jacques Ellul, *La foi au prix du doute: « encore quarante jours. »*, op. cit., p. 151-155.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 135-137.

<sup>73</sup> Matthieu 16,15 ; Marc 8,29 ; Luc 9,20. La diversite des reponses de Pierre pourrait etayer la lecture ellulienne de la Bible comme livre de questions. Les reponses peuvent ainsi varier d'une personne a l'autre, mais aussi chez une meme personne selon les etapes de la vie.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Genese 4,9-10a. Le texte dit plus precisement: « Le Seigneur dit a Cain: "Ou est Abel ton frere?" Il repondit: "Je ne sais pas. Suis-je le gardien de mon frere, moi?" Alors il dit: "Qu'as-tu fait?" ».

<sup>75</sup> Jean 20,15.

une reponse existentielle, par la parole et par notre vie. Cain, pour sa part, refuse de repondre a la question de Dieu, et donc d'assumer ses « responsabil-ites »<sup>76</sup>. On pose trop de questions a la Bible ou sur la Bible, et l'on oublie trop souvent de recevoir les questions que la Bible elle-meme nous pose<sup>77</sup>. Au lieu de poser des questions a la Bible, comme le fait d'ordinaire le croy-ant, et au lieu de poser des questions sur la Bible, comme le fait l'exegete, dans un cas comme dans l'autre a partir de preoccupations extra-bibliques, au risque d'instrumentaliser la revelation, il s'agit de laisser la Bible poser des questions au monde et aux croyants ; il s'agit donc d'avoir une liberte aussi grande envers le monde que celle a laquelle nous pretendons vis-a-vis du monde revele<sup>78</sup>.

### « L'analogie de la foi »

Mais la methode royale que propose Jacques Ellul, afin d'echapper a la fois au literalisme et a la critique textuelle, est celle de l' « analogie de la foi ». Cette expression nous vient de l'apotre Paul, qui l'emploie une seule fois (c'est donc un *hapax*) dans l'epitre aux Romains<sup>79</sup>:  $\text{Kara t}^{\wedge}\text{v}^{\wedge} \text{'avaXoY}^{\wedge}\text{av T}^{\wedge}\text{g nicTsmc}$  en grec, *fidei analogia* en latin. Elle se situe dans un passage consacre aux differents charismes qui sont donnees aux uns et aux autres au sein de l'Eglise: prophetie, service, enseignement, exhortation, generosite, direction de la communaute, misericorde<sup>80</sup>. L'analogie de la foi est attachee au charisme de prophete: « Puisque nous avons des dons differents, selon la grace qui nous a ete accordee, que celui qui a le don de prophetie l'exerce selon l'analogie de la foi »<sup>81</sup>.

Jean Calvin a repris cette expression paulinienne dans son *Commentaire de l'epitre aux Romains*<sup>82</sup> (dans son exegese de Romains 12, 6), et a differentes reprises dans *l'Institution de la religion chretienne*<sup>83</sup>. Dans son commentaire, Calvin plaide en faveur d'une conception large de la prophetie, comprise non pas comme le don de predire l'avenir, mais comme une droite intelligence de l'Ecriture et une capacite a l'expliquer clairement. Il est donc demande d'accorder toute doctrine enseignee a partir de l'Ecriture avec les fondements de la foi<sup>84</sup>. Dans *l'Institution de la religion*

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<sup>76</sup> Cf. Jacques Ellul, *Ethique de la liberte*, op. cit., tome 2, p. 181-182.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, tome 1, p. 203.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Jacques Ellul, *Ethique de la liberte*, op. cit., tome 1, p. 205.

<sup>79</sup> Romains 12, 6b.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Romains 12, 4-8.

<sup>81</sup> Romains 12, 6.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Jean Calvin, *Commentaires de Jean Calvin sur le Nouveau Testament. Tome quatrieme: Epitre aux Romains*, Aix-en-Provence / Fontenay-sous-bois, Editions Kerygma / Editions Farel, 1978, p. 292-293.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Jean Calvin, *Institution de la religion chretienne*, Aix-en-Provence / Charols, Editions Kerygma / Editions Excelsis, 2009: « Au roi de France », p. xxx ; livre iv, chapitre xvi, §4, p. 1252 ; livre iv, chapitre xvi, §8, p. 1256 ; livre iv, chapitre xvii, §32, p. 1321.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Jean Calvin, *Commentaires de Jean Calvin sur le Nouveau Testament. Tome quatrieme:*

*chretienne*, Calvin mentionne l'analogie de la foi des son adresse au roi de France qui introduit l'ouvrage. Contre ses adversaires qui l'accusent de détourner la Parole de Dieu de son vrai sens, le Reformateur rappelle ceci:

Quand Paul a voulu que toute prophetie soit interpretee selon l'anal-ogie et a la similitude de la foi (Romains 12, 6), il a enonce une regle sure pour apprecier toute interpretation de l'Ecriture. Si donc notre doctrine est examinee selon cette regle de foi, nous avons la victoire en main<sup>85</sup>.

Dans le corps meme du volumineux traite, Jean Calvin a recours au concept d'analogie de la foi au sujet du bapteme des enfants et de la sainte Cene. Le pedobap-tisme n'est pas explicitement affirme dans la Bible, mais un silence ne veut pas dire reprobation, sinon les femmes ne pourraient etre admises a la Cene ; en revanche, il est question de baptemes de familles entieres ; c'est donc conformement a l'analogie de la foi que l'on peut fonder bib-liquement le bapteme des enfants<sup>86</sup>. De meme, le Reformateur defend sa comprehension du mystere de la Cene a partir du principe methodologique de l'analogie de la foi<sup>87</sup>. Selon Calvin, l'analogie de la foi consiste donc a interpreter l'Ecriture par l'Ecriture, a laisser l'Ecriture s'interpreter elle-meme: a creuser chaque texte afin de le mettre en coherence avec les autres textes de la Bible.

Jacques Ellul rejoint Calvin dans sa comprehension de cette regle de lecture, tout en s'en demarquant quelque peu. Dans la seconde partie de *Le Vouloir et le Faire*<sup>88</sup>, texte inedit recemment publie en fran<sup>^</sup>ais et en voie de traduction en anglais, le professeur de Bordeaux consacre de longs developpements a l'analogie de la foi<sup>89</sup>. A la suite de Karl Barth, mais aussi en polemique avec lui, il commence par distinguer nettement l'*analogia fidei* de l'*analogia entis*, concept qui se situe a la base de la theologie naturelle de type thomiste<sup>90</sup>. Sa critique a l'encontre de Barth consiste a dire que le theologien de Bale a cede a la tentation qu'il denon<sup>^</sup>ait lui-meme. Jacques Ellul s'eloigne ensuite de Calvin en limitant l'analogie de la foi a l'exercice de la prophetie *stricto sensu*, au lieu de faire de cette regle un principe tres general pour l'inter-pretation de tous les textes bibliques<sup>91</sup>. Il comprend neanmoins la mission du prophete comme etant proprement ethique, c'est-a-dire comme consistant a enoncer une ethique, sous l'inspiration de l'Esprit, et a en garantir l'objectivite en la confrontant a l'Ecriture:

Si donc la prophetie consiste dans cette formulation d'une morale *hic et nunc*, inspiree par l'Esprit de Dieu a partir de, et par rapport a, l'Ecriture sainte, nous com-

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Epitre aux Romains, op. cit., p. 292-293.

<sup>85</sup> Jean Calvin, Institution de la religion chretienne, op. cit., p. xxx.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. ibid., p. 1252, 1256.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. ibid., p. 1321.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Jacques Ellul, Les sources de l'ethique chretienne. Le Vouloir et le Faire, parties IV et V, op. cit.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. ibid., p. 287-311.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. ibid., p. 281-285.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. ibid., p. 292.



prenons bien que l'analogie de la foi dont il est question ici concerne effectivement l'interprétation des textes bibliques, et qu'il s'agit bien d'un garant d'objectivité<sup>92</sup>.

Il n'empêche que Jacques Ellul se rapproche implicitement de la conception large de Calvin en appliquant cette méthode à de nombreux textes, dont il croit discerner l'intention éthique: « Il ne peut y avoir de formulation d'une morale pour les chrétiens à partir de la compréhension profonde des textes éthiques que s'il peut y avoir analogie de la foi », déclare-t-il<sup>93</sup>. Il définit l'analogie comme « un rapport entre des éléments de nature ou de grandeur différentes »<sup>94</sup>, mais aussi comme « la compréhension de la *raison* » de ce rapport<sup>95</sup>. L'interprétation de l'Écriture consiste donc à comprendre l'écart entre la révélation biblique et la morale courante de l'époque, afin de reproduire le même écart dans notre propre milieu, sans adopter à la lettre un énoncé aujourd'hui périmé. Or, ce qui fait l'objectivité du créateur même de la révélation, c'est l'œuvre de salut accomplie par Jésus-Christ. Toute la Bible renvoie à Jésus-Christ, et le désigne comme Seigneur et Sauveur. Par conséquent, Jésus-Christ doit être la constante par rapport à laquelle l'analogie de la foi doit s'établir<sup>96</sup>. Et si un passage du corpus biblique semble s'éloigner de l'image et du visage du Dieu d'amour que Jésus nous a révélés, il s'agira de le travailler, jusqu'à y discerner ce qui peut être mis en cohérence avec ce noyau de la révélation.

## Exemples d'application de la méthode d'analogie de la foi

Nous prendrons quatre exemples de textes bibliques qui font difficulté et que la méthode d'analogie de la foi va permettre d'éclaircir en les situant en écho avec d'autres textes, dans une harmonieuse symphonie. Nous les présentons en nous appuyant sur le commentaire de Jacques Ellul, mais aussi en le prolongeant au-delà de ce qu'il nous en dit.

### Qoheleth

Qoheleth est le livre biblique que Jacques Ellul affectionne le plus: « Il n'y a probablement pas de texte de la Bible que j'aie autant fouillé, dont j'aie autant re^u—qui m'ait autant rejoint et parlé »<sup>97</sup>. Il a donc consacré à l'Écclésiaste un ouvrage de méditation, *La raison d'être*<sup>98</sup>, qu'il considère comme la conclusion de l'ensemble de son œuvre<sup>99</sup>. Pour son étude, notre auteur affirme avoir pris le chemin inverse de la méth-

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 293.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 297.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 308-311.

<sup>97</sup> Jacques Ellul, *La raison d'être. Méditation sur l'Écclésiaste*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1987, p. 11.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Jacques Ellul, *La raison d'être*, *op. cit.*

<sup>99</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 13-14.

ode universitaire, en partant du texte hebreu et non pas de commentaires<sup>100</sup>. Il refuse également de considerer la Bible comme n'importe quel texte litteraire, alors qu'elle est porteuse de la revelation<sup>101</sup>. C'est pourquoi Jacques Ellul cherche une coherence textuelle au-dela des apparentes contradictions, par exemple en-tre « tout est vanite (y compris la sagesse) » et « recherchons la sagesse (car elle vient de Dieu) ». Et il repere cette coherence dans un mouvement dia-lectique entre « Realite » et « Verite ». La « Realite », c'est que tout est vanite, et la « Verite », c'est que tout est don de Dieu. La « Realite » empeche la « Verite » d'etre une evasion, tandis que la « Verite » empeche la « Realite » d'etre desesperante<sup>102</sup>.

Tous les commentateurs de l'Ecclesiaste ont ete deconcertes par l'absence de plan logique, et ont generalement cherche a identifier des auteurs dif-ferents et des couches redactionnelles. Selon Jacques Ellul, la coherence ne vient pas d'un plan mais d'une trame, comme un tissage de reflexions qui s'enchevetrent en echos. La dialectique entre la vanite et la sagesse trouve son issue en Dieu: la sagesse fait apparaitre la vanite de tout, mais la sagesse est elle-meme vanite, et cependant la vanite est depassee par la sagesse. Et neanmoins le livre de Qoheleth ne s'acheve pas dans ce cercle immanent, a cause de la reference a Dieu, qui est centrale et decisive car elle noue les facteurs disperses. Les contradictions ne sont pas de grossiers oublis, comme disent les exegetes, mais l'une des cles du livre: « Le principe de non-contradiction est un principe de mort. La contradiction est la condition d'une communication »<sup>103</sup>. L'oeuvre de Kierkegaard a ete decisive pour le discernement par Jacques Ellul du mouvement dialectique au sein du livre de Qoheleth. Et c'est egalement en reference au penseur danois que notre auteur plaide finalement en faveur d'une approche subjective et intuitive:

D'abord se laisser saisir par la beaute du texte, d'abord le recevoir dans l'emotion et l'ecoute silencieuse comme une musique, et laiss-er sa sensibilite, son imagination parler avant de vouloir analyser et « comprendre »<sup>104</sup>.

Jacques Ellul synthetise son approche par un schema en spirale<sup>105</sup>, grace au-quel on peut traverser les apparentes contradictions du livre de Qoheleth en suivant le mouvement du texte. Il ne s'agit pas d'un livre ecrit par trois auteurs: l'un, sceptique et desabuse, qui ne verrait en toutes choses que vanite ; le second, riche d'experiences, qui considererait une sagesse sans Dieu comme un art de vivre avec realisme et lucidite ; et le troisieme, qui confesserait sa foi en Dieu. Il s'agit du meme auteur, qui part de la vanite (1, 1-11), lui repond par la sagesse (1, 12-18), mais retombe dans la vanite puisque la sagesse elle-meme est vanite (2, 1-11) ; ce cercle vicieux trouve son ouverture en Dieu (qui apparait pour la premiere fois en 2, 24) ; c'est « devant Dieu » que tout

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<sup>100</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 11. Cette remarque trahit de graves prejuges quant aux methodes exegetiques enseignees et pratiquees dans les Facultes de Theologie.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 16-18.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 323.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

prend sens, car tout est « don de Dieu » (3, 10-17 ; 5, 17-19), c'est pourquoi « crains Dieu » (5, 6). Et Dieu a le dernier mot (12, 10-13). Il s'agit bien de l'application de la methode d'analogie de la foi, car Dieu est le debut, le centre et la fin de la Bible, tout converge vers lui, et par consequent tout texte qui semblerait le negliger peut etre eclaire si on le creuse jusqu'a ce que, finalement, on y trouve Dieu.

## La parabole des Noces<sup>106</sup>

Notre second exemple sera celui de la parabole des Noces<sup>107</sup>. Nous sommes dans une parabole du royaume. Ces paraboles du royaume sont egrenees tout au long de l'Evangile de Matthieu, depuis le chapitre 13 jusqu'au chapitre 25, et nous donnent chacune une image de ce qu'est le royaume des cieus: « Le royaume des cieus est semblable a . . . » A un homme, a un grain de moutarde, a du levain, a un tresor cache, a un marchand, a un filet, a un roi. Ici, dans notre parabole, le royaume des cieus est semblable a un roi. Ce roi organise des noces pour son fils. Et une fois le festin mis en place, il envoie ses serviteurs appeler ceux qui etaient invites. Ceux qui etaient invites etaient done deja au courant de l'invitation, ils savaient que les noces allaient avoir lieu, et qu'ils y etaient convies. Et cependant, ils se derobent, et declinent l'invitation, trop occupes a leurs champs et a leur commerce. Et les convies se saisissent des serviteurs, les outragent et les tuent. Alors le roi se venge en les faisant perir. Puis il demande a ses serviteurs d'aller inviter tous ceux qu'ils trouveraient, dans les carrefours et les chemins, « mechants et bons », precise le texte. Mechants et bons: tous sont invites. Cela semble etre un premier element decisif<sup>108</sup>. Et la salle de noces est pleine de convives. Or, un homme n'a pas revetu son habit de noces. Un seul dans toute la foule: c'est un second element determinant<sup>109</sup>. Le roi lui demande comment il a pu entrer, et il garde le silence. Alors le roi dit a ses serviteurs: « Attachez-lui les pieds et les mains, et jetez-le dans les tenebres du dehors, ou il y aura des pleurs et des grincements de dents . . . » Le roi se comporte a la maniere d'un tyran. Faut-il donc identifier le roi a Dieu, comme on l'a souvent fait? Faut-il identifier les invites desinvoltés aux croyants un peu trop tiedes, et le convive mal vetu a l'incroyant, a l'incredule, au mecreant, a celui qui ne vit pas selon l'Evangile, comme on l'a souvent fait? Faut-il donc voir dans cette parabole un moyen de terroriser les mal-croyants en les mena<sup>^</sup>ant de l'enfer, comme on l'a souvent fait? Est-ce cela l'image du Pere que Jesus est venu nous reveler, lorsqu'il s'adresse a nous de fa<sup>^</sup>on decryptee, en dehors des paraboles?

Reprenons donc les elements qui constituent la pointe du texte: mechants et bons partagent le festin ; et un seul est jete dans les tenebres, puni et supplicie. Meme

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<sup>106</sup> Cf. Jacques Ellul, *On Freedom, Love, and Power*, Compiled, Edited and Translated by Willem H. Vanderburg, Toronto / Buffalo / London, University of Toronto Press, 2010, p. 188-195.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Matthieu 22, 1-14 ; Luc 14, 16-24.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. Jacques Ellul, *On Freedom, Love, and Power*, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 191, 194.

les invites desinvoltés ne sont pas jetés dans les ténèbres ou il y a des pleurs et des grincements de dents. Ils sont tués, ils sont morts, mais ils ne sont pas soumis à ces supplices. Rien ne nous est dit sur leur sort après la mort. Il n'y en a qu'un qui soit condamné, expulsé, supplicié. Il n'y en a donc qu'un seul qui paie pour tous. Qui est-ce, sinon le Christ lui-même? Cet homme débrayé, sans vêtement de noces, c'est Jésus lui-même ! Cet homme qui garde le silence quand on l'interroge et qu'on le menace, c'est Jésus, qui s'est tenu devant Pilate ! Tous les autres sont revêtus d'un habit de fête, les méchants et les bons: tous ! Car Jésus est celui qui a pris sur lui nos fautes, et a été condamné pour nous, à notre place ! C'est ce que dit l'apôtre Paul aux Corinthiens dans un texte aussi énigmatique et scandaleux: « Celui qui n'a point connu le péché, Dieu l'a fait devenir péché pour nous, afin que nous devenions en lui justice de Dieu » (2 Co 5, 21). Il n'est pas devenu pécheur, il est devenu péché ! Et il a payé pour nous. Il a été jeté dans les supplices, les pleurs et les grincements de dents: il est « descendu aux enfers », comme dit le Credo... Tout cela a été fait

pour nous. Et cela est en cohérence avec l'ensemble du message évangélique, selon l'analogie de la foi.

Alors, on pourrait dire: mais ce Dieu est cruel, qui jette son fils dans les tourments ! C'est ici que je vois tout l'intérêt de croire à la Trinité. Si nous croyons que Dieu est Père, Fils et Saint Esprit, si donc Jésus-Christ n'est pas un autre que Dieu, mais qu'il est Dieu comme son Père est Dieu et comme le Saint Esprit est Dieu, alors ce n'est pas un dieu qui jette cruellement un homme, *a fortiori* son fils, dans les supplices. Ne soyons pas prisonniers d'une lecture littérale ou allégorique de la parabole, selon laquelle un roi expulse un convive. Le roi ne représente pas le Père, il représente le royaume, puisque c'est le royaume des cieux qui est semblable à un roi. Non, selon la foi trinitaire, c'est Dieu en tant que Jésus-Christ qui s'est donné pleinement pour nous: c'est un don de soi et non pas le sacrifice de quelqu'un d'autre. Dieu s'est donné pleinement à la souffrance et aux tourments, aux pleurs et aux grincements de dents, pour que nous, qui sommes pécheurs, en soyons libérés, en soyons sauvés. Et cela est en cohérence avec l'ensemble du message évangélique, selon l'analogie de la foi.

Et la parabole se termine ainsi: « Car il y a beaucoup d'appelés, mais peu d'élus ». La encore, la formule est étrange. La parabole vient de nous dire que la salle de noces était pleine de convives. Et la lecture de la parabole consiste à nous dire qu'il y a beaucoup d'appelés, mais peu d'élus. On ne peut donc pas raisonnablement identifier les convives, qui sont innombrables, aux élus, qui sont très peu nombreux. Les convives seraient peut-être plutôt les appelés que les élus. Cette formule finale ne peut pas signifier que

très peu d'hommes seront sauvés à la fin des temps<sup>110</sup>. « Peu d'élus » peut vouloir dire, par euphémisme: « pas d'élus, aucun élu ». Cette formule signifie donc que nous ne sommes pas dignes d'être sauvés, aucun d'entre nous. Mais que seul Jésus a payé pour que nous soyons sauvés. Cette formule signifie l'amour infini du Père sans lequel

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<sup>110</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 193-195.

nous ne pouvons rien faire par nous-mêmes. Et cela encore, c'est en cohérence avec l'ensemble du message évangélique, selon l'analogie de la foi.

## La parabole du Jugement

Notre troisième exemple est celui de la parabole du Jugement<sup>111</sup>. Ce texte pose un certain nombre de problèmes. Il semble aller à l'encontre du salut par grâce, et défendre l'idée du salut par les œuvres. De plus, il y est question de l'enfer<sup>112</sup>: ceux qui auront accompli des œuvres de miséricorde (les brebis) seront bénis et entreront dans le Royaume, et que ceux qui ne les ont pas accomplies (les boucs) seront maudits et iront dans le feu éternel. Car ceux qui ont donné à manger à celui qui avait faim, à boire à celui qui avait soif, ceux qui ont accueilli l'étranger, vêtu celui qui était nu, visité le malade et le prisonnier, ont servi le Christ lui-même. Donc ils ont droit à la vie éternelle. Mais ceux qui n'ont pas fait tout cela n'ont pas servi le Christ. Et par conséquent, ils iront au chatiment éternel.

Mais il y a un petit détail qui a trop souvent été négligé: les brebis sont toutes surprises d'apprendre qu'elles ont servi le Christ en servant leur prochain; de même, les boucs sont tout surpris d'apprendre qu'ils n'ont pas servi le Christ en ne servant pas leur prochain. Ils ne découvrent cela qu'après coup. Ils ignoraient donc, au moment de leur rencontre avec leur prochain, que le Christ s'identifiait à ce plus petit, qu'il était, littéralement, ce plus petit. En d'autres termes, les personnages mis en scène en Matthieu 25 n'avaient pas lu Matthieu 25! Et pour cause! Et cet effet de surprise est le premier élément décisif. Car on voit ainsi que ce n'est pas pour être sauvées que les brebis ont agi de la sorte, mais parce qu'elles ont laissé parler leur cœur. L'attitude des brebis comme celle des boucs n'étaient pas liées au salut, mais à la capacité d'aimer ou à l'incapacité d'aimer le prochain qui se trouve dans la détresse. C'est l'ouverture du cœur, ou la fermeture du cœur, qui est en cause, ouverture ou fermeture du cœur devant la situation concrète et devant les besoins immédiats du plus petit qui se trouve là, tout simplement.

C'est alors qu'un second petit détail, encore plus décisif, doit être relevé. Tout d'abord, ce que le Fils de l'homme dit aux boucs, c'est que « dans la mesure où (εἰς τὸ ὅσον) vous ne l'avez pas fait à l'un de ces plus petits, c'est à moi que vous ne l'avez pas fait ». Il s'agit bien de l'un de ces plus petits. Cela veut dire qu'il suffit d'avoir négligé un petit, un seul, pour être damné! Même si vous aidez 99 petits, si vous passez à côté du centième sans le regarder, vous êtes damnés! Mais cela signifie donc que nous sommes tous damnés, car nous avons tous négligé au moins une fois notre prochain. Nous sommes tous condamnables. C'est la logique de la Loi du Premier Testament: il suffit d'avoir manqué à l'un des 613 commandements de la Thora, tout en ayant

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<sup>111</sup> Cf. Matthieu 25, 31-46.

<sup>112</sup> Jacques Ellul signale qu'il n'est question d'enfer que dans les paraboles, car celles-ci ne sont pas des leçons d'enseignement doctrinal: cf. Jacques Ellul, *Ce que je crois*, Paris, Grasset, 1987, p. 257-258; *On Freedom, Love, and Power*, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

accompli les 612 autres, pour avoir transgressé la Thora toute entière. Mais si nous regardons maintenant ce qu'il est dit des brebis, nous constatons qu'il est dit la même chose, la même chose inversée, au sujet des brebis: « Dans la mesure où vous l'avez fait à l'un de ces plus petits, c'est à moi que vous l'avez fait ». Cela veut dire qu'il suffit d'avoir servi un petit, un seul, pour être sauvé ! Or, nous avons tous aidé au moins une fois notre prochain. Même une seule fois ! Donc, nous sommes tous sauvés ! Ou plus exactement, nous sommes tous à la fois damnés et sauvés, ou plutôt con-damnables et acquittés, car nous sommes tous, chacune et chacun d'entre nous, à la fois bouc et brebis. Chacune et chacun d'entre nous est à la fois un bouc et une brebis.

C'est là que se situe la pointe de notre texte: dans ce nœud paradoxal entre ce que nous n'avons pas fait, ne serait-ce qu'une seule fois, et ce que nous avons fait, ne serait-ce qu'une seule fois. Entre notre condamnation, que nous méritons tous, et notre salut, que personne ne mérite, mais qui est offert à tous. Et ce paradoxe nous invite à nous tourner vers la grâce. Tous condamnables, nous ne pouvons vivre que de la grâce de Dieu. Et en cela, ce texte fait écho à tout l'Évangile, aux épîtres, et à l'ensemble du Nouveau Testament, selon l'analogie de la foi. Car cette parabole est faite pour nous amener à nous en remettre à la grâce.

## Hommes et femmes<sup>113</sup>

Notre quatrième et dernier exemple concerne ce que l'apôtre Paul dit des femmes et aux femmes. On a généralement l'image d'un Paul conservateur et phalocrate, et on cite pour l'illustrer la fameuse formule: « Femmes, soyez soumises à vos maris ! »<sup>114</sup>. Mais comment comprendre cette injonction, qui contredit l'épouse libératrice du Christ envers les femmes, premiers témoins de la résurrection, c'est-à-dire premiers témoins de ce qui est au cœur même de la foi<sup>115</sup> (ce qui est absolument unique parmi toutes les religions), et qui contredit même la parole de Paul qui affirme qu'« il n'y a plus ni homme ni femme »<sup>116</sup>. Comment interpréter ce verset selon l'analogie de la foi? Tout d'abord, Paul ne dit pas: « Femmes, soyez soumises à vos maris ! » Il faut remonter au verset précédent, pour lire: « Soumettez-vous les uns aux autres ! »<sup>117</sup> Et le verset 22 poursuit: « De même, vous les femmes, à vos maris ! » Ainsi, les femmes sont invitées à faire vis-à-vis de leurs maris ce que tout le monde fait (y compris les hommes !), les uns envers les autres, au sein de l'Église. Ensuite, Paul s'adresse aux maris pour leur dire: « Maris, aimez vos femmes ! »<sup>118</sup>, en employant le verbe *ἀγαπάω*, qui ne désigne

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<sup>113</sup> Cf. Jacques Ellul, *La subversion du christianisme* (1984), Paris, La Table Ronde (coll. La petite Vermillon n°145), 2011[3], p. 122-124 ; *The Subversion of Christianity*, transl. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Eugene (Oregon), Wipf & Stock (The Jacques Ellul Legacy Series), 1986, p. 78-79.

<sup>114</sup> Ephésiens 5, 22.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. Jacques Ellul, *La subversion du christianisme*, op. cit., p. 120 ; *The Subversion of Christianity*, op. cit., p. 77.

<sup>116</sup> Galates 3, 28.

<sup>117</sup> Ephésiens 5, 21.

<sup>118</sup> Ephésiens 5, 25a.

pas l'amour conjugal, mais l'amour inconditionnel, l'amour dont Dieu nous aime. Et il y a d'ailleurs une suite a cette suite: « Maris, aimez vos femmes, comme Christ a aime l'Eglise et s'est livre lui-meme pour elle ! »<sup>119</sup> Ainsi, Paul demande aux hommes quelque chose de bien plus exigeant que ce qu'il demande aux femmes: d'etre prêts a donner leur vie pour leur femme...<sup>120</sup> Et cela est en coherence, selon l'analogie de la foi, avec ce que la revelation biblique dit des femmes, et des rapports entre hommes et femmes, y compris Paul qui affirme dans la premiere epitre aux Corinthiens: « Le corps de la femme appartient a son mari »<sup>121</sup>, ce qui est tout a fait conforme a la mentalite de l'epoque, mais il s'empresse d'ajouter: « Et le corps du mari appartient a sa femme »<sup>122</sup>. Et cela, c'est absolument inconcevable, inoui, revolutionnaire, subversif, pour l'epoque comme pour aujourd'hui: l'egalite complete entre hommes et femmes, y compris au lit. La methode d'analogie de la foi nous permet de voir que Paul, loin d'etre un affreux misogyne, est un homme d'avant-garde.

## Conclusion

A travers ces quatre exemples, choisis parmi beaucoup d'autres, Jacques Ellul nous invite a redécouvrir la Bible comme une lettre d'amour de Dieu aux hommes, y compris dans ses aspects les plus énigmatiques. Tel est le potentiel de renouvellement des lectures traditionnelles que nous offre la methode de l'analogie de la foi.

## Jacques Ellul: From Technique to the Technological System

Daniel Cerezuelle

Jacques Ellul (1912-94) had a lifelong concern with what he called "Technique." Over the course of four decades, he published three major books on the role of technology in the contemporary world: *The Technological Society* (French 1954, English 1964), *The Technological System* (French 1977, English 1980), and *The Technological Bluff* (French 1988, English 1990). These books are not disconnected but represent a constant deepening, by a mature thinker, of earlier intuitions.

In 1935, Jacques Ellul and Bernard Charbonneau, then just 23 and 25 years old respectively, composed a document that they called "Instructions for a Personalist

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<sup>119</sup> Ephesiens 5, 25.

<sup>120</sup> Cf. Jacques Ellul, *La subversion du christianisme*, op. cit., p. 123 ; *The Subversion of Christianity*, op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>121</sup> 1 Corinthiens 7, 4a.

<sup>122</sup> 1 Corinthiens 7, 4b.

Manifesto.”<sup>123</sup> In this text of about 15 typewritten pages, they protested the depersonalizing nature of modern daily life. The increasing power and concentration of vast structures, both physical (the factory, the city) and organizational (the State, corporations, finance), constrain us to live in a world that is no longer fit for mankind. Unable to control these structures, we are deprived of freedom and responsibility by their anonymous functioning; and thus we have all become proletarians. “Man, who has everywhere only a small and specific job to perform, and in which fate, rather than man, has become the manager, is made into a proletarian.” “In a society of this kind, the type of man who acts consciously becomes extinct.” Charbonneau and Ellul were not content only to denounce this sorry condition of modern man. To improve it, they also pointed to its underlying cause, which they believed it was necessary to act upon. This cause is the uncontrolled development of Technique, and during the past two centuries it has become a determining social force. “Technique dominates man and

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all of man’s reactions; against it, politics is powerless.” Technique’s increasing power also abets totalitarianism and the wanton destruction of nature. It is urgent therefore to put Technique in its proper place, so that it might be managed by a commanding power.

This “necessary revolution” is assuredly not simple, for what Ellul and Charbonneau called Technique is not only machines but also the pursuit of efficiency in every field: “Technique is the means of producing concentration; it is not an industrial process but a way of acting in general.” It is thus not only our tools and methods of production that must be changed but also our institutions and our style of life. Against the technicist and productivist ideology of their day, it was in the name of an objective of personal freedom and autonomy that our two young thinkers advocated for a limitation to our technological and economic power: “an ascetic city, so that man might live.”

Charbonneau and Ellul did not invent the concept of Technique to describe the unified process of social transformation whose overall effect eludes our choices. From the close of the First World War, various thinkers had been sensing that something new was transforming the human world: Spengler, Berdayev, Junger, Huxley, Valery, Bergson,

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<sup>123</sup> Bernard Charbonneau and Jacques Ellul, “Directives pour un manifeste per-sonnaliste” (Bordeaux, 1935). Reproduced in Bernard Charbonneau and Jacques Ellul, *Nous sommes des re’volutionnaires malgre nous: Textespionniers de l’ecologiepolitique*, intro. Quentin Hardy, texts transcribed Sebastien Morillon, corr. and annot. Christian Roy (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2014). Quotations from sections 17, 21, 25, and 26.



and others. Yet our two “Gascon personalists” were probably among the first, long before Heidegger, to give Technique a central role in the transformations of the modern world and to perform a radical critique upon it in the name of a demand for freedom. The technicization of the world, just like the unfolding of capitalist logic, takes place beyond our control and sometimes even beyond our awareness. It proceeds according to its own logic, which confers on it a broad autonomy. This idea of an autonomy of Technique, just like an autonomy of the State, was common to Charbonneau and to Ellul. They both engaged in a critique of the State and of Technique, and often in the same terms. In a lecture given in 1936, Charbonneau explained that “our civilization is not identified by an ‘ism.’ It cannot be categorized; it is born of an age of technological changes.”<sup>124</sup> In another talk given in 1945, a few months after Hiroshima, he invited his listeners to notice “the autonomy of technique” as the first step toward achieving a “control over techniques.”<sup>125</sup>

Ellul later recounted that immediately following the Second World War, in a social context of euphoric fascination with State-directed economics and technological progress, the two friends decided to undertake an in-depth critique of the State and of Technique. As a legal scholar of the history of institutions, Ellul would have preferred to study the State, but Charbonneau had already begun to prepare a work on this subject and asked Ellul to start instead upon the part of their common program that had to do with Technique. This is how Ellul developed in *The Technological Society* a systematic analysis of Technique’s decisive role in contemporary society.<sup>126</sup>

Ellul’s analysis owed much to the influence of Marx, which Ellul always acknowledged. But whereas in the 19th century Marx had insisted on the role of capital, and on the autonomous logic of its development, to explain the social disorganization (general proletarianization) and political disorganization (revolutions) of his day, Ellul believed that for the 20th century it was Technique that had become the primary factor determining social life. Technique develops according to its own logic, which confers on it an autonomy analogous to that of capital in the previous century:

Technique conditions and calls forth the social, political, and economic changes. It is the driver of everything else, despite appearances and despite man’s pride, which claims that his philosophical theories still have determining power and that his political regimes are decisive for progress. Technique is no longer determined by external necessities but by internal ones. It has become a reality in itself, sufficient unto itself, with its particular laws and its own decisions.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, “Le progres contre l’homme.” In Charbonneau and Ellul, *Nous sommes des revolutionnaires malgre nous*, 96.

<sup>125</sup> ———, “An deux mille.” In Charbonneau and Ellul, *Nous sommes des revolutionnaires malgre nous*, 202, 208.

<sup>126</sup> Ellul, *La technique ou lenjeu du siecle* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1954). *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Knopf, 1964).

<sup>127</sup> ———, *La technique*, 121.

This affirmation of Technique's developmental autonomy in modern society (and in this society alone) led to misunderstanding and numerous misinterpretations. In reading Ellul we must bear in mind that for him autonomy does not mean independence, and he never forgets that Technique develops in a society in which other non-technological forces are also at work. Ellul made use of the metaphor of cancer: this proliferation of harmful cells occurs according to a specific logic of self-generating growth. Biologists study its mechanism, and its results can be fatal to the organism in which the cancer develops. But the life of this organism, without which the cancer would not exist, follows another very different logic, and this logic can obstruct the cancerous cells' proliferation in such a way that many early cancers do not develop further.

For Ellul, Technique cannot develop except within certain social and cultural conditions. For Marx, economic laws are historically determined. Over the course of history, various societies have been acquainted with currency, banking, and private property, and yet they were not subject to the logic of what Marx calls "Capital" that characterizes industrial society. In the same way, for Ellul, Technique is not individual techniques. He distinguishes carefully between the technological *operation*, which is inseparable from man's mode of being in the world and is a sort of anthropological constant (which is why it is absurd to accuse Ellul of technophobia), and the technological *phenomenon*, which is specifically modern and might just as easily have not come to pass. Technique's autonomy is not a permanent and necessary attribute of all Technique; it is a social fact that is historically determined, particularly by the attitudes and values of men. "The technological phenomenon is the preoccupation of the great majority of the men of our day to seek out in all things the absolutely most efficient method."<sup>128</sup> Ellul's formulation is striking: he does not say that the technological phenomenon "requires" the preoccupation of men, but that it *is* this preoccupation. This preoccupation is inseparable from a conviction, namely, that all increase in the power to effect (efficiency) is good for man. But this is true only for our day; it was not always thus and may change again.

We find the same idea in *The Technological System*: "Self-generating growth rests upon Technique's *a priori* justification *in the consciousness*."<sup>129</sup> But it is clear that if for Ellul this is the conviction of our day, it may disappear, and the technological phenomenon may disappear with it. Autonomy is not an intrinsic and permanent characteristic of human Technique. It is relative to a particular state of the society and to the mindset that prevails in the civilization at the present time. This is why this alleged partisan of technological determinism writes, "There is no Technique in itself, but in its implacable advance it requires man's participation, for without him

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<sup>128</sup> ———, *La technique*, 19.

<sup>129</sup> ———, *Le système technicien* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1977), 241. *The Technological System*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Continuum, 1980). Italics mine.

it is nothing.”<sup>130</sup> Man’s consent is what drives Technique’s domination. So although relative, this idea of autonomy enables us to explain some of the difficulties that we all encounter in our individual and collective life. Technique is not a tool that we can use as we wish and that remains subject to our intentions. Rather, it has its own force of expansion and its own effects, whether social, cultural, political, or ecological. In particular, “it bends in its particular direction the wills that use it and the goals that are proposed for it,”<sup>131</sup> and our passion for technological power involuntarily brings into being particular situations that are especially hard to remedy. Without an understanding of this domination’s overall logic, our specific actions will not succeed in freeing us from it.

Twenty years after the publication of *The Technological Society*, Ellul felt it necessary to complete and update his analysis, for the situation had gotten worse. Not only do we have techniques at our disposal that are more and more numerous and powerful, but the development of the electronic techniques of information and communication confer on the autonomy of Technique dimensions that are qualitatively new. Of course, such novelty is not absolute. When he first published *The Technological Society*, Ellul emphasized the tendency of modern Technique to eliminate human interventions, and he stressed the importance of the computer’s appearance, which he called the “mathematical machine.” The computer was enabling the development of servo-mechanisms capable of performing more and more subtle tasks, previously performed by men, by inserting into the machine the ability to recognize feedback action. Ellul warns the reader, “This is a beginning; all cybernetics is oriented in this direction,”<sup>132</sup> and it makes possible the rise of mass unemployment, which is a factor of war; but he does not extend his analysis of the role of informatics further.

In addition, Ellul clearly identified how technological systems tend to become constituted. Four years before the publication of Gilbert Simondon’s book *Du mode d’existence des objets techniques*,<sup>133</sup> Ellul pointed out that one of the factors of Technique’s autonomization is the tendency of technological elements to become constituted into groups and systems:

Technique obeys its specific laws, with each machine in functional obedience to the others. Thus each element of the technological whole follows laws that are determined in relation to the other elements of this whole, laws that are thus internal to the system and cannot in any way be influenced by external factors.<sup>134</sup>

In the context of the 1950s, Ellul did not feel the need to take these prescient remarks further. In hindsight, with the rise of the computer, they took on a new meaning and needed to be deepened. *The Technological System* updated and renewed Ellul’s

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<sup>130</sup> ———, *La technique*, 203.

<sup>131</sup> ———, *La technique*, 128.

<sup>132</sup> ———, *La technique*, 124.

<sup>133</sup> Gilbert Simondon, *Du mode d’existence des objets techniques* (Paris: Aubier, 1958). It is unlikely that Ellul was aware of Simondon’s work before 1954.

<sup>134</sup> Ellul, *La technique*, 125.

reflection on the autonomy of Technique by drawing on the ideas of technological environment, information, and system, which thinkers such as Simondon and Leroi-Gourhan had been developing in the intervening years.<sup>135</sup>

Ellul shows first that the objective of mastering Technique is all the more difficult to attain because Technique has become man's environment. In the technological society, technical mediation becomes all-encompassing; it determines the relationship not only to nature but also to other men; it disqualifies the symbolic mediations that man had patiently built up. "Technique therefore forms a continuous interface on the one hand, and, on the other, a generalized mode of intervention."<sup>136</sup> With regard to this technological environment that orients his perception of reality and his desires, modern man has great difficulty maintaining a critical distance. This enfolding is all the more troubling given that Technique tends to transform itself into an overall technological system, whose different parts are in increasing functional interrelation and interdependence due to techniques that permit the constant treatment and exchange of information. On the one hand, this technological system is in permanent expansion and cannot be stabilized, and on the other, the informational integration of the technological holism produces a tendency to self-regulation and a level of complexity and inertia that makes correction more difficult.

To reorient this technological system by criteria that are no longer technological but ethical or spiritual seems more difficult than ever. Yet to interpret Ellul's analyses as a justification for fatalism would be to misunderstand him. On the contrary,

My attitude is no more pessimistic than that of a doctor who examines a patient and diagnoses a cancer. I have always tried to warn, to issue the alert. I am still persuaded that man remains free to initiate something other than what appears inevitable.<sup>137</sup>

To conclude, one could apply to this Ellulian analysis of Technique what Jacques Ellul said of Charbonneau's analysis of the State<sup>138</sup>:

Bernard Charbonneau seems to describe an abstract mechanism, the State, that functions on its own, has its own consistency, its motive for development, its coherence. As if there were a cancer developing in society, in itself, on its own, beyond man's control. And this is the first impression that may arise when we read this subtitle: "By Force of Circumstance." I therefore am not involved. The avalanche is accumulating on the heights, but I am in the valley. There is nothing I can do about it. Yet it is precisely this illusion and this justification above all that Bernard Charbonneau is denouncing

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<sup>135</sup> Andre Leroy-Gourhan, *Milieu et techniques* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1945) and *Le geste et la parole* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1964-65).

<sup>136</sup> Ellul, *La technique*, 44.

<sup>137</sup> Jacques Ellul and Patrick Chastenet, *A contre-courant* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1994), 75. Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology, and Christianity, trans. Joan Mendes France (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005).

<sup>138</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *L'Etat* (Paris: Economica, 1987). When this book was first circulated in 1951 as a mimeographed document, its full title was *L'Etat: Par la force des choses* (The State: By Force of Circumstance).

throughout this book. The State has developed on its own exactly to the extent that man has given in—and more: that man has wanted it this way. “Force of circumstance” functions blindly, to the precise degree to which man gives up. Power grows implacable because no man is capable of the smallest act of freedom. In other words, as the reader reads of this growth of the coldest of all cold monsters,<sup>139</sup> he stands before the mirror of his own complicity, his own irresponsibility. And this is why we have a book that takes up a position verging on the unbearable.<sup>140</sup>

## Jacques Ellul: de la Technique au Systeme technicien

Daniel Cerezuelle

En 1935, Bernard Charbonneau et Jacques Ellul (ils avaient vingt cinq et vingt trois ans) redigerent un texte d’une quinzaine de pages dactylographiees, intitule « Directives pour un manifeste personnaliste »<sup>141</sup>. Dans ce texte ils s’elevent contre le caractere depersonnalisant de la vie qu-tidienne moderne. La montee en puissance et la concentration des structures demesurees, materielles (l’usine, la ville) ou organisationnelles (l’Etat, les entreprises, la finance), nous contraignent de vivre dans un monde qui n’est plus a hauteur d’homme. Sans prise sur ces structures, privees de liberte et de responsabilite par leur fonctionnement anonyme, nous y sommes tous proletarises. « §25. L’homme, n’ayant partout qu’une petite tache bien determinee a accomplir, est partout remplace dans la direction par des fatalites ; il est proletarise ». « §26 Dans une telle societe, le type d’homme agissant consciemment disparaît ».

Charbonneau et Ellul ne se contentent pas de denoncer cette triste condition de l’homme moderne. Afin d’y remedier ils en indiquent aussi la cause profonde sur laquelle il leur semble necessaire d’agir. Cette cause, c’est le developpement incontrôle de la technique qui est devenue depuis deux siecles une force sociale determinante. « §21 La technique domine l’homme et toutes les reactions de l’homme, contre elle la politique est im-puissante (...) ». En outre la montee en puissance de la technique favorise le totalitarisme aussi bien que le saccage de la nature. Il est donc urgent de la remettre a sa place afin que de force dominante elle devienne dirigee.

Cette « revolution necessaire » n’est certes pas aisee car ce qu’Ellul et Charbonneau appellent « La technique », ce n’est pas seulement les machines mais la recherche de l’efficacite dans tous les domaines: « §17 Le moyen de

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<sup>139</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche’s definition of the State in Thus Spoke Zarathustra.

<sup>140</sup> Ellul, “Une introduction a la pensee de Bernard Charbonneau.” Cahiers du Sud-Ouest 7 (January-March 1985).

<sup>141</sup> Bernard Charbonneau et Jacques Ellul: « Directives pour un manifeste person-naliste ». Bor-

realisation de la concentration est la technique: non pas procede industriel, mais procede general ». Ce ne sont donc pas seulement nos outils et nos manieres de produire qu'il convient de changer mais aussi nos institutions et notre style de vie. Contre l'ideologie techniciste et productiviste de leur temps, c'est au nom d'un objectif de liberte et d'autonomie personnelle que nos deux jeunes penseurs pronent une limitation de notre puissance technique et economique: « une cite ascetique pour que l'homme vive ».

Charbonneau et Ellul n'ont pas invente la notion de *la technique* pour caracteriser l'unite d'un processus de transformation sociale dont l'effet global echappe a nos choix. Des le lendemain de la guerre de 14/18 divers penseurs ont senti que quelque chose de nouveau transformait le monde humain: Spengler, Berdiaï'ef, Junger, Huxley, Valery, Bergson, etc. Cependant nos deux « personnalistes gascons » ont ete probablement parmi les premiers, bien avant Heidegger, a donner a la technique un role central dans les transformations du monde moderne et a en faire une critique radicale au nom d'une exigence de liberte. La technicisation du monde, tout comme le deploiement de la logique capitaliste s'effectue hors de notre maitrise, et parfois meme hors de notre conscience, selon un processus qui a sa logique propre, ce qui lui confere une large autonomie. Cette idee d'une autonomie de la technique, tout comme de l'Etat, est commune a Charbonneau et a Ellul. Ainsi tous les deux procedent a une critique de la technique et de l'Etat, et souvent dans les memes termes. Dans une conference de 1936 Charbonneau explique que « notre civilisation ne se designe pas par un "isme", elle est inclassable, nee d'un siecle de changements techniques »<sup>142</sup>. Au cours d'une autre conference prononcee en 1945, quelques mois apres Hiroshima, il invite ses auditeurs a constater « l'autonomie du technique », premier pas pour acceder a une « maitrise des techniques »<sup>143</sup>.

Ellul raconte qu'au lendemain de la guerre, dans un contexte social de fascination euphorique pour le dirigisme d'Etat et le progres technique, les deux amis deciderent de proceder a une critique approfondie de l'Etat et de la technique. Juriste specialiste de l'histoire des institutions, Ellul aurait prefere traiter de l'Etat, mais Charbonneau avait commence a rediger un ouvrage sur ce sujet et lui demanda de mettre en reuvre la partie de leur programme commun qui concerne la technique. C'est ainsi qu'Ellul developpa dans *La technique ou l'enjeu du siecle*<sup>144</sup> une analyse systematique du role determinant de la technique dans la societe contemporaine.

Cette analyse doit beaucoup a l'influence de Marx, influence qu'Ellul a toujours revendiquee. Mais alors qu'au dix-neuvieme siecle, Marx insistait sur le role du capital et sur la logique autonome de son developpement pour expliquer la desorganisation

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deaux, 1935. Reproduit dans *Bernard Charbonneau et Jacques Ellul: Nous sommes des revolutionnaires malgre nous; textespionniers de l'ecologiepolitique*. Introduction de Quentin Hardy, textes transcrits par Sebastien Morillon, corriges et annotes par Christian Roy. Paris, Editions du Seuil, 2014.

<sup>142</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, « Le progres contre l'homme ». *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>143</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, « An deux mille ». *Ibid.*, p. 202 et 208.

<sup>144</sup> Jacques Ellul, *La technique ou l'enjeu du siecle*. Paris, Librairie Armand Colin, 1954.

sociale (proletarianisation de masse) et politique (révolutions) de son temps, Ellul pense qu'au vingtième siècle c'est la technique qui est devenue le principal facteur qui détermine la vie sociale. Elle se développe selon sa logique propre, ce qui lui confère une autonomie analogue à celle du capital au siècle précédent :

La technique conditionne et provoque les changements sociaux, politiques, économiques. Elle est le moteur de tout le reste, malgré les apparences, malgré l'orgueil de l'homme qui prétend que ses théories philosophiques ont encore une puissance déterminante et que ses régimes politiques sont décisifs dans l'évolution. Ce ne sont plus les nécessités externes qui déterminent la technique, ce sont ses nécessités internes. Elle est devenue une réalité en soi qui se suffit à elle-même, qui a ses lois particulières et ses déterminations propres<sup>145</sup>.

Cette affirmation d'une autonomie du développement de la technique dans la société moderne (et dans cette société uniquement) a suscité l'incompréhension et de nombreux contresens. En lisant Ellul il ne faut pas oublier que pour lui l'autonomie ne veut pas dire l'indépendance et il n'oublie jamais que la technique se développe dans une société où d'autres forces, non techniques, sont également à l'œuvre. Ellul utilise la métaphore du cancer : cette prolifération de cellules malignes s'effectue selon une logique d'auto-croissance particulière dont les biologistes étudient le mécanisme et dont les conséquences peuvent être mortelles pour l'organisme dans lequel il se développe. Mais la vie de cet organisme, sans lequel le cancer n'existerait pas, suit d'autres logiques très différentes qui peuvent faire obstacle à la prolifération des cellules cancéreuses, de sorte que beaucoup de cancers embryonnaires ne se développent pas.

Pour Ellul la technique ne peut se développer que dans certaines conditions sociales et culturelles. Pour Marx les lois économiques sont historiquement déterminées. Il y a eu au cours de l'histoire des sociétés qui connaissaient la monnaie, les banques, la propriété privée, sans pour autant être soumises à la logique de ce que Marx appelle « Le Capital », qui caractérise la société industrielle. De même, pour Ellul la technique, ce n'est pas les techniques. Il distingue soigneusement entre l'opération technique, inséparable du mode d'être au monde de l'homme, une sorte d'invariant anthropologique (c'est pourquoi accuser Ellul de technophobie est absurde), et le phénomène technique qui, lui, est typiquement moderne et aurait pu aussi bien ne pas apparaître. L'autonomie de la technique n'est pas un attribut permanent et nécessaire de toute technique, c'est un fait social, historiquement déterminé, en particulier par les attitudes et les valeurs des hommes.

Le phénomène technique est la préoccupation de l'immense majorité des hommes de notre temps de rechercher en toutes choses la méthode absolument la plus efficace<sup>146</sup>.

La formule d'Ellul est saisissante : il ne dit pas que le phénomène technique « requiert » la préoccupation des hommes, mais qu'il est cette préoccupation. Cette préoccupation

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<sup>145</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 121.

<sup>146</sup> La technique, p. 19.

est inseparable d'une conviction, a savoir que toute augmentation de la puissance operatoire (l'efficacite) est bonne pour l'homme. Mais cela ne vaut que pour notre temps: Il n'en fut pas toujours ainsi et cela peut changer.

On retrouve la meme idee dans *Le systeme technicien*: « L'autoaccroissement repose sur la legitimisation *a priori* de la Technique *dans la conscience* »<sup>147</sup>. Mais il est clair que si pour Ellul cette conviction est celle de notre temps, elle peut disparaitre, et avec elle le phenomene technique. L'autonomie n'est pas un caractere intrinseque et permanent de la technique humaine, elle est relative a un certain etat de la societe et des representations qui prevaient dans la civilisation actuelle. C'est pourquoi ce pretendu partisan du determinisme technologique ecrit « Il n'y a pas de technique en soi, mais dans sa marche implacable elle se fait accompagner de l'homme, sans quoi elle n'est rien »<sup>148</sup>. Le ressort de la domination de la technique, c'est le consentement des hommes. Ainsi, quoique relative, cette notion d'autonomie permet d'expliquer des difficultes que nous rencontrons tous dans notre vie individuelle et collective. La technique, ce n'est pas l'outil dont on se sert comme on veut et qui reste soumis a nos intentions. Au contraire, elle a une force d'expansion et des effets propres, qu'ils soient sociaux, culturels, politiques ou ecologiques. En particulier « elle inflechit dans son sens specifique les volontes qui l'utilisent et les buts qu'on lui propose »<sup>149</sup> et notre passion pour la puissance technique engendre involontairement des situations particulierement difficiles a corriger. Sans une comprehension de la logique globale de cette domination, nos actions particulieres n'arriveront pas a nous en liberer. Vingt ans apres la publication de *La technique ou l'enjeu du siecle*, Ellul a ressenti la necessite de completer et reactualiser ses analyses, parce que la situation a empire. Non seulement nous disposons de techniques de plus en plus nombreuses et puissantes mais le developpement des techniques elec-troniques de l'information et de la communication conferent a l'autonomie de la technique des dimensions qualitativement nouvelles. Bien entendu cette nouveaute n'est pas absolue. Dans son livre de 1954 Ellul avait signale la tendance de la technique moderne a eliminer les interventions humaines et il soulignait l'importance de l'apparition de l'ordinateur, qu'il appelait *machine mathematique*, permettant de realiser des servo-moteurs capables de se substituer a l'homme pour des travaux de plus en plus subtils par l'insertion dans la machine de la capacite de tenir compte de l'action en retour. Ellul avertit le lecteur: « Ceci est un commencement, toute la cyber-netique est orientee dans ce sens »<sup>150</sup>, ce qui risque d'engendrer un chomage de masse, facteur de guerre ; mais il ne pousse pas plus loin son analyse du role de l'informatique.

De meme Ellul avait bien identifie la tendance a la constitution de systemes techniques. Quatre ans avant la publication du livre de Gilbert Simondon *Du*

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<sup>147</sup> *Le systeme technicien*, p. 241.

<sup>148</sup> *La technique*, p. 203.

<sup>149</sup> *La technique*, p. 128.

<sup>150</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 124.



*mode d'existence des objets techniques*<sup>151</sup>, Ellul signalait qu'un des facteurs de l'autonomisation de la technique, c'est la tendance des éléments techniques à se constituer en ensembles et en systèmes :

La technique obéit à ses lois spécifiques, comme chaque machine obéissant en fonction des autres. Ainsi chaque élément de l'ensemble technique suit des lois déterminées par la relation avec les autres éléments de cet ensemble, des lois internes au système par conséquent et nullement influençables par des facteurs étrangers<sup>152</sup>.

Dans le contexte des années cinquante, Ellul ne ressent pas le besoin d'approfondir ces remarques prémonitoires. En revanche, avec l'arrivée de l'ordinateur, elles prennent un sens nouveau et demandent à être approfondies. *Le Système technicien* réactualise et renouvelle la réflexion sur l'autonomie de la technique en s'appuyant sur les notions de milieu, d'information et de système, développées entre temps par des penseurs comme Simondon et Leroi-Gourhan.

Tout d'abord Ellul montre que l'objectif d'une maîtrise de la technique est encore plus difficile à atteindre parce que la technique est devenue le milieu de l'homme. Dans la société technicienne la médiation technique devient totale ; elle détermine non seulement la relation à la nature mais aussi aux autres hommes ; elle disqualifie les médiations symboliques que l'homme avait patiemment tissées. « La technique forme alors un écran continu d'une part et d'autre part un mode généralisé d'intervention »<sup>153</sup>. À l'égard de ce milieu technique qui oriente sa perception de la réalité et ses desirs, l'homme moderne a beaucoup de mal à prendre une distance critique. Cet enveloppement est d'autant plus préoccupant que la technique tend à se transformer en un système technicien global dont les différentes parties sont en interrelation et en interdépendance fonctionnelle croissante grâce aux techniques qui permettent le traitement et l'échange constant d'informations. Or d'un côté ce système technicien est en expansion permanente et ne peut se stabiliser et d'un autre côté l'intégration informationnelle des ensembles techniques produit une tendance à l'autorégulation et un niveau de complexité, de lourdeur et de viscosité qui rend la correction plus difficile.

Reorienter ce système technicien en fonction de critères non plus techniques mais éthiques ou spirituels semble plus difficile que jamais. Toutefois ce serait commettre un contresens que d'interpréter les analyses d'Ellul comme une justification du fatalisme. Bien au contraire :

Mon attitude n'est pas plus pessimiste que celle d'un docteur qui, après examen d'un patient, diagnostique un cancer. J'ai toujours essayé d'avertir, de mettre en garde. Je suis toujours persuadé que l'homme reste libre de commencer autre chose que ce qui semble fatal<sup>154</sup>.

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<sup>151</sup> Gilbert Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*. Paris, Aubier, 1958. Nous ne savons pas si Ellul avait eu connaissance avant 1954 des travaux de Simondon.

<sup>152</sup> *La technique*, p. 125.

<sup>153</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 44.

<sup>154</sup> Jacques Ellul et Patrick Chastenet, *A contre-courant, entretiens*. Paris. La table Ronde, 1994, p.

Pour conclure, on pourrait appliquer a cette analyse ellulienne de la technique ce que Jacques Ellul disait de l'analyse charbonniere de l'Etat:

Bernard Charbonneau a l'air de decrire un mecanisme abstrait, L'Etat, qui fonctionne par lui-meme, qui a son poids, sa raison de developpement, sa coherence. Comme si l'on avait un cancer qui se developpe dans la societe, en soi, par soi, hors des prises de l'homme. Et c'est la premiere impression que l'on peut avoir lorsque justement on lit ce sous-titre « par la force des choses ». Je suis donc hors de question. L'avalanche s'accumule sur les sommets, moi qui suis dans la vallee, je n'y peux rien. Et precisement c'est avant tout cette illusion et cette justification que Bernard Charbonneau denonce tout le long de ce livre. L'Etat s'est developpe par soi exactement dans la mesure ou l'homme a cede, bien plus: a desire qu'il en soit ainsi. La force des choses fonctionne, aveugle, dans l'exacte mesure ou l'homme demissionne. Le pouvoir grandit implacablement, parce qu'aucun homme n'est capable du plus petit acte de liberte. Autrement dit, le lecteur en lisant ce developpement du plus froid de tous les monstres froids, est devant le miroir de sa propre complicité, de sa propre lachete. Et c'est pourquoi nous avons un livre qui se situe a la limite du tolerable<sup>155</sup>.

## The Crisis of Modernity by Augusto Del Noce

J. Peter Escalante

Del Noce, Augusto. *The Crisis of Modernity*, edited and translated by Carlo Lancellotti. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014. 336 pp.

Augusto Del Noce (1910-89) was a professor at La Sapienza University of Rome and a distinguished philosopher, political thinker, and public intellectual. He was deeply influenced by Jacques Ellul. Carlo Lancellotti is a professor of mathematics and a member of the graduate faculty in physics at the City University of New York (College of Staten Island).

Lancellotti has done a great service in translating the essays of Augusto Del Noce collected in *The Crisis of Modernity*. The essays are rich in insight, but their value is not only in what Del Noce saw but also in how he saw it. One expects a book from a conservative author with a title such as this to take one or both of two very predictable lines: an activist call to ideological arms, or an analysis of the "crisis," consisting largely or wholly of genealogizing in the history-of-ideas style. Del Noce's approach is different.

Del Noce does offer some genealogies of ideas, and the lines of influence he draws are similar to those drawn by Eric Voegelin or Erik von Kuehnel-Leddihn. His affinity with Voegelin is especially close; in one of the book's appendixes, which consists of an

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<sup>155</sup> Jacques Ellul, « Une introduction a la pensee de Bernard Charbonneau ». *Cahiers du Sud-Ouest*, n°7, janvier-mars 1985.

engagement with Voegelin, Del Noce affirms Voegelin's definition of modernity as an immanentization of the Christian eschaton, an attempt to have the world-consummating eu-catastrophe without God. Like Voegelin, his analysis is really more psychological, one might even say spiritual. He sees ideas as manifestations of the soul's relation, either healthy or unhealthy, to the world, a world whose

Escalante, J. Peter. Review of *The Crisis of Modernity*, by Augusto Del Noce. *Ellul Forum* 62 (Fall 2018): 75-77. © J. Peter Escalante, CC BY-NC-ND.

order reflects its eternal Origin. The titular crisis of modernity is for him a spiritual crisis, a state of widespread apostasy from reality.

But Del Noce does not offer a pseudoprophetic jeremiad in response, and this is because he does not reduce "modernity" to an inexplicable defection. His approach is profoundly philosophical, and the essays in the book are all devoted to illuminating explication. The book begins right away with an extremely acute definition of the modern sense of "modern," and the arguments of the rest of the essays proceed from it; "modernity" for him is the practical corollary of C. S. Lewis's "chronological snobbery." For Del Noce, modernity in the modern sense is by definition, then, the state of being "on the right side of history." But this "right side" is not devoid of ideal content. Rectitude, on its terms, is devotion to the project of radical self-creation, what Del Noce considers to be the praxis of atheism.

To this, Del Noce opposes a Catholic sense of truth, of conformity to reality. Although he identifies marxism as the purest form of atheism in action, he resists identifying political theism with the *ancien regime*, and he thoroughly critiques certain kinds of modern conservatism and "Right" movements. His critique of modern "permissivism" names "neo-capitalism" as a prime beneficiary, and his attack on the various forms of fascism is as radical as his attack on communism.

Students of Ellul's work will be happy to see that Del Noce engages admirably with Ellul in several places, and in doing so Del Noce cites him in criticism of both revolution and permissive consumer society. Modernity—atheism in action—for Del Noce has both "left" and "right" forms. But the way beyond "modernity" includes the positive aspects of both progressive and conservative ways of thinking; in the very last lines of the book's final essay he says that true progressivism—his definition of that is very positive—is possible only on truly conservative grounds, that is, fidelity to perennial principles.

The essays are all profoundly thoughtful considerations of their topics, and though there is some overlap of theme and repetition of argument, it never strikes the note of redundancy but rather of reinforcement. In his reading of texts, Del Noce can sometimes be surprisingly beholden to old stories. For instance, he names Martin Luther as a nominalist progenitor of marxism (204), but this always-dubious position of Luther as nominalist protorevolutionary is even less tenable now. Too, Del Noce posits an "abyss" between Marsilius of Padua and Dante (57), contra the Soviet critic Leonid Batkin, but it has long been fairly obvious that Marsilius is more "religious" and Dante more "secular" than has been commonly maintained, and some especially acute authors

have also seen an affinity between them (see Paul Avis, *Beyond the Reformation?* and George Garnett, *Marsilius of Padua and “the Truth of History”*). But these little limitations do not really detract from the merit of the essays.

This book is also useful for its indirect introduction to a number of Italian thinkers largely unknown to Anglophones and for its glimpse into the intellectual history of modern Italy. Lancellotti’s excellent introduction assists with this, and the interview with Del Noce published as an appendix is of special interest in this regard.

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## Technology and the Virtues by Shannon Vallor

Jonathan A. Tomes

Vallor, Shannon. *Technology and the Virtues: A Philosophical Guide to a Future Worth Wanting*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. 309 pp.

Shannon Vallor is the Regis and Dianne McKenna Professor in the department of philosophy at Santa Clara University. She is also a consulting artificial-intelligence ethicist supporting Google Cloud AI and a member of the board of directors of the Foundation for Responsible Robotics. In *Technology and the Virtues*, she proposes a strategy for a good life in a global technological society. Science and technologies shape moral and intellectual habits, skills, and virtues, but the technological society has long lacked the moral disposition to wisely invent and appropriate new technologies. Moral laws and principles have not proven capable of meeting yesterday’s challenges, let alone today’s and tomorrow’s. The future is cloaked in a techno-social fog, and technologists prove incapable of seeing through the technical opacity in order to construct a satisfying ethical framework. Against this long trend, Vallor proposes a virtue ethics strategy for cultivating the moral dispositions necessary to cope and flourish under any technological condition. After developing her account of techno-moral virtue ethics, she applies her strategy to social media, surveillance, robots for care and for war, and human-enhancement technology.

Vallor subjects her strategy for techno-moral cultivation to a comparative analysis in the classical texts of Aristotelian, Confucian, and Buddhist philosophical ethics. The seven core elements that she discerns in these three traditions are moral habituation, relational understanding, reflective self-examination, intentional self-direction of moral development, perceptual attention to moral salience, prudential judgment, and appropriate extension of moral concern. For each of these elements, she offers a reflection on

its importance for global techno-moral virtues and practices. Her comparative synthesis is admittedly thin. These three traditions provide the thin moral concepts for the essential structure of her global virtue ethics. After establishing her framework, she develops the unique virtues for techno-moral flourishing: honesty, self-control, humility, justice, courage, empathy, care, civility, flexibility, perspective, magnanimity, and wisdom. These are the virtues that direct, modulate, and integrate virtuous action to meet the demands of the technological situation. They enable the person to not only think and act rightly but also feel and want rightly with respect to technology. Such excellence is the necessary condition for living well.

The good life, according to Vallor, is the kind of life worth choosing from among the many ways of living in the world. A good life is a life worth living, a life lived well. Any conception of a good life today must explicitly consider life lived with technology. This worthy life is apparently known according to its opposite: a good life is one other than the life we commonly recognize as not worth choosing. Human excellence, or virtue, is necessary to living this good life. The techno-morally virtuous person is capable of doing the right thing with relative ease and joy. Beyond these possible good lives there is not, for her, a singular conception of the good life except that of the common and shared aim of living well with one another. She insists that the active flourishing of the virtuous person is not a subjective appearance and that her account is incompatible with moral relativism. While rejecting an essential realism and natural teleology, she affirms that the virtues are rooted in cognitive, emotional, and perceptual capacities and vulnerabilities deep within the human organism. Of course, if this is true, then one would expect a more thoroughly grounded pluralism than what Vallor provides—the good life behind the many good lives.

Techno-moral excellence answers to the problem of technological opacity and convergence. Technologies merge in unpredictable ways, magnifying their influence and power over our lives and institutions. As policies and rules to safeguard human life will never keep up with the technological phenomenon, virtue formation aims to develop people capable of flexible and creative responses to new (and old) challenges. Unfortunately, Vallor's discussion of technology and the virtues explicitly excludes Heidegger, Ellul, Marcuse, and Mumford's work as rather pessimistic philosophies of technological determinism. In the face of such a monolithic technological force, there is apparently little left to say about ethics.

Vallor's virtue ethics holds real promise for coping with the present technological system, but, as is usually the case, virtue ethics cannot stand alone as a strategy for flourishing in any particular society. It is also not clear that the various human-rights groups and aid associations—or any other group spread across the nations—constitute real virtue communities, regardless of social media and moral extension. Her discussion is vulnerable and weak insofar as she bypasses the effects of technique and efficiency on human freedom exercised in a recognizable and tangible community. This lacuna sets practitioners up at best for a merely apparent virtue and apparent flourishing, and at worst for a greater vulnerability in the face of technical deception and illusion.

Techno-moral practices are morally undone and twisted by the principles operating under the surface of hopeful appearances. The technological illusion is only amplified when virtue ethics is removed from a particular way of life and discourse and given a global view from nowhere. The questions of human nature, freedom, and technique are simply too great to ignore.

## About the Contributors

Daniel Cerezuelle is an independent scholar in Bordeaux, France. He is the executor of the literary estate of Bernard Charbonneau and a board member of the Societe pour la philosophie de la technique. He is the author of *Ecologie et liberte: Bernard Charbonneau precurseur de l'ecologiepolitique* (2006).

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## About the International Jacques Ellul Society

The International Jacques Ellul Society, founded in 2000 by former students of Ellul, links scholars, students, and others who share an interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), longtime professor at the University of Bordeaux. Along with promoting new publications related to Ellul and producing the *Ellul Forum*, the Society sponsors a biennial conference. IJES is the anglophone sister society of the francophone Association internationale Jacques Ellul.

The objectives of IJES are threefold:

Preserving a Heritage. The Society seeks to preserve and disseminate Ellul's literary and intellectual heritage through republication, translation, and secondary writings.

Extending a Critique. Ellul is best known for his penetrating critique of *la technique*, of the character and impact of technology on our world. The Society seeks to extend his social critique particularly concerning technology.

Researching a Hope. Ellul was not only a social critic but also a theologian and activist in church and community. The Society seeks to extend his theological, biblical, and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

IJES is a nonprofit organization, fully reliant on membership fees and donations from supporters worldwide. For more information or to become a member, please visit [ellul.org](http://ellul.org).

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# The **Ellul Forum**

Number 63 Spring 2019



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**About**

Jacques Ellul (1912-94) was a French thinker and writer in many fields: communication, ethics, law and political science, sociology, technology, and biblical and theological studies, among others. The aim of the *Ellul Forum* is to promote awareness and understanding of Ellul's life and work and to encourage a community of dialogue on these subjects. The *Forum* publishes content by and about Jacques Ellul and about themes relevant to his work, from historical, contemporary, or creative perspectives. Content is published in English and French.

**Subscriptions**

The *Forum* is published twice a year. Annual subscriptions are \$40 usd for individuals/ households and \$80 usd for institutions. Individual subscriptions include membership in the International Jacques Ellul Society, and individual subscribers receive regular communications from the Society, discounts on IJES conference fees, and other benefits. To subscribe, please visit [ellul.org](http://ellul.org).

**Submissions**

The *Forum* encourages submissions from scholars, students, and general readers. Submissions must demonstrate a degree of familiarity with Ellul's thought and must engage with it in a critical way. Submissions may be sent to [ellulforum@gmail.com](mailto:ellulforum@gmail.com).

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## Editor's Letter

Welcome to number 63 of the *Ellul Forum*. Jacob Marques Rollison opens this issue with an article focusing on Ellul's deep and lifelong engagement with the biblical book of Ecclesiastes. As Jacob argues, "Ecclesiastes is central to Ellul's entire theology, and understanding his unique reading of Ecclesiastes clarifies Ellul's relation to his primary extra-scriptural theological source, the Danish Lutheran thinker Søren Kierkegaard." Jonathan Lipps follows, comparing Ellul's analysis of the technological phenomenon with that of Albert Borgmann and highlighting points of similarity and difference between these two thinkers. In our third article, Patrick Troude-Chastenet provides a meditation on Ellul's understanding of Christian hope. "Hope is the foundation of his whole ethics of freedom," Patrick writes, and the only basis for the Christian's presence in the world in this "time of abandonment."

We round out this issue with three book reviews. Zachary Lloyd provides a review of *Political Illusion and Reality*, a volume arising from the IJES conference held in 2016. Alastair Roberts reviews the most recent work by Willem H. Vanderburg. And third, David Lovekin offers us an extended review of Byung-Chul Han's *The Burnout Society*.

The *Forum* welcomes your submissions and suggestions year-round. Please write to us at ellulforum@gmail.com.

We are grateful to Lemon Press Printing for its assistance in producing this issue. "Editor's Letter." *Ellul Forum* 63 (Spring 2019): 3.

## God's Time: Kierkegaard, Qohelet, and Ellul's Reading of Ecclesiastes

Jacob Marques Rollison

In *Reason for Being*, Jacques Ellul delivers the results of his lifelong meditation on the biblical book of Ecclesiastes. One of the most interesting features of this book is how it reveals Ellul's own approach to thinking about time, to living as a temporal creature. It is hard to read Ellul without interrogating oneself; allowing Ellul's reading of Ecclesiastes to question our own relation to time might prove a fruitful exercise. To this end, this article examines Ellul's reading of the biblical book of Ecclesiastes as a central element of his thought.<sup>156</sup> I argue that Ecclesiastes is central to Ellul's entire theology and that understanding his unique reading of Ecclesiastes clarifies Ellul's relation to his primary extra-scriptural theological source, the Danish Lutheran thinker Søren Kierkegaard.<sup>157</sup> Specifically, I suggest that Ellul reads Ecclesiastes through the lens of Kierkegaard, but then reads Kierkegaard through Ecclesiastes. These crossed readings structure Ellul's approach to the definitive category for Ellul's theological ethics—the *present time*.

To explore these topics, this article will make five successive points: first, Ellul was deeply rooted in Ecclesiastes for the length of his career. Second, the present time structures Ellul's whole work. Third, Ellul reads Ecclesiastes through Kierkegaard, making Ecclesiastes an existential book of ironic anti-philosophy. Fourth, Ellul re-reads Kierkegaard through Ecclesiastes, which alters Kierkegaard's philosophical approach to time and his ironic use of words. Finally, I suggest that this approach to time

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<sup>156</sup> This article is a revised version of a paper presented at "Ellul and the Bible," a conference of the International Jacques Ellul Society held at Regent College in Vancouver, Canada, 28-30 July 2018. The argument is developed at length in chapter 1 of Jacob Marques Rollison, *A New Reading of Jacques Ellul: Presence in the Postmodern World* (forthcoming from Fortress Press / Lexington Books).

<sup>157</sup> Among prominent secondary readings of Ellul, Willem H. Vanderburg seems to be the only other one who emphasizes the centrality of Ellul's reading of Ecclesiastes to his whole project. See Willem H. Vanderburg, *Secular Nations under New Gods* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), especially 300-388.

informs Ellul's understanding of the present time, which is *the* definitive category of his theological ethics. To conclude, I will then offer a few Ellulian ethical considerations for how we might think about time today.

Rollison, Jacob Marques. "God's Time: Kierkegaard, Qohelet, and Ellul's Reading of Ecclesiastes." *Ellul Forum* 63 (Spring 2019): 5-15. © Jacob Marques Rollison, CC BY-NC-ND. 5

## Ellul's Relationship to Ecclesiastes

Ellul's personal engagement with Ecclesiastes spanned his entire career and almost his entire life. In a late interview, Ellul said the book was one of his favorites even at the age of 12.<sup>158</sup> In the opening pages of his book *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes*, published in 1987, Ellul says his only qualification for writing it

is that I have read, meditated on, and prayed over Ecclesiastes for more than half of a century. There is probably no other text of the Bible which I have searched so much, from which I have received so much—which has reached me and spoken to me so much. We could say that I am now expressing this dialogue.<sup>159</sup>

If this claim was published in 1987, his "dialogue" with Ecclesiastes must have begun as early as 1937—one year after the publication of his doctoral work and thus at the very beginning of his writing career. In fact, it is possible that Ellul even began writing *Reason for Being* long before its publication. This would not be the first book written in this way; several of Ellul's books were written over a long period, such as *The Meaning of the City* and *The Ethics of Freedom*. Since Ellul mentions that he was already doing secondary reading on this book 30 years before its publication, and he mentions that for this specific book he wrote out his thoughts before doing the secondary research, it is plausible that he began writing the book in the 1950s or even earlier.<sup>160</sup>

Furthermore, Ecclesiastes informs his theology from beginning to end. References to Ecclesiastes abound in his *Presence in the Modern World* (1948), his full introduction to Christian ethics, *To Will and To Do* (1964), and his commentary on Second Kings, *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man* (1966), to name just a few.

Moreover, from the beginning of his writing career in the 1930s, Ellul had planned this study to be his "last word." In *Reason for Being*, Ellul writes:

Some forty years ago, I envisioned that a contemporary meditation on Ecclesiastes could serve as an adequate conclusion to the lifework I was beginning to foresee. It seemed, however, that it could come only at the end of my journey, both intellectual

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<sup>158</sup> Olivier Abel, Paul Ricoeur, Jacques Ellul, Jean Carbonnier, Pierre Chaunu: Dialogues (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2012), 61.

<sup>159</sup> Jacques Ellul, *La raison d'être: Méditation sur l'Ecclesiaste* (Paris: Seuil [Points: Sag-esse no. 229], 1987), 11. In my rendering, I have borrowed from Hanks's translation in Jacques Ellul, *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 1.

<sup>160</sup> See Ellul, *Reason for Being*, 2.

and lived. . . . In other words, if Presence in the Modern World formed the general introduction to all that I wanted to write, Ecclesiastes will be the last word.<sup>161</sup>

From the very beginning, Ellul valued Ecclesiastes *so much* that his meditations on it form his work's conclusion, his final statement.

If Ellul's whole theological-ethical project is based on biblical revelation (as he claims on the first page of *To Will and To Do*),<sup>162</sup> then clearly, as the biblical book that occupied him the most, Ellul's "biblical" thinking should naturally be heavily weighted toward Ecclesiastes.

## The Present Time in Ellul's Theology

Ellul said he began with *Presence in the Modern World* and ended with *Reason for Being*. This important statement expressing how Ellul viewed his own work should affect how we read Ellul's entire corpus. Specifically, the role of *presence* and the present time is a central feature of both books. I will briefly highlight how presence structures Ellul's theology in these books.

Before we address these books, however, it would be proper to begin where Ellul himself began. Even before *Presence in the Modern World*, one of his earliest articles lays the foundation for the meaning of presence. This unpublished 1936 article, titled "The Dialogue of Sign and Presence," is an 11-page handwritten manuscript of a dialogue between two characters. It was marked with edits by Yvette Lensvelt, who later became Ellul's wife. The extant manuscript is by no means in a polished or publishable state; any conclusions drawn from this very difficult article necessary involve the reader's active engagement and interpretation. The following paragraphs, therefore, stem from my own reading.<sup>163</sup>

The conversation between the two voices in this article (along with the dialogue between Ellul, Yvette's commentary, and Ellul's responses) discusses presence as a complex three-part dialogue. The first part is a dialogue between God's presence and communicative signs given to believers. As emphasized in Protestant theology, Jesus Christ is both God's Word and God himself; in the same way, God himself is *present* in these signs that he gives to believers. This means that God's signs are always more than just signs: they not only represent God but also include an element of God's presence. In Christian theology, discussions of signs and questions of presence generally focus on the Eucharist, the liturgical practice of eating bread and wine as representing (or making present) the body and blood of Jesus Christ. While this article does include

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<sup>161</sup> Ellul, *Reason for Being*, 3-4; modified with reference to *La raison d'être*, 13. "Last" here is not to be read chronologically—on the same page, he says he will write more if God allows him but will not finish all he had planned.

<sup>162</sup> Jacques Ellul, *To Will & To Do: An Ethical Research for Christians*, trans. C. Edward Hopkin (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1969), 1.

<sup>163</sup> I give my full interpretation and treatment of the article in Jacob Marques Rolli-son, *A New Reading of Jacques Ellul: Presence in the Postmodern World*.

discussions of these elements (one of the rare occasions in Ellul's writing to do so), Ellul's theology generally focuses on the Church, Christ's body, as God's presence in the world.

This leads to the second part of the dialogue, between a person's body and their spirit—in other words, between bodily and spiritual presence, which are inseparable. It must be emphasized that the summary I give here is more black and white than the article itself: Ellul and Yvette use a variety of terms to discuss the non-bodily element that I have called “spirit.”

The third part is a back-and-forth dialogue between space and time. Readers familiar with Ellul's emphases in his later book *The Humiliation of the Word* will recall that he linked sight with space and hearing with time. *Humiliation* saw the late 20th century as characterized by a dominance of space and images, and called for a renewed emphasis on the word and time. This article thus establishes the important equilibrium between space and time (and thus, between seeing and hearing) long before they are developed much later in *Humiliation*.

True presence involves all three elements of this dialogue—sign-presence, body-spirit, and space-time. Naturally, Jesus Christ is the center of this discussion: Christ is God's word (thus a sign of God), God in a fleshly body, and God in our time: in Jesus Christ, God is *present*. Note that I am not trying to indicate that Ellul had a philosophy of existence that involved these three elements. Instead, by calling these three elements “dialogues,” I am trying to express that Ellul thought that such a philosophy was impossible without cutting one of these elements off from its living relationship with the other.

If *Presence in the Modern World* is read in this light, it becomes clear that this book is precisely an elaboration of Ellul's idea of *presence*, in the *modern world* described by his modified Marxist sociology. The triple dialogue from the 1936 article roughly structures the chapters of this 1948 book. Each of the first three chapters roughly corresponds to one element of the triple dialogue. The end of the book puts all three in relation, seeking to rediscover a style of Christian life that could fulfill the conditions for true presence.

Crucially, this introduction to his whole work begins theologically with the New Testament language of “redeeming the time.” A central move in the first chapter examines verses from Colossians 4 and Ephesians 5 that speak of “redeeming the time.” In biblical language, redemption implies liberation, as in Paul's language of Christ liberating humanity from slavery to sin. But what could it mean that *time is enslaved*? I suggest that this question occupies Ellul for the rest of his career; his sociological work aims to describe time's slavery today so that Christians can set about their divinely ordained task of redeeming it, which he treats in his theological ethics.

In this way, the present time is at the heart of Ellul's opening to his project; what about his conclusion? In *Reason for Being*, Ellul reads Qohelet, the writer of Ecclesiastes, as a thinker whose thought stays within the limits of the present time. In Ellul's reading, Qohelet centrally emphasizes how time and death prevent human thought

from accessing any eternal, absolute knowledge. This is how Ellul reads *vanity*—as the anxiety caused by thinking about the future and the fact that the past is gone. He writes, “The future unforeseeable, the past forgotten, only the present remains.”<sup>164</sup> All we have is the present time, and wisdom consists in knowing this and not going beyond it. Within this present, *God’s* presence is “the meaning, the purpose, the origin, and the end of the entire work.”<sup>165</sup> So Ellul’s conclusion also reads God’s presence with us in the present time as the heart of Ecclesiastes—and thus the heart of his closing statement.

The theme of presence thus opens and closes Ellul’s theology and bookends his whole project. By informing Ellul’s present, Ecclesiastes thus informs his entire thought from beginning to end.

## Reading Qohelet through Kierkegaard

It is therefore important to understand what is unique about Ellul’s reading of Ecclesiastes. We cannot do so without diving into Ellul’s other primary theological source, the Danish thinker Søren Kierkegaard. Frederic Rognon has called *Reason for Being* Ellul’s most Kierkegaardian book, and for good reason.<sup>166</sup> We can see many similarities between Ellul’s reading of Kierkegaard and his reading of his favorite biblical book. Without developing them, I will list a few examples here.

First, Ellul explicitly reads Qohelet’s *vanity* as equivalent to Kierkegaard’s *anxiety*. Both describe the relationship between the limited and temporal creature that is the human being, and its future—or more precisely, the individual human’s lack of an indefinite future, due to death. Second, Ellul thinks Ecclesiastes clearly indicates that it was written by Solomon, but Ellul believes that this is chronologically impossible. Furthermore, “Qohelet,” which can be translated as “one who assembles,” is an ironic name for the author of such a solitary book. When read through the lens of Kierkegaard’s many pseudonymous writings, Ellul sees this contradiction as meaningful and intentional: Qohelet becomes a Kierkegaardian anti-philosopher. At the end of his work, Kierkegaard clarified that his pseudonymous works should be taken with a grain of salt. In these works, Kierkegaard purposely included philosophical ideas to ironically undermine them. This is precisely what Ellul sees in Qohelet: an ironic thinker who includes Greek philosophical ideas to show their ultimate vanity.

I will focus on one decisive way that Ellul’s reading of Ecclesiastes draws on Kierkegaard. I have shown that Ecclesiastes is at the heart of Ellul’s reading of the Bible, and that presence is at the heart of Ellul’s reading of Ecclesiastes and thus is central for his project. Ellul’s presence can be read as an adaptation of Kierkegaard’s major theological theme: contemporaneity with Christ. Kierkegaard’s *Practice in*

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<sup>164</sup> Reason for Being, 67; modified, La raison d’être, 80-81.

<sup>165</sup> Reason for Being, 22; modified, La raison d’être, 32.

<sup>166</sup> Frederic Rognon, *Jacques Ellul: Une pensée en dialogue* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2013), 179.



*Christianity* insists that to be a Christian is to be contemporary with Christ. Walter Lowrie writes that this theme becomes “an emphatic and persistent theme” for Kierkegaard, who equates contemporaneity with faith itself.<sup>167</sup> Describing this contemporaneity, Kierkegaard writes:

It is indeed eighteen hundred years since Jesus Christ walked here on earth, but this is certainly not an event just like other events

No, His presence here on earth never becomes a thing of the past, thus does not become more and more distant—that is, if faith is at all to be found upon the earth... But as long as there is a believer,

this person . . . must be just as contemporary with Christ’s presence as his contemporaries were.<sup>168</sup>

He later even calls contemporaneity “[his] life’s thought.”<sup>169</sup>

Thus, when Ellul reads Ecclesiastes, he reads it in a distinctly Kierkegaard-ian light. Ellul’s emphasis on God’s *presence in the present* is his own version of Kierkegaard’s *contemporaneity with Christ*. Ellul’s two major theological sources meet in the very theme that opens and closes his entire work: the present.

## Re-Reading Kierkegaard through Qohelet God’s Time

Not only does Kierkegaard affect Ellul’s reading of Qohelet; I will now show that, in turn, Ellul’s Kierkegaardian reading of Qohelet reflects back and alters Ellul’s reading of Kierkegaard himself.

That Ellul is deeply Kierkegaardian is well known; works by Vernard Eller, Frederic Rognon, and Sarah Pike Cabral, among others, have admirably substantiated this fact. Jean-Luc Blanc writes, “Ellul is Kierkegaard in the twentieth century!”<sup>170</sup> However, having acknowledged this strong continuity between the two, their *differences* matter just as much.

Rognon has described Ellul’s reading of Kierkegaard as “libertarian,” acknowledging that Ellul modifies elements of Kierkegaard’s thought. In my estimation, Ellul’s reading of Kierkegaard makes two very important changes: Ellul modifies Kierkegaard’s irony, and Kierkegaard’s conception of time.

First, Ellul changes Kierkegaard’s irony. As mentioned above, in his late work Kierkegaard stated that his use of pseudonyms was intended as a signal that he did not *directly* mean what he was saying. The reader should be constantly on guard for irony, wordplay, and indirect communication in these works, never taking anything at

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<sup>167</sup> Cited in Robert Bretall, ed., *A Kierkegaard Anthology* (New York: Random House [Modern Library] , 1943), 375.

<sup>168</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity. Kierkegaard’s Writings*, v. 20, ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 9.

<sup>169</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, *The Moment and Late Writings. Kierkegaard’s Writings*, v. 23, ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 290.

<sup>170</sup> Jean-Luc Blanc, “Jacques Ellul et la Dialectique.” *Revue Reformee* 33.165 (July 1990), 42.

face value. By contrast, Ellul sometimes employs pseudonyms but still generally writes things that he directly means. Certainly, Ellul is ironic toward himself as an author; his very decision to base his work's conclusion on Ecclesiastes clearly demonstrates this kind of irony. But Ellul *never* adopts Kierkegaard's ironic approach toward his own words. While he may say "I could not write today what I wrote then," Ellul never says "I did not mean what I wrote."<sup>171</sup> Irony toward one's own speech is the opposite of Qohelet: Ellul reads Ecclesiastes as saying that *everything* is vanity—except the spoken human word.

Second, and more importantly for this paper, Ellul changes Kierkegaard's philosophical approach to time. Despite his ironic undermining of abstract philosophy, Kierkegaard's approach to time includes static philosophical elements—even in his non-pseudonymous theological works (which thus means that this approach to time must be taken seriously, not ironically). According to Flemming Fleinert-Jensen, Kierkegaard's presence is "independent of time [I]n this situation of contemporaneity, times and places do not count, because it is a question of the register of the absolute."<sup>172</sup> What Fleinert-Jensen describes might be called a dialectic of time and eternity, which relies on a conception of time inherited from Plato. Employing this time/eternity distinction gives Kierkegaard strong critical force, to be sure; but Ellul sees it as importing a Greek way of understanding time into Hebrew thought. For Ellul, conceiving "the eternal" in this way goes directly against Qohelet, whose *vanity* undermines this Greek philosophical approach to time. Instead, Qohelet forbids knowing anything outside of time except Jesus Christ, whom we know precisely because he entered time. We know of God *only* what he reveals of himself *in* time.<sup>173</sup> Thus, reading Kierkegaard in light of Ellul's reading of Qohelet strips Kierkegaard's time of its philosophical elements, leaving only the existential present—the present that we cannot conceive of as an idea but in which we live our lives.

So, I suggest that Ellul reads Qohelet through Kierkegaard, which means that Ecclesiastes is a book of ironic anti-philosophy, restricting human thought to the humble

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<sup>171</sup> Cf. Ellul's comments on his earlier writings regarding Jean-Paul Sartre, in Jacques Ellul and Patrick Troude-Chastenet, *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology, and Christianity: Conversations with Patrick Troude-Chastenet* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 99.

<sup>172</sup> Flemming Fleinert-Jensen, *Aujourd'hui—Non pas demain! La priere de Kierkegaard* (Lyon: Editions Olivetan [Veillez et priez], 2016), 101.

<sup>173</sup> Cf. this citation from Jacques Ellul, *The Theological Foundation of Law* (London: SCM Press, 1961), 46: "It is one thing to say, 'Justice existing eternally by itself.' It is quite another to say, 'The Will of God is justice.' For the first affirmation is essentially static, and the Greek system understood it as such, whereas the second is dynamic. Eternal as God's will is, it is nevertheless not immobile. The opposite is true. The scriptures reveal that we cannot know the will of God apart from God's Revelation, outside the act of God and consequently *hic et nunc*. The will of God in the manifestation of justice is therefore no rigid framework wherein we can arrange our concepts. Nor is it a kind of principle from which we can deduce a system. At all times it is action. We cannot know either its essence or its form apart from the present and concrete act of God, which is judgement. In other words, where there is no judgement, there is no justice and only in judgement do we grasp justice."

limits of the present. Ellul also reads Kierkegaard through Qohelet: this changes the present from a philosophical contrast between a moving time and a static eternity, into the lived moment of God's self-revealing.

## God's Present Time

To see where all of this leaves us, I will now combine the points I have made in this article. Ellul's lifelong engagement with Ecclesiastes drives his biblical approach to theological ethics. Because Ellul views theological ethics as relating to God's presence in the present time, he begins and ends his entire project with a focus on the present. His understanding of presence comes from his mixed readings of Kierkegaard's "contemporaneity with Christ" and Qohelet's emphasis on vanity. Reading both sources through each other changes both, making Qohelet into an ironic anti-philosopher and making Kierkegaard *less* philosophical. This mix informs Ellul's whole project: rather than reasoning based on absolutes, Ellul opens his eyes and ears (like Qohelet) and makes personal and sociological observations of what he sees and hears in the world around him. This realist approach would lead him to despair if not for his lived experience of the presence of God in his own time. For Ellul, all theological-ethical reasoning happens in the present moment, and God is presently acting in this present moment with us; theological ethics thus is a process not of reasoning based on eternal "Christian" principles but of actively seeking and living with and in the presence of God, here and now.

What does this mean for us today?

In Western society, we often think of time as a commodity. We live by clock-time, in which every second is equal to every other second; time is an empty container that we fill with whatever we want—work, leisure, entertainment, and so on. Following Ellul, we might see our commonplace phrases as revealing something true about ourselves; phrases such as "time is money," "killing time," and "time crunch" suggest that perhaps we treat time with a certain utilitarian brutality. By contrast, in a 1960 essay, Ellul develops a much more theological approach to time.<sup>174</sup> Reading the first verses of Genesis, Ellul views time and space as God's first creatures. Calling time a *creature* emphasizes its dependence on its creator. Like the rest of creation, time is thus put under human authority; like other creatures, it can be cared for, or abused. Instead of our modern clock-time, Ellul draws on Ecclesiastes, seeing that God has made a time for everything, and everything beautiful in its time. Rather than being an empty container, or a commodity, the present time is *God's* time; each moment is a temporal gift. Ellul's emphasis on the New Testament language of *redeeming* this time reminds us that if time is enslaved, it is partially because we have abused it; part of our participation in Jesus Christ's redeeming work is to find a new way of thinking and talking about time that does not enslave or kill it.

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<sup>174</sup> Jacques Ellul, "Notes en vue d'une éthique du temps et du lieu pour les chrétiens." *Foi et Vie*

Only in this lived present time can we encounter God. Remember that Ellul's journey of faith began with an "encounter with God [that] provoked the upheaval of my entire being, beginning with a reordering of my thought. It was necessary to think differently from the moment where God could be near."<sup>175</sup> Ellul's theology is thus a forceful call to look endlessly for the presence of the living God revealed in Jesus Christ, who is at work in the present time just as much as 2,000 years ago.

## Efficiency and Availability: Jacques Ellul and Albert Borgmann on the Nature of Technology

Jonathan Lipps

Jacques Ellul (1912-1994) and Albert Borgmann (born 1937) have both attempted to unmask the hidden technological engines of modern society. Their work jointly discerns what is most essential about technology, helping to create the space necessary for any human response to the subtle dangers of our increasingly technological world. Writing in different generations and in different languages, their ideas can nonetheless be held together as sometimes parallel and always insightful revelations of a perplexing phenomenon, carving out roughly similar conceptual territory despite their many differences, whether in genre, style, scope, or outlook. The purpose of this essay is to explore the nature and consequences of modern technology via the thought of Ellul and Borgmann, drawing them into a conversation with one another that does not, for the most part, occur within the pages of their books.

The volumes under consideration for this essay will of necessity be limited to the seminal works of each thinker: for Ellul, *The Technological Society* (1964) and *The Technological System* (1980), with additional help from *Presence in the Modern World* (1948), and for Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life* (1984), along with insight from his later *Power Failure: Christianity in the Culture of Technology* (2003). There are immediately obvious surface differences between Ellul and Borgmann. As a French sociologist and theologian, Ellul is concerned to produce a broad unifying description of seemingly disparate phenomena across all levels of human society, from the economy to politics to the state to work. Borgmann, a German-born philosopher familiar with the methods of modern analytic philosophy, touches on the same subjects but within a framework much more devoted to clarity of definition and stepwise reasoning. Ellul looks at general historical, political, or economic changes in order to find the evidence of "technique," whereas Borgmann follows a "paradigmatic"

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59.5 (Sept.-Oct. 1960), 354-374.

<sup>175</sup> This is my translation from Jacques Ellul and Patrick Troude-Chastenet, *A con-tre-courant: Entretiens* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 2014), 120.

method, attempting to show how all components of the technological system exhibit the same features as obvious examples.<sup>176</sup>

These surface differences are arguably minor in comparing the thought of Ellul and Borgmann, however significantly they might have influenced the audience or reception of their works. Let us now examine the substantive framework of each thinker with respect to the core questions of technology.

Lipps, Jonathan. "Efficiency and Availability: Jacques Ellul and Albert Borgmann on the Nature of Technology." *Ellul Forum* 63 (Spring 2019): 17-26. © Jonathan Lipps, CC BY-NC-ND. 17

## The Nature of Technology

Ellul and Borgmann have both rendered a great service to their readers in highlighting the complexity involved in giving a suitable definition of technology. Many of the extant conceptual understandings of technology that *have* been articulated fail to capture or explain the deeper reality of the technological phenomenon. What is it, then? For Ellul, technique is "the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency (for a given stage of development) in every field of human activity."<sup>177</sup> Contrary to popular understanding, technique has nothing to do with machines *per se* but is a much broader concept, encompassing any method, including political or religious ones. Technique is simply "*means and the ensemble of means.*"<sup>178</sup>

This is all that we need to define the nature of technology for Ellul, but of course there is much more required to understand the consequent determining role of technology in society, and much more to say about how this singular focus on efficiency plays out (not least in making specifically *modern* technique an entirely new phenomenon). In his works, Ellul makes several attempts at schematizing the characteristics of technology, which result in the following insightful (if not always clearly delineable) set of features: *Autonomy*—no authority external to technology manages or restrains it.

*Unity* (or unicity)—technology is now a system with so many interlocking parts that it must be understood first and foremost as a whole.

*Universality*—technology extends inexorably in all directions: "horizontally" (across the globe) and "vertically" (up and down the levels of human experience from home life to work to politics).

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<sup>176</sup> A word about terminology is in order: Ellul primarily speaks of *la technique*, which is variously translated as "technique" or "technology" (sometimes infelicitously so, Ellul would say). Borgmann, writing in English, simply uses "technology." In this essay I will use the terms interchangeably, but prefer "technology" outside of quotations. For my purposes, Ellul's "technique" and Borgmann's "technology" overlap enough in meaning to support the points I will be making.

<sup>177</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (New York: Vintage, 1964), xxv.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 19. Italics in the original.

*Totalization*—when technology invades a certain area, it necessarily links up with other technologies in order to function, which implies the eventual totality of the technological domain.

*Automatism*—human choice is superfluous with respect to the natural unfolding of technology’s inner logic.

*Self-augmentation*—technology needs less and less direct intervention to move forward.

Borgmann is clearly well aware of Ellul’s work, mentioning Ellul’s viewpoint specifically as an example of the “substantivist” perspective on technology (which Borgmann defines as the stance within which technology has its own force or existence outside of human choice). In this context he disagrees with Ellul, arguing that the

concept of technique [suffers] from a debilitating generality..... Efficiency

is a systematically incomplete concept. For efficiency to come into play, we need antecedently fixed goals on behalf of which values are minimized or maximized.<sup>179</sup>

In other words, he claims that Ellul’s position is ultimately circular, reducing technology to an unexplained *explanans*.<sup>180</sup>

Borgmann would nonetheless agree with much of Ellul’s characterization of technology, with the claim that modern technology is different in significant ways than what came before, and with the claim that technology is indeed the hidden engine of most aspects of society, even if he finds the explanatory power of “efficiency” to be lacking. Borgmann offers in its place a more “realist” view of technology that avoids recognizing technology as a force in its own right.<sup>181</sup>

Borgmann sees the fundamental *raison d’être* of technology as the promise rooted in Enlightenment ideals “to bring the forces of nature and culture under control, to liberate us from misery and toil, and to enrich our lives.”<sup>182</sup> This can be summed up in the word “availability”—

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<sup>179</sup> Albert Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life: A Philosophical Inquiry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 9.

<sup>180</sup> We should be clear that Borgmann does not want to sideline Ellul’s work in general, and certainly finds it important, or it would hardly make sense for him to serve on the advisory council of the International Jacques Ellul Society!

<sup>181</sup> There is room for future dialogue here, however. Ellul is quite clear that he does not intend for technology to be regarded as *metaphysically* distinct and autonomous and is quite happy to allow that at any given point it is indeed human beings who make the relevant decisions. Ellul simply wants to argue that *sociologically*, in practice, there is virtually no possibility of choosing outside the trajectory of technology. For his part, Borgmann does not always shy away from treating technology as a force, if only as a way of speaking, for example, calling it a “tendency that asserts itself” (Albert Borgmann, *Power Failure: Christianity in the Culture of Technology* [Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2003], 17) or noting that “the parlance [of the substantive view] is convenient” (Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*, 41). Ellul and Borgmann are probably closer on this point than has been realized.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

Goods that are available to us enrich our lives and, if they are technologically available, they do so without imposing burdens on us. Something is available in this sense if it has been rendered instantaneous, ubiquitous, safe, and easy.<sup>183</sup>

In this way Borgmann attempts to give non-circular content to the Ellulian notion of “efficiency” and declare that what is maximized is a human good (of any kind—heat, clothing, music, health, etc.) and what is minimized is the burden required to obtain the good (time, labor, expense, etc.). Any object or system that brings this maximization of availability into our lives is called a “device,” and by examining this pattern at work all across the world of modern technology we come to realize that the heart of technology is the “device paradigm.”

Borgmann thus shares with Ellul the argument that the core essence of technology can be divined in surprising places, for example, in claiming that microwave dinners or Cool Whip are devices in just the same way as TV sets or mobile phones, because they conform to the paradigm of availability maximization.<sup>184</sup> It is not a neutral thing for a device to come onto the stage, however, because there are direct and sometimes dire consequences of the device paradigm. For Borgmann, these necessary consequences constitute a “paradigmatic explanation”<sup>185</sup> of technology, lending explanatory support to the observations of Ellul (i.e., the totalization and automatism of technology), which would otherwise be mere givens.

## The Consequences of Technology

For each of our authors, it is in drawing out the (sometimes unexpected) consequences of technology that their essential frameworks are put to the test. Ellul and Borgmann both go into quite a bit of detail on these consequences, in all levels of human society and life. In this essay, we will restrict our comparison to their treatment of (a) the fate of traditional culture, (b) labor and leisure, and (c) the world of politics.

When it comes to the consequences of the new technological culture for traditional modes, Ellul is clear:

Technical invasion does not involve the simple addition of new values to old ones. It does not put new wine into old bottles; it does not introduce new content into old forms. The old bottles are all being broken. The old civilizations collapse on contact with the new. And the same phenomenon appears under every possible cultural form.<sup>186</sup>

Or even more strongly:

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<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>184</sup> See *ibid.*, 51 and Borgmann, *Power Failure*, 15.

<sup>185</sup> Both Borgmann and Ellul rely on Thomas Kuhn’s *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* to support the notion of a paradigm. See Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*, 68, for example.

<sup>186</sup> Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 121.

[Technique] dissociates the sociological forms, destroys the moral framework, desacralizes men and things, explodes social and religious taboos, and reduces the body social to a collection of individuals.<sup>187</sup>

Modern society is not, despite what many think, simply “the traditional society *plus* technologies.”<sup>188</sup>

While for Ellul all this is simply an observation mentioned in connection with the universality of technology, Borgmann gives a more specific explanation based on the device paradigm. The major consequence of any device is the introduction of an artificial division between the good that is produced and the machinery that produces it. As device machinery evolves (along the Ellulian trajectory of “one best means,” i.e., maximization of availability), the good (by supposition) stays the same. The result is *com-modification*—the severing of a good from its traditional context in order to make it more readily available.<sup>189</sup> On the surface, making a good more readily available is unobjectionable. In traditional cultures, however, goods were embedded in a unified system that held them in concert with numerous other tangible and intangible goods. When goods become technologically available, their production relies less and less on the traditional context, which thereby becomes superfluous and eventually disappears, taking along with it any of these “unrelated” goods.<sup>190</sup> Borgmann is essentially making the same point as Ellul, but is also giving a cogent explanation of it based on the device paradigm.

What results for both authors is a sort of rift in our everyday lives. Ellul decries the meaninglessness of city life and the techniques of organized mass entertainment that serve primarily to adjust the human being to an inhuman environment.<sup>191</sup> Borgmann laments the loss of “distinction between ‘simulated experience’ and ‘the real thing.’”<sup>192</sup> Both authors place much emphasis on the unfortunate transformation of work into a mindless drudgery supporting the technical machinery of society, whose only value is providing resources to expend on equally mindless leisure. Here again Borgmann’s device paradigm is a helpful complement to Ellul’s eloquent observations:

The sharp division in our lives between labor and leisure is a unique feature of modern existence. Leisure consists in the unencumbered enjoyment of commodities

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<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>188</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1980), 88.

<sup>189</sup> Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*, 48.

<sup>190</sup> For the sake of brevity, we omit the many examples that help clarify this argument, except for this one: the wood-burning stove provided the good of heat, the same way that an electric or gas furnace now does. But the wood-burning stove required physical exertion (cutting the wood), engagement with nature (going into the forest), and familial closeness (its heat only extended in a small radius). It also necessitated communal enjoyment of music or story rather than allowing the possibility of each person disappearing into her own room for individual consumption of entertainment. All of these goods were unintentionally stripped from our lives with the introduction of central heating (*ibid.*, 41).

<sup>191</sup> Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 37.

<sup>192</sup> Borgmann, *Power Failure*, 125.



whereas labor is devoted to the construction and maintenance of the machinery that produces the commodities<sup>193</sup>

he says, precisely articulating Ellul's "division of man into producer and consumer."<sup>194</sup> This modern split is echoed in many other areas, such as education. Borgmann and Ellul have many insights in common here that we must pass over, for example, the relatively new distinction between means and ends, which Borgmann sees as an instantiation of the device paradigm and which Ellul sees as the loss of extra-technological ends altogether.<sup>195</sup>

When it comes to politics, there is substantial underlying agreement in treatment by our two thinkers, despite little obvious overlap in topic and style. Politics, the state, and related issues take up quite a bit more space in Ellul, who sees technology as the determining factor *par excellence* ("Political motivations do not dominate technical phenomena, but rather the reverse"<sup>196</sup>) Without carving as wide a swath as Ellul, Borgmann looks specifically at liberal democracy in America but agrees that it is only the technological paradigm that allows the current political situation to function, offering liberty, equality, and self-realization essentially on the model of a technological device.<sup>197</sup> Borgmann exposes the central lacuna in liberal democracy as the same as the limitation inherent in technology's promise: what we end up with is a negative sort of freedom guaranteeing the absence of limits, rather than a positive freedom leading to a concrete Good Life, despite claims that "happiness" is around the corner. Ellul would enthusiastically join with Borgmann here, and Borgmann's discussion of freedom could just as easily have been taken from Ellul's own works.<sup>198</sup>

## The Response to the Technological Situation

Even in the previous section's brief sketch, it is clear that technology, whether characterized by Borgmann or Ellul, is a challenge to a full and free human life. At this point, Ellul becomes conspicuously silent and is officially dubious about the upshot

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<sup>193</sup> Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*, 114. Ellul sees the causality going the other way, and leisure arising as the antidote to technological labor, rather than the commodity for which technological labor is the machinery (see Ellul, *The Technological System*, 62).

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>195</sup> For now we can say that both authors see this split as fatal: "for Christians there is no separation between end and means," says Ellul (Jacques Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*, trans. Lisa Richmond [Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016], 51), and Borgmann makes a similar point: "In the Gospels . . . freedom is not divided into the machinery of liberation and the state of liberty; it always occurs as an event in which liberty and liberation are one" (Borgmann, *Power Failure*, 99).

<sup>196</sup> Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 251.

<sup>197</sup> Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*, 86.

<sup>198</sup> To list just one example: "The choice among technological objects is not of the same nature as the choice of a human conduct. There is no theoretical category of 'choice' that would express freedom." (Ellul, *The Technological System*, 321).

of concrete action.<sup>199</sup> It is not however that he thinks the challenge cannot be met,<sup>200</sup> but that his job is merely to diagnose the disease (“I am in the position of a physician who must diagnose a disease and guess its probable course”<sup>201</sup>). It is primarily in Ellul’s non-socio-logical works that he discusses what is necessary for resisting mass culture, techniques of propaganda, and so on.

Borgmann is not so circumspect and devotes much of his books to suggestions both concrete and abstract for how we might move forward individually and as a society. Essentially, Borgmann believes that we should neither reject technology entirely nor hope for reformation from within the resources of the technological paradigm, but that we should institute a reformation *of* the paradigm itself. What does this reform look like? “The reform . . . would prune back the excesses of technology and restrict it to a supporting role.”<sup>202</sup> In essence, we need to eschew the “regardless power” of technology and instead operate out of a “careful power.”<sup>203</sup>

Put positively, Borgmann hopes that we can sidestep the hypersensitivity of technology to judgment<sup>204</sup> and argues that we need to rigorously oppose the rifts caused by the device paradigm in our lives, by creating space for “focal things and practices.” Focal things (for example, nature) speak to us as an undivided unity and command our attention as *things* instead of *devices*. Focal practices (for example, running) “guard in its undiminished depth and identity the thing that is central to the practice, to shield it against the technological diremption into means and end.”<sup>205</sup> We cannot commend focal things and practices according to the standards of efficiency or availability, for that would be to deliver them back into the technological para-digm.<sup>206</sup> Instead, we speak about them “deictically” (winsomely, always from personal experience), and strive for focality both in our personal lives and as the result of public political engagement.

Whether or not Ellul would hold out hope for the outcome of such political engagement, he would certainly applaud Borgmann’s measured vision. Neither author wishes (nor thinks it possible)<sup>207</sup> to do away with technology, but to restrain it, to introduce the concept of a limiting factor above technology itself, however undesirable limits may

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<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 282.

<sup>200</sup> In fact: “The challenge is not to scholars and university professors, but to all of us. At stake is our very life, and we shall need all the energy, inventiveness, imagination, goodness, and strength we can muster to triumph in our predicament” (Ellul, *The Technological Society*, xxxii).

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxi.

<sup>202</sup> Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*, 247.

<sup>203</sup> Borgmann, *Power Failure*, 88 and 90.

<sup>204</sup> “The discovery of the technological system normally seems like an attack against technology, a criticism of technology per se” (Ellul, *The Technological System*, 14).

<sup>205</sup> Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*, 209.

<sup>206</sup> Ellul senses the same thing when he talks about the “difference between a fisherman, a sailor, a swimmer, a cyclist, and people who fish, sail, swim, and cycle for sport. The last are technicians” (Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 383).

<sup>207</sup> So Ellul: “[Technology] is now our one and only living environment” (Ellul, *The Technological System*, 42).

be to those of us who are heirs of the technological system today. Ellul, at the last, does not shy away from calling us to resist the runaway self-augmentation of technology: “Each of us, in his own life, must seek ways of resisting and transcending technological determinants. Each man must make this effort in every area of life, in his profession and in his social, religious, and family relationships.”<sup>208</sup> Borgmann echoes these exhortations in numerous places, upholding the traditional virtue of fortitude in the face of apparent technological determinism: “Fortitude needs to become the defining virtue of the postmodern era.”<sup>209</sup>

The insight of both Ellul and Borgmann is proved by the staying power of their ideas. Despite writing before the advent of widespread personal computing, or indeed the Internet, to say nothing of the subsequent explosion of social media and the like, their theories help to explicate exactly what we see happening around us with the spread and consequences of the latest technologies. If we combine Ellul’s notion of “efficiency” with Borgmann’s concept of “availability,” we can use them as a tightly focused beam in the focus of true “apocalypse,” revealing the all-too-simple but all-too-unacknowledged drive at the heart of our technological society. And if we augment Borgmann’s suggestions for political and economic reform with some of Ellul’s healthy skepticism about “revolution,” not to mention his insistence on the systemic nature of technology, we will not lose heart even when triumph seems far away. Ultimately, what Ellul (circumspectly) and Borgmann (directly) join together in calling forth in us is the recovery of virtue that does not derive from or bow to technology but that guards our own inner lives from being mere replicas of the devices we now encounter everywhere around us.

## Celui dans lequel je mets tout mon creur

Patrick Troude-Chastenet

Jacques Ellul avait-il une preference parmi ses tres nom-breux livres? A cette question rituelle—mais o combien difficile a tranch-er pour un auteur—Ellul avait repondu que, finalement, *L’esperance oubliee* etait son livre prefere: « C’est celui dans lequel je mets tout mon creur »<sup>210</sup>. Cette confiance a elle seule justifierait la lecture de ce livre non seulement pour les lecteurs du registre theologique de son reuvre mais egalement pour ceux qui souhaitent, par manque de curiosite ou pour des raisons epis-temologiques, se cantonner exclusivement au seul volet socio-politique. On peut bien sur choisir deliberement d’ignorer l’un ou l’autre des deux registres—et meme en tirer

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<sup>208</sup> Ellul, *The Technological Society*, xxxii.

<sup>209</sup> Borgmann, *Power Failure*, 116.

<sup>210</sup> Jacques Ellul/Patrick Chastenet, *A contre-courant*, Paris, La Table Ronde, « la petite vermillon », 2014, p. 230 ; *Entretiens avec Jacques Ellul*, Paris, La Table Ronde, p. 181 ; Jacques Ellul and Patrick Troude-Chastenet, *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology and Christianity*, Eugene, Oregon, 2005, p. 116.

grand profit<sup>211</sup>—mais on se condamne alors a passer a cote de l'essentiel: a ne pas saisir le creur de son message pour paraphraser Ellul lui-meme. On le sait, Ellul se moquait comme d'une guigne des frontieres academiques<sup>212</sup>. Il oblige le specialiste de sciences sociales a s'improviser theologien et le theologien a se faire historien, juriste, sociologue, philosophe et politiste. Comment ignorer les quatre volumes de son *Ethique de la Liberte* ou sa meditation sur l'Ecclesiaste mais comment vou-loir passer sous silence sa trilogie sur La technique, celle sur la revolution ou encore son maitre ouvrage sur la propagande?

Jacques Ellul avait fini par admettre que les deux volets de son reuvre etaient a la fois rigoureusement separees mais qu'ils se repondaient l'un l'autre. La dialectique jouant du reste a l'interieur de chacun des deux registres mais aussi d'un registre a l'autre. Cette pensee dialectique on la retrouve pleinement dans *L'esperance oubliee* ou l'auteur ne cache pas sa dette a l'egard de Soren Kierkegaard (« je l'ecris avec tremblement et ne puis m'avancer ici qu'avec crainte »)<sup>213</sup> et de Karl Barth (l'enfer reste une « possible impossibilite »).

Troude-Chastenet, Patrick. "Celui dans lequel je mets tout mon creur" Ellul Forum 63 (Spring 2019): 27-32. © Patrick Troude-Chastenet, CC BY-NC-ND.

S'il est une conviction centrale dans lreuvre d'Ellul, qui le conduira du reste au milieu des annees 1960 au principe du Salut universel, c'est que Dieu est avant tout Amour. Certes Dieu est aussi Justice mais si Dieu est Amour il ne peut condamner une seule de ses creatures sans reconnaitre par la meme que le sacrifice de son fils Jesus sur la croix aura ete inutile. Comme le dit Paul: tout homme est sauve en Christ. Le Jugement ne signifie pas la condamnation. Selon le cas, Dieu ne retiendra de nos vies que de l'or ou du marbre ou du bois ou de la paille. L'enfer n'existe pas. Plus exactement il est employe comme metaphore dans la Bible, l'homme le vit deja sur terre et il reste toujours possible. Pourquoi? Parce que rien n'est impossible a Dieu car il est Dieu, mais en meme temps l'existence de l'enfer est impossible car Dieu est amour. Ellul rejoint Barth: « Il faut etre fou pour enseigner le Salut universel mais il faut etre impie pour ne pas le croire »<sup>214</sup>.

Ellul distingue radicalement l'espoir de l'esperance. Dans la langue fran^aise usuelle ces deux mots sont souvent employes comme synonymes<sup>215</sup>.

Espoir 1. Le fait d'esperer, d'attendre quelque chose avec confiance ^ esperance, esperer. 2. Sentiment qui porte a esperer ^ esperance. *Etre plein d'espoir*.

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<sup>211</sup> Cf. sur des registres differents: Didier Nordon, *L'homme a lui-meme*, Paris, Editions du Felin, 1992, et Jean-Luc Porquet, *L'homme qui avait (presque) toutprevu*, Paris, Le cherche-midi, 2003.

<sup>212</sup> Patrick Troude-Chastenet, (Dir.) *Jacques Ellul, penseur sans frontieres*, Le Bouscat, L'Esprit du Temps, 2005.

<sup>213</sup> Jacques Ellul, *L'esperance oubliee*, Paris, Gallimard, 1972, Paris, La Table Ronde, 2004, p. 77.

<sup>214</sup> Patrick Chastenet, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 173. ; Jacques Ellul and Patrick Troude-Chastenet, *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 112.

<sup>215</sup> *Petit Robert de la langue francaise*, nouvelle edition millesime 2007, pp. 928-929.

Esperance 1. Sentiment qui fait entrevoir comme probable la realisation de ce que l'on desire ^ assurance, certitude, confiance, conviction, croyance, espoir. 2. Ce sentiment applique a un objet determine ^ aspiration, desir, espoir.

Mais alors que la langue fran^aise comporte egalement l'expression *es-perances trompeuses* au sens d'illusion, de leurre, pour Ellul c'est l'espoir qui trompe. « L'espoir est la malediction de l'homme »<sup>216</sup>, affirme-t-il. Rien de moins ! N'est-ce pas l'espoir qui en definitive a permis le genocide des juifs? « Tant qu'il y a de la vie, il y a de l'espoir » dit le vieil adage populaire. L'espoir signifie donc que l'on peut encore eviter le pire alors que, dans la terminologie ellulienne, l'esperance intervient au contraire lorsque le pire est certain. L'espoir est la passion des possibles alors que l'esperance est celle de l'impossible.

Dans quelle situation sommes-nous aujourd'hui? D'une part, nous pou-vons constater que le XXeme siecle aura ete celui de la barbarie, du mepris de l'homme, de la trahison de tous les grands ideaux, des desillusions et du soup^on generalise. La societe technicienne, c'est-a-dire une societe qui place la recherche de l'efficacite dans tous les domaines comme seule finalite legitime independamment de toute autre consideration, ne laisse aucune place a l'esperance. Or nous avons un cruel besoin d'esperance pour vivre. D'autre part, nous sommes entres dans le temps de la dereliction: une periode ou Dieu se tait et donc, paradoxalement, une periode propice a l'esperance. Comme l'homme moderne est persuade qu'il peut assumer seul tous ses besoins grace a la technique, alors Dieu le laisse face a son destin. Meme s'il est present dans la vie de certains d'entre nous il est absent de l'histoire de nos societes. Cette situation n'a d'ailleurs rien d'exceptionnelle. Il ne faut pas oublier, rappelle Ellul dans un entretien, que bibliquement

Dieu intervient rarement sur des periodes qui durent des centaines d'annees. De meme que Dieu parle rarement. Si vous pensez que cela commence en quatorze cent avant Jesus-Christ et qu'il y a quoi? Ce que contient l'Ancien Testament: sept ou huit cents pages. Cela ne fait pas beaucoup—sur quatorze cents ans—de paroles de Dieu<sup>217</sup>.

Ce silence ne signifie pas que Dieu nous rejette mais que nous le rejetons. Dans ce monde plein de bruit et de fureur Dieu ne souhaite pas opposer sa Parole aux jacasseries des hommes.

La dereliction concerne aussi l'Eglise puisque depuis longtemps deja l'Eglise n'est plus l'Eglise, l'or s'est mue en plomb, la parole du Christ s'est transformee en son contraire, comme le deplore Ellul apres Kierkegaard<sup>218</sup>. L'Eglise se conforme au monde alors que le chretien doit etre le sel de la terre. La presence au monde moderne souhaitee par Ellul differe radicale-ment du conformisme sociologique. « Ne vous conformez pas au Siecle present »<sup>219</sup>, demande Paul dans l'Epitre aux Romains (12,2). L'injonction

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<sup>216</sup> Jacques Ellul, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

<sup>217</sup> Patrick Chastenet, *op. cit.*, 1994, p. 165 ; Jacques Ellul and Patrick Troude-Chastenet, *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 114.

<sup>218</sup> Cf. Jacques Ellul, *La subversion du christianisme*, Paris, Seuil, 1984, La Table Ronde, 2001.

<sup>219</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Ethique de la liberte*, Geneve, Labor et Fides, tome II, 1975, pp. 85-111.

de Paul est tellement recorrente dans l'œuvre d'Ellul que l'on peut dire quelle a pour lui valeur de commandement et qu'elle est à peut-être à la source d'une grande partie de son anticonformisme.

Malgré la trahison de l'Église et la « subversion du christianisme », Ellul ne se résigne pas. Il rejoint le théologien Jürgen Moltmann pour faire de l'espérance le creux de la vie chrétienne mais à la différence de ce dernier il ne croit pas que la promesse se réalise avec certitude<sup>220</sup>. La libre grâce—l'homme sauve par pure grâce, sans aucune participation des œuvres—aurait pu donner lieu, chez les protestants, à un désespoir absolu ou inversement à un quietisme total. À la suite de Max Weber, Ellul a montré qu'il n'en fut rien<sup>221</sup>.

Car le « tout est permis » de l'apôtre Paul ne justifie pas le « n'importe quoi ». Au contraire, il faut faire « comme si ». Comme si Dieu n'existait pas, et comme si tout dépendait de nous.

Néanmoins, il ne faut pas confondre: le salut est non pas le résultat de la vertu mais son origine. Mener une vie vertueuse pour être sauvé n'a pas de fondement dans l'Écriture. Pourtant on y trouve des injonctions parfaitement contradictoires: « vous êtes sauvés par le moyen de la foi » (...) Et Paul d'ajouter: « par conséquent travaillez à votre salut avec crainte et tremblement, car c'est Dieu qui produit en vous le vouloir et le faire selon son bon plaisir »<sup>222</sup>. Selon Ellul, il est inutile de chercher à réduire cette contradiction, au creux même de la vie de Jésus. Si nous sommes sauvés par grâce, pour quoi travailler à notre salut, et réciproquement? Jésus lui-même a accepté de souffrir et de mourir, « comme si » il n'était pas le fils de Dieu. « Personne ne prend ma vie, c'est moi qui la donne. »

Toute l'éthique chrétienne se pense au travers de la relation dialectique unissant ces deux contraires: le salut par grâce et les œuvres de la vie. Amour, espérance, liberté et responsabilité sont inséparables. Il n'y a pas d'autre impératif que l'amour dans la liberté. « La liberté est le visage éthique de l'espérance »<sup>223</sup>, écrit Ellul dans l'introduction du tome I de son *Éthique de la liberté* où il prend la peine de préciser qu'il avait commencé à rédiger ces pages sur l'espérance en 1960, donc avant la publication de l'ouvrage de Moltmann. L'espérance est le fondement de toute son éthique de la liberté. « Seul l'homme libre peut espérer »<sup>224</sup>. La présence du chrétien au monde interdit de se figer dans le passé—par la répétition d'une attitude moralisante—et dans l'avenir, par la projection d'une idéologie à réaliser. Le chrétien est libre parce qu'il espère. « L'espérance est la réponse de l'homme au silence de Dieu. » L'homme devient vraiment libre lorsqu'il décide d'espérer et d'imposer à Dieu son espérance.

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<sup>220</sup> Frédéric Rognon, *Jacques Ellul, une pensée en dialogue*, Genève, Labor et Fides, 2007, p. 103.

<sup>221</sup> Jacques Ellul, « Les sources chrétiennes de la démocratie. Protestantisme et Démocratie », in Jean-Louis Seurin, *La démocratie pluraliste*, Paris, Economica, 1980, p. 86.

<sup>222</sup> Ephésiens (2,8) et Philippiens (2,12), d'après la traduction Segond, 1977, Société biblique de Genève, Trinitarian Bible Society, Londres.

<sup>223</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Éthique de la liberté*, Genève, Labor et Fides, tome I, 1973, p. 11.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

C'est un appel à Dieu contre Dieu. Une lutte de l'homme pour contraindre Dieu à briser son silence et à tenir ses promesses. L'espérance sonne alors comme une mise en accusation de Dieu au nom de la Parole de Dieu.

À la question insoluble de l'antériorité de la grâce à la repentance, Luther répondit par son célèbre: « toujours et en même temps pécheur et juste et pénitent ». La Bible met la crainte en relation dialectique avec l'amour et le pardon. De la même façon, on y trouve un renouvellement constant de la promesse et de l'accomplissement, du royaume déjà au milieu de nous et du royaume à venir à la fin des temps, autrement dit: du « déjà » et du « pas encore ». Jésus-Christ est déjà le seigneur du monde, mais pas encore, puisqu'il le sera définitivement lors de sa parousie.

Au cours de son essai Ellul avoue que l'on ne peut pas *parler* de l'espérance mais seulement la vivre. Comment définir la situation paradoxale du chrétien au sein du monde moderne? Face au débat qui opposa deux penseurs personnalistes: le catholique français Emmanuel Mounier (1905-1950) partisan de l'optimisme tragique au protestant suisse Denis de Rougemont (1906-1985) partisan du pessimisme actif, Ellul décide de renvoyer les deux camps dos à dos. Optimisme et pessimisme étant des sentiments humains, la seule formule acceptable à ses yeux est celle du « pessimisme de l'espérance ». Celle qui permet de penser dialectiquement ce que Karl Barth nomme la libre détermination de l'homme dans la libre décision de Dieu.

L'homme naturel trouvera toujours, et à raison, une forte tonalité pessimiste dans les écrits de Jacques Ellul mais le chrétien devra se souvenir des paroles de l'écrivain Georges Bernanos: « Pour être prêt à espérer en ce qui ne trompe pas, il faut d'abord désespérer de tout ce qui trompe »<sup>225</sup>.

## The One in Which I Put All My Heart

Patrick Troude-Chastenet

Did Jacques Ellul have a preference among his great many books? Ellul answered this ritual question—one that is all too difficult for an author to decide—by saying that, in the final analysis, *L'espérance oubliée* was his favorite book: “It is the one in which I put all my heart.”<sup>226</sup> This confidence alone would justify reading this book, not only for readers of the theological register of his work but also for those who wish, either through lack of curiosity or for epistemological reasons, to confine themselves exclusively to the socio-political part.

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<sup>225</sup> Dans *La Raison d'être. Méditation sur l'Écclésiaste*, Ellul ne donne pas la source de la citation mais elle est extraite de *La liberté, pour quoi faire?*, Paris, Gallimard, 1953, p. 249.

<sup>226</sup> Jacques Ellul and Patrick Chastenet, *A contre-courant* (Paris: La Table Ronde, “La petite vermillon” series, 2014), 230; *Entretiens avec Jacques Ellul* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1994), 181; Jacques Ellul and Patrick Troude-Chastenet, *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology and Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 116.

One may of course deliberately choose to ignore either one or the other of the two registers—and even greatly benefit from it<sup>227</sup>—but then one is condemned to miss what is most important: not to grasp the heart of his message, to paraphrase Ellul himself. As we know, Ellul did not care a whit about academic boundaries.<sup>228</sup> He forces the social-science specialist to pretend to be a theologian and the theologian to become a historian, a jurist, a sociologist, a philosopher, and a political scientist. How do you overlook the four volumes of his *Ethique de la Liberte* or his meditation on Ecclesiastes, yet how can you fail to mention his trilogy on Technique, that on revolution, or again his key work on propaganda?

Jacques Ellul did finally admit that the two sides of his work were at once rigorously separate yet in mutual correspondence. This dialectic also happened to play out within each of the two registers but also between one register and the other. This dialectical thinking is also very much present in *L'esperance oubliee*, where the author makes no secret of his debt to Søren Kierkegaard (“I only write this with trembling and can only advance here with fear”<sup>229</sup>) and to Karl Barth (hell remains a “possible impossibility”).

If there is a central conviction in Ellul’s work, which incidentally would lead him in the mid-1960s to the principle of universal Salvation, it is that God is above all else Love. To be sure, God is also Justice, but if God is Love he cannot condemn a single one of his creatures without admitting by the same token that the sacrifice of his son Jesus on the cross would have been in vain. As Paul says, every man is saved in Christ. The Judgment does not mean condemnation. According to the case, God will keep from our lives only gold or marble or wood or straw. Hell does not exist. More precisely, it is used as a metaphor in the Bible; man already experiences it on earth and it always remains possible. Why? Because nothing is impossible to God because he is God, but at the same time the existence of hell is impossible since God is Love. Ellul agrees with Barth: “One has to be mad to teach universal Salvation, but one has to be impious not to believe in it.”<sup>230</sup>

Ellul radically distinguishes *espoir* from *esperance*. In customary French language, these two words often get used as synonyms.<sup>231</sup>

Espoir 1. The fact of hoping, of expecting something with confidence ^ esperance, esperer. 2. A feeling that leads one to hope ^ esperance. *Etreplein d'esperoir*: being full of hope.

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<sup>227</sup> See on different registers: Didier Nordon, *L'homme a lui-meme* (Paris: Editions du Felin, 1992) and Jean-Luc Porquet, *L'homme qui avait (presque) toutprevu* (Paris: Le Cherche-midi, 2003).

<sup>228</sup> Patrick Troude-Chastenet, ed., *Jacques Ellul, penseur sans frontieres* (Le Bouscat: L'Esprit du Temps, 2005).

<sup>229</sup> Jacques Ellul, *L'Esperance oubliee* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972; Paris: La Table Ronde, 2004), 77.

<sup>230</sup> Patrick Chastenet, *op. cit.*, 1994, 173; Jacques Ellul and Patrick Troude-Chastenet, *op. cit.*, 2005, 112.

<sup>231</sup> Petit Robert de la langue francaise, new edition, 2007, 928-929.



Esperance 1. A feeling that makes one make out as probable the realization of what one wishes ^ assurance, certitude, con fiance, conviction, croyance, espoir. 2. This feeling applied to a specific object ^ aspiration, desir, espoir.

But while the French language also includes the expression *esperances trom-peuses* in the sense of illusion, of a lure, for Ellul, it is only *espoir* that deceives. “Hope is the curse of man,”<sup>232</sup> he states. No less! Is it not hope that ended up allowing the Jewish genocide? “As long as there is life, there is hope,” says the old popular saying. Hope as *espoir* thus means that the worst can still be avoided, while, in Ellul’s terminology, hope as *esperance* comes in on the contrary when the worst is certain. *Espoir* is a passion for possible outcomes, while *esperance* is a passion for the impossible.

In what situation do we find ourselves today? On the one hand, we can take stock of the fact that the 20th century has been that of barbarism, of contempt for man, of the betrayal of all great ideals, of generalized disillusionment and suspicion. Technological society, that is, a society that places the search for efficiency in all areas as the only legitimate end, independently of any other consideration, leaves no room for hope as *esperance*. Now, we are in cruel need of that kind of hope in order to survive. On the other hand, we have entered the time of abandonment: a period in which God is silent and thus, paradoxically, a period well suited for *esperance*. Since modern man is convinced that he can fulfill all of his needs alone thanks to technique, God leaves him to face his destiny. Even if he is present in the life of some of us, he is absent from the history of our societies. There is nothing unusual about this predicament, by the way. As Ellul reminds us in an interview, we must not forget that, biblically,

God rarely intervenes over periods that last hundreds of years. Likewise, God rarely speaks. If you think that it begins in 1400 BC, and that there is what? What the Old Testament contains: seven or eight hundred pages. That does not amount to a lot—over 1400 years of words of God.<sup>233</sup>

This silence does not mean that God is rejecting us but that we are rejecting him. In this world full of noise and fury, God does not care to oppose his Word to men’s chatter.

This abandonment also concerns the Church, since, for a long time already, the Church is no longer the Church, gold has turned into lead, Christ’s word has turned into its opposite, as Ellul bemoans after Kierkegaard.<sup>234</sup> The Church conforms itself to the world, whereas the Christian must be the salt of the earth. The presence to the modern world that Ellul called for is radically different from sociological conformism. “Do not conform to the pattern of this world,”<sup>235</sup> asks Paul in the Letter to the Romans (12:2). Paul’s injunction is so recurrent in Ellul’s work that it can be said it is tantamount to a commandment for him, and it may be the wellspring of much of his anticonformism.

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<sup>232</sup> Jacques Ellul, *op. cit.*, 189.

<sup>233</sup> Patrick Chastenet, *op. cit.*, 1994, 165; Jacques Ellul and Patrick Troude-Chastenet, *op. cit.*, 2005, 114.

<sup>234</sup> Cf. Jacques Ellul, *La subversion du christianisme* (Paris: Seuil, 1984, La Table Ronde, 2001).

<sup>235</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Ethique de la liberte*, v. 2 (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1975), 85-111.

Despite the betrayal of the Church and the “subversion of Christianity,” Ellul is not resigned. He concurs with theologian Jurgen Moltmann in making of hope the heart of Christian life, but unlike the latter he does not believe that the promise is fulfilled with certainty.<sup>236</sup> Free grace—man saved by sheer grace, without any participation from works—might have given rise in Protestants to an absolute despair or else to total quietism. After Max Weber, Ellul has shown this was not the case.<sup>237</sup> For the apostle Paul’s “everything is permitted” does not justify “anything goes.” On the contrary, one has to act “as if.” As if God did not exist and everything depended on us.

Nevertheless, we should not mix things up here: salvation is not the result of virtue but its origin. Leading a virtuous life in order to be saved has no grounding in Scripture. And yet we find in it utterly contradictory commands: “You have been saved through faith.” And Paul adds,

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.<sup>238</sup>

According to Ellul, it is useless to try to reduce this contradiction at the very heart of the life of Jesus. If we are saved by grace, why work for our salvation, and vice versa? Jesus himself agreed to suffer and die, “as though” he was not the son of God. “No one is taking my life, it is I who give it.”

All of Christian ethics is thought through the dialectical relation between these two opposites: salvation by grace, and the works of life. Love, hope, freedom, and responsibility are inseparable. There is no other imperative than love in freedom. “Freedom is the ethical face of hope [ *I’esperance* ],”<sup>239</sup> wrote Ellul in the introduction to volume 1 of his *Ethique de la liberte*, in which he takes care to specify that he had begun to write these pages on hope in 1960, thus before the publication of Moltmann’s work. Hope is the foundation of his whole ethics of freedom. “Only a free man can hope.”<sup>240</sup> The Christian’s presence to the world forbids him to become frozen in the past—by the repetition of a moralizing attitude—and in the future, by the projection of an ideology to be realized. The Christian is free because he hopes. “Hope is man’s response to the silence of God.” Man becomes truly free only when he decides to hope and to impose his hope on God. It is a call to God against God. A struggle of man to compel God to break his silence and to keep his promises. Hope then sounds like an indictment of God in the name of the Word of God.

Luther answered the insoluble question of grace’s anteriority to repentance with his famous “always and at the same time sinner and just and penitent.” The Bible puts fear in dialectical relation to love and forgiveness. In the same way, we find in it a constant

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<sup>236</sup> Frederic Rognon, *Jacques Ellul, une pensee en dialogue* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2007), 103.

<sup>237</sup> Jacques Ellul, “Les sources chretiennes de la democratie. Protestantisme et Democratie.” In Jean-Louis Seurin, *La democratie pluraliste* (Paris: Economica, 1980), 86.

<sup>238</sup> Ephesians 2:8 and Philippians 2:12, New King James Bible.

<sup>239</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Ethique de la liberte*, v. 1 (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1973), 11.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

renewal of the promise and the fulfillment of the kingdom already among us and the kingdom to come at the end of time, in other words: of the “already” and the “not yet.” Jesus Christ is already lord of the world, but not yet, since he will be definitively at his parousia.

Through his essay, Ellul admits that one cannot *talk* about hope as *esperance*, but only live it. How do we define the paradoxical situation of the Christian within the modern world? Ellul’s position in the debate between two Personalist thinkers, the French Catholic Emmanuel Mounier (1905-1950), favoring a “tragic optimism,” and the Swiss Protestant Denis de Rougemont (1906-1985), favoring “active pessimism,” Ellul was to stay clear of both. Optimism and pessimism being human feelings, the only acceptable formulation for him was that of a “pessimism of hope,” that which makes it possible to think dialectically what Karl Barth calls the free determination of man in the free decision of God.

Natural man will always rightly find a strongly pessimistic tone in the writings of Jacques Ellul, but the Christian should recall the words of writer Georges Bernanos: “To be able to hope in what does not deceive, one should first despair of all that deceives.”<sup>241</sup>

## ***Political Illusion and Reality* edited by David W. Gill and David Lovekin**

Zachary Lloyd

Gill, David W., and David Lovekin, eds. *Political Illusion and Reality: Engaging the Prophetic Insights of Jacques Ellul*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2018, 316pp.

*Political Illusion and Reality* is a collection of 23 essays centered on Jacques Ellul’s political thought. As the title of the book indicates, it takes as its pivot Ellul’s 1965 *L’illusion politique*, first translated into English as *The Political Illusion* by Konrad Kellen in 1967. Although Ellul himself noted that his political work was rooted in particularly French concerns (French statecraft, institutions, and personalities), the essays gathered in *Political Illusion and Reality* concretely demonstrate his belief that his observations hold universal value and application. The essays in this collection

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<sup>241</sup> In *La Raison d’être. Meditation sur l’Ecclesiaste*, Ellul does not give the source of the quotation, but it is taken from *La liberté, pour quoi faire?* (Paris: Gallimard, 1953), 249. *Translator’s note*: Catholic novelist and polemicist Georges Bernanos (1888-1948) had come to the same conclusions about Technique and the threat it posed to the human spirit and meaningful freedom as Jacques Ellul; they quoted each other approvingly and apparently corresponded, being alone in raising this issue as paramount in post-war years of general enthusiasm for technological Progress, including among Christians. Thus, Mounier took explicit aim at Bernanos, with implicit allusions to Ellul and Charbonneau (defectors from the *Esprit* movement he had launched in 1932), in his posthumous critique of critics of Technique, *La Petite peur du XXe siècle* (translated as *Be Not Afraid: A Denunciation of Despair* [New York: Sheed and Ward], 1962).

are remarkably multiform in approach, splendidly various in style, and arise from an international community of scholars, activists, medical practitioners, and civil leaders. To lend the book overall coherence, the editors have helpfully organized the collection into three distinct (yet interrelated) sections: “Foundations,” “Applications,” and “Appropriations.” “Foundations” features essays exploring Ellul’s ideas in relation to his precursors and his contemporaries, intending to give us a fuller, more rounded understanding of his political analyses. This section also, importantly, presents us with Jacob Rollison’s translation (for the first time into English) of Ellul’s 1936 article “Fascism, Son of Liberalism.” Next, “Applications” offers us a diverse set of essays reflecting on how Ellul’s thought can inspire and guide specific political engagements. The authors of this section—activists and community organizers in the thick of things—concretely show us how Ellul’s dictum to “think globally, act locally” can be put into play in a variety of political contexts. Lastly, “Appropriations” attempts to situate Ellul’s sociopolitical analyses in

Lloyd, Zachary. Review of *Political Illusion and Reality*, ed. David W. Gill and David Lovekin. *Ellul Forum* 63 (Spring 2019): 39-41. © Zachary Lloyd, CC BY-NC-ND.

the landscape of the here-and-now and offers us some directives for how we might progress toward a more truthful, equitable, and sustainable future.

As a whole, *Political Illusion and Reality* can profitably be read under two main registers: 1) as a scholarly supplement to Ellul’s *The Political Illusion* (and to his other political writings, such as his chapter on “Technique and the State” in *The Technological Society*), and 2) as a modern advancement, critique, and application of his ideas. The book may also serve as a useful introduction to Ellul’s political thought for readers who are familiar with other aspects of his philosophy. As with his studies of law, social institutions, theology, and ethics, Ellul’s political analyses center on the ever-pervasive notion of *la technique*: basically, the totality of methods of and for achieving absolute efficiency in every field of human knowledge. Ellul’s overriding theme guiding his political thought is that the heightened technological character of modern life—including the newly formed methods of “social engineering” aimed at the individual, the bureaucratization of the community and the state, and the electrification of the means of communication—has made the control of events both by politicians and by the public completely illusory. The concept of efficiency—central to the technical mentality—drives politics, even as the political realm has become, arguably, less and less efficient. Efficiency, as the new moral good of political discourse, is increasingly sought after and yet rarely attained. The modern complexities of statecraft thus become a means for retaining the mere illusion, and not the reality, of political effectiveness. In the modern digital age especially, when efficiency becomes increasingly conceptually linked to a kind of instant gratification, political leaders find their authority displaced, if not subverted. Beholden to the immense power of images, politicians adapt: they become technicians of the image. Exceptionally skilled at seeing certain images as symbols, as signs of something else, they then give these symbols over to the populace to sate (or thwart) rising political passions. For Ellul, when everything becomes political in this

way, nothing is, simply because real politics no longer exists. Political illusion—which for Ellul is tantamount to idolatry—is a veil utterly shrouding all meaningful efforts to confront real human challenges and needs.

It is within this decidedly pessimistic context (not uncommon to Ellul’s sociological analyses) that the authors of *Political Illusion and Reality* are writing, and their own conclusions can often seem just as grim. The book itself, however, gives us cause for real optimism. As the product of a conference on Ellul’s political thought held in Berkeley, California, in 2016, *Political Illusion and Reality* is a testament to the ways in which Ellul’s thought can bring an international community together in hope and shared commitments. Beyond the book’s significant intellectual contributions, its call for awareness, community, and shared responsibility in the face of troubled political times is perhaps its most inspiring achievement.

## Our Battle for the Human Spirit

by Willem H. Vanderburg & Alastair Roberts

Vanderburg, Willem H. *Our Battle for the Human Spirit: Scientific Knowing, Technical Doing, and Daily Living*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016, 440pp.

The influence of Jacques Ellul is pronounced throughout this, the fifth in Willem Vanderburg’s series addressing the relationship between technique and culture. After undergoing something akin to an intellectual conversion experience as an engineer reading *The Technological Society*, Vanderburg travelled to France, where he studied under Ellul for four and a half years. Since that time, the influence of technique upon the formation of culture has been the focus of his research.

Within this book, which does not require familiarity with the preceding instalments in the series (he reprises their core arguments in his introduction), Vanderburg offers what he describes as “the most ambitious interdisciplinary synthesis” he has yet attempted. The result is a frequently brilliant and stimulating, if somewhat sprawling and repetitive, survey of the contemporary structuring of science, technology, economy, society, and personal life, the destructive impact that the rise of technique has had upon them, and prescriptions for their remedial “resymbolization.”

We face a crisis of knowing and doing, a crisis occasioned by the fragmentation of thought and life by a world of theoretical and practical technique into discrete and mutually alienated domains. In the realm of knowing, this is seen in myopically discipline-based thought. In the realm of doing, it is seen in the compartmentalization of technique, which abstracts domains of activity from the larger fabric of life, society, and the world and causes them to develop autonomously, utterly unmindful of their effects and externalities in a broader ecosystem. These approaches both contrast and unavoidably conflict with the interconnectedness of human life, society, and the biosphere, with their unconsidered externalities inflicting increasingly damaging re-

sults. Typical responses to the destructive impact of apotheosized technique are offered in “end-of-the-pipe” solutions, with little attention given to preventative approaches. Vanderburg considers how the design process could be reordered in terms of the irreducible integration of different realms of life, preserving it from its dysfunctional and often counterproductive operation in terms of narrowly discipline-based thought. In some of the most insightful parts of the book, Vanderburg discusses the historical metastasis of technique in its host societies since the Industrial Revolution, disordering an increasing number of systems and organs of society as its mediation replaced that formerly played by culture. Van-derburg demonstrates the explanatory power of the category of technique over various alternatives, which both fail to appreciate the deep essential commonalities shared by seemingly disparate or opposing economic, political, and social systems and lack the capacity either adequately to explain or conceptually to grapple with the mutations that have occurred in areas such as the economy over the last couple of hundred years.

Beyond its catastrophic toll upon the natural environment, as technique overwhelmed culture and desymbolized society, progressively reorganizing life in terms of non-life, social and individual existence have suffered profound alienation and dysfunction. This has precipitated the introduction and intensification of technique-based approaches to human populations, engineering social bonds where organic society has been eradicated, uniting society through the empty and alienating spectacles of mass media, inculcating compensatory “secular myths” to substitute for the loss of the symbolic world of culture and ensure greater conformity to technique, managing the symptoms of the dysfunction it causes through medication and other end-of-the-pipe solutions, and the development of technocratic states to perform the integrating role formerly exercised by culture.

Vanderburg argues for the necessity of resymbolization to wrestle with the reality of our new life-milieu of technique. The dominance of technique and its desymbolizing effects leave us incapable of perceiving, let alone effectively addressing, the underlying causes of the dysfunctions afflicting our biosphere, lives, and societies. While he believes that the window of opportunity for effective change is rapidly closing in many areas, he offers some [Book Reviews] hopeful suggestions for meaningful action.

With extensive editing, this could perhaps have been a better book at even half the length. Nevertheless, it is a worthy and timely development of El-lulian thought.

## **The Burnout Society by Byung-Chul Han**

David Lovekin

Han, Byung-Chul. *The Burnout Society*, translated by Erik Butler. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015, 68pp.

*The Burnout Society* is part of a new series (Stanford Briefs) published by Stanford University. This outing attempts a diagnosis of society's current ills with philosophy and the social sciences. Han maintains that society has moved from an immunological paradigm to a neurological one. Han identifies ills such as depression, attention-deficit disorder, and borderline-personality disorder as defining the current social order/disorder. He visits Martin Heidegger, Hannah Arendt, Walter Benjamin, Herman Melville, Roberto Esposito, Jean Baudrillard, Alain Ehrenberg, Michel Foucault, Merleau-Ponty, Gilles Deleuze, Giorgio Agamben, Richard Sennett, Peter Handke, Freud, Kafka, Aristotle, Kant, Nietzsche, and Hegel, and others, all in 60 pages. Han's abiding thesis is that a healthy self would need a good dose of Otherness, which makes self-knowledge possible. He tests his paradigm in a variety of texts that he presumes the reader already knows.

This modern malaise is due to an over-active ego, an ego replete in consumption. The self is compromised and captured in an abundance of information geared to survival concerns, like a feral animal without the relief of Otherness: activity for activity's sake (12-13). Disease from outside, immunological disease, is a form of Otherness that no longer characterizes the milieu of "excessive positivity," Baudrillard's notion of "viral violence" is modified as is Foucault's notion of external punishment, the gaze from outside. The outside moves inside. Neurological violence exhausts and saturates rather than deprives and alienates (7). This new violence is systemic with Otherness absorbed. Otherness keeps freedom alive and narcissism at bay: a self without the Other is not a stable self but a self-consuming self, a self-become Other (39). I know what I am by knowing what I am not, as Sartre would say.

Lovekin, David. Review of *The Burnout Society*, by Byung-Chul Han. *Ellul Forum* 63 (Spring 2019): 47-53. © David Lovekin, CC BY-NC-ND.

"Should" is replaced by "can," enlarging Foucault's critique of disciplinarity. A paradigm of "discipline" is subsumed in a paradigm of "achievement." As Alain Ehrenberg states, "The depressed individual is unable to measure up; he is tired of having to become himself" (9). Individuals become "entrepreneurs of themselves" but without senses of self, without the Other. Freedom is of much concern, ironically, as it fades with achievement as an absolute. Nothing is impossible presumes that nothing is possible (22). Multi-tasking is symptomatic of the self of consumption, absorbed in everything and nothing, a scattered self. Walter Benjamin in his reveries for a deep boredom where, "a dream bird . . . hatches the egg of experience" is unavailable to such a self. The Benjaminian *flaneur*, I would add, is placed on the treadmill and not allowed to dance or to dally and to transcend the achievement principle of linear walking (14).

Han considers Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* and the distinction between a *vita contemplativa* and a *vita activa*. The ancient Greeks gave priority to the former, to the degradation of the latter, which they regarded as sheer restlessness. Arendt wants to find value in an active life, in the possibility of heroic creativity (16-17). Han states:

According to Arendt, modern society—as a society of “laboring” [arbeitsgesellschaft]—nullifies any possibility for action when it degrades the human being into an animal laborans, a beast of burden. Action, she maintains, occasions new possibilities, yet modern humanity passively stands at the mercy of the anonymous process of living. (17)

Han disagrees. The modern ego is far from passive but is “just short of bursting” (18). There is no loss of individuality and no signs of animality, lacking Otherness noted above. And then: “Life has never been as fleeting as it is today The late modern ego stands utterly alone” in a world lacking narrative and plot, bare being (18). There is no freedom when there are no constraints: for example, in the Master/Slave relation neither the master nor the slave is free, dominated by “hysterical work” and hyperactivity (19). Nietzsche wanted to revive a *vita contemplativa* that addressed the calm, the compelling, in a deep attention, which is anything but passive. By contrast, machines operate unthinkingly; they cannot pause or digress: “the computer is stupid insofar as it lacks the ability to delay” (22). We lose the capacity of rage, Han states, that involves the ability to put all into question. Gone is the state of “not-to” found in Zen meditation, the art of letting things go. Han examines Melville’s *Bartleby* and his mantra “I would prefer not to,” which is not the negative potency of the Zen practitioner or an attempt to delay (25). It is the apathy that dooms *Bartleby*, a blank gaze at a “dead brick wall” (26). *Bartleby* is exhausted and not transformed as Agamben claims; *Bartleby* has not achieved a high metaphysical potency. Han concludes: “*Bartleby*’s *Dasein* is a negative being-unto-death” (28).

Modernity is not afflicted by negativity but by an excess of positivity, a tiredness born of excessive achievement that brings nothing. This is not the tiredness that may lead to community, to a Sabbath where we could enjoy time off, to a true rest. This is an “I-tiredness” that does not invoke “we-tiredness,” as Handke notes (31-34). This tiredness admits the Other in response, in letting go. The tired, exhausted self shrinks while seeming to expand, but only in achievement, which is without matter or measure. Han considers the Prometheus myth, that hero who stole tools and fire for human betterment but who then suffers from an eagle consuming his liver, which grows back endlessly. As Kafka had it: “The gods grew weary, the eagles grew weary, the wound closed wearily” (35). Han suggests ambiguity: perhaps the pain—the liver—is the self-exploitation of the alter ego, waging a war on itself. Or, perhaps it is as Kafka suggested, a healing tiredness open to community and a way from self-absorption (35-36).

Opening to Freud, the achievement ego is different from the disciplinarity of a divided self: id, ego, and super ego, out of which character is formed in resistance to alterity. The modern person is without character. This ego is not Kant’s moral conscience (40-42). A sense of closure or judgment does not manifest in an endless anxiety of “can” without “should.” This person without qualities does not mourn, does not suffer melancholy, in the absence of a sense of loss, which Han finds unexamined in Ehrenberg. Ag-amben, as well, does not grasp the complete lack of Otherness in attempts to locate the modern self as a *homo sacer*, an outsider who can be punished



and sacrificed in the face of some sovereignty. Such alterity, Han concludes, does not feature in a burnout society. The modern selves cannot be killed:

“Their life equals that of the undead. They are too alive to die, and too dead to live” (51).

This examination, a kind of drive-by philosophy, is exhausting. The read-er—at least this one—seeks a pause beyond the rush of concepts. We need a place to stand, a story or a narrative. If we are readers of Ellul, who is not mentioned, we could claim that Otherness is co-opted by technology that has replaced the natural and cultural worlds with technical phenomena that technical consciousness has constructed but which are taken for reality and not known as constructions. We give the illness a name. The consciousness of technique does not know itself and is lost in its own objectifications; it cannot symbolize itself without objectivity: it is a bad infinity having neither goal nor purpose beyond itself. For this reason, social networks crumble as a sense of reality (the Other and Others) needed for political action dissipates along with the nonrenewable natural resources (Others) upon which life depends.

We could revisit Arendt’s examination of the human dimensions of labor, work, and action as they played between an active and contemplative life for a sense of place and narrative.<sup>242</sup> The contemplative life was privileged in the ancient Greek world as thinking pursued eternal truths typically unavailable to the hurly-burly of public life. Socrates and Aristotle stood apart from the crowd. Labor in this world occupied the space of the home. “Labor” is the watchword, signifying a circularity moving between death and creation. Women greatly defined this space. Work took place in the world outside the home, typically taken up by men reaching for a measure of im-mortality—for something that would last. Language enabled the transition and interplay between the public space and private space in opening to action, to the unknown, the unforeseen, and the unpredictable. The philosophical stance was problematic. Socrates is the city’s victim in the crime of being Other.

In the modern age, private space and the public space are transformed into “social space,” losing the character of each. The work place and the home place combine. Words and deeds are silenced or rendered anonymously in some officialese or *am sprache*. Workers and laborers become functionaries in the march of science and technology that dictate our expressions, goals, and projects. Bodily life, central to ancient labor, is transformed. Tools and devices carry the day. Arendt finds that labor will hold sway in the modern age when it is no longer possible to do or to say great things in public, when thinking becomes calculation and statistical analysis, as Han notes, but without seeming to appreciate the transformed sense of labor she has in mind. Activity becomes passive when it becomes meaningless; individuals lose individuality when action and space no longer help to locate them as individuals, when the otherness that requires speech and narrative is hobbled to the sound bite and tweet. She writes:

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<sup>242</sup> To date, I would suggest Margaret Canovan’s, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992) as one of the best overarching studies of

It is a society of laborers which is about to be liberated from the fetters of labor, and this society does no longer know of those other higher and more meaningful activities for the sake of which this freedom would deserve to be won. Within this society, which is egalitarian because this is labor's way of making men live together, there is no class left, no aristocracy of either a political or spiritual nature from which a restoration of the other capacities of man could start anew. Even presidents and kings, and prime ministers think of their offices in terms of a job necessary for the life of society, and among the intellectuals, only solitary individuals are left who consider what they are doing in terms of work and not in terms of making a living. What we are confronted with is the prospect of a society of laborers without labor, that is without the only activity left to them. Surely, nothing could be worse.<sup>243</sup>

Arendt does not advocate an impossible return to tradition that ignores the problems and inequities in those traditions. She wants to observe and understand those traditions that made our present possible. The realm of *homo faber*, man the maker, gained force and presence in the realm of action, losing the onus placed on it by contemplation and thought, which came to doubt itself. Cartesian doubt led to a question of whether nature could be known with certainty because God had made nature. Giambattista Vico, in his *De antiquissima Italorum sapientia (On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians)*, 1710), made this issue a principle: *Verum esse ipsum factum*.<sup>244</sup> The true is the made. Vico concluded, Arendt noted, that if the mind can best know what it has made, then the natural sciences had to give value to the human sciences, notably geometry and history. Vico thought that this would lead to a study of moral and political sciences. Instead, human making flourished establishing pride of place, or a place in pride. The true, then, was that which appeared in the force of human hands and later in technique, hands that became very busy.

Taking up Arendt's spirit, we move to *The New Science of Giambattista Vico* (1744) where Vico stated that the first making was poetic making.<sup>245</sup> Vico did not make this up, just as the *verum/factum* principle was not made up. Vico discovered it in the literatures of the ancients. The first word—*pape*— was uttered from the fear and wonder of ancient people (Vico called them *giganti*, giants) as they faced a thundering and lightning-filled sky (448). This event, Vico claimed, caused some of humanity to turn, to run, and to hide in caves, while others—the most robust—stood to face this Other and uttered the first word in response: a contemplation in wonder that founded

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her thought.

<sup>243</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 5.

<sup>244</sup> Giambattista Vico, *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians Unearthed from the Origins of the Latin Language*, trans. L. M. Palmer (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 46. Vico's insight in this work is noted by Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition*, 298. See also her references to Vico at 232 and 283n.

<sup>245</sup> Giambattista Vico, *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984).

meaningful human action.<sup>246</sup> This discovery and action took place in the face and sound of Otherness. Human culture and language began with this epiphany. *Fantasia*, or imagination, was the prime mover with this originating metaphor. As culture advances, or devolves, language takes a turn.<sup>247</sup> Metaphors became concepts, concepts became objects, and humanity becomes dissolute. Han would say: burned out. Vico said: “Men first feel necessity, then look for utility, next attend to comfort, still later amuse themselves with pleasure, thence grow mad and waste their substance.”<sup>248</sup> Han’s text is an invitation to others’ writings. This is its great value. It is good when books talk to each other, when the voices of Otherness hold forth. Han provides us with unexpected connections and conclusions, and we should welcome them, but we should also take time to pause, open to *fantasia*, to consider Vico’s new/old science, and to let the dream bird come out.

## About the Contributors

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<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 377.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, pars. 400-411.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 241.

*Jacques-Ellul*, and member of the board of directors of the International Jacques Ellul Society.

## About the International Jacques Ellul Society

The International Jacques Ellul Society, founded in 2000 by former students of Ellul, links scholars, students, and others who share an interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), longtime professor at the University of Bordeaux. Along with promoting new publications related to Ellul and producing the *Ellul Forum*, the Society sponsors a biennial conference. IJES is the anglophone sister society of the francophone Association internationale Jacques Ellul.

The objectives of IJES are threefold:

**Preserving a Heritage.** The Society seeks to preserve and disseminate Ellul's literary and intellectual heritage through republication, translation, and secondary writings.

**Extending a Critique.** Ellul is best known for his penetrating critique of *la technique*, of the character and impact of technology on our world. The Society seeks to extend his social critique particularly concerning technology.

**Researching a Hope.** Ellul was not only a social critic but also a theologian and activist in church and community. The Society seeks to extend his theological, biblical, and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

IJES is a nonprofit organization, fully reliant on membership fees and donations from supporters worldwide. For more information or to become a member, please visit [ellul.org](http://ellul.org).

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# The **Ellul Forum**

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## About

Jacques Ellul (1912-94) was a French thinker and writer in many fields: communication, ethics, law and political science, sociology, technology, and biblical and theological studies, among others. The aim of the *Ellul Forum* is to promote awareness and understanding of Ellul's life and work and to encourage a community of dialogue on these subjects. The *Forum* publishes content by and about Jacques Ellul and about themes relevant to his work, from historical, contemporary, or creative perspectives. Content is published in English and French.

## Subscriptions

The *Forum* is published twice a year. Annual subscriptions are \$40 usd for individuals/ households and \$80 usd for institutions. Individual subscriptions include mem-

bership in the International Jacques Ellul Society, and individual subscribers receive regular communications from the Society, discounts on IJES conference fees, and other benefits. To subscribe, please visit [www.ellul.org](http://www.ellul.org).

### **Submissions**

The *Forum* encourages submissions from scholars, students, and general readers. Submissions must demonstrate a degree of familiarity with Ellul's thought and must engage with it in a critical way. Submissions may be sent to [toellulforum@gmail.com](mailto:toellulforum@gmail.com).

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## **Editor's Letter**

This issue of the *Forum* serves as a foretaste of our upcoming conference, to be held in July 2020 at the University of Strasbourg, France, on the theme of "Ellul and Charbonneau on Ethics in an Age of Ecological and Technological Change." As many readers of the *Forum* will know, Bernard Charbonneau and Jacques Ellul were lifelong friends whose works focused on similar concerns and who complemented each other's investigations. The conference is being sponsored jointly by IJES and our francophone sister



society, the Association Internationale Jacques Ellul. If you have so far been undecided about attending, we hope that this *Forum* issue will tip you in the right direction. Registration is now open: to register, please visit <https://ellul2020conference.weebly.com> or follow the links on the IJES website at [www.ellul.org](http://www.ellul.org).

The *Forum* always welcomes your submissions and suggestions. Please write to us at [ellulforum@gmail.com](mailto:ellulforum@gmail.com).

"Editor's Letter." *Ellul Forum* 64 (Fall 2019): 3.

## Nature and Scripture in Bernard Charbonneau's *The Green Light*

Christian Roy

Having translated Jacques Ellul's posthumous book on *Theology and Technique* for Wipf and Stock, I was struck by the way that it makes explicit the intertwining of these two strands of his lifelong investigation: Christian faith and the sociology of the modern world, carried out in the parallel series of books devoted to their respective ramifications, that here come together at last. A crucial issue on which that convergence comes to bear is that of "Limits," to which an important chapter is devoted. It deals among other things with the thesis, fashionable since Lynn White's famous 1967 article about "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,"<sup>249</sup> that locates these in biblical religion's "departure from the origin where there were limits to man's enterprise over nature," when, "surrounded by a sacred universe, man knew himself to be limited in his enterprises. He might have techniques, but he could not use them just anywhere nor anyhow." The Promethean hubris of the "unlimited remained a virtuality, but prohibitions remained more powerful."

And so it comes about that Christianity intervenes in this equilibrium, by desacralizing the world, deritualizing religion and negating magic. It brings things down to being only things, it refuses the limits of a sacred that it manifests as imaginary, it kills the gods of the forest, the earth and the waters, and as a result puts all things at the disposal of man who can, from now on, use "nature" as he sees fit, without limits imposed from the outside. Why should one respect what is now no more than matter?

And we must here pay heed to B. Charbonneau's call-out: by spiritualizing God too much, by making him radically heavenly and Transcendent, man was necessarily pushed away toward Matter, his action was materialized, man's material instinct was liberated. [...]

Christianity has separated what the ancient world, and the traditional world, had carefully joined, balanced. From that moment on, man may seek the most efficient means and use everything without limits and without shame. The unlimited is inherent

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<sup>249</sup> Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis." *Science* n.s. 155.3767 (March 10, 1967): 1203-07.

to Christianity itself, perhaps not the Christianity of theologians, but Christianity as experienced by the masses of the faithful, and producing effects that were not so much spiritual (having to do with holiness), but concretely historical ones.<sup>250</sup>

## **Carl Amery's Ecological Challenge to Christianity: Contrasting Responses of Ellul and Charbonneau**

Ellul seems to be referring here, perhaps from an early draft, to the chapter on “Nature and Christianity” of Bernard Charbonneau’s 1980 book *Le Feu vert. Auto-critique du mouvement écologique* (my English translation of which was published by Bloomsbury in 2018 as *The Green Light: A Self-Critique of the Ecological Movement*), as well as to Bavarian writer and environmentalist Carl Amery’s 1972 book *Das Ende der Vorsehung. Die gnadenlosen Folgen des Christentums* (i.e., *The End of Providence: The Merciless Consequences of Christianity*). Both Ellul and Charbonneau engage at length with the latter’s 1976 French translation as *La Fin de la Providence*, albeit with different emphases. Charbonneau is much more positive about this critique, whereas Ellul remains rather defensive and apologetic. This is what enables Ellul’s just-cited mention of Charbonneau’s challenge to Christians to seamlessly segue into an implicit account of what sounds more like Amery’s own positions about Christianity’s ambiguous “success” in a disenchanted world of its own making.

Ellul feels the challenge of Amery’s book so keenly that he devotes to it a whole “Annex to the Fifth Chapter” on “Ethical Mediation.” On the one hand, he locates it as part of the trend that traces to Christianity as such “all the evil of modern Western society.” “Christianity set out on a quest for the final Kingdom and only ends up in a general conquest of the world,” in the guise “of technical expansion, of ‘planetary revolution.’”<sup>251</sup> That hardly seems controversial to the world historian that I sometimes purport to be, at least if we are talking about a specifically Western Christianity where, under Charlemagne for the first time, the “mechanical arts” came to be theologically valued as instrumental in the gradual restoration of the full power over Creation that Adam had enjoyed before the Fall and that made him the image of God on earth. This conflation of the divine image with human power over the world as a totality fuelled the technological revolutions that spread from monasteries to fields and thence from cities to the State, with a Church mandate to gather the ends of the earth as one for the end times of a historicized millennial Kingdom. Far from being the result of the intrusion of non-Christian impulses soon after the Reformation, as Ellul insists, the Western drive to cosmic mastery was always intimately linked to this eschatological pattern, from the Scientific Revolution effected by millenarian evangelical Christians who sought the mind of God in the laws of nature, to the Positivists who took them as scripture of a

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<sup>250</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Theologie et Technique. Pour une éthique de la non-puissance*, ed. Yves Ellul and Frederic Rognon (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2014): 181-82.

<sup>251</sup> Ellul, *Theologie et Technique*, 299.

new religion of industry, and beyond to the current transhumanist endeavor to remake reality as the new creation of omnipotent “spiritual machines” (Howard Rheingold).<sup>252</sup> Whether this really existing historical and cultural Christianity is true to the essence of the faith is of course a different matter, and as a Christian whose loyalty is to the Gospel rather than to Christendom, Ellul is quite ready to take a stand against the latter’s dubious holdovers alongside non-Christian critics of technological society, such as Charbonneau and Amery. Ellul’s other problem with the latter however is that “what he puts forward as an ethic, to which I readily subscribe, has no chance of being born for lack of a positive motivation” for “post-Christian man who lives without hope, in anguish, in the shadow of death. What could be the use of driving him deeper, of telling him no one will come to his help?” He views *The End of Providence* as “actually just an iteration of Death of God Theology.”

Man must be persuaded that nobody is going to come to his help, that the God on whom he was relying is absent, and that he must manage on his own with the problems he has raised. [...] Now, I say that without hope and without the certainty of a Transcendence, the situation in which we are can only lead to suicide. Amery, with his book, seems to me to hasten the temptation of collective suicide.<sup>253</sup>

Charbonneau has a very different, even sympathetic, assessment of this very stance of Amery’s that troubles Ellul so much. In keeping with their common early calls for “an ascetic City so that man may live,”<sup>254</sup> Charbonneau holds that “faith alone will be able to impose the asceticism” required to recognize the material limits of embodied life in all areas. “We may say with Carl Amery that, since the sacrifices needed to save the earth and man ‘can hardly find justifications in our immediate interests, the call to a religious renewal seems well-founded.’”<sup>255</sup> And Charbonneau proceeds to quote at length as its ground the same passage that seemed so dispiriting to Ellul, as though his friend could not entertain the hypothetical bracketing of reliance on a divine breakthrough awaiting us ahead in time to save us. But Ellul appears to misunderstand this as an *a priori* exclusion of that possibility, when it may be a precondition for it in Charbonneau’s reading of Amery, who, invoking Job’s “lived experience of human and earthly finitude,” writes that “we have to treat the future itself ‘as though’ it could and should be defined in purely human ways,” in order to be responsible for our actions.

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<sup>252</sup> See David F. Noble, *The Religion of Technology: The Divinity of Man and the Spirit of Invention* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1999). I am indebted to this book in my own account of “Space, Time, and the Christian Matrix of Faustian Man,” a paper given at the conference “100 Years after the Publication of *The Decline of the West*: Oswald Spengler in an Age of Globalisation,” October 17-18, 2018, Blankenheimerdorf and Brussels. <https://youtu.be/H7O9JUcBRvQ>. Downloadable (pending publication of the proceedings) at [www.academia.edu/39267384](http://www.academia.edu/39267384).

<sup>253</sup> Ellul, *Theologie et Technique*, 306.

<sup>254</sup> This is the title of the last section of their 83 “Directives pour un manifeste per-sonnaliste” (1935). See Bernard Charbonneau and Jacques Ellul, *Nous sommes des revolutionnaires malgre nous. Textespiionniers de l’ecologiepolitique* (Paris: Seuil, 2014), 80.

<sup>255</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *The Green Light: A Self-Critique of the Ecological Movement*, trans. Christian Roy (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 74.

And we must not allow any agency, be it divine or human, to leave half-open the least way out, to count on any miraculous intervention whatsoever, to spare us the sufferings we have laid in store and inflicted upon ourselves with our own hands. We must, to speak in theological language, tend towards this final kenosis, this ultimate self-emptying: the renunciation of any guaranteed future. It is only by losing it that we will win it. [...] We have entered a new phase of divine unfathomability.<sup>256</sup>

This could well be read as an illustration of Ellul's crucial contrast of *espoir* and *esperance*: the former has to be lost or renounced for the latter to come into play as an opening to unforeseeable possibilities, with no certainty to fall back on, only *faith*.<sup>257</sup> And this is precisely the point that Charbonneau makes, arguably more Ellulian than Ellul himself here, in support of Amery's insistence on "lowering the growth rate to restore equilibrium," which he sees as a road without end that begins at our own feet, no matter one's situation or the timescale involved, regardless of the odds of success as we take one small step after another.

Despite a glaring emergency, it is only very gradually that it will be possible to perform such an about turn, after many conflicts and compromises with large interests and the public's habits (let us only think of the car), with mythologies, such as ideological and nationalist passions. To take on such an adversary with our eyes open, hope is but a feeble help; it will take faith in the meaning and necessity of that enterprise. But the choice is between the latter and nothing-ness.<sup>258</sup>

Charbonneau's words, written forty years ago, neatly capture the predicament we can no longer evade today and the kind of spiritual resolve required to face it. This is what he likes to call a post-Christian situation, assuming a Christian problematic of incarnation, yet independent of continued belief in the objects of faith. In line with Amery's kenotic approach to eschatology, Charbonneau feels that, not speaking as one himself, "a Christian can answer such a challenge only by effecting a Copernican reversal at the level of religion itself; if it puts Christian faith in question, it does seem true to its general direction though."

The current crisis finds us fundamentally involved in the earth which we had purported to escape. And it is no longer from the heavens or from nature or from History that rescue will come, but from the—paradoxically spiritual—experience of an Earth where man forever more makes a decision against entropy, death and necessity in a struggle that may be crazy, but that is the only meaningful one. Only the freedom that is its conscience will be able to save us: this time in the sense in which we say that we save ourselves from drowning. But it is written somewhere that the spirit became incarnate in a body.<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 75.

<sup>257</sup> See Jacques Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment* (New York: Seabury, 1977).

<sup>258</sup> Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 185-86.

<sup>259</sup> Amery as quoted in Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 75-76.

## Charbonneau's Ambivalent Reading of Christian Scripture

This last sentence, shorn of its dogmatic content, is at the core of Charbonneau's existential thought as it directly translates into ecological commitment. This is the foundational insight he takes from Christianity and remains ever faithful to, and in light of which he assesses the way it has translated in this religious tradition that has much to answer for in terms of its historical and environmental impact but to which he remains indebted for his moral compass. I will not attempt here to give a panorama of Bernard Charbonneau's thinking on Nature and Christianity, a topic that exercised this reverent agnostic all his life, largely in uneasy but mutually fruitful dialogue with the staunch, if critical, Christian Jacques Ellul. An admirable paper along these lines has already been given by Frederic Rognon at the Bernard Charbonneau conference in Pau in 2011, which I urge readers of French to download from the online proceedings.<sup>260</sup> But in keeping with the IJES conference theme, I will confine myself in the rest of this paper to skimming Charbonneau's close reading of the Bible over the first half of the "Nature and Christianity" chapter of *The Green Light*, this being his most sustained published engagement with Christian Scripture itself as a focus, rather than Christian civilization in general, in order to tease out the dynamics and paradoxes of the denial of limits that has largely driven the latter.

From the outset, Charbonneau draws from the Creation story a rebuttal of its simplistic anti-environmental interpretation by non-Christians (and even by some Christians, such as those supporting the Trump administration), since "man received as his property the earth that Providence created for him. But nowhere does it say that he has the right to destroy God's handiwork. This sovereignty given to man has another, even more basic reason. If God gives it to him, it is because God created him in his image: sovereignty over nature belongs to the very being of the God of Jews and Christians," since, unlike "Greek or Oriental 'pagans,'" who divinized nature, "the personal and transcendent God distinguishes himself from it."<sup>261</sup> Likewise, "the Old Testament reminds man that he was drawn from the silt of the earth," and to that extent stands over against it as a distinct and autonomous *human* being, i.e., one that comes from the ground (*humus*) but is not reducible to it, though he returns to it in his fallen historical state.

The sovereignty he has been granted is not absolute like that of his creator, it is bounded by Adam's finitude, and due to sin, his work is never purely good. If, instead of being the vague sense of a general and abstract evil, the awareness of sin and evil

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<sup>260</sup> Frederic Rognon, "Bernard Charbonneau et la critique des racines chretiennes de la Grande Mue." In Alain Cazenave-Parriot, ed., *Bernard Charbonneau: habiter la terre. Actes du Colloque du 2-4 mai 2011, Universite de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour*. DVD accompanied by a booklet, Universite de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour, 2011, 108-116. <https://lagrandemue.wordpress.com/>

<sup>261</sup> Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 66.

was that of our own limits and of human weakness, it could be the wellspring of a more realistic view of nature, and warier of man and his works.<sup>262</sup>

But the exile from Eden into a nature now fallen along with man and turned into “a jungle ruled by the survival of the fittest”<sup>263</sup> instead launches its former lord on a path of precarious mastery, where he constantly feels the need to defend and consolidate the limits of his uneasy comfort zones. It is thus “the divine curse that condemns him to build the city”<sup>264</sup>—the foundational act of civilization as one of disobedience to God for which Ellul blames man in his theology of the city based on the biblical stories of Cain and Babel.<sup>265</sup> But Charbonneau seems to be suggesting that man’s own creation of a social and technological microcosm shielding him from the elements with artificial barriers to unmediated reliance on unpredictable, hostile nature, rather than a declaration of independence from divine Providence as Ellul sees it, was an inevitable and therefore legitimate response to the new conditions into which God allows man to find a footing in his exile.

Condemned to till the earth, he is less and less in magical communion with things, brought to mere utility by a will to power that reduces them to dust as soon as he lays hold of them. An ambivalent curse since it was imposed by God, work is both a duty and a blessing that happens to come along with the promise of deliverance from it.<sup>266</sup>

But according to Charbonneau, a perverse interpretation of this “curse-blessing” afflicts many one-sided readers of the Bible, such as the Puritans, who “had a religion of work that they transmitted to capitalist societies”:

As long as we are going to bear suffering and inflict it upon ourselves, we might as well derive delight from it, either by enjoying other people’s suffering out of sadism or our own suffering out of masochism: a specifically human and Christian vice, doubtless unknown in nature. But look at all these new pleasures!<sup>267</sup>

The this-worldly asceticism of the Protestant work ethic was so successful in its unintended consequence of producing an embarrassment of riches<sup>268</sup> that, transfigured by Fordism’s use of mass purchasing power to drive the industrial economy, the guilty pleasures of consumption eventually became hallowed as an unmixed blessing and sign of election in the new dispensation of a consumer society driven by an endless stream of new technological distractions, proof of the bounties of a secular providence that hardly needs explicit religious validation by a prosperity gospel. “For, always for good

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<sup>262</sup> Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 70.

<sup>263</sup> Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 67.

<sup>264</sup> Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 70.

<sup>265</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, trans. Dennis Pardee (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011).

<sup>266</sup> Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 67.

<sup>267</sup> Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 67.

<sup>268</sup> See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism and Other Writings*, ed. and trans. Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells (London: Penguin, 2002).

or ill, the old man lives on in the new: the pagan in the Christian,”<sup>269</sup> just as Christian patterns live on in the ostensibly heathen hedonism of a post-Christian civilization.

”But it would be a mistake to reduce the Old and even the New Testament to a progressive ideology,” Charbonneau insists, for “there is hardly a chapter without its own retort”:

At the same time as the condemnation of nature, we find in the Bible its glorification. It is everywhere in the Old Testament, rooted (or mired), far more than the New, in its soil and its people: in the Promised Land that is not in Heaven but smack in the middle of a geographic and historical crossroads.<sup>270</sup>

Still, “the Heavenly Jerusalem is not of this world, and things go awry every time man attempts to build it on earth. [...] And the *Psalms* and the *Prophets* constantly renew the condemnation of any human work that wants to equal that of God.”

Although the New Testament continues the spiritualist and univer-salist tradition of the prophets, it remains nonetheless rooted in a Galilean countryside peopled by shepherds, agriculturalists and fishermen, where nature is omnipresent.<sup>271</sup>

In the guise of the birds and the lilies of the fields, “far from being cursed, nature is held up as an example to men, with their anxiety and greed for power and money.”

But the glorification of nature in the New Testament is not exactly that of the Old. It is no longer its power that is praised, but its humble beauty and its carefreeness. What is put into question by the Gospel and the prophets, more than nature, is the social power that does it violence, as it does to men. It is war, money, the Law.<sup>272</sup>

Oblivious to this serious business of human affairs, Christ thus lives “like an anarchist who ignores the economy and politics, without which men would have little power over nature. If Christians had strictly followed the Gospel’s teaching, their power would hardly have gone beyond that of a tribe of gypsies or Indians” and there would have never been such thing as Christian civilization to upset the old ways of all human societies throughout the world, leading it at once to unity and to the brink of collapse. Just as biblical transcendence tends to “bring upheaval to the earth in the attempt to realize an impossible ideal,” “Gospel anarchism is condemned to subvert a society that can only realize the conditions of freedom by translating them into laws and sanctions,” a process known as civilization. “But if the old law is abolished, it is in favour of another one that belongs to personal conscience and love,” as a new way of approaching not only the neighbor as irreplaceable person, regardless of social function or context, but also a nature now stripped of the power once wielded by its divinized features and likewise given over to human care and respect in its vulnerable if daunting otherness.

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<sup>269</sup> Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 68.

<sup>270</sup> Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 69.

<sup>271</sup> Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 70.

<sup>272</sup> Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 70.

If Christ finishes the process of disembodiment of the spirit, he re-em-bodies it on the other hand as no other religion has done, in a Godman who, through his body, lives, experiences death throes and then expires on a cross in his time and place.<sup>273</sup>

## Disentangling Christianity and Progress

The kind of behavior that led Jesus to this divine consecration of human life is inseparable from his corporeal assumption of its mortal limits, so that incarnation refers not just to Christ's theological status or his sacramental incorporation of elements of the world but to the consistent translation of ethical principles into action within these limits: "hearing these words and putting them into practice." This demand now has to go deeper than ritual observance and socially sanctioned propriety, since

no law determines how that is supposed to happen, it is up to freedom to do it. When that happens, nothing is negligible anymore: neither earth nor history; at every moment, a game is being played out in which the stakes are personal and universal salvation.<sup>274</sup>

It will no longer do to view this salvation in mostly otherworldly terms, however, now that "a secularized, rogue Christianity is at work throughout the human species,"<sup>275</sup> exposing it along with most other species to the Sixth Great Extinction in which this spiritual tradition was instrumental, like it or not. For "Progress, the continual development of science and technique, is inseparable from evangelical Christian faith; without it, it would have lacked an engine, nothing would have driven humans, until then steeped in the sacred, to break with the gods, except for the God-Man"<sup>276</sup> who brought a new heaven and a new earth within their reach. This alone could eventually turn the given earth and sky into mere springboards or fuel reserves for the historical journey to a better world as *telos* of all thought and activity. "But if the old chains binding man to the earth and man to man held on their own, the new link can only be tied freely by every man, at the risk of losing himself."<sup>277</sup>

This is why Charbonneau welcomes Carl Amery's call for an end to Providence as the assumption of a divinely ordained happy end to the human adventure on this planet. He agrees that people have to be disenchanted of this sacred history of salvation that remains in the guise of Progress in the wake of the disenchantment of all other forms of the sacred it has enabled. It is a personal leap of faith in meaningful life without ultimate guarantee that Charbonneau demands of every human, no matter his or her beliefs or lack thereof, to defy the hopeless odds of steering mankind on the narrow path to meaningful collective survival. Where Ellul takes Amery to task for leaving out the transcendent hope that he deems indispensable to keep the future

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<sup>273</sup> Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 71.

<sup>274</sup> Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 71.

<sup>275</sup> Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 72.

<sup>276</sup> Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 72.

<sup>277</sup> Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 72.



open, Charbonneau finds support in this thinker for both the spiritual and practical value of entertaining as he always has the uncomfortable question of the “only thing we can hold against pure Christianity” of the kind his friend is a reliable witness to: “Is not the challenge it puts to the hominid mammal, that of a new Law embodied in an individual freedom, too far beyond its capacities?”<sup>278</sup>

This question is not a rhetorical one to this agnostic. Yet even in the worstcase scenario of irredeemable environmental doom, Charbonneau maintains that there is no way back to conditions prior to biblical revelation and its possibly fatal world-historical consequences: “the old order is crumbling, and we do not have any other way” beyond the dead end of Progress than that Way of personal freedom opened by the embodied Word as revealed in Christian Scripture—for better or for worse. “If it happens that man is not up to the challenge of his own destiny, then that will have been the mistake of his Creator, whether God or nature.”<sup>279</sup>

## Jacques Ellul and Exodus: A Summary and Review

G. P. Wagenfuhr

This paper summarizes and reviews the place of exodus<sup>280</sup> in the corpus of Jacques Ellul. I argue that Ellul rightly understands the centrality of exodus and God as liberator in the Bible, but that he is bound to a perspective that prevents him from explaining in satisfactory detail what exodus is for. That is, every liberation is from a bondage to a goal. Ellul regularly underemphasizes the place of the people of God, the mission of that people, and the connection of the exodus with the Kingdom of God. Nevertheless, his understanding of the centrality of exodus in the Bible makes him a prescient thinker whose theology of freedom remains well worth continued study.

### Ellul on Exodus

The theme of exodus occupies an important place in the thought of Jacques Ellul, as it forms the biblical foundation of his theology of freedom. While a fair amount has been written on Ellul and freedom or liberation, I am not aware of a specific investigation into his view on exodus.

Rather than surveying the literature reference by reference, we will proceed thematically. This is somewhat easy to do, because Ellul’s use of the concept of exodus is consistent in many of his works. Although I will aim to cite multiple references as they

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<sup>278</sup> Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 72.

<sup>279</sup> Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 72.

<sup>280</sup> Throughout this paper, I use *exodus* in lowercase to refer to the biblical theme found in Abraham’s call, the liberation under Moses, and the work of Jesus. *The exodus* refers specifically to the liberation of God’s people from Egypt. The book of the Bible is always referred to as *the book of Exodus*.

are available, this article should not be understood to be a complete index entry to his vast corpus. Although *The Ethics of Freedom* is his central work on freedom, and thus on exodus, he makes claims unique to other works as well.

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## The Centrality of Exodus in Scripture

*Exodus* is a Greek word meaning a "way out." Generally, it refers to any major act of leaving. In the Bible it is specifically used to refer to the particular event of the Hebrew people leaving Egypt and going into the wilderness. By extension, it refers to any way out of a type of oppressive situation, like subjection to Rome by the Jewish people of the Second Temple period, or even as a general human condition like that of sin. Ellul argues that exodus is *the* central narrative of the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>281</sup> It is a major part of Pauline theology, which is not in contrast but is complementary to the rest of the New Testament.<sup>282</sup> Jesus' whole work is seen as an exodus.<sup>283</sup> Interestingly in this regard, Ellul explores the Pauline and Johannine literature and compares them, but he does not make use of key passages of Luke in *The Ethics of Freedom*. In his inaugural address in the synagogue of Nazareth, Jesus claims that he is the fulfilment of the year of the Lord's favor, in which he will proclaim liberty to the captives (4:18-21). This is a surprising omission that would have significantly strengthened Ellul's position on the centrality of exodus and linked exodus with jubilee.

Ellul characteristically does not thoroughly defend the claim that exodus is the central biblical narrative nor cite sources that would support this claim. Such a claim is far less radical-sounding after the thorough work of more-recent biblical scholars such as N. T. Wright.

## God as Liberator

Just as exodus can refer to a specific event in the Bible or a generalized theme of leaving oppression, so too is God understood as the one who brings the people of God out of Egypt and the one who frees people from oppression in general.<sup>284</sup> God is known

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<sup>281</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 39; Jacques Ellul, *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 298.

<sup>282</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 94-98.

<sup>283</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Living Faith: Belief and Doubt in a Perilous World*, trans. Peter Heine-gg (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), 276.

<sup>284</sup> Examples of this abound in Scripture. The songs of Moses and Miriam (Ex 15), Hannah (1 Sam 2), and Mary (Lk 1:46-55) should be added to the long list of Psalms that convey this theme of the exaltation of the weak or lowly. Jesus' sermons about the Kingdom of God/heaven likewise include the same kind of power reversals (Mt 5:1-12, Lk 6:20-49).

as liberator, for Ellul. He makes the bold claim that God is God only as our liberator.<sup>285</sup> This is not a claim about the nature of God so much as it is about God's relationship to a people bound by necessity and slavery. God is the God of Israel because of his liberating action, as in Exodus 20. Thus, God can be known only in the experience of liberation. This is an important reason why Ellul's thinking shifts on the order of how one comes to know sin. He explains that he began with a strong Calvinistic view of sin and moved later in life to seeing sin less and less as an important category. Following Barth, Ellul sees that sin can be recognized only through the experience of liberation in Christ. The depth of sin is revealed only after one has been rescued from the sin itself. This means that the message of sin is itself a message predicated on the reality of liberation.<sup>286</sup> Like any situation of normalcy, one requires critical distance to better understand the shape of a situation in which one formerly lived.

Ellul makes the sovereignty of God dependent on God as liberator. In *The Subversion of Christianity*, he writes about Islam's influence on Christianity, which he sees in the doctrine of providence. Islam holds to a very strong version of submission to the will of God. Ellul thinks that providence is the very reverse of what we are told about the biblical God, who opens up freedom for us, who lets us make our own history, who goes with us on the more or less unheard-of adventures that we concoct. This God is not "providence" (which is never a biblical word).

He is never the determinative cause or an irreducible conductor of events.<sup>287</sup>

God's sovereignty, although not expressed in providence,<sup>288</sup> is still necessary for liberation. "God has to be ours, and sovereign, if we are to be truly free. Israel is free only to the extent that its God is absolutely sovereign."<sup>289</sup> That is, God must be a higher authority than all others, or we fall back into slavery as the Israelites do. If God is not sovereign, he does not have the power to truly liberate. This deduction from the essence of God (sovereign) to his historical action (liberation) does not deeply interest Ellul, who would prefer to refer to God as revealed in Scripture rather than God as he must be based on logical outcomes of his divine essence. He maintains that the two perspectives—God does everything and humans do nothing, or humans do all things—are unbiblical.<sup>290</sup> He believes in a third option, that God has full sovereignty, and thus full potentiality, but does not use his power to override the will of humans. Instead God uses his power and authority to liberate people according to his will.

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<sup>285</sup> Ellul, *Ethics*, 96.

<sup>286</sup> Willem H. Vanderburg, ed. *Perspectives on Our Age: Jacques Ellul Speaks on His Life and Work*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (Toronto: Anansi, 2004), 85.

<sup>287</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 107.

<sup>288</sup> See also Jacques Ellul, *What I Believe*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), chapter 12.

<sup>289</sup> Ellul, *Ethics*, 96-97.

<sup>290</sup> Ellul, *Subversion*, 147-48.

The Judeo-Christian God is unique in his revelation as the liberator. Ellul contrasts Yahweh with Ancient Near Eastern gods, who are not sovereign, so that human history is really just the “‘fallout’ of divine misadvent-ures.”<sup>291</sup> And he contrasts the God of the Bible with Allah of Islam, whose all-encompassing and unalterable will is his primary attribute.<sup>292</sup> Indeed, so crucial is God as liberator to the Bible, Ellul thinks, that God’s first real self-revelation is in his call to Moses from the burning bush to act on behalf of liberation.<sup>293</sup>

While God is clearly the liberator in the exodus, the great and final exodus comes in Christ, which has become a major theme of recent New Testament scholarship. But whereas current scholarship often points toward the historical aspects in which Christ saw himself, and Paul saw Christ, as liberator (from Rome, from law), Ellul also emphasizes the current aspects of liberation in Christ. Christ frees us from politics, from being *in* politics, for example.<sup>294</sup> Jesus’ incarnation and crucifixion is the final exodus, the banishment of death.<sup>295</sup>

Although Ellul consistently points to the necessity of the sovereignty of God for the reality of liberation, he also says that God cannot be understood as the master of the universe,<sup>296</sup> as Christ *Pantocrator*.<sup>297</sup> By this he means that God is better known through exodus than through Genesis, and that God revealed himself as Jesus. Jesus is localized, personal. God’s love is expressed in direct, personal ways, not in a universal sense. God is revealed in Christ on the cross, not in universal lordship.<sup>298</sup> This is a major aspect of Ellul’s theological and ethical vision. God allows human freedom, but that does not make him any less sovereign.

## The Historicity of the Exodus

The exodus is the great historical event in which God liberates Israel from Egypt. But for Ellul the exodus is not the only liberative event in the Bible. He points also to Abraham’s call out of Ur as an exodus, and to the whole work of Jesus.<sup>299</sup> These are portrayed as historical acts of liberation. But as he is with many other points in

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<sup>291</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation*, trans. George W. Schreiner (New York: Seabury, 1977), 49.

<sup>292</sup> Ellul, *Subversion*, 107.

<sup>293</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 58.

<sup>294</sup> Jacques Ellul, *False Presence of the Kingdom*, trans. C. Edward Hopkin (New York: Seabury, 1972), 183. By “in politics,” Ellul means that Christians are able to choose to join in the political arena but are not subject to it. Politics is “there to get into as a pure act of will.”

<sup>295</sup> Ellul, *Living Faith*, 276.

<sup>296</sup> Jacques Ellul and Patrick Chastenet, *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology, and Christianity*, trans. Joan Mendes France (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005), 103.

<sup>297</sup> Ellul, *False Presence*, 69.

<sup>298</sup> Ellul, *Ethics*, 85.

<sup>299</sup> Ellul, *Living Faith*, 274.

the Old Testament, Ellul is less interested in establishing the historicity of the events than he is in reading the text as a revelation of the character of God. For Ellul, biblical history is not a bare catalogue of events but the revelation of God's meaning for human history. Thus, whether or not the exodus of Moses happened as narrated in the book of Exodus does not interest Ellul, and he does not discuss it.

Although Ellul does not believe in a distinction between a Christ of faith and a Christ of history and has little time for Bultmannian demythologization,<sup>300301</sup> he is nevertheless careful to distinguish the reality of the historical event from its enduring theological implications and spiritual realities. One might argue that exodus is a typological theme for Ellul. That is, the exodus of Moses is a type that gives structure to much of the rest of the biblical revelation. Ellul means this in some specific and some general ways.

Specifically, Ellul links the work of Christ with the Passover lamb. "The Word, the passage, the crossing, is the celebration of liberation. History can be read only in the light of this liberation."<sup>302</sup> For Ellul, humans must be liberated for God to be God, and all history leads to this liberation, which is its final product. We might say that, for Ellul, the crucifixion of Jesus, the paschal lamb, is *the* historic event, the point at which history definitively gains its meaning and purpose. Again, this liberation is possible only by recognition of the sovereignty of God in the Lamb.

From this point, Ellul can move to see exodus as a spiritual or existential reality. Ellul notes on a number of occasions that *mitzraim*, the Hebrew word for *Egypt*, means "twofold anguish" and cites the Talmud for this interpretation.<sup>303</sup> This "twofold anguish" is oppression and death. Egypt is both physical oppression and spiritual finality in meaninglessness. The liberation of God cannot be limited to one or another in isolation. This hints, of course, at Ellul's ethics found in many of his theological works, such as in *Presence in the Modern World*. But this link between historical and existential reality is also clear in his concept of the principalities and powers. Ellul's perspective on the powers has been elaborated at length.<sup>304</sup> He views the powers as having a reality dependent on humans, but this is still a reality that is oppressive. The exodus is liberation from the powers.<sup>305</sup> Pharaoh is not simply Pharaoh but a power of oppression, an embodiment of the prince of the world.

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<sup>300</sup> Ellul, *Apocalypse*, 49. This entire book is dedicated to this thesis. See also Ellul, *Subversion*, 147-49.

<sup>301</sup> Ellul, *Ethics*, 68-69.

<sup>302</sup> Ellul, *Apocalypse*, 119.

<sup>303</sup> Ellul, *Reason for Being*, 39; Ellul and Vanderburg, *Perspectives*, 84.

<sup>304</sup> Marva Dawn, "The Concept of 'the Principalities and Powers' in the Works of Jacques Ellul" (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 1992).

<sup>305</sup> Ellul, *Ethics*, 133.

## Threefold Exodus

In one of his few hints at the corporate aspect of liberation, Ellul explains that exodus has three aspects: God's self-revelation that brings a people into his mystery, liberation from oppression and idolatry, and the institution of a people by giving a law of liberty.<sup>306</sup> Each of these has a depth to it. God's self-revelation is liberative. This freedom from slavery to the necessary course of events and situations is what gives meaning to history, as written by the liberating God. Liberation from oppression includes both a spiritual and a material element inseparably. Ellul here also notes that liberation is from idolatry. This highlights another major theme in Ellul's work, which is his investigation into false belief. One could easily argue that much of Ellul's sociological work subtly points to the idolatry of various fields: *la technique*, *la politique*, propaganda, power and violence, money and economics, the State, and the city. Each of these represents a field in which humans aim to construct ultimate meaning, solutions, and security, but which are all false sources of meaning.<sup>307</sup> Again, God must be entirely sovereign if he is to be liberator, which means that all other powers must be submitted or dethroned. The problem that lies at the heart of idolatry is the enthronement of anything else, the sacralization of the forces of necessity and determination.<sup>308</sup> Thus, Ellul says, "Spiritually the most destructive and deceptive act is that of making a virtue of necessity."<sup>309</sup> To claim that obeying necessity or adapting to contextual determinations is virtuous is an annihilation of any possible meaning, because it shows that humans are fully and only products of their environment. For Ellul, there is no meaning if there is no freedom. If all things are predetermined or fate, an *amor fati*, like that of Nietzsche, is nothing but capitulation. Exodus thus begins with God's self-revelation, which opens humans up to the possibility of the alternative, to the destruction of the power of necessity. God is outside of contextual determinations or the realm of necessity, so that his self-revelation is a revelation of an alternative and thus the possibility of freedom. Exodus then liberates people from necessity and from the idolization of necessity. This is both a material and an imaginative liberation. Exodus is a liberation from myth, which is the formation of narratives of meaning that integrate people into an environment of determinisms. And liberation in Christ is freedom from alienation,<sup>310</sup> which is Ellul's best attempt at modernizing talk of sin. There is external alienation, in which a person is possessed by another or by a larger category such as a corporation. Self-alienation is the defining of oneself in another. This is slavery, but it focuses on the dehumanizing aspect of redefinition of identity rather

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<sup>306</sup> Ellul, *Ethics*, 96.

<sup>307</sup> Ellul, *Ethics*, 97-98.

<sup>308</sup> Ellul, *Ethics*, 37-50.

<sup>309</sup> Ellul, *Ethics*, 45.

<sup>310</sup> Ellul, *False Presence*, 206.

than simply on the conditions of subjection.<sup>311</sup> Finally, exodus leads to the giving of law, which we explore in the next section.

## Freedom and Law

In the exodus, God liberates a people to the wilderness wherein he gives them his law. Ellul, a scholar of the history of institutions, is keenly aware of the realities of law. The giving of law is the grounds of freedom, “the charter of the liberty of the people of God.”<sup>312</sup> Ethics, for Ellul, is the grounds of freedom, not its inversion. The law of God is a law of liberty. It forms the basis for an expression of freedom by retaining the sovereignty of God. “The deeper meaning is that the law is the word of God. It is thus liberation. The aim of the commandment is to free, not to enslave.”<sup>313</sup> Law forms the limits in which freedom is possible.<sup>314</sup> It is a schoolmaster of freedom. It is not the end of freedom but its foundation. There is a necessary tension between obedience and transgression, which is what enables freedom.<sup>315</sup>

Although the law is the basis of Israel’s freedom, the history of Israel and that of humanity is to constantly fall into new forms of bondage. Eventually, even the law of God becomes a bondage for Israel.<sup>316</sup> The very grounds of exodus thus can become a new bondage. This happens when the tension between obedience and transgression is resolved on one side or the other. Freedom occurs in a tension between slavish obedience and rebellion. Constant transgression of the law is itself a way that one defines oneself by the law. The purpose of the law of God is to help maintain a tension that enables the law to recede into the background as a foundation of liberty. When Israel elevates the law over the Spirit of God, the law becomes a slave master.<sup>317</sup> Put another way, when the law becomes an independent objective power, rather than an expression of the sovereignty of the liberating God, it enslaves. Thus, the first commandment of the Decalogue is the command to worship and serve Yahweh alone.

## Bearing God’s Revelation

Exodus is the grounds of any human ability to bear the revelation of God to the world. Without living in the freedom of God there is no possibility of revealing God.<sup>318</sup> The brief paragraph in *The Ethics of Freedom* (96) provides a helpful window onto the whole theological framework of Ellul’s thought. The role of Israel and of the Christian

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<sup>311</sup> Ellul, *Ethics*, 24.

<sup>312</sup> Ellul, *Ethics*, 96.

<sup>313</sup> Ellul, *Ethics*, 122.

<sup>314</sup> See also Ellul, *Reason for Being*, 298.

<sup>315</sup> Ellul, *Ethics*, 347-49.

<sup>316</sup> Ellul, *Ethics*, 97.

<sup>317</sup> Ellul, *Ethics*, 147.

<sup>318</sup> Ellul, *Ethics*, 96.

is to reveal God to the world, and for this to be accomplished there must be evidences of full liberation. That is, liberation cannot simply be spiritual. It must have concrete implications (as Ellul wrote *Presence in the Modern World* to explain). On the other hand, the liberation cannot be expressed in the ways that the progressive world is already working within. There must simultaneously be a revelation of God and a submission to God's total sovereignty for any material liberation to be real (as Ellul wrote *False Presence* to explain). The Christian life of exodus is therefore a constant interplay between discerning the forces of alienation, calling all to submit to God in Christ with his love, and acting in concrete ways to demonstrate this.

## Exodus as the Location of Christian Life

In *Living Faith* (French title: *La foi au prix du doute*), Ellul concludes his reflections on faith, hope, and doubt with a long chapter on Jonah as the model for the Christian life. Jonah had to experience his own exodus, not when he ran from God and found himself in a big fish, but when he had to go to Nineveh. God's call was for him to leave his world behind and enter the world of his enemies, not to pursue his own task but to bring the revelation of God to a people under judgment.<sup>319</sup>

Christian faith is a movement, for Ellul.<sup>320</sup> It is not a static state of being but a constant movement out of the world and to the world. Exodus is not about a condemnation of the world as evil, as with the flood of Noah.<sup>321</sup> It is liberation from the world, so that, free in Christ, one can bring the revelation of God's Kingdom to a world bent on suicide.<sup>322</sup> Moving out of the world is obedience to the call to become a people of God, a holy people. But this people exists for the purpose of being sent into the world with the message of reconciliation. Within this movement comes formation, maturity, freedom. If this movement is schematized or turned into a static Christ and Culture model, like that of Niebuhr, confusion of holiness and mission results.

Thus, the Christian location is exodus, wilderness, or exile. The Kingdom is not yet present enough that the Christian can live within it in a largely material way. But the Kingdom is the call of the Spirit and the imagination. Thus, the actual location of the Christian tends to be in exile, unable to be part of the world, envisioning another, and working as exiles within the world for its reconciliation. The mere acceptance of Christ is to place oneself in exile. Exile is not a choice of the Christian life; it is the necessary condition. That means that Christian faith is the rejection of our land,

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<sup>319</sup> Ellul, *Living Faith*, 277.

<sup>320</sup> See G. P. Wagenfuhr, "Revelation and the Sacred Reconsidered: The Revelation of God in Jesus Christ as Desacralising Reorientation to 'Milieu' in and beyond Jacques Ellul" (PhD diss., University of Bristol, 2013).

<sup>321</sup> Ellul, *Living Faith*, 277.

<sup>322</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World: A New Translation*, trans. Lisa Richmond (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016), 15.



our home, our milieu, our professions.<sup>323</sup> This exodus is a “mortal combat with the world.”<sup>324</sup> But exodus is not the conclusion of the movement of the Christian life, it is the prerequisite to entry into the world. This reentry is the calling of Jonah, the preaching of God’s judgment in love upon human alienation. This call is a total refusal to allow the world to march toward its necessary self-destruction. But Christian faith is built not on rescuing the world but on faithfulness to God.

## Exodus and Freedom as Not Happiness

The act of liberation, as with Jonah’s rebellion, is utterly devastating to a life integrated into the world. The experience of exodus is not happiness. Indeed, Ellul thinks, if the act of liberating the world from its sacral attitudes toward its contemporary idolatries is not accompanied by a reason for living that can adequately sustain a will-to-life, it would have the tendency to drive the great majority of people to insanity or suicide.<sup>325</sup> Ellul often points to the Israelite desire in the wilderness to return to the perceived good life of slavery in Egypt. Interestingly, as Old Testament scholar and agrarian Ellen Davis points out, this good eating in Egypt was likely an accurate memory. Ancient Egypt had a varied and nutritious diet. She says, “No people would eat so well again for a thousand years.”<sup>326</sup> This lends further credence to the reality about which Ellul is speaking. Christian freedom is a lifestyle that is in direct contradiction to the lifestyle of happiness. Humans, like the Israelites, prefer the security of bondage, which is regarded as happiness, to the risks of freedom. Freedom is risk, it is the “non-satisfaction of needs that we see as natural or essential,”<sup>327</sup> such as those of security.

## The Exodus Temptation of Jesus and the Self-Limitation of Freedom

One final aspect to point to is Ellul’s regular use in his theology of Jesus’ temptations. For Ellul, God risked everything by sending Jesus into the ex-ile/exodus of temptation in the wilderness. Jesus was entirely free to choose to submit to his desires or the temptation of the devil, and it is on this risk that God’s plan of reconciliation hinges. The wilderness is a place of dislocation, where there are no grounds of support. Ellul merges exodus, the flood of Noah, and the temptation of Adam all into this one event. It is the success in Christ of overcoming the temptations of materialism, power, and spiritual proof, temptations that led Israel into bondage throughout its history.

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<sup>323</sup> Ellul, *Living Faith*, 274.

<sup>324</sup> Ellul, *Living Faith*, 274.

<sup>325</sup> Ellul, *The New Demons*, trans. C. Edward Hopkin (New York: Seabury, 1975), 208.

<sup>326</sup> Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 70.

<sup>327</sup> Ellul, *Ethics*, 262-63. See also Ellul, *Subversion*, 167.

Jesus resists temptation by accepting his relation to God. True freedom is, again, submission to the sovereign God alone. This alone is the force that can free people from determinations and necessities. Jesus demonstrates freedom by self-limitation. Rather than by an expression of his power, Jesus chooses limits for himself within which he is free.<sup>328</sup>

This concept of self-limitation and refusal of power finds expression throughout Ellul's works, including many of his sociological works in which he is critical of the uncritical implementation of what is possible.

## Evaluation of the Exodus Theme in Ellul

I believe that Ellul has identified the heart of living the Christian faith by focusing so intently throughout his writings on the biblical themes of exodus and liberation. His understanding of an intolerable dialectical existence between slavery and freedom, and the careful elaboration of what that freedom truly means, is accurate. This aspect of Ellul's work has received great support from New Testament scholarship in recent decades, with the rise of the "New Perspective on Paul" and study of the genre of apocalyptic. The radical inbreaking of the Kingdom and its total otherness from the kingdoms of this world confirm Ellul's appraisal of New Testament theology. Furthermore, Ellul rightly understands that exodus is central to both the Old and New Testaments and is indeed one of their chief unifying elements. This means that Ellul's understanding of the role of *torah* in the Bible, and its transition from Old to New Testaments, is commendable. He was able to see that *torah* can be both the ground of freedom and the source of slavery, and he does so without creating some Jewish-Christian opposition in which Jews are legalists and Christians are about freedom. This corresponds very well to the more recent reappraisal of the pharisees in Second Temple Judaism,<sup>329</sup> though Ellul would not have known this.

But this leads to one area in which Ellul's thought about exodus is limited. The exodus under Moses was about the formation of a people of God. Ellul recognized this, but he did not develop much of an ecclesiology of freedom or exodus. The work of Christ in liberating people was not simply for individual, personal relationships with God but for the formation of a community in which the Kingdom of God is plausible and tangible. This is a key ecclesial concept that I elaborate in detail elsewhere.<sup>330</sup> Most basically it means that the Kingdom is not intended to be aspirational for individual experience but a shared communal experience that normalizes the values of the Kingdom and

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<sup>328</sup> Ellul, *Ethics*, 51-62. See also Jacques Ellul, *Si Tu es le Fils de Dieu*. In *Le Defi et le Nouveau: ttuvres Theologi.qu.es 1948—1991* (Paris: Table Ronde, 2007), 937-1016.

<sup>329</sup> N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*. Christian Origins and the Question of God, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1996).

<sup>330</sup> G. P. Wagenfuhr, *Plundering Eden: A Subversive Christian Theology of Creation* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, forthcoming).

thus may be perceived as reasonable. Ellul does not develop much in the way of a communal life of liberty. There are a variety of likely reasons for this. His own ecclesial experiences did not fill him with hope in the institution of the church. Such disappointment has become an increasingly common experience among Christians in the North Atlantic, as evidenced by copious data from major church-research institutions on reasons for church decline, as well as in the necessary shift in the social function of church institutions under a post-Durkheimian late secularism.<sup>331</sup> This is a situation in which Moses figures are desperately needed. There must be the development of bold leaders who can take the risks of freedom in modeling and fostering exodus communities, for the Christian life of liberty to be plausible and tangible. These communities can then form the basis of a prophetic “Yet forty days!” that Ellul recognizes is necessary.

Along with his limited ecclesiology, Ellul significantly underdevelops a portrait of the life of the Kingdom. Perhaps ironically, Ellul focuses so much of his effort on explaining the reality of the Kingdom, the dialectic of its presence/absence, and the Christian’s place within it, that he doesn’t spend much time explaining his perspective of what characterizes the Kingdom. Put another way, Ellul doesn’t say much about what freedom or liberation is for or to. What is that vision of the city of God of Hebrews? Certainly Ellul develops his view of *anakephalaiosis* or recapitulation,<sup>332</sup> in which God takes up the history of humanity and reconciles it with himself. But Ellul’s eschatology lacks crucial dimensions that would otherwise round out his ethical call to “freedom to.” Put another way, Ellul does not adequately spell out the mission of God’s people. Rescue, salvation, liberation is not the goal but the beginning of God’s purposes in the world. Certainly this is a theological weakness that Ellul shares with generations of theologians who have fixated on salvation as the core theme of Christianity.

And although Ellul is himself a major forerunner of the ecological movement, along with his friend Bernard Charbonneau, he also misses bringing the whole of creation into the exodus theme. Although Ellul believes in the salvation of all creation, he does not detail what the reconciliation of all creation means or how that fits into his theory of Christ as the one who gives meaning to history. We might say that he runs the risk of seeing God as liberator of humanity without seeing God as the Creator who is rescuing all creation *from* humanity as well.<sup>333</sup> Exodus and the wilderness is replete with symbolic content to aid ecological thinking of exodus. Again, Ellul makes a significant interpretative error in *The Meaning of the City* that perhaps prevents him from drawing more ecological conclusions. Does the history of creation not have meaning until humanity arrives on the scene? Certainly not. This anthropocentric danger is endemic in Ellul’s Barthian Christocentrism that focuses on the salvation of

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<sup>331</sup> See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2007) and G. P. Wagenfuhr, “Religion comme jeu: la situation au XXIeme siecle.” In *Comment peut-on (encore) etre ellulien au XXIe siecle?* (Paris: Table Ronde, 2014).

<sup>332</sup> See Ellul, *What I Believe*, chapter 16, and Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, trans. Dennis Pardee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), chapter 6.

<sup>333</sup> See Wagenfuhr, *Plundering Eden*.

humanity to the neglect of the restoration of creation. This does not mean that Ellul's ethic is anti-ecological, of course, only that it has a conceptual weakness that hinders it from becoming a major source for contemporary ecotheology.

Lacking also is any real connection of liberation with jubilee or the practices of the sabbath year. Certainly, Ellul mentions the sabbath as a sign of liberty in the Old Testament and as a mark of Christian freedom.<sup>334</sup> But as he does so, he consistently fails to speak about the sabbath year and the year of jubilee. This legal framework would significantly bolster his theology of liberation in that it would add some content to a positive ecclesiology or view of Kingdom life as intentionally liberating. It would also go some way to addressing the ecological deficit that his work on liberation has. And it would aid in his theological ethic of self-restraint and exercise of non-power.

Certainly, Ellul's understanding of freedom and exodus is deeply engrained in his existentialism. This is both positive and negative. It is positive in the reminder that the life of Christian faith is not reducible to a formula, a static worldview, or applicable principles. It forces the Christian to meet with his or her own individual alienations in an encounter with Christ. But his existentialism is also one of his chief weaknesses. As we've seen, it prevents a more mature exploration of the people of God in a robust ecclesiology and eschatology. In the 21st-century post-Durkheimian secular world, the formation of communities of faith will be increasingly a conscious and difficult effort, and sources of inspiration are needed for this task. It is therefore lamentable that Ellul does not provide much help for a time of building new communities and expressions of Christian discipleship.

All that said, Ellul's thinking about exodus is both an excellent microcosm of his theology in general and an accurate explanation of biblical theology in a way unique to himself.

## Liberation Theology?

We cannot conclude this review without mention of Thomas Hanks's article "The Original 'Liberation Theologian'?" Hanks compares Ellul's thinking on liberation (as of 1985) with the development of liberation theology in Latin America. He finds, rightly, that Ellul was a precursor to the theologies of liberation that developed later in the 20th century, though Ellul came from a different background and thus had different emphases. Hanks notes how Ellul shares with liberation theology the idea that salvation is liberation. He also quotes Geoffrey Bromiley, the major translator of both Karl Barth and Jacques Ellul, a quotation worth copying here:

This freedom (unleashed at the cross) is received exclusively in Christ, making the gospel essentially one of liberation. Here again is a theme that recurs constantly in

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<sup>334</sup> Ellul, *Ethics*, 129-30, 496; Jacques Ellul, *Violence: Reflections from a Christian Perspective*, trans. Cecilia Gaul (London: S.C.M. Press, 1970), 128; Ellul, *What I Believe*, chapter 12.

Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, and Ellul takes it up with vigor. Liberation, he thinks, provides the present age with a better figure of salvation than redemption does.<sup>335</sup>

Exodus helps inform Ellul's claim that in our time the concept of redemption is better understood as liberation and de-alienation.<sup>336</sup> This is partly due to the archaic nature of the concept of redemption but also due to the deeper alienations of modern life.

Ellul is not a liberation theologian in the Latin American sense of the term. He remained deeply critical of baptizing political movements and imagining that they represented the Kingdom of God. Thus, Hanks sees Ellul transcending liberation theology. Ellul perceived the centrality of exodus through Scripture, rather than seeing Scripture as a tool for revolution. In this way, Ellul retains a non-instrumental value for theology unlike other theologies of liberation.

## Conclusion

This paper examined the exodus theme in much of the corpus of Jacques Ellul. It was not comprehensive, and only touched on his much wider theme of liberation and freedom. This paper has demonstrated that Ellul saw exodus as the central theme of the Bible and God's chief characteristic as liberator. It also showed that exodus provides a window into his theology as a whole in its major outlines. Ellul was a forerunner, in some ways, of more recent trends in New Testament scholarship concerning the centrality of exodus, even if he missed some key texts and themes that would have supported his view (i.e., Luke). His analysis is not perfectly accurate, nor is it comprehensive. It has weaknesses, but on balance I believe that Ellul's contribution to modern theology is vital to retain the dialectical movement of the life of exodus/exile/wilderness in which freedom is difficult and bondage is attractive. His work on liberation and exodus is not timeless, but it has aged well. It should not stand as the only word on the subject, but it still provides a needed voice of critique and encouragement in theology today.

## Le plus dur des devoirs: La liberte chez Bernard Charbonneau et Jacques Ellul

Daniel Cerezuelle

Des les annees trente Bernard Charbonneau (1910-96) et Jacques Ellul (1912-94) ont voulu susciter un mouvement de critique du developpement industriel, du culte de

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<sup>335</sup> Geoffrey Bromiley, "Barth's Influence on Jacques Ellul." In Clifford G. Christians and Jay M. Van Hook, eds, *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays*. Quoted in Thomas Hanks, "The Original 'Liberation Theologian'?" *Cross Currents* 35.1 (1985): 21.

<sup>336</sup> Ellul, *Ethics*, 67.

la technique et de l'Etat, et jeter les bases d'une maitrise collective du changement scientifique et technique. Dans leurs *Directives pour un manifeste personnaliste*<sup>337</sup>, texte redige en 1935, Charbonneau et Ellul se revoltent contre la depersonnalisation de l'action et l'anonymat qui resultent du fonctionnement normal des structures economiques, institutionnelles, administratives et techniques qui organisent la vie sociale de leur temps et determinent son evolution. Il en resulte un monde caracterise par l'anonymat, l'absence de responsabilite personnelle. Comme l'ecrit Charbonneau dans un texte de 1939: « La societe actuelle, par ses principes et son fonctionnement ne peut avoir qu'un resultat: la depersonnalisation de ses membres.<sup>338</sup> ». En 1937 dans *Le sentiment de la nature, force revolutionnaire*<sup>339</sup>, Charbonneau montrait comment le developpement industriel prive les hommes de la possibilite d'etablir un rapport equilibre et epanouissant avec la nature. Cette montee en puissance et cette autonomisation des structures s'impose comme un phenomene social total, et determine aussi nos manieres de penser et de sentir. Convaincus qu'une pensee qui n'est pas mise en pratique est derisoire, Charbonneau et Ellul se sont associes pour agir afin de contribuer a une necessaire reorientation de la vie sociale, remettre a leur place la technique et l'Etat et promouvoir « une cite ascetique afin que l'homme vive ». A ce titre on peut considerer ces deux jeunes Bordelais comme des precurseurs de l'ecologie politique et du mouvement décroissant.

Cerezuelle, Daniel. "Le plus dur des devoirs: La liberte chez Bernard Charbonneau et Jacques Ellul." *Ellul Forum* 64 (Fall 2019): 35-51. © Daniel Cerezuelle, CC BY-NC-ND.

Charbonneau et Ellul etaient convaincus que les formes conventionnelles d'action politique qui visent l'acces au controle de l'Etat pour reformer la societe de haut en bas sont inadaptees pour susciter un changement qu'ils envisagent en termes de *civilisation*<sup>340</sup>. Fideles a leurs intuitions de jeunesse, tout au long de leur vie ils resteront, « unis par une pensee commune<sup>341</sup> » comme l'ecrira Charbonneau au lendemain de la mort d'Ellul. Ils agiront, parfois separement, parfois ensemble, dans deux directions complementaires: d'une part tenter de diverses manieres de susciter un mouvement collectif visant une reorientation non productiviste, non techniciste et non etatiste des pratiques sociales ; d'autre part mener un travail « theorique » d'approfondissement

<sup>337</sup> CHARBONNEAU (Bernard) et ELLUL (Jacques), « Directives pour un manifeste personnaliste », in *Nous sommes revolutionnaires malgre nous. Textespionniers de l'ecologiepolitique*, Paris, Le seuil, 2014.

<sup>338</sup> CHARBONNEAU (Bernard), « Reformisme et revolution », revue *Esprit* n° 77, 1939.

<sup>339</sup> CHARBONNEAU (Bernard), « Le sentiment de la nature, force revolutionnaire », in *Nous sommes revolutionnaires malgre nous. op. cit.* Texte disponible sur le site <https://lagrandemue.wordpress.com/>

<sup>340</sup> LOUBET DEL BAYLE (Jean Louis), « Bernard Charbonneau, le contexte personnaliste des annees trente et sa posterite » in Jacques Prades (sous la direction de) *Bernard Charbonneau, une vie entiere a denoncer la grande imposture*, Toulouse, Eres, 1997.

<sup>341</sup> CHARBONNEAU (Bernard), « Unis par une pensee commune », revue *Foi et vie*, vol. XCIII, n°5-6, decembre 1994. Texte disponible sur le site <https://lagrandemue.wordpress.com/>

de leur critique sociale et des raisons d'être de leur engagement, travail qui donnera lieu à la publication de nombreux ouvrages qui, souvent mal reçus ou ignorés lors de leur parution, s'avèrent prémonitoires et nous donnent des repères précieux pour penser notre situation présente et tenter d'agir. Si ce travail de critique sociale s'avère aujourd'hui si pertinent c'est qu'il a été conduit à partir d'un point de vue très particulier qui est celui de la liberté.

## Une valeur commune: la liberté

Pour Charbonneau et Ellul, tout ce qui réduit la maîtrise des individus sur leur vie quotidienne est un mal. Face à une civilisation qui institutionnalise et porte à l'extrême la scission du matériel (puissance et efficacité) et du spirituel (autonomie, égalité, justice ...), Ellul et Charbonneau se soucient d'instaurer des conditions de vie qui soient concrètement compatibles avec l'exigence de responsabilité personnelle de chacun dans tous les domaines de sa vie. Ce point de vue éthique a inspiré une œuvre écrite abondante qui, chez l'un comme chez l'autre, s'organise autour de deux pôles étroitement complémentaires. D'un côté un volet de leur œuvre est consacré à l'analyse des contradictions du monde moderne, qu'il s'agisse de la croissance de l'État et du phénomène totalitaire, de la dégradation des conditions de vie quotidienne et de la nature, du rôle social de la science (Charbonneau), ou qu'il s'agisse de la technique, de la propagande, des idéologies etc. (Ellul). D'un autre côté chacun a consacré un second volet de son œuvre à une explicitation des raisons éthiques et spirituelles qui les ont incités à s'opposer aux évolutions sociales qu'ils observaient et à promouvoir une reorientation de la civilisation. C'est au nom de la liberté qu'ils s'obstinent à évaluer les institutions et les techniques non seulement en termes d'efficacité mais aussi

(et surtout) en fonction des conséquences qui en résultent pour la maîtrise de chacun sur ses conditions de vie concrètes. Inlassablement ils posent la même question: quelle place la civilisation industrielle et technicienne laisse-t-elle au pouvoir de décision de l'individu dans sa vie quotidienne? C'est au nom de la liberté qu'ils critiquent non pas tout ce qui est moderne (ils ne sont pas réactionnaires) mais principalement l'autonomisation du pouvoir de l'argent, de l'État et de la technique. Comme le disait Jacques Ellul: « Rien de ce que j'ai fait, vécu, pensé ne se comprend si on ne le réfère pas à la liberté.<sup>342</sup> ». L'exigence de liberté est à l'arrière-plan de sa critique sociale; et dans ses nombreux ouvrages théologiques il a tenté d'en expliciter les fondements et de préciser pourquoi l'appel à vivre la liberté s'enracine dans sa foi chrétienne.

De même Bernard Charbonneau, lui aussi, parle de la liberté dans tous ses ouvrages. Le texte fondamental autour duquel s'organise toute son œuvre s'intitule *Je fus, Essai sur la liberté*. Et si Charbonneau se fait des années trente l'avocat de la défense de la nature, c'est surtout parce que pour lui la société industrielle prive l'individu

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<sup>342</sup> CHASTENET (Patrick), *Lire Ellul. Introduction à l'œuvre sociologique de Jacques Ellul*, Talence, Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 1992.

moderne non seulement de beauté mais aussi de liberté. Il ne s'agit donc pas tant de sauver la nature pour elle-même que de préserver les conditions d'existence d'une humanité libre dans une nature terrestre vivante. Charbonneau ne croit pas qu'il y ait pour l'homme une manière « naturelle » de vivre, qui définirait une fois pour toute la bonne vie et ce n'est pas la nature « en soi » qu'il convient de protéger: sa puissance cosmique dépasse infiniment l'homme et les galaxies n'ont nullement besoin de son respect. La nature est invincible, c'est l'homme, capable de liberté, qui est fragile. Charbonneau redoute que l'imprudence et l'inconséquence humaines favorisent une reorganisation de la nature, qui de toute façon, produira de nouveaux équilibres, mais dans lesquels l'homme libre n'aura peut-être plus sa place. C'est aussi au nom de la liberté qu'il procède dans *L'Etat* à une critique approfondie des logiques qui favorisent la sur-organisation sociale. Dans un texte écrit vers la fin de sa vie, il écrit

La liberté ... c'est le dernier mot ; en dehors d'elle bientôt il n'y aura plus que des chiffres. Mais est-ce un rêve ou un mensonge? En tout cas, dans ce livre, fragment de l'œuvre d'une vie, l'auteur s'est efforcé d'en faire autre chose qu'un mot. Ce qu'il a pu dire en dépit de la censure, du silence et de l'indifférence, de sa jeunesse à sa vieillesse n'a eu que ce motif. La description, qu'il a tenté dans d'autres livres, de la mutation radicale de l'espèce humaine provoquée par le développement de la science et des techniques, peut se résumer par la menace qu'il fait peser sur la liberté, plus encore que sur la terre<sup>343</sup>.

C'est donc à partir de l'exigence de liberté que nos deux personnalistes gascons ont élaboré leurs œuvres respectives. Je me bornerai dans la suite de cet article à signaler quelques points forts de cette convergence.

## La liberté est dans l'acte

On ne trouvera pas dans les œuvres de Charbonneau et d'Ellul une philosophie de la liberté au sens traditionnel du terme. En effet, l'un et l'autre répugnent à donner une définition de la liberté et de ses conditions métaphysiques. Bien qu'ils l'abordent chacun de manière très différente, tous les deux ont en commun une approche existentielle de la liberté, basée sur l'approfondissement de l'expérience que l'individu peut faire de sa liberté. Ainsi dans *Je fus* Charbonneau se refuse à donner une définition conceptuelle de la liberté et d'en préciser les conditions transcendantales ou métaphysiques. Pour lui, la liberté ne se prouve pas, elle ne se démontre pas par des raisonnements, mais quand je parle à un homme ou quand j'attends qu'il me réponde, je postule qu'il est capable de liberté—sinon je ne lui parlerai pas ! Ce constat suffit car, au fond, Charbonneau est convaincu qu'une démonstration logique de la possibilité de la liberté ne rendra pas les hommes plus libres, c'est-à-dire plus aptes à vivre leur liberté.

Si la liberté est disponibilité devant les possibles, l'acte libre est le choix qui les sacrifie: la liberté réelle est toujours négation de la liberté théorique [...] La réalité

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<sup>343</sup> CHARBONNEAU (Bernard), *Quatre témoins de la liberté*. Rousseau, Montaigne, Berdiaev,



de la liberte n'est pas dans les preuves de la science ou de la philosophie—elles te l'assureraient que tu l'aurais perdue, mais dans la personne vivante. Ce qui departage la fatalite de la liberte ce n'est pas ta metaphysique mais ton acte, celui qui les reunit tous: ta vie. Le determinisme n'est vrai que dans la mesure ou quelqu'un refuse la decision qui manifesterait son inanite. Prends-la, et tout change. Mais cette preuve a la difference des autres n'est pas donnee une fois pour toutes. Si l'effort se relache le monde se remet a crouler. Atlas n'a pas fini de porter le faix de la terre. [.] Si la liberte etait fatale elle ne meriterait plus son nom. [.] Il n'y a pas de liberte mais une liberation, et surtout un liberateur<sup>344</sup>.

Et ce qui interesse surtout Charbonneau c'est de comprendre pourquoi et comment la liberte peut se perdre. En effet alors que la pensee liberale, tout comme ses heritieres socialistes et marxiste s'interesse surtout aux forces naturelles, politique ou sociales qui menacent la liberte de l'exterieur, Charbonneau s'interesse aux dimensions autodestructrices de la liberte car les tentatives modernes de liberation de l'homme ont trop souvent debouche sur son asservissement a de nouvelles formes de contraintes sociales.

La demarche d'Ellul est tres proche. C'est ainsi qu'en introduction d'un texte reste longtemps inedit en France et intitule « Les structures de la liberte », Ellul ecrit « Je ne poserai pas la question metaphysique de la liberte humaine, a laquelle je serais bien incapable de repondre.<sup>345</sup> ». « Dieu seul sait si nous sommes libres ou non. [...] Il a bien fallu que l'homme vive en fais-ant comme s'il etait libre, en jouant le jeu de la liberte, c'est-a-dire en faisant son histoire. Cela seul m'importe<sup>346</sup>. » ; « il convient donc de demythifier la liberte pour savoir non pas ce quelle est mais qui je suis appele a etre en tant qu'homme libre.<sup>347</sup> ».

Ellul poursuit:

La premiere certitude que nous pouvons avoir, c'est que la liberte ne peut etre que mouvement, changement, volonte de passage, de transformation. [...] La liberte ne peut etre potentielle car, nous l'avons vu, on ne sait qu'elle n'existe ni par un raisonnement metaphysique ni par un examen psychologique mais seulement par l'experience du vecu. Pretendre etre potentiellement libre c'est entrer dans l'illusoire et la justification qui est la negation meme de la liberte. Ou celle-ci est vecue, mise en action, et par consequent mouvement, ou elle n'est rien<sup>348</sup>.

Ainsi, ajoute Ellul, la liberte ne peut etre un etat, une situation acquise, un etre fige, ou encore un resultat *obtenu* ; elle est dans l'acte qui cherche a faire reculer les contraintes: « s'il n'y a pas de liberte instituee, s'il n'y a pas de liberte donnee, s'il n'y

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Dostoievski, Paris, R&N, 2019.

<sup>344</sup> CHARBONNEAU (Bernard), *Je fus. Essai sur la liberte*, Bordeaux, Opales, 1980, pp. 130-31.

<sup>345</sup> ELLUL (Jacques), « Les structures de la liberte », in *Vivre et penser la liberte*, Geneve, Labor et Fides, 1919, p. 55.

<sup>346</sup> *op. cit.* p. 95.

<sup>347</sup> *op. cit.* p. 90.

<sup>348</sup> *op. cit.* p. 91.

a pas de liberte en soi, si elle est toujours en mouve-ment, alors cela implique l'obstacle et le refus qu'il faut vaincre. La liberte n'est jamais autre qu'un refus a un ordre de contrainte<sup>349</sup> » ; ou encore:

L'homme determine qui conquiert sa liberte ne le fait que parce qu'il est determine ; c'est pendant sa conquete qu'il est libre, et la liberte n'existe que par rapport et en fonction des determinations. Nous at-teignons ici le creur des structures de la liberte. Car il n'y a pas d'au-tre mouvement de la liberte que celui-la.<sup>350</sup>

Ainsi, pour Charbonneau et Ellul, on n'est pas libre parce que l'on vivrait dans un contexte politique, economique, technique ou culturel qui nous garantit la possibility de faire des choix. Nous croyons que plus les possi-bilites de choix sont nombreuses et plus nous sommes libres, sans prendre conscience que ces choix qui nous sont proposes peuvent etre complete-ment alienes ou insignifiants. La liberte est bien autre chose qu'un choix offert ; elle est action, effort de liberation. La liberte est presente lorsque nous faisons le difficile effort d'incarner par des actes nos valeurs spirituelles a rebours des determinismes naturels et sociaux.

## Il n'y a de liberte que par l'acte de l'individu

Dans les quelques ouvrages « speculatifs » qui jalonnent son reuvre, Charbonneau s'interroge sur la liberte, cette force d'arrachement qui n'existe que dans et par l'individu et qui le pousse a dire *non* a ce qui semble fatal. Dans *Je fus*, il ne cesse d'affirmer que « la liberte c'est le *je* quand il n'est pas un faux semblant<sup>351</sup> » et qu'il n'y a de liberte que par l'acte d'un individu qui s'ef-force de s'arracher aux determinismes naturels, sociaux et psychologiques. Cette conviction qu'il ne saurait y avoir de liberte que par l'individu sout-ient egalement tout son livre *Une seconde nature* qui explique combien il est difficile a un individu de prendre ses distances a l'egard de sa societe. Enfin, vers la fin de sa vie, dans son livre *Quatre temoins de la liberte*<sup>352</sup>, il lui a paru necessaire de reprendre cette question dans le chapitre "Nicolas Berdiaev. Le Chretien, individu ou personne?". La aussi il reprend le debat de sa jeu-nesse avec le personnalisme communautaire de Mounier et s'engage dans une discussion serree pour defendre la primaute de la source individuelle de la liberte. Bien entendu, Charbonneau reconnaît que la societe offre a l'individu des mediations institutionnelles, techniques et culturelles qui le protegent et rendent *possible* le developpement de son individualite, mais en meme temps, comme une mere abusive, elle reprime l'individualite et ses pre-tentions a la liberte, ce qui nous arrange bien et a quoi nous consentons volontiers tout en pretendant le contraire, car le plus facile c'est de jouer la comedie de la liberte tout en restant bien sagement installe dans le sein maternel, d'ou l'essai ironique intitule

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<sup>349</sup> *op. cit.* p. 103.

<sup>350</sup> *op. cit.* p. 101.

<sup>351</sup> CHARBONNEAU (Bernard), *Je fus*, *op. cit.* p. 31.

<sup>352</sup> CHARBONNEAU (Bernard), *Quatre temoins de la liberte*, *op. cit.*

*Bien aimer samaman*<sup>353</sup>. Charbonneau sait ce qu'il doit à la société. Par exemple il reconnaît que pour un Occidental, et pour lui en particulier, le sens de la liberté et de l'individualité est un des legs du Christianisme<sup>354</sup> ; mais il n'écarte pas la possibilité que d'autres individus, tel Socrate, en d'autres temps et dans d'autres civilisations aient été à même d'incarner ces valeurs sans avoir été touchés par l'appel du dieu des Juifs et des Chrétiens.

Pour Ellul aussi il n'y a de liberté que par l'individu. Ce thème est repris dans plusieurs de ses ouvrages. Il explicite cette conception dans « Les Structures de la liberté » où il affirme qu'« il n'y a et ne peut y avoir de liberté qu'individuelle.<sup>355</sup> ». Ellul revendique sur ce point l'héritage de Marx:

L'homme pour Marx est avant toute chose appelé à être libre, sujet, et cette liberté s'exprime dans une domination des conditions qui le déterminent, dans une possibilité de s'exprimer dans son œuvre (son travail) sans en être dépossédé, ce qui revient au même que la possibilité de faire lui-même son histoire... par conséquent l'orientation finale de la pensée de Marx n'est ni la justice ni l'égalité, ni même l'établissement du socialisme, mais bien la liberté. [...] Comme corollaire, pour Marx, il n'y a ni une liberté de nature, ni une liberté d'origine, ni une liberté historique: il faut la faire<sup>356</sup>.

Bien entendu, Ellul n'ignore pas qu'il y a des prises de conscience collectives: mais il ne s'agit jamais que d'accumulation de prises de conscience individuelles. Il n'y a pas de mouvement d'une collectivité en soi. « Quelle que soit la forme de la tendance à la liberté dans une collectivité, on peut affirmer absolument que l'initiative en revient toujours à un individu, qui veut la liberté.<sup>357</sup> ». Mais Ellul affirme en même temps qu'il n'y a pas de liberté hors du social: « Il va de soi que l'individu n'est pas sans une société, sans un groupe pour lui. Il va de soi que la liberté ne peut jamais être une propriété individuelle<sup>358</sup> ». L'insertion dans le collectif est donc une condition de la liberté. Mais le collectif est forcément répressif et la liberté individuelle suppose donc un affrontement, une capacité de résistance à la contrainte sociale. Ainsi le rapport entre liberté personnelle et société est éminemment paradoxal.<sup>359</sup>

Le collectif est le lien nécessaire, indispensable, ou s'inscrire dans la liberté [...] Il devient la condition objective de la liberté parce que c'est sa présence qui exige l'objectivation de la liberté, l'affrontement qui conduit à savoir si cette liberté n'est que prétexte, illusion, ou attestation. Le collectif est alors à la fois l'occasion de la liberté (sans lui, elle ne pourrait jamais s'attester, elle serait toujours supposée) et la possibilité de la liberté (sans

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<sup>353</sup> CHARBONNEAU (Bernard), *Bien aimer sa maman*, Bordeaux, Opales, 2006.

<sup>354</sup> Cf. ELLUL (Jacques), « La liberté fondatrice de l'Europe », in *op. cit.*, p. 143.

<sup>355</sup> ELLUL (Jacques), in *op. cit.*, p. 63.

<sup>356</sup> ELLUL (Jacques), « Les structures de la liberté », in *op. cit.*, p. 62.

<sup>357</sup> ELLUL (Jacques), *Vivre et penser la liberté*, p. 64.

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>359</sup> Ici Ellul s'oppose aux conceptions de Sartre sur le groupe en fusion.

lui la liberte n'aurait jamais aucun moyen d'expression). Ainsi la societe, le groupe, la collectivite ne peuvent jamais etre liberales ou permissives, ce n'est jamais par fusion en eux que l'on trouve la liberte, mais sans eux cette liberte n'est que probleme. On peut en debattre indefiniment, il n'y a aucune solution. On ne saura jamais que l'homme est libre, sinon par son affrontement avec l'en deca de la liberte, avec cette realite tres exacte qui la nie. Ainsi le collectif est le lieu ou la volonte individuelle, que l'on pourrait appeler, a la limite, la metaphysique de la liberte, est sommee de se decouvrir dans sa realite en meme temps que dans sa verite, c'est-a-dire de devenir historique<sup>360</sup>.

Ainsi, paradoxalement, la liberte ne peut exister que pour autant qu'il y a un individu capable d'affronter, d'entrer en tension avec cette meme societe qui pourtant lui permet d'exister. C'est pourquoi, dans *De la revolution aux revoltes*, il ecrit au sujet de la « revolution necessaire »:

Nous en revenons toujours au meme point: dans notre societe, ce n'est plus a partir des structures, des collectivites que l'action revolutionnaire peut se produire, mais elle doit s'effectuer d'abord dans l'individu car c'est l'individu qui est menace de disparition. [...] c'est dans l'individu que doit s'effectuer le travail revolutionnaire et s'etablir la tension conflictuelle impliquee par la revolution<sup>361</sup>.

Ellul et Charbonneau s'accordent pour penser que, puisqu'elle doit s'incarner dans un donne naturel et social qui la rend possible tout en lui resistant, la liberte ne peut etre absolue, elle est toujours relative ; ainsi le reve d'une liberte totale est litteralement insense, car la liberte ne peut etre un etat, elle consiste en un effort de liberation qui aboutit plus ou moins. Mais cette victoire, toujours precaire, debouche forcement sur une condition difficile a vivre: la liberte est une ascense. Elle n'est qu'un possible, et le faire advenir demande un effort constamment renouvele ; et cela met un fardeau terrible sur les epaules de chacun d'entre nous.

## **Echapper a l'angoisse de la liberte**

Dans *Je fus* puis dans *Une seconde nature*, Charbonneau tente d'elucider le caractere paradoxal de la liberte et de comprendre pourquoi elle est si difficile a vivre. D'un cote elle est puissance d'arrachement, capacite de mise a distance et de prise de conscience par rapport aux evidences du reel. Elle suppose une capacite a enregistrer une contradiction entre une aspiration a des valeurs (verite, beaute, paix, justice ...) qu'il faut bien appeler spirituelles et la realite de l'ordre du monde qui resiste a ces

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<sup>360</sup> ELLUL (Jacques), *Vivre et penser la liberte*, p. 71.

<sup>361</sup> ELLUL (Jacques), *De la revolution aux revoltes* [1972] , Paris, La table Ronde, 2011, pp. 85-86.

valeurs car il est soumis a d'autres logiques, naturelles ou sociales. Cette experience de distance critique est douloureuse, car elle met l'individu en conflit avec sa societe mais aussi avec soi-meme en tant qu'il appartient a sa societe a laquelle il est uni par un lien intime, de sorte qu'il fait frequemment demi-tour devant l'effort d'une prise de distance a l'egard de sa societe que reclame un acte reellement libre. Si l'homme moderne a tant de mal a prendre conscience des contradictions de sa societe, ce n'est pas seulement parce qu'il est soumis a une pression sociale qui s'exercerait sur lui de l'exterieur. C'est aussi parce qu'il est un individu pensant et capable de liberte que tout homme est habite par une tendance spontanee a interioriser le fait social ; et ce conformisme social se nourrit du tragique de la liberte. Charbonneau reactualise les intuitions des grands fondateurs de la philosophie existentielle: Montaigne, Pascal, Kierkegaard et Nietzsche, en montrant que l'homme est un animal social qui reve d'une liberte qu'il ne supporte pas. Nous ne cessons de revendiquer le caractere personnel et libre (peut-on distinguer les deux?) de nos actes, qu'il s'agisse de notre style de vie, de nos gouts esthetiques, de nos loisirs, de nos convictions politiques et religieuses, de nos engagements politiques ou autres. « C'est mon choix », proclamons-nous tous ensemble avec une conviction toujours renouvelee. Mais un examen retrospectif un peu honnete revele vite que ces actes etaient surtout conformes a notre milieu, a l'air du temps, a des emballements collectifs et a des modes, a des modeles institutionnels ou professionnels etc. Ou est l'individu capable de prendre ses distances et d'agir selon soi? Charbonneau a cette phrase terrible: « Mais il se peut apres tout, que fait pour rever la liberte, l'homme ne soit pas fait pour la vivre.<sup>362</sup> ». En effet, l'experience individuelle de la liberte expose tout homme a une contradiction angoissante entre l'exigence d'un sens personnel et le constat de sa finitude, de la contingence et de l'absurde de sa vie sociale. Le philosophe Jean Brun, commentant la conception de la liberte de Bernard Charbonneau ecrivait que la liberte est une ascese car « etre libre c'est supporter, et non fuir, cette tension entre l'experience centrale de la liberte et l'epreuve qu'il est difficile de la vivre.<sup>363</sup> ».

C'est pour fuir cette dimension tragique de la liberte que l'homme se fait doublement social et choisit une « servitude volontaire » rassurante en interiorisant les valeurs et les modeles sociaux et en s'identifiant a la societe de son temps. Ainsi, dans *Une seconde nature* Charbonneau montre comment, a peine s'est-il distingue de la nature qui l'entourne, l'homme cherche a se fondre dans une « seconde nature », sociale cette fois-ci, qui le protege du sentiment de sa faiblesse et de sa finitude, mais au prix de son individualite. C'est pour eviter d'avoir a vivre cette tension que chaque homme interiorise activement la contrainte sociale et adhère aux valeurs collectives du moment, et ce avec toutes les forces conscientes et inconscientes de son esprit. Plus que d'un consentement passif a une force qui s'impose de l'exterieur il s'agit d'une participation active qui ne veut pas se reconnaitre comme telle, qu'il s'agisse,

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<sup>362</sup> CHARBONNEAU (Bernard), *Le Systeme et le Chaos, op. cit.*, p. 257.

<sup>363</sup> BRUN (Jean), « Une ascese de la liberte, a propos de *Je fus* », revue *Reforme*, 1980. Texte disponible sur le site <https://lagrandemue.wordpress.com/>

par exemple, de l'adhésion à des idéologies politiques ou à celle du développement. En dépit du mince vernis d'une culture individualiste, dans la société moderne tout comme dans l'ancienne, le fait social s'impose spontanément comme une vérité et comme un ordre juste. Et comme la société d'aujourd'hui est une société du changement, c'est donc tout « naturellement » qu'elle produit l'homme-du-changement, l'individu dispose à accepter et justifier jusqu'aux aspects les plus contestables du développement industriel et technoscientifique.

Jacques Ellul fait un constat analogue:

J'aurai envie de dire que l'homme recule toujours devant l'aventure véritable de la liberté.[...] L'homme ne se conçoit homme que s'il est libre [...] Il semble n'avoir qu'une orientation depuis les origines alors qu'il était un membre indistinct du groupe ; c'était par un mouvement imperceptible, le dégageant de la personne hors du communautaire, comme insensiblement la plante se tourne vers le lieu d'où lui vient la lumière—mais en même temps, chaque fois qu'il a été en mesure de vivre libre ou d'exercer sa liberté, il en fut soit incapable soit terrorisé. Il s'est chaque fois inventé de nouvelles chaînes, une nouvelle fatalité, il s'est inscrit dans une nouvelle dialectique, il s'est donné de nouvelles autorités, il a édifié une nouvelle morale, aussi implacables, déterminantes, contraignantes que celles contre lesquelles il s'était affirmé libre. Devant l'espace béant l'homme ne peut se hasarder à tout risquer. La liberté se révèle comme une mise à l'épreuve si radicale que l'homme n'accepte jamais ce risque<sup>364</sup>.

C'est pourquoi,

Ce n'est pas vrai que l'homme veuille être libre. Ce qu'il voudrait ce sont les avantages de l'indépendance sans avoir aucun des devoirs et des duretés de la liberté. Car la liberté est dure à vivre. La liberté est terrible. La liberté est aventure. La liberté est dévorante, exigeante. Un combat de chaque instant, car autour de nous ne cessent de se multiplier les pièges pour nous enlever la liberté ; mais surtout parce que la liberté, en elle-même, ne nous laisse aucun repos. Elle exige de se dépasser, elle exige la remise en question incessante de tout, elle suppose une attention toujours en éveil, jamais d'habitude, jamais d'institution. La liberté me demande d'être toujours neuf, toujours disponible, de ne jamais me cacher derrière les précédents ou les échecs passés. Elle entraîne des ruptures et des contestations. La liberté ne cède jamais à aucune contrainte et n'exerce elle-même aucune contrainte ; Car précisément, il n'y a de liberté que dans un contrôle permanent de soi-même et dans l'amour de celui qui m'est proche<sup>365</sup>.

Une des raisons pour lesquelles ce contrôle permanent de soi-même est particulièrement difficile c'est qu'il est très difficile de prendre ses distances avec la société à laquelle nous appartenons. Bien souvent nous justifions nos conduites au nom de la liberté, sans nous rendre compte que la plupart du temps notre « choix » est parfaitement déterminé par le contexte social qui est le notre. Certes l'automobile individuelle augmente notre puissance de déplacement, mais comme le remarque Ellul

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<sup>364</sup> ELLUL (Jacques), « Les structures de la liberté » in *op. cit.*, p. 55.

<sup>365</sup> ELLUL (Jacques), *La subversion du christianisme* [1984] , Paris, La Table ronde, 2001, p. 257.

des qu'il y a trois jours de vacances, un pont, trois millions d'auto-mobilistes se precipitent sur les routes. Plus merveilleux, chacun est libre, il le fait librement. Combien de fois n'a-t-on pas dit « Quand je prends mon automobile, je suis libre de la prendre ». L'ennui c'est qu'il y a trois millions de Francais qui disent en meme temps « je suis libre », mais ils le disent ensemble, en bloc, c'est-a-dire qu'en fait il s'agit d'un mouvement auquel on obeit ; c'est une obeissance a la masse<sup>366</sup>.

La liberte consiste bien a « pouvoir faire ce que l'on veut » comme dit le sens commun, mais chacun des termes de cette definition est problematique. Rien n'est moins naturel que ce pouvoir et rien n'est moins facile que de vouloir l'exercer. La liberte, ecrit Charbonneau « n'existe pas en dehors du combat par lequel l'homme terrasse en lui-meme l'etre social.<sup>367</sup> ».

Il n'y a donc pas de liberte sans force d'ame. La liberte n'est pas un droit ni une propriete de l'humain, comme le croyaient les liberaux, mais le plus difficile des devoirs.

## La tension entre puissance et liberte

Nous nous exonerons de ce fardeau en confiant notre liberte au fonctionne-ment de dispositifs impersonnels senses nous liberer des contraintes et des necessites naturelles et sociales. Certes la liberte a besoin de mediations qui lui permettent de s'affirmer face aux forces naturelles ou sociales sans s'epuiser dans une confrontation qui serait constamment a recommencer. Mais, nous disent Charbonneau et Ellul, qu'il s'agisse de la monnaie, de l'Etat ou de la technique, ces mediations ne sont pas neutres. Elles tendent a s'autonomiser selon une logique propre ; et leur puissance, qui repond si bien a nos desirs, fait obstacle a cette meme exigence de liberte qui leur a donne naissance.

On sait depuis longtemps qu'il en va ainsi avec la monnaie. Elle facilite les echanges et la concentration du capital qui rendent possible la creation d'outils qui augmentent la productivite du travail et cette « richesse des nations » que nous voulons toujours voir croitre pour augmenter nos possibil-ites de choix parmi les biens disponibles. Mais la monetarisation toujours croissante des echanges et la multiplication de la monnaie engendrent des effets de puissance, favorisent l'autonomisation des logiques financieres qui, laissee a elles-memes, tendent a se soumettre l'ensemble de la vie sociale et ont des effets sociaux, environnementaux et culturels desastreux et devant lesquels la fascination productiviste pour l'efficacite economique nous laisse impuissants. C'est pour nous premunir contre cette fascination asservis-sante que Charbonneau et Ellul ont chacun ecrit un ouvrage sur le rapport a l'argent<sup>368</sup>.

De meme, nous attendons de l'Etat impersonnel qu'il nous defende con-tre les abus du pouvoir personnel et nous lui confions le monopole de la violence pour qu'il soit en

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<sup>366</sup> ELLUL (Jacques), *Lesprit de puissance et l'impuissance de fait*, Conference du 2 avril 1990 a Merignac. Texte inedit.

<sup>367</sup> CHARBONNEAU (Bernard), *Jefus, op. cit.*, p. 162.

<sup>368</sup> CHARBONNEAU (Bernard), *Il court, il court, le fric*, Bordeaux, Opales, 1996 ; ELLUL (Jacques), *L'homme et l'argent* [1954] , Lausanne, Presses bibliques uni-versitaires, 1979.

mesure d'imposer la loi a tous, de defendre nos « droits » et nos libertes. Ainsi, pour Montesquieu, c'est l'existence d'un mode particulier d'organisation du gouvernement qui permet de determiner si on est libre ou pas: « La liberte politique, dans un citoyen, est cette tranquillite d'esprit qui provient de l'opinion que chacun a de sa surete: et, pour qu'on ait cette liberte, il faut que *le gouvernement* soit tel, qu'un citoyen ne puisse pas craindre un autre citoyen<sup>369</sup> ». Ou encore « Il faut que, *par la disposition des choses*, le pouvoir arrete le pouvoir<sup>370</sup>. ». Charbonneau et Ellul, qui ont eu une conscience aigue du peril totalitaire, ne contestent pas la sagesse d'une telle conception, mais ils soulignent qu'elle est trop partielle et oublie l'essentiel.

La liberte politique—et elle peut prendre bien d'autres formes que celle du parlementarisme a l'anglo-saxonne—plus qu'une cause est l'effet d'une liberte plus profonde. Meme les libertes individuelles: habeas corpus, droit de s'exprimer et de se deplacer, inviolabilite du domicile etc. encore plus importantes dans la vie quotidienne que le droit de vote, ne sont que des consequences. Si elles garantissent aux individus un domaine ou exercer leur liberte, a leur tour elles n'existent que parce que des hommes les ont un jour revendiquees et qu'ils songent encore a les defendre: sans eux elles survivront quelque temps encore par inertie, puis disparaîtront d'elles-memes [...] Ce n'est pas pour rien que le siecle du totalitarisme a succede a celui du liberalisme, cela seul aurait du nous alerter sur la relation qui les unit.<sup>371</sup>

Si nous nous ne resistons pas pour remettre l'Etat a sa place, il finit par intervenir, au nom de l'interet general, dans tous les domaines de la vie. Tout etant fait pour le peuple, mais rien par le peuple, la liberte n'est plus que celle d'effectuer des choix qui ne changent rien. Ellul ne dit pas autre chose:

Autrement dit, je pourrais generaliser en avançant que le corps social accorde finalement les libertes qui n'ont aucune importance et qui ne risquent pas de mettre en cause les principes ou encore le processus d'evolution des societes. Tant qu'une liberte revendiquee est dangereuse, elle est toujours refusee. Quand on assiste a une « liberalisation », il ne faut pas se glorifier d'une conquete ; il faut comprendre que l'adversaire a accorde ce qui n'a plus de valeur. Ainsi actuellement, la liberte spirituelle, la liberte de consommation, la liberte des loisirs.<sup>372</sup>

Et dans un texte plus recent:

Nous constatons sans peine l'existence de deux secteurs dans nos societes. Le secteur des « choses serieuses » ou il n'est tolere aucune liberte de choix, qu'il s'agisse de la production, du metier, de l'ordre public, de l'argent, de

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<sup>369</sup> MONTESQUIEU, *De l'Esprit des lois*, « De la Constitution d'Angleterre », livre XI, chap. VI.

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.*, livre XI, chap. IV.

<sup>371</sup> CHARBONNEAU (Bernard), *Je fus, op. cit.*, pp. 28-29.

<sup>372</sup> ELLUL (Jacques), « Les structures de la liberte », in *op. cit.*, p. 53.



l'information, de la science etc. et le « secteur de la liberte » c'est-a-dire des choses sans importance, les loisirs, la mode, les choix de consommation. encore que dans ces domaines, un devoir reste imperatif: c'est quand meme de faire comme tout le monde et d'entrer par exemple dans le cadre des loisirs possibles, organises, amenes.<sup>373</sup>

Nous attendons du perfectionnement des techniques une protection contre notre faiblesse naturelle. Et plus nous sommes fascines par la puissance qu'elles nous procurent, plus notre liberte est eliminee de notre vie quotidi-enne. Division du travail, perte d'autonomie, manque de sens, sur-organisa-tion bureaucratique de la vie sociale, opacite des logiques qui la condition-nent, organisation des loisirs, gestion urbaine, aménagement du territoire etc. Tout ceci est engendre par des evolutions technico-economiques qui sont subies plutot que choisies et sur lesquelles nous n'avons guere de prise.

A partir de 1930 la societe industrielle se transforme en societe tech-nicienne [...] Le fait majeur est celui de l'organisation, du devel-oppement des services, de l'universalisation des techniques etc. Or, pendant ce temps, que voyons-nous? [...] On croit faire la revolution de la liberte en luttant contre l'industrialisme, mais celui-ci (qui bien sur, comme le capitalisme, existe toujours) est largement depasse. La question de l'alienation n'est plus celle du capitalisme, mais de l'in-vasion de l'individu par la multiplication des techniques externes, et internes, comme par exemple la manipulation psychologique (pro-pagande, publicite, creation de nouveaux besoins etc.), son insertion dans le systeme technicien qui laisse de moins en moins d'autonomie d'action, son encerclement par les objets techniques, son adaptation par toutes les voies.<sup>374</sup>

## Esprit de puissance ou esprit de liberte?

Pour Charbonneau il ne peut y a voir de liberte sans l'exercice d'une certaine puissance. Dans un premier temps tout progres de la puissance peut etre considere comme un progres de la liberte. La creation d'une cite ou d'un minimum d'Etat ou de techniques efficaces libere de la violence de la nature et des rapports de rivalite et de domination ; mais les mediations et les outils de la puissance sont ambivalents et ne sont pas neutres et, passe un certain seuil de puissance, produisent a la fois de la liberte et de la domination. Ainsi, en permettant a l'homme d'accéder a une certaine maitrise des forces naturelles, la technique a permis a l'homme de reduire sa vulnerabilite, d'augmenter la productivite du travail. La puissance economique elle aussi

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<sup>373</sup> ELLUL (Jacques), *De'viances et deviants dans notre societe intolerante*, Preface de Jean-Louis Porquet, Toulouse, ERES, 2013, p. 96.

<sup>374</sup> ELLUL (Jacques), « Les structures de la liberte », in *op. cit.*, p. 44.

est bonne car elle peut liberer du caractere repetitif du labeur et cree les conditions d'une capitalisation des reuvres de l'esprit. Cependant l'augmentation de la puissance qui a accompagne les progres de la rationalite finit par se retourner contre l'esprit de liberte qui lui a donne son dynamisme. Mais apres s'etre applique sur la nature hors de l'homme, avec des effets environnementaux et sociaux de plus en plus preoccupants, mu par un esprit de puissance qui n'arrive pas a se donner de limites, l'ordre technique s'interiorise ; un nouveau stade s'ebauche, « caracterise par l'usage de techniques de plus en plus discrettes, celles de la vie et de l'esprit humain. Apres avoir couvert toute l'etendue visible, la technique se prepare a refluer invisiblement dans les profondeurs de l'homme.<sup>375</sup> ». Dans une conference prononcee en avril 1990<sup>376</sup> Ellul souligne le paradoxe suivant: l'homme occidental est habite par un esprit de puissance qui s'est investi dans l'argent, l'economie, la science et la technique. Or la montee en puissance de ces mediations debouche sur une impuissance de fait, individuelle et collective. Ainsi, pour Charbonneau comme pour Ellul, l'autonomisation des mediations qui permettent la liberte engendre des fatalites qui menacent la liberte ; mais cette autonomisation, elle, n'est pas une fatalite. Elle est l'effet d'un esprit de puissance materielle qui aspire a une liberte desincarnee et n'arrive pas a se donner des limites. Et toute leuvre de ces deux penseurs est un appel adresse a chacun pour resister a cet esprit de puissance.

## The Hardest Duty: Freedom in the Thought of Bernard Charbonneau and Jacques Ellul

Daniel Cerezuelle

Beginning in the 1930s, Bernard Charbonneau (1910-96) and Jacques Ellul (1912-94) sought to instigate a movement that would criticize industrial development and the worship of technique and the State and that would lay the foundations for communal control over scientific and technical change. In their "Steps toward a Personalist Manifesto,"<sup>377</sup> which they drew up in 1935, Charbonneau and Ellul turned against the depersonalization of action that results from the normal functioning of the economic, institutional, administrative, and technical structures that organized the social life of their day and determined its development. What results is a world characterized by anonymity, by the absence of personal initiative and responsibility. As Charbonneau wrote in 1939, "There can be only one outcome for present-day society, based on its principles and functioning: the depersonalization of its members."<sup>378</sup> In 1937, in *The Feeling of Nature as a Revolutionary Power*,<sup>379</sup> Charbonneau showed how industrial

<sup>375</sup> CHARBONNEAU (Bernard), *Le Systeme et le Chaos*, Paris, Economica, 1990, p.

<sup>376</sup> ELLUL (Jacques), « L'esprit de puissance et l'impuissance de fait », op. cit.

<sup>377</sup> Bernard Charbonneau and Jacques Ellul, "Directives pour un manifeste personnaliste." In *Nous sommes revolutionnaires malgre nous: Textes pionniers de l'ecologie politique* (Paris: Seuil, 2014).

<sup>378</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, "Reformisme et revolution." *Esprit* 77 (1939).

<sup>379</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, "Le sentiment de la nature, force revolutionnaire." In *Nous sommes rev-*

development keeps men from the possibility of establishing a balanced and fulfilling relationship with nature. This increasing power and autonomization of *structures* is imposed as a total social phenomenon and also determines the way that we think and feel. Convinced that a thought that is not put into practice is ridiculous, Charbonneau and Ellul joined forces to contribute to a necessary reorientation of social life, putting the economy, technique, and the State back in their proper places, and to promote “an ascetic city, so that man might live.” In this way, these two young men from Bordeaux may be viewed as progenitors of political ecology and the degrowth movement. Charbonneau and Ellul believed that conventional forms of political action, which are directed at accessing State control in order to reform society from the top down, are poorly suited to initiating a change that they thought of in terms of *civilization*.<sup>380</sup> Faithful to the intuitions of their youth, throughout their lives they remained “united by a common thought,”<sup>381</sup> as Charbonneau would write shortly after Ellul’s death. They acted sometimes apart, sometimes together, in two complementary directions: on the one hand, they attempted in various ways to raise up a collective movement aiming for a reorientation of social practices that would be neither productivist nor technicist nor statist; on the other, they engaged in a “theoretical” work of deepening their social critique and the reasons for their commitment. This work would result in the publication of many books that were often poorly received or ignored at first but proved to be prescient and to offer us invaluable bearings for thinking through our present situation and attempting to act. If this work of social criticism seems to be so relevant today, it is because it was carried out from a very specific initial point of view, that of freedom.

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## Freedom: A Value in Common

For Charbonneau and Ellul, everything that reduces individuals’ responsibility and autonomy in their daily life is harmful. Faced with a civilization that institutionalizes and carries to the extreme the split between the material (power and efficacy) and the spiritual (autonomy, equality, justice . . .), Ellul and Charbonneau were concerned with establishing conditions of life that might be compatible in concrete terms with the need for each person to have responsibility for all areas of his life. This ethical point of view gave rise to a wealth of written work that, for each of them, is arranged

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*olutionnaires malgre nous*. <https://lagrandemue.wordpress.com/>

<sup>380</sup> Jean Louis Loubet del Bayle, “Bernard Charbonneau, le contexte personnaliste des annees trente et sa posterite.” In Jacques Prades, ed., *Bernard Charbonneau, une vie entiere a denoncer la grande imposture* (Toulouse: Eres, 1997).

<sup>381</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, “Unis par une pensee commune.” *Foi et vie* 93.5-6 (1994). <https://lagrandemue.wordpress.com/>

around two closely complementary poles. The one part of their work was devoted to analyzing the contradictions of the modern world, such as the growth of the State and the totalitarian phenomenon, the degradation of the conditions of daily life and of nature, and the social role of science (Charbonneau), or technique, propaganda, ideologies, and so forth (Ellul). For each of them, the second part of their work was devoted to clarifying the ethical and spiritual reasons leading them to oppose the social developments that they were observing and to advocate for civilization to be reoriented. In the name of freedom, they insisted on evaluating institutions and techniques not only in terms of efficacy but also (and above all) in relation to the consequences that result for each person's control over the concrete conditions of his life. They relentlessly kept asking the same question: What place does industrial and technicist civilization leave to the individual person's power of decision in his daily life? It was for freedom that they critiqued not all that was modern (they were not reactionaries) but primarily the autonomization of the power of money, the State, and technique. As Jacques Ellul said, "Nothing that I have done, lived, or thought can be understood apart from its relationship to freedom."<sup>382</sup> The necessity of freedom forms the backdrop to his social criticism, and his many theological works attempt to set forth freedom's foundations and clarify why the call to live in freedom found its root in his Christian faith.

Bernard Charbonneau also spoke of freedom in all of his books. The fundamental text that his whole work is organized around is titled *I Was: An Essay on Freedom*. And if Charbonneau from the 1930s onward became an advocate for the defense of nature, it was particularly because he believed that industrial society deprives the modern individual not only of beauty but also of freedom. Thus it was not a matter so much of saving nature for itself as of preserving the conditions in which a free humanity could exist within a living, earthly nature. Charbonneau did not believe that man had a "natural" way of life, one that defined the good life once and for all. Nor did he believe that it was nature "as such" that should be protected: its cosmic power infinitely exceeds man, and the galaxies have no need of man's respect. Nature is invincible. It is man, capable of freedom, who is fragile. Charbonneau feared that human imprudence and recklessness would increase the reorganization of nature, but whereas nature would re-stabilize itself anew, the free man would perhaps find that he no longer had a place within it. In *The State*, freedom also motivated his in-depth critique of the processes that promote social over-organization. Late in his life he wrote,

Freedom . . . that is the final word; after it there will soon be nothing but numbers. But is freedom a dream or a lie? In any case, in this book that is the fragment of one life's work, the author has done his best to make of it something other than a word. What he could say, despite censorship, silence, and indifference, from his youth to his old age, has had only this one theme. His attempt in other books to describe the radical mutation of the human species that is being brought on by the development of

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<sup>382</sup> Patrick Chastenet, *Lire Ellul: Introduction a l'œuvre sociologique de Jacques Ellul* (Talence: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 1992).

science and techniques can be summed up in the threat that it places upon freedom, more than upon the earth.<sup>383</sup>

Thus it was that, starting with the necessity of freedom, our two Gascon personalists developed their respective bodies of work. I will limit myself in what follows to pointing out a few main points of this convergence.

## Freedom Lies in the Act

We will search in vain in Charbonneau's and Ellul's works for a philosophy of freedom in the traditional sense of the term. In fact, each of them resisted offering a definition of freedom and of its metaphysical conditions. Although it was quite different for each one, what they held in common was an existential approach to freedom that was grounded in a deepening of the individual's experience. In *I Was*, Charbonneau refused to provide a conceptual definition of freedom and to specify its transcendental or metaphysical conditions. For him, freedom cannot be proven, it cannot be demonstrated rationally, but when I speak to a man or when I expect that he will respond to me, I posit that he is capable of freedom—if not, I would not be talking to him! This observation is enough, because Charbonneau was ultimately convinced that a logical demonstration of the possibility of freedom would not make men freer, that is, more capable of living out their freedom.

If freedom means the availability of possibilities, then the free act is the choice that sacrifices them. Real freedom is always the negation of theoretical freedom. [...] The reality of freedom does not lie in the proofs of science or philosophy—these would ensure that you lose it—it lies within the living person. What divides fate from freedom is not your metaphysics but your act, and what brings them together is your life. Determinism is true only to the extent to which someone refuses the decision that would make its futility plain. Grasp that, and everything changes. But this proof, unlike others, is not given once for all. If the effort flags, the world starts to disintegrate again. Atlas has not ceased to bear the weight of the earth. [...] If freedom were fated, it would no longer be worthy of its name. [...] There is no freedom, but a freeing, and above all, one who frees.<sup>384</sup>

Charbonneau was primarily interested in understanding why and how freedom can be lost. Liberal thought, just like its socialist and Marxist inheritors, was interested primarily in freedom's theoretical *conditions*, the natural, political, or social powers that threaten it from the outside. But Charbonneau was interested in the *personal exercise* of freedom, and in particular in its self-destructive dimension, because modern attempts to liberate man have too often resulted in his enslavement to new forms of social constraints.

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<sup>383</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Quatre temoins de la liberte: Rousseau, Montaigne, Berdiaev, Dosto'ievski* (Paris: R & N, 2019).

<sup>384</sup> Charbonneau, *Je fus: Essai sur la liberte* (Bordeaux, Opales, 1980), 130-31.

Ellul's approach was quite similar. In his introduction to a text that remained unpublished for many years, called "The Structures of Freedom," Ellul wrote, "I will not put the metaphysical question of human freedom; I would be quite incapable of answering it."<sup>385</sup> "God alone knows if we are free or not. [...] Man had to live as though he were free, acting out this freedom, that is, working out his history. This alone is what concerns me."<sup>386</sup> The important thing is not to establish a freedom from the outside, but to live it: "What matters then is to demythicize freedom, in order that I might know not what it is but who I am called to be, as a free man."<sup>387</sup>

Ellul continued,

The first thing that we can be sure of is that freedom can only be movement, change, the will to change, to transform. [...] Freedom cannot be potential, because, as we have seen, we know that it exists neither by metaphysical reasoning nor by psychological examination but only by lived experience. To claim to be potentially free is to enter into the illusion and justification that is the very negation of freedom. Either it is lived, put into action, and as a result into movement, or else it is nothing.<sup>388</sup>

Thus, Ellul added, freedom cannot be a state, an established situation, a set way of being, or yet an outcome that *has been reached*; freedom lies in the act, which seeks to push back constraints: "If there is no freedom that is established, no freedom that is given, if there is no freedom as such, if it is always in motion, then this entails the obstacle and the refusal that must be overcome. Freedom is never anything other than a refusal of an order of constraint."<sup>389</sup> Or again:

The determined man who conquers his freedom does so only because he is determined; it is while he conquers that he is free, and freedom exists only in relation to, and in terms of, what determines. Here we arrive at the heart of the structures of freedom. For freedom has no other movement than this.<sup>390</sup>

Thus, for Charbonneau and for Ellul, freedom does not come from living in a political, economic, technical, or cultural context that guarantees us the possibility of making choices. We believe that the greater the possibilities of choice, the freer we are, without realizing that these choices that are being *suggested* to us may be completely alienating or meaningless. Freedom is something very different than a choice being offered; it is an action, the effort of liberation. Freedom is present when we make the difficult effort of embodying our spiritual values through our actions, counter to natural, psychological, and social deterministic processes.

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<sup>385</sup> Jacques Ellul, "Les structures de la liberte," in *Vivre et penser la liberte* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2919), 55.

<sup>386</sup> *op. cit.*, 95.

<sup>387</sup> *op. cit.*, 90.

<sup>388</sup> *op. cit.*, 91.

<sup>389</sup> *op. cit.*, 103.

<sup>390</sup> *op. cit.*, 101.

## There Is No Freedom but through an Individual's Act

In several “speculative” works that are key to his oeuvre, Charbonneau investigated freedom, this power of uprooting that exists only in and through the individual and that propels him to say *no* to what seems to be fated. In *I Was*, he continually asserted that “freedom is the *I* when it is not a pre-tense,”<sup>391</sup> and that there is no freedom except by the action of an individual striving to uproot himself from natural, social, and psychological deterministic processes. This conviction that there can be no freedom except through the individual also underpins his whole book *A Second Nature*, which explains how difficult it is for an individual to stand apart from his society. Finally, toward the end of his life, in his book *Four Witnesses to Freedom*,<sup>392</sup> he thought it necessary to take up this question again, in the chapter “Nicholas Berdyaev: The Christian, an Individual or a Person?” Here also he goes back to the debate of his youth with the communitarian personalism of Mounier and engages in a close argument to defend the primacy of the individual source of freedom. Of course, Charbonneau recognized that society offers institutional, technical, and cultural intermediaries to the individual, which protect him and make the development of his individuality *possible*, but at the same time, like an abusive mother, society punishes this individuality and its claim to freedom. And this suits us well; we willingly agree to this while claiming the opposite, because the easiest thing is to playact freedom while quite sensibly staying at our mother’s breast, whence the ironic essay that is titled *Loving One’s Mother Well*.<sup>393</sup> Charbonneau knew what he owed to society. For example, he recognized that for a Westerner, and for him in particular, the sense of freedom and individuality is part of the Christian heritage,<sup>394</sup> but he did not reject the possibility that other individuals, such as Socrates, in other times and other civilizations, might also have embodied these values without being touched by the call of the god of Jews and Christians.

For Ellul also there is no freedom except through the individual. This theme is reprised in several of his works. He elaborated on this idea in “The Structures of Freedom,” where he states that “freedom is and can only be individual.”<sup>395</sup> On this point, Ellul laid claim to the heritage of Marx:

For Marx, man is above all called to be free, to be a subject, and this freedom is expressed in a mastery over his determining conditions, in a possibility of self-expression in his work (his labor) without its being taken from him, which comes down to the possibility of making his own history. [...] Thus, the final orientation of Marx’s thought is neither justice nor equality, nor even the establishment of socialism, but indeed free-

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<sup>391</sup> Charbonneau, *Je fus*, *op. cit.*, 31.

<sup>392</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Quatre témoins de la liberté*, *op. cit.*

<sup>393</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Bien aimer sa maman* (Bordeaux: Opales, 2006).

<sup>394</sup> Cf. Ellul, Jacques, “La liberté fondatrice de l’Europe.” In *op. cit.*, 143.

<sup>395</sup> Ellul, *op. cit.*, 63.

dom. [...] As a corollary, for Marx there is neither a freedom of nature, nor an original freedom, nor an historical freedom: it must be made.<sup>396</sup>

Of course, Ellul understood that realization can be communal; but this is always the accumulation of individual realizations. A community has no motion in itself. “Whatever form the tendency to freedom takes in a community, we can affirm absolutely that the initiative always comes down to one individual, who wants freedom.”<sup>397</sup> Yet Ellul also maintained that there is no freedom apart from the social: “It is clear that the individual does not exist without a society, without a group. It is clear that freedom can never be an individual possession.”<sup>398</sup> To be part of the community is thus a condition of freedom. But what is communal is necessarily repressive, and so individual freedom involves a confrontation, a capacity for resistance against social constraint. The relationship between personal freedom and society, then, is eminently paradoxical.

The community is the necessary and indispensable link where we can inscribe ourselves in freedom. [...] It becomes freedom’s objective condition, because it is its presence that turns freedom into an objective reality, in a confrontation that enables us to know whether this freedom is only pretext, illusion, or witness. The community is thus both the opportunity for freedom (without it, freedom could never be demonstrated, it would always be putative) and the possibility for freedom (without it, freedom could never have any means of expression). Society, the group, the community can never be liberal or permissive, freedom is never found by merging with them, but without them this freedom is just a problem. It can be debated endlessly, but there is no solution. We will never know if man is free except through his confrontation with freedom, with this very precise reality that denies it. The community is the place in which the individual’s will, what we can almost call the metaphysics of freedom, is summoned to reveal itself in its reality and truth, that is, to become historical.<sup>399400</sup>

Paradoxically, then, freedom can exist only insofar as there is an individual capable of confronting, of entering into tension with, this very society that is what also enables him to exist. This is why, in *From Revolution to Rebellions*, he wrote, in reference to the “necessary revolution”:

We always come back to the same point. In our society, it is no longer from structures, from communities, that revolutionary action may arise; it must happen first in the individual, because it is the individual who is threatened with extinction. [...] It is in the individual that the revolutionary work must take place, and it is in the individual that the conflictual tension that revolution involves must be developed.<sup>401</sup>

Ellul and Charbonneau agreed that freedom cannot be absolute. It is always relative, because it must be realized within a natural and social setting that both makes it

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<sup>396</sup> Ellul, “Les structures de la liberte,” 62.

<sup>397</sup> Ellul, *Vivre et penser la liberte*, 64.

<sup>398</sup> Ellul, *Vivre et penser la liberte*, 70.

<sup>399</sup> Here Ellul is opposing Sartre’s conceptions about the group merged together.

<sup>400</sup> Ellul, *Vivre et penser la liberte*, 71.

<sup>401</sup> Jacques Ellul, *De la revolution aux revoltes* (Paris, Table ronde, [1972] 2011), 85-86.



possible and also resists it. To dream of complete freedom is literally absurd, then, because freedom cannot be a state. It is an effort of freeing, and it succeeds to a greater or lesser degree. But this ever-precarious victory leads necessarily to a condition that is hard to live out. Freedom is an ascesis. It is only a possibility, and to make it happen requires a continually repeated effort. And this places an awesome burden on the shoulders of each one of us.

## Escaping the Dread of Freedom

In *I Was*, then in *A Second Nature*, Charbonneau attempted to set out the paradoxical character of freedom and understand why it is so difficult to live out. On the one hand, it is the power of uprooting, the ability to stand apart and become aware of the evident facts about the real. It assumes an ability to register a contradiction between an aspiration to values (truth, beauty, peace, justice . . .) that are properly speaking spiritual, and the reality that the order of the world resists these values because it is obedient to other laws, both natural and social. This experience of critical distance is painful, because it places the individual in conflict with his society and also with himself as a member of his society and tied closely to it. As a result, he often turns back from this effort to take a distance from his society that a truly free act requires. If modern man has so much difficulty becoming aware of the contradictions of his society, it is not only because he is obedient to a social pressure that is being exercised over him from the outside. It is also because he is a thinking individual and capable of freedom. Within every man one finds a spontaneous tendency to internalize the social fact, and this social conformism draws its strength from the tragic side of freedom. Charbonneau brought back into focus the intuitions of existential philosophy's great founders, Montaigne, Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche, in showing that man is a social animal who dreams of a freedom that he cannot bear. We never stop claiming the free and personal (can these two be distinguished?) character of our actions, in our lifestyle, aesthetic tastes, leisure activities, political and religious convictions, political involvements, or any other. "The choice is mine," we declare in unison, with a conviction that is continually rekindled. But when we look back with any honesty, we quickly see that these actions were mostly in tune with our milieu, the spirit of the times, the community's sudden enthusiasms and what was in style, institutional or professional patterns, and so forth. Where is the individual who is able to stand apart and act for himself? Charbonneau could make this grim statement: "It is possible, after all, that man is made for dreaming of freedom but not made for living it."<sup>402</sup> The individual experience of freedom exposes every human being to a dreadful contradiction between the demand for personal meaning and the recognition of his finitude, of the contingency and absurdity of his social life. The philosopher Jean Brun, commenting on Bernard Charbonneau's understanding of freedom, wrote that freedom is an ascesis because "to

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<sup>402</sup> Charbonneau, *Le système et le chaos*, op. cit., 257.

be free is to bear, and not to flee from, this tension between the central experience of freedom and the trial that shows how difficult it is to live out.”<sup>403</sup>

In order to flee from this tragic aspect of freedom, man becomes all the more social and chooses a reassuring “voluntary servitude” by internalizing the values and models of his society and by identifying with the society of his day. Thus, in *A Second Nature*, Charbonneau demonstrated how man, as soon as he distinguishes himself from the nature that surrounds him, seeks to merge with a “second nature,” a social one this time, that protects him from feeling his frailty and finitude but does so at the cost of his individuality. Each man actively internalizes social constraint and adheres to the communal values of the moment, so as to avoid having to live out this tension. And he does so with all the conscious and unconscious powers of his mind. This is not a passive consent to a power imposed from the outside but an active participation—one that does not want to be recognized as such, whether it concerns one’s adherence to political ideologies, for example, or to that of development. Despite a thin veneer of individualistic culture, in modern society as in pre-modern ones, the social fact is spontaneously enforced as a truth and a just order. And since the society of today is one of change, it is entirely “natural” that it produces “the man of change,” the individual prepared to accept and justify even the most debatable aspects of industrial and technoscientific development.

Jacques Ellul made a similar observation:

It feels like man always draws back before the true experience of freedom. [...] Man understands himself as man only if he is free. [...] He seems to have been oriented like this right from the start, when he was one indistinct member of the group. The person’s disengagement from what is held in common occurs by an imperceptible movement, just like a plant that turns imperceptibly toward the place that the light is coming from—but also, each time that he was in a position to live freely or exercise his freedom, he was either unable or terrified to do so. Each time, he invented new chains for himself, a new fatalism, he adopted a new dialectic, he gave himself new authorities, he constructed a new morality, just as implacable, determining, and constraining as those that he had declared himself to be free of. As he stands before the gulf, man cannot venture to risk everything. Freedom is revealed to be such a radical test that man never accepts this risk.<sup>404</sup>

This is why

it is not true that man wants to be free. What he wants is the advantages of independence without any of freedom’s duties and difficulties. For freedom is hard to live out. Freedom is dreadful. Freedom is a venture. Freedom is all-consuming and exacting. It is a fight at every instant, because the traps that lie around us to take away our freedom do not cease to proliferate. But supremely because freedom itself leaves

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<sup>403</sup> Jean Brun, “Une ascèse de la liberté, a propos de Je fus.” *Reforme* (1980). <https://lagrandemue.wordpress.com/>

<sup>404</sup> Ellul, “Les structures de la liberté,” 55.

us no rest. It demands that we go beyond, it demands that everything be constantly questioned, it requires that our attention be always on the alert, never routinized, never institutionalized. Freedom demands that I be always fresh, always ready, never hiding behind past precedents or failures. It involves rifts and controversies. Freedom never gives in to any constraint and never imposes any. Because, precisely, there is no freedom except in permanent control over oneself and in loving the person next to me.<sup>405</sup>

One of the reasons that this permanent control over the self is particularly hard is that it is not natural to stand apart from the society that we belong to. Very often we justify our conduct in the name of freedom, without realizing that most of the time our “choice” is completely determined by our social context. Certainly, each individual automobile increases our power to go from one place to another, but, as Ellul noted,

As soon as we have three days of vacation, a long weekend, three million drivers rush to the highways. More astonishingly, each one is free, they do so freely. How many times has it been said, “When I take the car, I am free to do so.” The problem is that there are three million Frenchmen who are saying “I am free” at the same time, and they are saying it together, *en bloc*. That is, it is actually a movement that they are obeying; it is an obedience to the mass.<sup>406</sup>

Freedom does consist in “being able to do what you want,” as common sense has it, yet each term in this definition is problematic. Nothing is less natural than this ability, and nothing is less easy than wanting to exercise it. Freedom, Charbonneau wrote, “does not exist apart from the fight in which man slays the social being within himself.”<sup>407</sup>

There is no freedom without strength of soul. Freedom is not a right or a natural property of the human person, as liberals have believed, but the most dreadful of duties.

## The Tension between Power and Freedom

We release ourselves from this burden by trusting our freedom to the functioning of impersonal arrangements that are supposed to liberate us from natural and social constraints and necessities. Certainly, freedom needs mediations to enable it to assert itself against natural or social forces without being exhausted by this ongoing confrontation. But, Charbonneau and Ellul told us, whether it has to do with money, the State, or technique, these mediations are not neutral. They tend to become autonomous following their own logic, and their power, which responds to our desires so well, impedes the very demand for freedom that gave rise to them.

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<sup>405</sup> Jacques Ellul, *La subversion du christianisme* (Paris, Table ronde, [1984] 2001), 257.

<sup>406</sup> Jacques Ellul, “L’esprit de puissance et l’impuissance de fait.” Unpublished lecture, Merignac, 2 April 1990.

<sup>407</sup> Charbonneau, *Je fus*, 162.

We have known for a long time that this is the case with money. It enables the exchange and concentration of capital that enables new tools to be created that increase the productivity of work and this “wealth of nations” that we always desire to see grow so that we can increase our possibilities for choice among the goods available. But the ever-increasing monetarization of the exchanges and the multiplication of money engenders powerful effects and favors the autonomization of financial processes, which, left to themselves, tend to subjugate the whole of social life and have disastrous social, environmental, and cultural effects that render us powerless before the productivist fascination for economic efficiency. To warn us against this enslaving fascination, Charbonneau and Ellul each wrote a work about the relation to money.<sup>408</sup>

Likewise, we expect that the impersonal state will defend us against the abuses of personal power, and we entrust it with the monopoly of violence so that it might be in a position to impose the law on everyone and defend our “rights” and freedoms. Thus, for Montesquieu, the existence of a particular mode of governmental organization is what enables us to determine if we are free or not: “Political liberty, in a citizen, is the tranquility of mind that comes from the opinion that each one has of his security; and, in order to have this liberty, *the government* must be such that no citizen can fear another citizen.”<sup>409</sup> Or again, “It is necessary, *by the way things are arranged*, for power to check power.”<sup>410</sup> Charbonneau and Ellul, who had a keen awareness of the totalitarian peril, did not question the wisdom of such a conception, but they emphasized that it is too partial and forgets what is essential:

Political liberty—and it can take many other forms than that of An-glo-Saxon-style parliamentarianism—is the effect, not a cause, of a deeper liberty. Even individual freedoms, *habeas corpus*, the right to self-expression and freedom of movement, the inviolability of the home, and so forth, which are more important to daily life than is the right to vote, are only results. If they guarantee individuals a sphere in which to exercise their freedom, they in turn exist only because some men one day laid claim to them and still remember to defend them. These freedoms will survive with them for some time yet, by inertia, and then will disappear on their own. [...] It is no coincidence that the century of totalitarianism followed that of liberalism. This alone should have alerted us to the relationship between them.<sup>411</sup>

If we do not resist and put the State in its place, it will end up infiltrating every sphere of our lives, in the name of the common good. When all is done for the people but nothing by the people, freedom is only the freedom to make choices that change nothing. Ellul did not say otherwise:

In other words, I could generalize by suggesting that in the end, the social body extends the freedoms that have no importance and that are unlikely to call into question

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<sup>408</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Il court, il court, le fric* (Bordeaux: Opales, 1996); Jacques Ellul, *L’homme et l’argent* (Lausanne, Presses bibliques universitaires, [1954] 1979).

<sup>409</sup> Montesquieu, “De la Constitution d’Angleterre.” In *De l’Esprit des lois*, book 11, chapter 6.

<sup>410</sup> Montesquieu, book 11, chapter 4.

<sup>411</sup> Charbonneau, *Je fus*, 28-29.

a society's principles or even the process of its development. When a freedom that is demanded is dangerous, it is always refused. When we witness a "liberalization," we should not boast of having conquered. We should understand that the adversary has granted what no longer has value. These are, at the present time, spiritual freedom, freedom of consumption, freedom of leisure.<sup>412</sup>

And in a later work:

We easily observe the existence of two sectors in our societies. The "sector of serious business," where no freedom of choice is permitted, in production, trades, public order, money, information, science, etc., and the "sector of freedom," which is to say, things without importance, leisure activities, fashion, consumer choices... Yet even in these spheres an imperative duty remains: to act like everyone else, and, for example, join in with the available pastimes that have been organized and laid out for us.<sup>413</sup>

By perfecting techniques, we expect protection against our natural frailty. And the more fascinated we are by the power that they bring us, the more our freedom is eliminated from our daily lives. The division of labor, the loss of autonomy, the lack of meaning, the bureaucratic over-organization of social life, opaque processes that condition us, the organization of leisure activities, urban management, land management, and so on: all these are generated by technico-economic developments, which we undergo and do not choose, and over which we have almost no control.

Beginning in 1930, industrial society was transformed into technicist society. [...] The primary fact is one of organization, the development of services, the universalization of techniques, etc. During this time, what do we see? [...] As we struggle against industrialism, we think we are engaging in a revolution of freedom, but industrialism (which still exists, of course, just like capitalism) is largely out of date. The question of alienation is no longer that of capitalism but of the invasion of the individual by the multiplication of external and internal techniques such as psychological manipulation (propaganda, advertising, the creation of new needs, etc.) and its insertion into the technical system that leaves less and less autonomy of action, its encompassing by technical objects, and its adaption by all means.<sup>414</sup>

## **Spirit of Power or Spirit of Freedom?**

For Charbonneau, there can be no freedom without the exercise of a certain power. At first, each advance of power can be viewed as an advance of freedom. The creation of a city, or the creation of a minimum of state or effective techniques, frees us from nature's violence and from relationships of competition and domination. But power's mediations and tools are ambivalent and not neutral, and once they go beyond a certain threshold of power they produce freedom and domination both. Thus, by allowing man

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<sup>412</sup> Ellul, "Les structures de la liberte," 53.

<sup>413</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Deviations et deviants dans notre societe intolerante* (Toulouse: ERES, 2013), 96.

<sup>414</sup> Ellul, "Les structures de la liberte," 44.

to attain to a certain mastery over natural forces, technique has enabled him to reduce his vulnerability and increase the productivity of labor. Economic power is also good, because it can free us from the repetitive nature of labor and create the conditions for a capitalization of the works of the mind. The growth of power, however, that has accompanied the advance of rationality ends up turning against the spirit of freedom that gave it its dynamism. But after having been applied to nature apart from man, with environmental and social effects that are ever more worrisome, moved by a spirit of power that never succeeds in limiting itself, the technical order turns inward. A new stage emerges, “characterized by the use of techniques that are ever more discrete, those of the life and spirit of man. After having covered every visible surface, technique gets ready to flow invisibly into the depths of man.”<sup>415</sup> In a lecture given in April 1990,<sup>416</sup> Ellul stressed the following paradox: Western man is inhabited by a spirit of power that threw itself into money, the economy, science, and technique. Now the increasing power of these mediations is in effect leading to both individual and collective powerlessness.

Thus, for Charbonneau as for Ellul, the autonomization of the mediations that enable freedom spawns fated patterns that threaten freedom. But this autonomization is not itself a fate. It is the effect of a spirit of material power that aspires to a discarnate freedom and is incapable of giving itself limits. The whole work of these two thinkers is a call to each one of us to resist this spirit of power.

Translated by Lisa Richmond with the assistance of Christian Roy.

## Anarchie et christianisme par Jacques Ellul

Patrick Chastenet

**ELLUL (Jacques), *Anarchie et christianisme*, Lyon, Atelier de creation libertaire, 1988; nouvelle edition, Paris, La Table Ronde, 2018, « La petite vermillon », 160 pp.**

J’imagine volontiers un logicien ayant à examiner la question suivante: sachant d’une part que les anarchistes rejettent toute forme de religion et d’autorité, et que d’autre part les chrétiens pronent l’obéissance au pouvoir politique, comment peut-on être à la fois anarchiste et chrétien? Mais dans ce domaine comme dans l’ensemble de son œuvre, Jacques Ellul n’a que faire des pures questions abstraites, logiques ou spéculatives. Il ne s’exprime pas en qualité de spécialiste de philosophie politique ou d’histoire des idées, pas plus qu’en tant que théologien. Ce qui le préoccupe est de donner un sens à sa propre histoire personnelle, et à travers elle d’aider les chrétiens et les anarchistes qui auront eu, comme lui, à concilier douloureusement, ce double engagement, cette double fidélité.

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<sup>415</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Le Système et le Chaos* (Paris: Economica, 1990), 27.

<sup>416</sup> Ellul, “L’esprit de puissance et l’impuissance de fait,” *op. cit.*

La tache n'est pas facile si l'on s'en tient au sens commun. D'un cote, les an-archistes regroupes sous la banniere noire du « Ni Dieu, Ni maitre », portee haut par le Russe Michel Bakounine et son ami aquitain Elisee Reclus. De l'autre, les chretiens rives sur quelques versets de l'epitre de Paul aux Romains:

Que chacun se soumette aux autorites en charge. Car il n'y a point d'autorite qui ne vienne de Dieu, et celles qui existent sont consti-tuees par Dieu. Si bien que celui qui resiste a l'autorite se rebelle contre l'ordre etabli par Dieu.

Pourtant, au prix d'une reflexion exigeante et d'un art de la dialectique dont seul Ellul a le secret, il est possible d'aller bien au-dela de cette incompati-bilite fondamentale. Dans *Anarchie et christianisme* Ellul reconnaît avoir lu Proudhon en contrepoin de Marx mais il s'etait empressé de lire également Celse, Feuerbach, d'Holbach, La Mettrie, et autre penseurs materialistes pour eprouver la solidite de sa foi. Apres l'apologete chretien Lactance qui attribuait ce raisonnement a Epicure, Bakounine avait cru trouver l'argu-ment dirimant face au Dieu chretien. Compte tenu de l'existence du mal dont nous pouvons observer les manifestations tous les jours, soit Dieu est tout puis-sant mais alors il n'est pas bon, soit il est bon mais alors il est impuissant. L'objection semble en effet imparable. Soit Dieu est bonte, amour, mais alors il ne peut rien contre le mal sur terre. Soit il est le Tout-Puissant, mais alors c'est un Dieu malfaisant. Lorsque l'on observe le monde comme il va, un Dieu a la fois amour et puissance semble en effet une contradiction dans les termes. Mais Ellul a beau jeu de montrer que ce n'est pas Dieu mais l'homme qui fait le mal. Un Dieu qui forcerait l'homme a faire le bien supposerait un homme robot, precisement le contraire de la conception el-lulienne de la liberte tout droit inspiree de Karl Barth. Le grand theologien protestant l'a en effet aide a penser dialectiquement l'obeissance de l'hom-me libre a l'egard du Dieu libre, autrement dit l'idee centrale du message biblique: la libre determination de la creature dans la libre decision du Createur.

Chastenet, Patrick. Compte rendu de *Anarchie et christianisme*, par Jacques Ellul. Ellul

Forum 64 (Fall 2019): 69-73. © Patrick Chastenet, CC BY-NC-ND.

Ellul considere du reste que c'est Bakounine dans son livre *Dieu et l'Etat* qui a le mieux resume l'ensemble de la critique anarchiste a l'egard de la religion en general et du christianisme en particulier. Depuis, rien de decisif n'a ete ecrit sur le sujet du cote des anarchistes. Au-dela des theses exposees dans *Anarchie et christianisme*, il n'est pas inutile de reconstituer en parallele les itineraires ayant conduit Ellul a la foi chretienne au plan ethique et a la position anarchiste au plan politique. Dans les deux cas rien de necessaire, rien de previsible, rien d'ineluctable, rien de determine mecaniquement par son milieu social, rien d'inscrit dans une quelconque idiosyncrasie.

Son pere etait grec orthodoxe d'education mais voltairien de conviction, quant a sa mere elle etait resolument protestante mais n'affichait pas ses croyances religieuses pour ne pas contrarier son mari athee. La conversion d'Ellul au christianisme a pris la forme d'une sorte de revelation brutale le 10 aout 1930, ou il a senti la presence de Dieu,

puis d'un long processus de plusieurs années durant lequel il s'est efforcé d'échapper en vain à ce qui allait provoquer un bouleversement total de sa pensée et de sa vie<sup>417</sup>.

Quant à son ralliement à la cause anarchiste, il s'est effectué lui aussi par étapes successives. Ellul a d'abord été un fervent lecteur et admirateur de Marx. S'il a également lu avec beaucoup de profit Proudhon, Kropotkine et Bakounine, ces auteurs lui ont toujours semblé plus faibles au plan théorique que l'auteur de *L'idéologie allemande*. Dès le début des années 1930, la lecture de Marx n'avait rien pour lui d'un pur exercice intellectuel. Son père étant alors privé d'emploi, il ressentait

comme une injustice terrible qu'un homme de sa qualité se trouve dans cette situation. Par son analyse du capitalisme et de ses crises, Marx me fournissait une explication au drame vécu par mon père<sup>418</sup>.

Soucieux de ne pas en rester à une approche livresque mais de changer radicalement la société, Ellul prit d'abord contact avec des membres de la S.F.I.O. Section française de l'internationale socialiste qui le déçurent par leur carriérisme, puis avec des militants communistes plus préoccupés de la ligne du Parti que d'herméneutique marxiste. Finalement, c'est au sein de la mouvance personnaliste incarnée par les revues *Esprit* et *Ordre Nouveau* qu'il trouva l'occasion de mettre en pratique, dans le sud-ouest de la France, la pensée de Marx et de Proudhon.

Au plan international, les procès de Moscou, les purges staliniennes visant des marxistes qu'il admirait—comme Boukharine par exemple—, mais surtout le comportement des communistes durant la guerre civile en Espagne commencerent à le rapprocher nettement des anarchistes. Par l'intermédiaire d'un ancien camarade de classe, Ellul et sa femme aidèrent d'ailleurs de jeunes anarchistes espagnols venus en France pour se procurer des armes. Au plan interne, l'arrivée au pouvoir du Front populaire (1936-37) le remplit d'espoir et il crut fermement que l'heure de la révolution venait enfin de sonner. Ce fut du reste la seule fois où il avoua avoir voté. La déception fut proportionnelle aux attentes suscitées.

À la Libération lui qui avait rêvé sous l'Occupation de passer, selon le slogan du mouvement Combat, « De la résistance à la révolution » assis-ta, impuissant, au retour en force des partis traditionnels et des puissances économiques. Dans ces conditions, la France ne méritait pas le qualificatif de démocratie, ou du moins, elle illustrait seulement la formule de Marx: « la démocratie est la faculté pour le peuple de choisir qui l'étranglera ! »

**Ellul Forum** Lorsque en 1947, il évoqua pour la première fois publiquement son inclination libertaire, dans l'hebdomadaire protestant *Reforme*, il prit énormément de précautions:

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<sup>417</sup> ELLUL (J.) et CHASTENET (P.), *Entretiens avec Jacques Ellul*, Paris, La Table Ronde, 2014 « la petite vermillon », pp. 118-20; ELLUL (J.) et TROUDE-CHASTENET (P.), *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology, and Christianity*, Eugene, Oregon, Wipf and Stock, 2005.

<sup>418</sup> ELLUL (J.) et CHASTENET (P.), *op. cit.*, p. 124; ELLUL (J.) et TROUDE-CHASTENET (P.), *op. cit.*, p. 55.



Je maintiens qu'actuellement et pour un certain temps, en France, l'anarchie est la seule solution possible. Je ne pretends nullement que c'est le regime de l'avenir, mais celui du moment present ; ni le regime universel et ideal, mais local et concret<sup>419</sup>.

Alors qu'il entretenait deja des relations d'amitie, et avait mene de nom-breux combats aux cotes de militants anarchistes, il fallut attendre 1974 pour qu'il revienne sur le sujet de fagon nettement plus audacieuse et ar-gumentee. Dans un article intitule « Anarchie et christianisme »—publie initialement par la revue *Contrepoint* et reedite en 2008<sup>420</sup>—Ellul posait les premiers jalons du livre eponyme ou il confirmait en substance que la position anarchiste etait la plus a meme de permettre a l'individu de devenir une « personne » capable d'exercer un controle sur les decisions prises au nom du peuple, d'introduire des grains de sable dans une mecanique trop bien huilee, de creer des tensions face a un pouvoir politique totalitaire par essence.

Face a ses detracteurs Ellul (2003, p. 259) a souvent du rappeler qu'il ne s'opposait pas a l'Etat et a la technique, en soi, mais a leur sacralisation ici et maintenant<sup>421</sup>. C'est leur combinaison, tout a fait inedite dans l'histoire de l'humanite selon lui, que l'on trouve a la source de l'alienation et de la reification de l'homme. L'Etat-nation etant devenu la puissance coordinatrice de l'organisation technicienne ; on ne peut toucher a l'un sans atteindre l'autre. Dans ces conditions, l'anarchie constitue une attitude de resistance face a l'oppression techno-etatique.

Le livre *Changer de revolution* (1982) inspire en partie des theses de Radovan Richta et d'Ota Sik mais aussi des theories *conseillistes* semble aller dans cette voie<sup>422</sup>. De meme que la micro-informatique permettrait de sortir du systeme technicien, « de meme ces granules sporadiques permettraient de construire un socialisme revolutionnaire de la liberte ». Ce socialisme pourra-t-il attribuer une finalite a cette technique, cette technique pourra-t-elle devenir l'instrument de ce socialisme? La conjonction de ces deux mouvements n'a rien d'automatique, prevenait-il. Et en effet, a la lecture du *Bluff technologique* (1988) on s'aper^oit que le rendez-vous n'a pas eu lieu. Considerant que son livre *Changer de revolution* avait donne lieu a des contresens, Ellul semble soucieux de justifier la continuite de ses analyses:

J'ai simplement indique qu'il pouvait y avoir une mutation s'il y avait conjonction entre quelques techniques-moyens, et un changement a cent quatre-vingt degres du politico-economique. J'indiquais aussi que le temps pour ce faire etait bref, peut-etre quelques mois, au mieux quelques annees. Ces annees sont ecoulees. Il est aujourd'hui trop tard pour esperer changer le cours de la technique<sup>423</sup>.

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<sup>419</sup> ELLUL (J.), « Propositions louches », revue *Reforme*, 28/06/1947.

<sup>420</sup> ELLUL (J.), « Anarchie et christianisme », in TROUDE-CHASTENET (P.), Dir., *La Politique, Le Bouscat, L'Esprit du Temps*, Paris, diffusion PUF, 2008 (coll. Cahiers Jacques-Ellul), pp. 95-118.

<sup>421</sup> ELLUL (J.), *Les nouveaux possedes*, Paris, Fayard, 1973, p. 259. Reedition Mille et une Nuits, 2003.

<sup>422</sup> ELLUL (J.), *Changer de revolution. L'ineluctable proletariat*, Paris, Seuil, 1982.

<sup>423</sup> ELLUL (J.), *Le bluff technologique*, Paris, Hachette, 1988.

Impression confirmée par *Anarchie et christianisme* (1988) ou s'il présente l'anarchisme comme « la forme la plus complète et la plus sérieuse du socialisme<sup>424</sup> », il nous dit aussi que l'homme étant ce qu'il est, la société anarchiste idéale n'est pas de ce monde.

## Kierkegaard's Theological Sociology by Paul Tyson

Paul Martens

**Tyson, Paul.** *Kierkegaard's Theological Sociology*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019, 148pp.

Paul Tyson's *Kierkegaard's Theological Sociology* is as expansive as it is succinct and as provocative as it is explanatory. In this small text, Tyson, a Senior Research Fellow with the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities at the University of Queensland, presents a constructive argument for theologically informed sociology with a sharp polemical edge directed at intellectual and practical forms of materialist atheism.

Structurally, the text is constituted of two parts: (1) a reading of Søren Kierkegaard's *Two Ages* through an Augustinian lens intended to reconstruct a model of studying society in a theological register, and (2) a loose appropriation of Kierkegaard's model to engage critically the deformed roles that knowledge, money, and religion play in contemporary materialist societies. As such, this theological text is a mix of intellectual history, social history, social analysis, and normative claims.

Martens, Paul. Review of Kierkegaard's Theological Sociology, by Paul Tyson. *Ellul Forum* 64 (Fall 2019): 75-77. © Paul Martens, CC BY-NC-ND.

The issue at the heart of this text is the binary choice that is forced in social theory after the Enlightenment: to adopt or reject methodologically materialist and non-theologically framed social sciences. Tyson argues that, historically, the possibility of real choice between the two options was foreclosed somewhere between 1840 and 1860; during these decades the legacy of David Strauss, Ludwig Feuerbach, and the other young Hegelians was open to either a Marxist or a Kierkegaardian direction. By the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* late in 1859, however, "the study of society by positivistic and pragmatic lights was moving ahead powerfully" (40). Or, in short, the wrong fork was taken, with consequences that have very recently been recognized within the field of social theory. Against this background, Tyson's text should be understood as a theological intervention that contributes to the long-awaited rehabilitation of social theory.

So, to the role of Kierkegaard in the text. Against the declension narrative that haunts and motivates the text, Kierkegaard is the champion that performs diagnostic,

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<sup>424</sup> ELLUL (J.), *Anarchie et christianisme*, Paris, La Table Ronde, 1998 (coll. La petite vermillon), p. 10.

constructive, and exemplary roles, and it is worth attending to each of these briefly. Nearly half of Kierkegaard's *Two Ages* is a series of concluding reflections on "the present age," or Golden Age Denmark. Ostensibly reviewing Thomasine Gyllembourg's novel titled *Two Ages* (hence Kierkegaard's title), Kierkegaard compares and critiques "The Age of Revolution," the age of passion and immediacy, and "The Present Age," the age of reflection, envy, leveling, superficiality, and abstraction. Kierkegaard's diagnosis of mid-nineteenth century Denmark is prescient and almost wholly embraced in Tyson's critique of contemporary idolatries that yield modes of existence consisting of little more than mass consumption of material meaninglessness. It is also important to note that John Milbank should probably be given some credit for instigating Tyson's diagnostic project, and that Tyson supplements Kierkegaard's diagnosis with Ellul's critique of the twentieth-century obsession with instrumental power and efficiency and, inevitably, propaganda.

Kierkegaard's diagnosis, however, is not merely a negative; it is rooted in a constructive vision that Tyson also utilizes to provide an alternative to the spiritual problem of the present age. That constructive vision is rooted in an expansive understanding of worship, doxology: "It is the right worship of God that enables human flourishing for individuals within human communities" (ix). On this matter, Tyson's appropriation of Kierkegaard is not quite as seamless, because Kierkegaard's theology—including but not limited to *Two Ages*—is a little more wary of the nature of communities and communal practices than Tyson seems to be. What Tyson argues is that the logic of worship plays itself out in various social contexts and that society simply cannot be understood apart from worship. No doubt this is true. Framed this way, however, Tyson's argument betrays a notion of something like a nostalgia for Christendom, where societies are or ought to be understood as uniformly oriented toward the same worship. Kierkegaard lived in such a context, and his account of worship deliberately attempted [Book Reviews] to foreclose an automatic communal outcome:

If the individual is unwilling to learn to be satisfied with himself in the essentiality of the religious life before God, to be satisfied with ruling over himself instead of over the world [...] then he will not escape from reflection.

So, while Kierkegaard and Tyson both agree that one's relationship with God is inseparable from one's social life, Tyson's appropriation of Kierkegaard is self-consciously contextualized within the "Platonist tradition of the West" (49), a tradition that worried Kierkegaard because of its potential alignment with Hegel's theological vision. I raise this point not to be contentious but simply to note that the theological sociology Tyson eventually develops has debts to Kierkegaard, but it also has debts that would make Kierkegaard nervous, especially the implication that Christianity is a tradition in which "divinity, value, thought, and meaning are primary and where contingent matter embedded in the spatio-temporal manifold is a derivative property of ontic reality" (51). No doubt Kierkegaard would rephrase in quite different language, but he too would agree that particular forms of life (e.g., the aesthetic and the ethical) are

not accidentally problematic but are problematic precisely because they do not align with the proper role ascribed to humans within the created order.

In the end, however the debts are apportioned, Tyson's critique of contemporary practices in the present age is incredibly pointed and persistent. For many in the developed world, it is hard to imagine any other existence except perhaps revolution. In this context, Kierkegaard's final appearance in Tyson's argument is that of exemplar—a prophet, a Socratic gadfly from the 1840s that gives in to neither idolatry nor dystopian despair. And, at this final moment, Tyson fittingly turns from argument to exhortation: “Let us follow [Kierkegaard's] lead and think about our social context through a doxological lens, and pursue the practice of right worship in all humility” (125).

## *The Green Light* by Bernard Charbonneau

Jacob Marques Rollison

**Charbonneau, Bernard.** *The Green Light: A Self-Critique of the Ecological Movement*, trans. **Christian Roy.** London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018, 248pp.

Bernard Charbonneau's *The Green Light* provides a profound and provocative entrance into contemporary ecological dialogue and into Charbonneau's thought (and if I am not mistaken, his debut in English). It explores the ecological movement's intellectual foundations and historical development, probes its political makeup and pitfalls, accounts for the current situation (in 1980 France, though it is still very instructive today), and offers political recommendations for forward movement.

The book opens with two helpful contributions: a foreword by Piers H. G. Stephens, environmental philosopher at the University of Georgia, who helpfully situates *The Green Light* as a prescient forerunner of current ecological debates, and an introduction by Daniel Cerezuelle, philosopher and specialist on Ellul and Charbonneau, who sketches *The Green Light's* relation to the main lines of Charbonneau's writings. A preface by Charbonneau lays foundational concerns, situating one of the book's foci as retrieving the words *nature* and *freedom* from “the dustbin of history” (xxxiv). Charbonneau writes from his meditations and observation of the effects of technological development on his lived environment, doing so in common language.

The text is structured like a plant whose (part I) “seeds,” (II) “roots,” (III) “diseases and poisons,” and (IV) “fruits” move from the ecological movement's origins to its theoretical foundations, then to its current political situation and problems plaguing its growth, before finally offering a proposal for ecological politics. “Seeds” schematizes the movement's historical development, tracing the origins of present-day ecology from events and ideas from the ancient world, the era of Christendom, the thought of Rousseau, and the modern era, after which Charbonneau hears ecology's “great silence.” As the benefits of technological progress reached their limits, the integrated, vulgarized, bourgeois discourse that the present incarnation of the ecological move-

ment represents shot up rapidly. Charbonneau explores the current movement's North American origin and Protestant heritage, seeing it not as a revolutionary counterforce but as a reaction to techno-scientific development. He finds a similarly propagandistic pattern in French ecology from the 1960s-80s, with 1970 as a watershed year. He finds the current movement to be a "melting pot" of contradictions, enveloping Marxists and anarchists, the average person and the marginalized, flip-flopping from right to left.

Rollison, Jacob Marques. Review of *The Green Light: A Self-Critique of the Ecological Movement*, by Bernard Charbonneau, trans. Christian Roy. *Ellul Forum* 64 (Fall 2019): 79-82. © Jacob Marques Rollison, CC BY-NC-ND.

"Roots" (part II) explores a contradiction between nature and freedom as the dialectical foundation of a true ecology. Humans are a constantly negotiated combination of the two, unable to forgo either one. While Charbonneau refuses to give clean-cut definitions of these two terms, nature is knowable in negative contrast to human artifice, and freedom is the "claim of the part against the whole" (48). Seeking a balance between the city and the country, Charbonneau wants dialogue between human creation and the otherness of nature, between freedom and necessity. But our age of maximized growth finds freedom at risk of self-destruction. Charbonneau explores the specific form of this dialectic that Christianity has bequeathed to ecology, allowing him to define ecology's task thus: if "man is not up to the challenge of his own destiny, then that will have been the mistake of his Creator, whether God or nature" (72).

"Diseases and poisons" (III) evaluates the current traps that ecology must avoid yet endlessly falls prey to. Charbonneau wants a relative and realist ecological politics that does not seek heaven on earth but only the avoidance of hell (92). Ecology also tends to be marginalized, or to be co-opted into contemporary mediatized politics, exchanging a clear vision of its goals for more powerful means and reducing itself to just one more political option; this is how society "recycles" ecology, including it in its own system and blunting its revolutionary edge. Charbonneau hopes for a true ecological politics that would transcend right/left binaries and restore meaning to politics.

Finally, the fourth part, "Fruits," moves toward proposals for what ecological politics might look like. Charbonneau seeks nothing less than a "counter-society" built around a "refusal of absolute power" (141-42). For Charbonneau, the tricky question for establishing a post-Christian, humanist counter-society concerns how to maintain techno-science's relativity in the absence of religious truth. Without claiming to have the answer, he recognizes that ecology does treat "ultimate" questions, though without claiming to seek truth, only to respond to a situation. True ecology is a "revolution for that which exists" (148). True politics should be lived at the individual level, involving simple things such as taking one's time, eating well, and watching one's words, since language links the individual to society. It should involve small meetings, real dialogue, and no media, publicity, or violence. Ecology can play a prophetic role regarding the State. Power must be carefully limited; the goal is no longer unfettered growth but a purposed equilibrium. As sites of the human/nature dialogue, agriculture and leisure are key elements in this battle.

Those familiar with Ellul and Charbonneau's lifelong friendship will enjoy spotting both significant commonality and difference between the two thinkers, gaining a fresh perspective on Ellul as well. Certain themes recall the duo's personalist agenda from the 1930s, including the threat of unlimited development and State centrality, the push for federalist democratic political organization, and common language as the fragile and crucial link between the individual and society. Their different perspectives on religious faith exist in appreciative tension, keeping both respectfully on their toes.

While not always easily accessible, *The Green Light* is a careful call to seek the limits that would allow for true freedom, in relation to both the artificial and the natural world—and, notably, a call that avoids apocalypticism, cheap sloganeering, and propaganda. As such, it is a timely volume, especially in its new translation. It is hard to tell whether the mellifluous, thought-provoking, and at times arresting (if also dense, enigmatic, and sometimes sarcastic) prose owes more to Charbonneau's meditative and communicative style or to Christian Roy's deft and poetic translation; in any case, both are to be thanked for this splendid volume's existence (at all, and) in English, respectively.

## About the Contributors

Daniel Cerezuelle is an independent scholar in Bordeaux, France. He is the executor of the literary estate of Bernard Charbonneau and a board member of the Societe pour la philosophie de la technique. He is the author of *Ecologie et liberte: Bernard Charbonneau precurseur de l'ecologiepolitique* (2006).

Patrick Chastenet is professor of political science at the University of Bordeaux. He is president of the Association Internationale Jacques Ellul, director of the *Cahiers Jacques-Ellul*, and author of *Introduction a Jacques Ellul* (Paris, La Decouverte, 2019).

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Christian Roy is a historian, translator, and art critic living in Montreal and is a member of the IJES board of directors. He holds a PhD from McGill University.

G. P. Wagenfuhr is the coordinating theologian of ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians and the founder/pastor of The Embassy, a new model for reconciling church and seminary. He is author of *Plundering Egypt: A Subversive Christian Ethic of Economy* (2016), *Unfortunate Words of the Bible: A Biblical Theology of Misunderstandings* (2019), and *Plundering Eden: A Subversive Christian Theology of*

*Creation* (2020), all with Cascade Books. His PhD (2012, University of Bristol) focused on Jacques Ellul's understanding of the Christian faith as movement.

## About the International Jacques Ellul Society

The International Jacques Ellul Society, founded in 2000 by former students of Ellul, links scholars, students, and others who share an interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), longtime professor at the University of Bordeaux. Along with promoting new publications related to Ellul and producing the *Ellul Forum*, the Society sponsors a biennial conference. IJES is the anglophone sister society of the francophone Association internationale Jacques Ellul.

The objectives of IJES are threefold:

**Preserving a Heritage.** The Society seeks to preserve and disseminate Ellul's literary and intellectual heritage through republication, translation, and secondary writings.

**Extending a Critique.** Ellul is best known for his penetrating critique of *la technique*, of the character and impact of technology on our world. The Society seeks to extend his social critique particularly concerning technology.

**Researching a Hope.** Ellul was not only a social critic but also a theologian and activist in church and community. The Society seeks to extend his theological, biblical, and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

IJES is a nonprofit organization, fully reliant on membership fees and donations from supporters worldwide. For more information or to become a member, please visit [ellul.org](http://ellul.org).

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# The **Ellul** Forum

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[The] Ellul Forum

About

Jacques Ellul (1912-94) was a French thinker and writer in many fields: communication, ethics, law and political science, sociology, technology, and biblical and theological studies, among others. The aim of the *Ellul Forum* is to promote awareness and understanding of Ellul's life and work and to encourage a community of dialogue on these subjects. The *Forum* publishes content by and about Jacques Ellul and about themes relevant to his work, from historical, contemporary, or creative perspectives. Content is published in English and French.

**Subscriptions**

The *Forum* is published twice a year. Annual subscriptions are \$40 usd for individuals/ households and \$80 usd for institutions. Individual subscriptions include membership in the International Jacques Ellul Society, and individual subscribers receive regular communications from the Society, discounts on IJES conference fees, and other benefits. To subscribe, please visit [www.ellul.org](http://www.ellul.org).

## Submissions

The *Forum* encourages submissions from scholars, students, and general readers. Submissions must demonstrate a degree of familiarity with Ellul's thought and must engage with it in a critical way. Submissions may be sent to [ellulforum@gmail.com](mailto:ellulforum@gmail.com).

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## Advert: Call for Papers

The spring 2021 issue of the *Ellul Forum* will be a theme issue on Christian responses to modern technology, guest edited by Richard Stivers and J.M. van der Laan.

In his prophetic work *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, Jacques Ellul argues that the church needs to rethink its position on technology in terms of abandonment / hope. He asserts that we live in a time, not unprecedented, in which God has abandoned us and we him. We are left to our own devices, notably technology. Christian hope must fill the void of God's abandonment of the church and the world.

We are calling for papers on a Christian response to modern technology in terms of abandonment / hope. What does it mean to relate to technology and use it as an act of hope? You may choose to write about a specific technology or set of technologies, or about technology in general. The papers should be less academic and more existential. We need to clarify our starting position, rather than work out a detailed ethic, Ellul states. We will assume that readers will have at least a general knowledge of Ellul's ideas about technology.

Submissions may be in essay or short story form. They should be in English and between 3,000 and 4,000 words. Submissions are due by October 31, 2020. Please send your submission to [ellulforum@gmail.com](mailto:ellulforum@gmail.com).

## How I Discovered Hope

Jacques Ellul

Reading the eighth chapter of Paul's Letter to the Romans was a watershed in my life. In fact, it was such a totally decisive experience that it became one of the steps in my conversion. And for the first time in my life, a biblical text really became God's Word to me.

I had often read the Bible. I had found it to be of great religious and intellectual interest. I had discovered admirable poetic texts. I'd found historical knowledge—and subjects worthy of reflection. I'd even found—in the Gospels, for example—some elements to nourish my young faith. But until that decisive, watershed experience, I'd never been *seized* by a written text. Never before had a text so suddenly transformed itself into Absolute Truth, truth beyond debate, truth like a blinding light.

I can't even describe what happened then. Nor do I think it could possibly be explained psychologically. But this eighth chapter of Romans, which I'd already read many times, suddenly became many things for me. It became the answer to so many of the questions I'd been asking. It became the place where I simultaneously encountered the Absolute and Eternity. It became a living, contemporary Word, which I could no longer question, which was beyond all discussion. And that Word then became the point of departure for all my reflections in the faith.

I'd like to underline three essential themes of Romans 8: freedom, the sufferings of the present time, and the salvation of the world.

First, let's look at freedom. The law of the Spirit of life in Jesus Christ, Paul writes, "freed me from the law of sin and death" (v. 2). Life and freedom, freedom and salvation, that's what Paul is writing about in this chapter. The salvation he speaks of is not merely that of the soul but that of the whole of life. The liberation he speaks of is not merely that of the spirit. It's a salvation, a liberation that puts me on *the path of freedom*.

Ellul, Jacques. "How I Discovered Hope," trans. Alfred Krass and Martine Wessel. *Ellul Forum* 65 (Spring 2020): 5-8. © The Other Side, 1980.

Modern psychology is more and more demonstrating that all of human life is dominated by the feeling of death, conditioned by it. Death represents bondage, obligation, fatality. Death is the final, inescapable reality of human life. And death is tied to sin, in that sin (this isn't merely a matter of morality!) is a break with God. Since God is the Living One, a break with God inevitably leads to death. All of us have broken with God. We are all therefore given over to fate, to necessity. We are conditioned, whether biologically, culturally, socially, economically, or by political dictatorship.

And here's where the work of God in Jesus Christ comes in: because of what God has done, we're no longer inevitably subject to that law. A freedom is possible, which will express itself in all of our bondages. To live according to the Spirit is to move at all times in the direction of human liberation. Now certainly it's a mistake to confuse political liberation with the liberation that is in Christ. But the liberation that Christ gives to those who believe *must* also express itself in the struggle for the material, economic, and political liberation of the rest of humanity. That isn't the most important thing, but it is the way faith expresses itself.

What's most important is to transmit this faith that liberates. What's most important is to transmit this Spirit that permits us to become detached from things of the flesh. People who are materially or physically liberated always end up re-creating the constraints, obligations, and dictations that formerly bound them. So it's necessary that all people know and practice the liberation of the Spirit—and then diligently seek the full liberation to which the Spirit drives us.

One further point: it's wrong to imagine that liberation in Christ is a permanent state or condition. We constantly lose it. It must constantly be given to us anew. And so I have often found myself needing to re-learn what it is to be free in Christ.

But let me go on. For the salvation Paul is speaking of, the text reminds us (in strong fashion), can't be just a personal affair. Although "*my* salvation" has preoccupied Christians for years, that's a terribly egotistical way of looking at things. Salvation is far more than an individual matter. And if you read Romans 8:18-24, you will see that Paul throws us into solidarity with the whole of creation. The creation's sufferings, he tells us, arise out of human sin—out of my sin. The world and I are connected!

This was an answer to the many questions I'd had about the injustice of the world. This was the text that led me to become politically and socially involved. Suddenly I saw that my personal solution was connected with things larger than myself. It was connected to the whole of creation. The creation had been "subjected to vanity"—or futility—because of human sin. Like us, the creation is destined to death, destined to have no further meaning. And if all is connected, I came to see then, I can't be saved alone. If I've been saved in faith, then that concerns the whole of creation. I can't be liberated or emancipated by myself!

Now in these same verses (Romans 8:18-24), Paul also connects the themes freedom and hope. The world, he says in verse 21, *will* be set free from its bondage to corruption.

In this desolate, meaningless world, where evil and injustice always win, it always seems that one life cannot exist except by the death of others. The best of human intentions always seem to be turned around and made into evil. The world consists of darkness. No light remains. But at the heart of this dark world, Paul tells us, hope is nevertheless to be found. There's nothing *but* hope, but there *is* hope. It is there for all—in every life, in each birth, in each act of charity, in each dawn, in each light (even that of the sun!). In all of these, we see signs of hope. And this hope is not merely human. It comes from the One who allows this suffering creation to continue to exist, and permits it to *wait*.

The creation—and humanity—don't know exactly what they're waiting for. Still, they wait—with the certainty that “All this *will* change.” And the voice of God answers, “Yes, they have good reason to wait.” What they're waiting for, Paul says, is for “God's children to be revealed” (v. 19). Let's be careful here. It's important to understand what this *doesn't* mean. It does *not* mean a judgement where certain of God's children will be damned while others are declared to be God's children. No, what's told us in verse 22 is that *all of creation* is involved. The revelation that the creation is waiting for is that *all* are God's children. Now that's something that can heal the sickness of creation. All of creation—humans, animals, things—*all* are promised salvation, reconciliation, new birth, new creation.

Finally, I want to share what grasped me in a radical way. When I read Romans 8:32-39, I saw with blinding certainty that “If God is for us, who can be against us?” How is it possible for anything (even myself—my doubting spirit, my attitude of rejection) to separate me from God?

God's gift of the Son is *proof* that God loves us. Paul tells us that there is nothing in God but this love. Except for such a love, God wouldn't have had to deliver himself, in the person of the Son, to death. This love I speak of is nothing less than the love of *God*, the *Almighty*, the *Eternal*, the *Universal*. From this point on, God is not going to allow anything to exist outside of that love. Outside of God, only ‘Nothing’ (nothingness!) remains. And since God *is* Love, then *all* is in God's love. And since that love is the love of the *Almighty*, what could ever be mighty enough to detach us from it? I go through all the miseries of the world carried by this hope. And this hope gives me power, because I know that both those who know of it and those who don't are walking together to meet their Lord and their Saviour.

Today, as I reread this text, I realize that Romans 8, indirectly, without my knowing it, has inspired all the research I've done over the last fifty years. One day, many years ago, it gave me an indestructible certainty. And I see now that these words of Paul—and the certainty they gave me—were the kernels of ideas brought to fruition only later in my life. Truly, Romans 8 has been God's Word to me.

This essay was first published in *The Other Side*, March 1980, pp. 28—31. As this magazine is no longer in print, we were unable to seek permission for this reprinting.

# The Dialogue of Sign and Presence

Introduction

Jacob Marques Rollison

Few things in life are as exciting as finding what you are seeking. Sometimes, when a search has gone on for a long time, we lose hope, finding it hard to believe that the search could ever come to an end. But how joyful the moment when hope is united with its object! The joy is even more pronounced when finding is discovering, when the union with what we barely knew enough to seek combines with the novelty of discovering something or someone we had never encountered. But still more delicate and more precious (if also less verifiable) is the conviction that what you are seeking has been seeking you all along.

The article that you are reading is a testament to such a seeking, hoping, finding, and discovering on many levels. One might call this multifaceted process “research,” if the term did not smack so much of stale academia. But if academic research can be seen simply as a rigorous apparatus for more living and personal seeking, then the shoe might be a fit. And when research searches us too, this back-and-forth movement might be better described as a dialogue.

The following is a brief introduction to “The Dialogue of Sign and Presence (Notes for a Christianity Learned by Heart)” a never-before-published article by Jacques Ellul. It happens to be one of his earliest (and perhaps one of his most difficult) articles and touches the very heart of his enormous corpus of writings.

## Finding the Article

Like many of Ellul’s unpublished writings, the article is in the Ellul family archives near Bordeaux, France, which is currently under construction by

Rollison, Jacob Marques. “Introduction.” *Ellul Forum* 65 (Spring 2020): 9-16. © Jacob Marques Rollison, CC BY-NC-ND.

**Ellul Forum** Jerome Ellul with the help of Jean-Philippe Qadri and members of the Ellul family. It was found among the many boxes of papers that have remained largely untouched from the time of Ellul’s death in 1994 until quite recently. As such, the story of its finding is relatively unremarkable. But for me, learning of the existence of this article was a crucial moment in a long search.

I have been avidly reading Ellul’s works since I first encountered them at Wheaton College in Illinois in 2009. In Ellul’s works, I find what I suspect many of his readers find: an interpellation, a call, and an interrogation; a challenge to try to understand the world; an erudite and humble guide; but moreover, sometimes, the voice of a prophet. As Ellul reminds us, in biblical parlance a prophet is only such if they are somehow tied up with the speaking of God. Ellul wrote for readers of all faiths and none, but in his theological writings Ellul wrote about the God who revealed himself in Jesus Christ. For Ellul, God is not an idea but the Living one, the one who sought him

out and confronted him as a teenager, who gave him a task to accomplish, and who accompanied him through all his undertakings, risks, achievements, and losses. Ellul invites believing readers into his own intimate dialogue with God, then encourages them to look for what God might be saying in their own lives.

Having spent much time in dialogue with Ellul's writings, I became convinced that *presence* (and a closely related term, *signification*) were crucial terms to Ellul's ethics and overall thought, terms that have not received the attention they are due. One of the guiding questions of my doctoral research at the University of Aberdeen was therefore, "What does Ellul mean by presence?" Very few of his contemporaries understood his use of the term in *Presence in the Modern World* (among other places), tending to reduce it to political engagement; this elicited Ellul's spirited critique in *False Presence in the Modern World*. But questions of presence and signification pop up throughout his biblical studies, his theological ethics, and even in his non-theological works as well.

Andrew Goddard's wide-ranging work on Ellul encouraged my thinking, noting that in *Les combats de la liberte*, Ellul "trac[es] the origins of *Presence* [*in the Modern World*] to a 1936 article."<sup>425</sup> Yet when I looked through all of Ellul's published and unpublished material from the 1930s that I could find, nothing seemed to match up with this description. Goddard's note thus confirmed my hunch that presence was important to getting what Ellul was really after in his ethics, but I also knew that there was more to the story than was currently available.

#### Introduction

In the fall of 2016 I came to Strasbourg, France, for an extended research trip. While in France I spent a week in Bordeaux, during which I was privileged to discuss my work both with leading Ellul scholars such as Patrick Chastenet, Daniel Cerezuelle, and Jean-Philippe Qadri, and with members of the Ellul family. Jerome Ellul graciously invited me to spend time with him in the archives that he is constructing. Among several decisive thesis-shaping moments that took place in the archives, Jerome, knowing that my research focused on presence, casually handed me this article. Upon reading the title alone, I was stunned; I knew I was holding exactly what I had been looking for.

Once back in Aberdeen, I transcribed the article. Jerome and Jean-Philippe graciously corrected my transcription. I then translated it into English, a translation that I have revisited and revised for the present publication.

## The Article's Context

"The Dialogue of Sign and Presence" is remarkable for several reasons. First, the article was most likely written in 1936, as indicated by Ellul's remark cited above, and by Jerome Ellul and Jean-Philippe Qadri's estimation based on its place in the archives and the paper it was written on. This means that it is among the very first of

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<sup>425</sup> Andrew Goddard, *Living the Word, Resisting the World: The Life and Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 2002), 53.



the roughly 1,100 articles that Ellul (who would have turned 24 years old that year) wrote, positioning it at the very beginning of his writing career.

Second, the article crucially represents what might be the clearest and most important glimpse of the crucial role that Ellul's wife, Yvette, played in his work. Patrick Chastenet goes to great lengths to discuss Yvette with Jacques in interviews conducted at the end of his life. In beautiful and intimate descriptions, Ellul highlights how Yvette brought him out of his books and taught him to relate to others, to *live*, to disdain power, to love the forest, and much more. He notes, too, that she read and commented on his writings, often with astounding insight.<sup>426</sup> He dedicates several of his books to her, and his chapter on "Lifelong Love" in *What I Believe* stems from his marriage with her.<sup>427</sup> But her presence is rarely apparent in the content of the books themselves. Yvette is, however, very visibly and unavoidably present in this article. The original article is written by Jacques in pen, then commented on by Yvette in pencil; Jacques even sometimes responds to Yvette's comments again in pen. If this article was indeed written in 1936—that is, the year before the two married—Ellul's closing line ("oh mon amie chretienne!") appears in a different light. "The content of the article bears witness to Yvette's influence on Ellul, to the lived dialogue between them that contextualizes and nourishes the dialogue in the article.

## The Article's Content

This article is full of beauty and poetry, but it does not always come easy. I would rank it among the least accessible of Ellul's works; but the effort required to grasp it is well spent. Without giving a complete analysis, I will suggest how this article might be read, as well as several ways in which I find this article foundational to Ellul's thought as a whole.<sup>428</sup>

From the outset, this article is about dialogue. Structured as a discussion between two characters, this ostensibly unfinished article *is* a multi-layered dialogue: the dialogue between Jacques and Yvette comments on a dialogue between two unidentified speakers who discuss a back-and-forth dialogue between sign and presence. We start out *in medias res*, without any introduction; the dialogue finishes with the two speakers seeming to agree, humbly emphasizing the limited unity of sign and presence, body and spirit, before a resolving by fading into Yvette's poetic commentary and Ellul's joyful exclamation. Starting this way leaves the reader trying to figure out what is

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<sup>426</sup> Jacques Ellul and Patrick Troude-Chastenet, *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology, and Christianity: Conversations with Patrick Troude-Chastenet*, trans. Joan Mendes France (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005). See especially 1, 58-59, 80-81, 93-98.

<sup>427</sup> For the dedications, see *To Will & To Do* and *Reason for Being*. Ellul, *What I Believe*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 66ff. Importantly, the theme of the importance of "dialogue" in marriage returns at 77-78.

<sup>428</sup> For my full analysis, see Jacob Marques Rollison, *A New Reading of Jacques Ellul: Presence and Communication in the Postmodern World* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020), which should be available soon.

going on from the beginning, but things become somewhat clearer in ^12-14 before the conclusion.

The chief concern of the article is *ethical*. The subtitle locates the rest as a sketch of “Notes for a Christianity Learned by Heart,” and it opens discussing ethical rules and spiritual values. As the dialogue progresses, it becomes clear that the most important consideration is how to understand the presence of God and what God’s presence means for understanding relations between time and space, body and spirit, and sign and presence. How to think about *God’s* presence is thus crucial for thinking about the *Christian’s* presence in the world.

## Introduction

Theologically, to consider the presence of God is inextricably linked to the question of eucharistic communion, the bread and wine sacramentally consumed by the church. Denominations are split over the specifics of *how* it is that Christ is present in this act: that is, whether the elements of bread and wine are transformed, “transubstantiated” into the actual body and blood of Jesus, or whether the elements are “merely” symbolic of Christ’s body and blood, or whether Christ is somehow mysteriously present in a way that neither of these two quite capture. Ellul almost never addresses the Eucharist in his works, which further highlights this article’s unique posture. The biblical citations opening the article signal the Eucharist as linked to the issues under examination, but Ellul does not explicitly delineate his dogmatic position. How, then, are we to understand divine presence?

One of the most important lines in this article comes in ^12:

God, bound by no law and by no historical cohesion, could effectuate the rescue of lost man without a tangible sign of this sanctification. In other words, He could efface original sin without sending the Christ. He could have just had a prophet announce that Christ *had already* come and that the redemption of those who wanted to put their faith in Christ *had already* happened. It would be enough to justify Christ’s presence through dialectical reason, saying that man, having been lost by the fault of a man, had been redeemed by the blood of a man. [...] And yet, He sent Christ.

In a Kierkegaardian theological move, Ellul situates the saving work of Jesus Christ in his incarnation, death, and resurrection within a framework of the freedom of the trinitarian God.<sup>429</sup> Because God does not *have* to send Christ, for Ellul, Jesus Christ’s bodily incarnation is a communicative sign *freely* given to humanity. Were humanity living in sinless communion with God, they might not need this sign to instigate faith, but the incarnation is a sign given to help a sinful humanity “who need to break bread together to know what communion is.” However, the incarnation is not just a signpost

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<sup>429</sup> Ellul’s description pays clear homage to Kierkegaard’s understanding of God as the “Unconditioned” one. Cf. Frederic Rognon, *Jacques Ellul: Unepensee en dialogue* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2013), 171.

pointing back to something else; the whole point of the dialogical unity of *sign* and *presence* is that God is present in God's signs. Jesus Christ is God's giving of himself to humanity. As all through the Old Testament wisdom literature, as throughout John's Gospel, God's word invites us to *taste* and to *see*, to bind God's commands on our *fingers*, write them on the tablet of our *heart*, to *cover* our naked bodies in the Gospel like clothing and armour. Ellul has not given us a dogmatic look at the Eucharist but a poetic affirmation that God is fully (and even bodily) present with us. Knowing God is a fully embodied adventure; the speaker who affirms the carnal presence of Christ cannot reduce this presence to intellectual dogma.

I suggest that thinking God's presence in this way implies a three-part dialogue, seen most clearly in ^14. First, a *body-spirit* dialogue: bodily presence is indissociable from spiritual presence. Second and third, in the last two lines of ^14 we see that this dialogue implies both a *time-space* dialogue, and a *sign-presence* dialogue: bodily presence is a *sign* of spiritual presence. I suggest that true presence for Ellul involves all three parts of this dialogue. No one of these pairs can do without the other, but their relation is not static, either; it is a dialogue. If this is too complicated, we might suggest the following citation as the closest to a concise definition of "presence" as Ellul gets: "Presence is above all a testimony of the person. [...] It is the complete engagement of the being in this gift that one person is to another. It is the complete engagement of God in this gift of God."

Taking this understanding of presence seriously should significantly affect how we read Ellul's works. The most obvious impact comes in interpreting his theological-ethical works. This conception of presence is a structural theme running throughout *Presence in the Modern World*. *To Will & To Do* is an extended meditation on the trouble that presence causes for dogmatics and ethics. *Hope in Time of Abandonment* diagnoses the failure of signification and presence as a driver of theological ethics under postmodern conditions. *The Humiliation of the Word* calls for re-starting the blocked dialogue of sign and presence. However, this even shifts the weight of our understanding of Ellul's sociological works on technique: I suggest that *technique* can be understood as *anti-presence*. Ultimately, we might hear Ellul as principally a thinker of presence, rather than of technique.

Finally, this should also cause us to reconsider standard approaches to Ellul's corpus. Most of Ellul's interpreters rightly invoke "dialectic" as an interpretive tool for understanding how his whole work fits together. But what is dialectic? Is it, as in Socrates' usage, a dialogue? Or is it more of a logic of evolving forces in tension, as for Hegel? Both usages are certainly present in Ellul's work and among his interpreters. But I suggest that however helpful it might be in understanding Ellul's work, the second interpretation on its own is insufficient. This article purposely undermines "dialectical reasoning" as sufficient in itself for considering God's presence and our ethical presence

to one another. Dialectic *as logic* excludes the presence of the other; only dialectic *as embodied dialogue* can ultimately allow for true communion.<sup>430</sup>

## Concluding Remarks

As Ellul has remarked, the beauty of dialectic as dialogue is that it never ends. I have by no means exhausted this article's potential; I have only presented some of what seem to me to be the main points, picking the low-hanging fruit. Hopefully you too will join in the conversation; if so, we will all be better off. And who knows? You too might find what you are looking for.

Special thanks to Jerome Ellul and the Ellul family for allowing this article's publication, to Jerome and Jean-Philippe Qadri for their help with transcribing the article, and to Lexington Books for allowing me to publish my interpretive summary here.

## The Dialogue of Sign and Presence - Text

Jacques Ellul and Yvette Ellul

Ellul, Jacques. "The Dialogue of Sign and Presence (Notes for a Christianity Learned by Heart)," trans. Jacob Marques Rollison. *Ellul Forum* 65 (Spring 2020): 17-28. © Jacques Ellul.

Matt. 26:26: And while they were eating, Jesus took bread and having given thanks, broke it, and gave it to them saying: Take, eat, this is my body . .

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Luke 24:30: And as they were at the table with him, he took bread and gave thanks, then having broken it, he gave it to them. In this way their eyes were opened and they recognized him.

Translator's Note: Words shown in italics were written by Yvette between the lines of Jacques's manuscript. I have tried to place them where they appear in relation to Jacques's words. Words shown in bold italics are Jacques's responses to Yvette. Words shown with *solid underline* were underlined by Jacques. Words shown with double solid underline were underlined by Yvette. Bracketed numbers in the text indicate page breaks in the original document. Pilcrows (¶) are editorial insertions; these mark apparent transitions between speakers or clear indentations in the original manuscript.

¶1 Let us be wary of the Spirit and spiritual values. We are not spirits, and we must recognize our powerlessness. With a stew in front of me, I don't feel spiritual at all.

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<sup>430</sup> For more on these questions, see Brian Brock, "Prayer and the Teaching of Christian Ethics: Socratic Dialogue with God?" *Studies in Christian Ethics* 33.1 (2020): 40-54.

Why? I believe I am only more aware of myself. Will I say I am disgusted? To what good?! Shouldn't I shave? well? I have no desire to break my attachment to my flesh, for what could I do without it? Move toward the development of the spirit?—if it is to the detriment of my flesh, I refuse. I am body and soul. I will remain body and soul. A presence is not an absence for me. A presence demands the body and the soul.

"I am perfectly spiritual, what does dogma matter to me? I live the rule." But if it is thus, what good is living? If I live the rule, it is because I am the rule. If I am the rule, I have no possibility of diversity. Yet diversity is my nature. . . . But I could respond that since I am the rule, I have a common measure with God. So be it. I am persuaded that I have a common measure with God, but if it is thus, I no longer understand either sign or presence.

¶2 Let's pursue this—"I am the rule"—so then, it is I who create the common measure with God; it is I who, as the rule, have the common measure; it is I who measure myself against God. Nevertheless, can I not have my salvation on my own? Certainly not; but this salvation is only possible because I am the rule. Without this, I wouldn't be able to benefit from the salvation offered to me. But then, if this salvation is offered to me, how can it be that it comes from God, since I, who am perfectly spiritual, reject dogma?

¶3 I did not say that I rejected dogma at all. I said that at a certain level of spiritual elevation, dogma is no longer necessary, and consequently, that I can directly know and live the rule. We have passed rather quickly over this in your haste—so be it, but if you know the rule directly, you must be able to live it. For either you esteem that your action (because it is yours, and because your spiritual development is sufficient) is the rule itself—or you yourself posit the rule as known, yet exterior to yourself, but able to be known by you, and you must conform yourself to it. In the first case, you posture yourself as God, because the knowledge of the rule does not depend on God but on you—and it is after having acted that you can consider your action as rule. And in this case, you are no longer open to the<sup>431</sup><sup>432</sup> presence of God. If indeed you suppose, you feel that you are predestined to salvation, you can thus suppose this without sin, I believe; but you cannot without sin say that your action suffices for salvation—(which is another way of saying that it is the rule); now you have conceded that your salvation comes from God. If you listen to God you can no longer speak of a rule, and your action is thus justified because it is, but then you can no longer make salvation depend on it, which has no meaning. *exactly* If, on the contrary, you situate the rule as exterior to yourself but directly known by you, a further step is necessary to act out this rule. For we agree on the fact that one must apply this rule and not confine oneself to knowing it (knowledge supposes action, for that matter), but in this case you suppose that you are capable of applying it, and how will you apply it if not in and by your flesh? You therefore esteem your flesh capable of acting on the rule by itself,

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<sup>431</sup> *Archivists Note:* The footnotes to the text being analyzed are not included.

<sup>432</sup> *Archivists Note:* The footnotes to the text being analyzed are not included.

alone—thus sanctified before salvation—but in doing so you presume your salvation, not in positing yourself as predestined, but in positing yourself as blameless—and you commit a sin.

¶4 But nevertheless, I can hold two perfectly coherent positions; on the one hand the flesh can be purified by the spirit, and spiritualized, without necessarily implying a duality of nature. On the other hand, I can know the rule without being able to apply it, without supposing that I can live it. There are two successive states here: one of knowledge, which via purification of the flesh moves towards the second, which is a state of life. And the passage from the one to the other happens through my will, under the influence of the direct and spiritual knowledge of the rule. *at all / by necessity. identical*

¶5 Let us accept this, even though I don't clearly see this duality (for there is duality in the first state, since the flesh is an obstacle to the realization of the rule) which is transformed into unicity. I do not understand this process. It matters little. But I cannot understand that I could be capable of directly knowing the rule while I am still in a state of sin and incapable of realizing it. I do not see (since I am disabled, and you recognize that I can be incapable at this moment of living and being this rule) how I could know it if not through revelation. But if I know it in this way, it inevitably conforms to dogma. And, by the way, I don't understand at all by what means you can know the accuracy of the rule if you do not relate it to dogma. For if you are perfect, of course I want you to have the certitude of the rule, but we have seen that this is impossible. And you have conceded that you were not perfect at all to begin with,<sup>433</sup> so I don't see what certitude you can have of this rule that you cannot apply and for which you have no criteria. Nevertheless, let us allow that your certitude would be sufficient to conform your life to your rule, and that you would thus be able to purify your flesh. You tell me that you spiritualize it, that you can bring the flesh and the spirit to unicity. And thus you are perfectly spiritual. Henceforth, your attitude is certainly justified. On the one hand, you can know the rule directly and with certitude, on the other hand you can live it—and the two become one. By the same token, you can henceforth neglect dogma, since there is dogma only because there is incertitude. And opposite dogma, it seems you can neglect worthless matter and the flesh. Fine. You perfectly embody the saying that it is by the fruit that we can know the tree. You bear good fruits since you are spiritual, pure, and in this you are sanctified. But what worries me is this unicity. There is no duality of nature. I don't know. In any case, as I was saying at the beginning, I am certain that if I stop eating for a month, I will die of hunger. Will I say that this doesn't matter? I believe that even spiritually, this is extremely important.

¶6 Yet I can defeat matter by the spirit.

¶7 You can defeat matter on the condition of satisfying its needs. And if you reduce it to that, you seriously risk the backlash of the defeated. If you seek only to defeat

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<sup>433</sup> *Archivists Note:* The footnotes to the text being analyzed are not included.

and to limit its needs, they will be all the stronger since they will be more limited, and you would expend even more spiritual energy to defeat them—so much so that all you have taken away from matter, as a result, you will have taken away from the spirit. But don't take the opposing view and tell me that all that you would have ceded to matter you would have won by the spirit. But let's pursue this; admitting that you would have attained this unicity, do you believe yourself to be nearer to perfection? Doubtless, perfection is not unicity, but it is essentially diversity in unicity. And it is in this that it escapes us. Unicity can always be grasped, no matter how absolute it may be—all the elements of this unicity are gathered within limits. A number, no matter how high, will never exceed our understanding; on the contrary, absolute diversity in absolute unicity inevitably escapes us, and it is in this diversity that divine perfection resides. Now, you deny the first element of diversity that you have at your disposal.

¶8 Nevertheless, Christ spiritualized the flesh, and if he dwelt in a body of flesh, he never ceded to the temptations of the flesh, no?

¶9<sup>434</sup> I believe that there is some confusion here. Christ surely did not spiritualize the flesh, since he did not disrupt the Sabbath by picking heads of wheat at the edge of a field and rubbing them in his hands, eating the grains of wheat. But if he did not sin at all, this is not because he had spiritualized the flesh, it is that sin is not of the nature of the flesh, any more than it is of the nature of the spirit. It is of the nature of man. And if we always speak of temptations of the flesh, it is that they are more visible, and crude, but with original sin removed, neither flesh nor spirit inevitably contain sin. *Good Lord* By the fact that he could not sin spiritually, Christ considered the body as what it really is: the temple of God—but I do not in the least see a spiritualization of the flesh here, but only a unity, a communion of the flesh and the Spirit *coexistence Good* in their profound diversity.

¶10 Would I make matter perfectly obedient to the spirit, and perfectly embodying the rule that the spirit is unknown? [sic] But this is impossible, because this would suppose,

first of all, that I cannot sin in spirit; yet, I can sin in spirit, I can  
*not true. I cannot not realize it (the whole being)*

know the rule and not apply it because the flesh is opposed to it, and that thus *unless you consciously and voluntarily and grotesquely take the opposing view* the spirit tends to change the rule because matter is powerless. And it is *but why eternally separate spirit and matter and*

now that dogma must come into play. It is a perfect expression of  
*why always this opposition. Since sin is not*

realism. Dogma finds its foundation in the existence of matter. It is *of the flesh and is not of the spirit but it is of man.*

its measure and respects it. That which tries to escape dogma denies the reality of man by the same token, because it denies the possibility of man's sin. Dogma is the

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<sup>434</sup> *Archivists Note:* The footnotes to the text being analyzed are not included.

judgement on man, at the same time as the condition of his salvation, because if man is not the rule he cannot even conceive of an offer of salvation. He cannot conceive of it except by dogma, but if he is the rule, we have seen that he becomes incapable of salvation because he is committing a definitive sin *No.* and straying from perfection by the fact that he is the rule. Dogma is thus necessary to me because I am not and I know that I cannot be perfectly spiritual.

Translator's note: for this section, I have broken the lines as they are broken in the manuscript, to keep Yvette's remarks where they appear relative to Jacques's text.

But I see a terrible danger here: if you deny that we could directly know the rule, do you not at the same time deny the possibility of a calling? If indeed you say that calling returns inevitably in dogma, it is too easy to respond that the one who receives the calling can perfectly ignore dogma—and that calling, incidentally, has no need of a sign. By the very fact that it is absolutely personal to an individual,<sup>435</sup> it has no need of a sign; it is an affair between God and the one who receives the calling. And here again, I see nothing but a spiritual action without the diversity you have spoken of. By giving a calling to a man, God expects precisely this act of the man's faith in his calling. Now if the act of faith is based on a sign, on a manifestation, it is no longer an act of faith. What God wants is precisely the leap into the unknown, the brusque separation of what was before with what he proposes—and what He proposes is precisely this calling which is known only spiritually, *are you sure?* and which must be accepted as such. The only true rescue of man by God is a purely spiritual rescue; God's only true action in man is purely spiritual action; man cannot boast about living *about living, period* at once according to the flesh and according to the spirit. And by the way, there is considerable danger in telling me that the sign is necessary and that dogma is a necessary expression of God—an expression that is valid for all. For dogma existing by matter and for matter, as you have precisely stated, only supposes a relation between matter and dogma. And thus you are led to admit that since dogma can only judge matter, it is matter that it must judge. Thus, man must be judged by spiritual action. And just as you accused me of performing a solely spiritual action, I accuse you of moralizing the Spirit. If you accept dogma as a sign of the Spirit, you are thereby constrained to construct a morality as a function of dogma. Yet who could claim that morality is the very expression of the Spirit? All Christ's teaching goes against this. In short, as soon as you accept the sign as a spiritual necessity, you enter a labyrinth that you can't get out of except by subordinating the Spirit to the matter; the slippery slope is unavoidable. ^12 While listening to you, I was thinking that we should have distinguished two things. On the one hand, the relation of God to man, and on the other hand, man's action in relation to God. And it is by fault of not having distinguished them that your argument seems convincing. When I think of the relation of God to man, I say that the sign is necessary—and thus you say that I deny calling, which is based on the acceptance of an order by faith. But we must

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<sup>435</sup> *Archivists Note:* The footnotes to the text being analyzed are not included.



stop ourselves here. I will not allow you to<sup>436</sup> make the leap from calling to morality without acknowledging it, and—having told me that I deny the calling—make it into an obligation for me to accept a morality. Once again, you speak without accounting for the sinful state of man. You are taking the notion of calling in a pure state, as if man were not a sinner. Indeed, for a man without sin, it would be a paradox to speak of a calling on the one hand, of the sign on the other. God would no longer be a hidden God for him, because he would be able to see him face to face. And furthermore, even if it were not so in this regard, the man without sin would receive the order of God exactly by virtue of what he is, because he would live totally by faith; and of course, he would not need a sign, because his faith would be a sign to him and (which is also important) a means of differentiation, both sufficient. But for we who are in a state of sin, which you don't think to bring up again, God is a God who is hidden, on the one hand, and this is partly our fault because we don't want to fully enjoy the benefits of God's goodness. And on the other hand, our faith is never sufficient to accept something as the order of God, if it goes against our nature and our will; we are always of little faith, because we are also incapable by our very nature of contenting ourselves with our faith to differentiate spiritual values (such is the sense of "be as little children") (cf. this study). And God knows this well and has never refused the sign to the one who asked it of Him. It is by virtue of our status as sinners that the sign is necessary. And I will come back to this in a little while. But for the moment, I would first like you to recall the innumerable times where Christ, after having accused those who asked him for a sign of a lack *of* faith, nevertheless gave them this sign. In general, the miracles are nothing other than this. But they always require an element of faith from those who ask for the sign. When Christ refuses the sign, it is always when a temptation is proposed to him (cf. the study of those who have tempted God). In short, the sign becomes confirmation, but never a point of departure.

Text

But this still seems insufficient to me; we cannot make use of this or that situation except by our interpretation of it<sup>437</sup>, which is necessarily personal, and can be falsified when it is separated from ourselves. You have said something that seems very important to me: the rescue must be purely spiritual. But if you accept that the rescue of a man must be purely spiritual, i.e., that it has no need of confirmation by any sign, in any case you must admit (and I would not be far from admitting it like you, but in another sense) that the rescue of all men, that is their redemption—and thus their sanctification—could also be effected in a purely spiritual fashion. God, bound by no law and by no historical cohesion, could effectuate the rescue of lost man without a tangible sign of this sanctification. In other words, He could efface original sin without sending the Christ. He could have just had a prophet announce that Christ *had already* come and that the redemption of those who wanted to put their faith in Christ *had*

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<sup>436</sup> *Archivists Note:* The footnotes to the text being analyzed are not included.

<sup>437</sup> *Archivists Note:* The footnotes to the text being analyzed are not included.

*already* happened. It would be enough to justify Christ's presence through dialectical reason, saying that man, having been lost by the fault of a man, had been redeemed by the blood of a man. And the whole theory (almost heretical, if you ask me) of Jesus as an expiatory victim ("victim" here is not heretical, but immolated by your transgressions, and not *for* your transgressions, as we say) is developed on this basis. But if this would satisfy us and would seem like a completion, a circle that cannot be broken, we must consider that God was in no way bound to this dialectical progression. He could have enacted the salvation of men without sending Christ. And yet, He sent Christ. And we know that it would not be the same for us if we knew ourselves to be saved by the virtue of a disincarnate God, having given us no other sign than this affirmation, instead of knowing ourselves saved by virtue of the incarnate Christ, the living sign of our sanctification. Christ was not thus a necessity for the salvation of man since God could effect this salvation without incarnating himself, but it was a necessity for the sign of salvation. *Yes* Now this sign was necessary, precisely because if the sign had not taken place, the certitude of our salvation would not have entailed the change signified in us. Once again, we are sinners. If for a non-sinful man, the certainty of his salvation<sup>438</sup> can act directly and with no other condition, for us, we necessarily need a sign of this certainty so that this certitude becomes a living reality. A sign that our salvation is not inefficacious and that it is bought by God himself, that it is not a caprice on the part of God. Such is the value of the sign of Christ for the certainty of our salvation. The sending of Christ is thus the quintessential example of the necessity of the sign of spiritual action. I thus cannot see how you were accusing me of not recognizing the calling? But having now addressed the first element, I can consider the second element, which is separate: you accuse me of forming a morality as a function of dogma, a sign thus recognized as necessary, *for all but not for each one* and of no longer judging by the spirit except according to this morality, and thus reducing the spirit to a rule. Fine; but to explain this, I will have to call on another notion: that of presence. You agree that if there is a power escaping all codification, it is that of presence. Presence is extremely complex, but in any case, it cannot be translated into defined rules. Models can no longer be applied wherever there is a true presence. And this does not mean that morality excludes presence, but that where there is presence, there cannot be a known morality but only a formulated morality. *Yes* Now, what does dogma signify if not the affirmation of a presence? So here we are before this simple dilemma, in which dogma affirms a presence superior to itself, and it can no longer give rise to an ordinary morality. Or, dogma does not affirm this presence, in which case we can construct a code based on dogma. But precisely, Christian dogma always comes down to this idea of the constant presence of Christ. A spiritual presence on the one hand, but also—I will go as far as to say a carnal—in any case, a temporal presence. For let us not forget that though Christ is seated at the right hand of God, he nevertheless lived in the Roman year 754, in a village in Judea; and that he crossed the

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<sup>438</sup> *Archivists Note:* The footnotes to the text being analyzed are not included.

Jordan on wide, flat boats driven by ferrymen with long mustaches and robes with big purple stripes; and that therefore, having asserted his presence in time, he continues to be in time. Dogma is only meaningful to the extent that for each man, Christ is temporally near to him. But if this is the case, this dogma can no longer give rise to a morality, because the presence of Christ gives each man the ability to take up this dogma for himself, and since there is thus the presence of the sign, there cannot be any codification of the spirit.

Text

^13<sup>439</sup> But I still don't quite understand this temporal presence. If I can accept that a spiritual presence cannot be reduced to a formula (which is what I am bending over backwards to show to you), must I accept by analogy that a carnal presence is of the same nature? And this relates, incidentally, to your first element: I do believe that the sign of God has a value—for man's salvation. But I hold that this sign is in the spiritual presence of Christ. In other words, the sign of salvation is the gift of God—and nothing else. Posed in these terms, I agree; but if you speak of the spiritual presence of Christ, do you believe that this presence cannot be apprehended directly, unmediated by dogma—and therefore, that we can hardly speak of presence, for it is rather a communion; but that we must instead exclude the notion of dogma, since two are incompatible? I do not think that a discussion of this quasi-carnal presence would be possible, because an entire world separates it from the other presence; and to me, it seems vain to look for its importance.

^14 Once again you deform what I have observed; you deform everything spiritual. You absolutely insist on maintaining your independence in the material domain, which is why you declare that a world separates material and spiritual presence. Still, this world is traversed by the sign; *Yes* but I would like to remind you that this gift of God took on a human form, that the blood of Christ was not mystical blood but red blood, the blood of a carpenter, who planed boards from city to city until he was thirty years old, who worked his muscles on the plane and jointer plane. I want you to remember that the communion of Christ is not a mystical union but a communion of living and sinful men, speaking and discussing and denying, who need to break bread together to know what communion is. You tell me that you can appreciate spiritual presence, but that it is vain to look for material presence—an admirable sophism. How can you grasp something that is suddenly felt and lived in a flash, yet at the same time refuse to attribute any importance to what your hands touch and your eyes see? As for me, I believe in the carnal presence (and in this I push my thinking to the limit!) of Christ. As to the importance of this presence, I need no other testimony than the fact of his showing himself to the disciples after his resurrection. Prove the resurrection? Fine. But not a spiritual resurrection, for he<sup>440</sup> knew how susceptible we can be to mysticism. See how he insists on proving to them that he is living flesh and

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<sup>439</sup> *Archivists Note:* The footnotes to the text being analyzed are not included.

<sup>440</sup> *Archivists Note:* The footnotes to the text being analyzed are not included.

bone. A spirit does not eat, which is why he asks for something to eat. A spirit has no flesh, which is why he makes them touch and feel him. He comes time and again, he walks alongside them. This is the culmination of three *years* of preaching, in which each word is a revolt against the detachment of the spirit from the flesh. He returns, a carnal presence, living and breathing. And this is the full realization of: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I will be there among you." I will be—me, Christ—that is, God *Incarinate* and not me, the Holy Spirit. I believe in the carnal presence of Christ, because this carnal presence is a necessary presence. Spiritual presence is insufficient, *which is the presence that only our spirit/mind grasps* which is why he did not neglect any sign of this carnal presence. This does not mean that I believe in visions, etc., which are the exasperation of this spiritual quest that Christ does not impose on us. As for me, I cannot dissociate carnal and spiritual presence. Note well the order. Presence in the complete sense of the word involves both elements, because presence is above all a testimony of the person. A witness borne by the person about the person. Consequently, it is the complete engagement of the being in this gift that one person is to another. It is the complete engagement of God in this gift of God. (So much so that human relations end up having the same nature as the relation of man to God. It is not for nothing that we are given the same commandment concerning God and the neighbour.) But this witness can only be such when it is borne by the entire person, body and soul. And the relation of the two presences is obvious for me. I know very well that spiritual presence can do without bodily presence, *Ah, there it is!* insofar as the spirit infinitely exceeds us and can be constant and permanent. The Spirit participates in the eternal, and not the body; *And the resurrection of the flesh?* A spiritual real presence not {unreadable} in the first state. *there must have been presence in the complete sense = spiritual presence real presence and impose itself and there is still presence* can be close to another spirit but it is fragility itself caught between mystique and sin.

*We should be able to make out the original fault starting from this one*

On the contrary, bodily presence cannot exist by itself. This word signifies nothing, *Hold on, hold on . . .*

there is no carnal presence, as such. There cannot be presence—bodily presence—except because there is spiritual presence.

*there will be no real presence except if you are spiritual presence, i.e., if your being is alert, ready to grasp real presence—I would almost say incorporate it into itself Good*

It only becomes presence by virtue of spiritual presence. Material presence<sup>441</sup> thus becomes the culmination of spiritual presence. *Nei*<sup>(3)</sup> But once it is manifested, a reversal takes place, *it is this which appears, but not which is they condition each other mutually* and henceforth carnal presence becomes a condition of spiritual presence. This latter can no longer do without corporeal presence, because we cannot pass from

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<sup>441</sup> *Archivists Note:* The footnotes to the text being analyzed are not included.

(3) Perhaps the word *nee* (born)?

the complete to the ideal, *God—Spirit! Very good* without getting the impression of a decadence and a resignation. The witness would cease to be, for corporeal presence has become the base and support of spiritual presence. This latter gives birth to its own reality. *Yes* It is thus this that a bodily presence *reasoning* is born, but once birthed, this latter becomes necessary to spiritual presence; unity in the order of simultaneous space takes the place of successive unity in the order of time. Dissociation is impossible because henceforth bodily presence is the sign of the other *the* presence.

^15 And with that, I have finished. What more could I say? "The two elements that I had dissociated are united. The sign and presence. Presence is the sign of the gift, and bodily presence is the sign of the spirit. The two are one and the same. Presence and the sign. For the sign is the confirmation of the Spirit, and the sign is the presence of the promise. *the sign is not uniquely corporeal —so?* Spirit and love. Promise and confirmation. All is indissolubly linked,

Text

Translator's note: for this section, I have broken the lines as they are broken in the manuscript, to keep Yvette's remarks where they appear relative to Jacques's text.

**Ellul Forum** the one leads to the other since there is no more separation here. Every sign asked for and obtained is a confirmation of the spirit already received, for the sign is such only by the spirit that is predisposed. *receives* Likewise, all bodily presence is such only by the spiritual presence that gives it its meaning. But blind, with clumsy hands, what would I make of the Spirit in my flesh, and of the spiritual presence without the body that I hold to?

*Let's not forget that "the body," bodily presence is always linked to spiritual presence; it is presence that you hold to; it is not the body. Very good No spiritual presence without bodily presence either, which will be perhaps unreal in the sense of unpalpable, but magnificently real by virtue "of the whole" that it engenders, and which is neither a creation nor an exasperation. A real presence, I tell you, which was not spiritual only because it was not bodily, but which attained my being—and in this it was not uniquely spiritual. For the complete joy of real and total presence was in me and not only in my spirit—and because I could not do otherwise, not even dive into the Apocalypses, I took the Bible and I opened to the page of the resurrection of Christ and I was astonished . . . and I meditated on the resurrection of the flesh, which will be the resurrection of the being. From here, we plunge into the domain of the unreal and our fingers cling to nothingness and sand. Reason rebels and the spirit withdraws. But we must have the courage to live this instability . . . so close. There is no longer anything but God.*

*oh my Christian friend!*<sup>(4)</sup>

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<sup>(4)</sup> amie chretienne.

# The Dialogue of Sign and Presence - Interpretive Summary of the Argument

Jacob Marques Rollison

Following my reading of the original document, I have assigned paragraph numbers to break where it seems that Ellul is transitioning between speakers. In the original, these are marked only by the beginning of a new line; it is thus perhaps an interpretive move to assign these to different speakers, but a move that I view as concretizing what is evident within the text. I will refer to these two speakers as Speaker A (SA) and Speaker B (SB) for convenience. ^1. SA suggests that directly knowing and living ethical rules excludes dogma. The ethical problem of posing rules gives humans a common measure with God, but this problematizes both presence and sign (discussed further on), because the life and the rule seem separate—too much spiritual development excludes the body.

^2. SB challenges this as contradictory, saying that if one creates this ethical rule / common measure<sup>442</sup> with God, it cannot be useful for salvation (which can only be from God); but if one rejects dogma, the rule / measure cannot be from God either. Yet, the human must be the measure of this salvation for it actually to be salvation of the human.

^3. SA retorts that they did not reject dogma but that a certain level of spiritual development will exclude it, since the ethical rule can be directly lived and known. SA suggests that either their action is the rule, or the rule is posited as known and exterior to themselves. In the first case, they are in the place of God, which problematizes God's presence—the rule justifies, which excludes an external salvation. In the second case, if the rule is exterior to themselves, there is a gap to cross to act out the rule in the flesh—but the flesh is sinful, so we cannot presume our salvation.

^4. SB says that the apparent contradiction is coherent if taken dialectically, as stages in succession: the spirit purifies and spiritualizes the flesh via one's will. One begins by *knowing* the external rule "spiritually," then *enacting* it in the flesh.

^5. SA rejects this as insufficient, seeing a problematic duality implied between spirit and body, even in the first "stage," which then moves towards unicity. But this is problematic. First, because in a sinful state how is knowledge of the exterior rule possible without dogma? Second, even allowing that one can achieve this unicity by conforming one's life to an exterior rule, this unicity itself is troubling . . . is the flesh truly spiritual-ized—i.e., can one stop eating physical food?

^6. SB says that the spirit can defeat matter.

^7. SA agrees, but says that this defeats the spirit as well. Besides, even this unicity would not be perfection, because divine perfection is *diversity in unicity*, which unicity can never grasp.

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<sup>442</sup> The French *regie* can be translated as "ruler," in the sense of a measuring instrument, as well as "rule," in the sense of a law, code, or regulation. I believe that both senses are implied in this article.

^8. SB suggests that Christ resolves this problem: did Jesus not spiritualize the flesh?

^9. SA says no, in fact, he did not—sin is a problem of the *human*, not the body or the spirit. Therefore, Christ did not *spiritualize* the flesh but only gave a unity, a communion of flesh and spirit in diversity.

^10. SB rejects an intended subordination of flesh to spirit, but they do imply an opposition between them in which the spirit tends to modify the rule because of the weakness of the flesh: this is the place for dogma. “Dogma finds its foundation in the existence of matter,” measuring and respecting it; dogma is necessary because I cannot be perfectly spiritual. In this section, Yvette notably pushes back on the speaker’s separation of spirit and flesh in sin.

¶11. SA suggests that the notion of “calling” problematizes SB’s schema. Because calling is an individual and purely spiritual phenomenon, it needs no sign and thus no diversity of matter and spirit. God desires a pure “leap of faith,” which the giving of a sign would invalidate. God’s “rescue” of humanity is only spiritual. If one says that the sign is necessary and dogma is universal, there is a problem: dogma only measures matter, presupposing only a dogma-matter relation, not a dogma-God relation. So dogma cannot judge the spirit. But if this dogma is taken to be the sign of the spirit’s work, morality must be elaborated in function of dogma—and thus the spirit is moralized! Once the sign is a spiritual necessity, spirit is necessarily subordinated to matter.

¶12. SB gives a long argument: SA’s objection is only convincing because they have failed to distinguish the relation of God to the human from the action of the human in relation to God. For the first of these, the sign is necessary. SA ignores the sinful state of humanity, treating “calling” as if addressed to a sinless human. This human would need no sign, “God would no longer be a hidden God,” and their faith would be sufficient as a sign and for discernment. But because we are sinful, God is hidden; our faith is too little, so God always gives a sign to those who demand it. But it is only a sign *to faith*, a confirmation and not a point of departure.

Since this sign is communicated *to us* and relies on our interpretation of it, it is thus *inseparable from us*. If SA is right and the “rescue” must be purely spiritual, the sign would not be necessary; God could simply have had a prophet announce that salvation *had* been effected, and dialectical reason would suffice for humans to have faith. But God *did* send Christ. Jesus is the *living sign of our sanctification*; *Jesus was not a necessity for the salvation of humanity but for the sign of this salvation*. We need signs so that our certainty becomes a living reality. Christ is the “quintessential example of the necessity of the sign of spiritual action.”

To fully comprehend this, the notion of *presence*, inherently complex, is necessary. Presence *can have no fixed rules*. True presence kills any models; the presence of God thus implies that there can be no (directly, certainly, exteriorly) known moral rule but only a *formulated* or constructed morality. And the *presence* of Jesus Christ is the core of Christian dogma. This presence is not just spiritual, but carnal, or in any case

temporal: “since there is thus the presence of the sign, there cannot be any codification of the spirit.”

¶13. SA is confused on temporal presence. Spiritual presence is irreducible to a formula, certainly, but is carnal presence the same? Yes, signs are valuable for human salvation, but they are only such in the presence of Christ—the sign is nothing but a gift of God. But is Christ’s spiritual presence only graspable in dogma? We can hardly speak of it—it’s more of a communion, but this problematizes dogma, no?

¶14. SB objects: SA has again insisted on the division of matter and spirit! The sign overcomes the world. This “gift” takes on a human form! “The communion of Christ is not a mystical union but a communion of living and sinful men, speaking and discussing and denying, and who need to break bread together to know what communion is.” But how can spiritual presence be discussed without carnal presence? *SB affirms their belief in the carnal presence of Christ*. This is insisted upon by Gospel accounts of his eating with disciples, being touched and seen after the resurrection. “This is the completion of 3 years of preaching, of which each word is a revolt against the spirit detached from the flesh.” God *incarnate* is among us in the church, and this carnal presence is a necessary sign. Here we see the most complete attempt at a definition of presence: “Presence involves the two elements, because presence is above all a testimony of the person. A witness borne by the person about the person. Consequently, it is the complete engagement of the being in this gift which one person is to another. It is the complete engagement of God in this gift of God.” Human-to-human relations are filtered through human-God relations. *Witness* demands both the body and soul—the entire person. While the spirit can exceed the body (and here, Yvette pushes back), bodily presence is nothing without spiritual presence. Material presence is only such by the spiritual; but then, a reversal occurs in which carnal presence becomes the condition of spiritual presence. Henceforth they are indissociable.

¶15. It is hard to tell who finishes; it seems SA has come around to SB’s position, accepting that they were wrong to have dissociated matter and spirit. “The two are one and the same. Presence and the sign. [...] All is indissolubly linked.” Yvette ends with a poetic focus on the unity of body and spirit.

## Information as a Problem for Human Freedom: Jacques Ellul’s Contribution to Library Science

Lisa Richmond

Freedom of information is a fundamental commitment of the academic library profession.<sup>443</sup> This commitment, while important and necessary, places emphasis on the

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<sup>443</sup> This essay was first delivered as a talk for an audience of academic librarians. It is printed here in the *Ellul Forum* in the hope that it has interest more broadly as an introduction to Ellul’s thought on these important societal questions.



harm that results from the absence, not the presence, of information, and generally treats information itself as an unambiguous good. According to the French social theorist Jacques Ellul (1912-94), however, information creates important problems for democratic societies and for individual human lives. “The free flow of information” is not the problem, he says. “The fundamental problem regarding information resides elsewhere, within the close relationship between information and propaganda.”<sup>444</sup>

Propaganda for Ellul is one manifestation of a pervasive, governing feature of contemporary life that he terms *la technique*. Technique is “to seek in everything the absolutely most efficient means.”<sup>445</sup> Technique foregrounds means, and the ends recede from view. Technique becomes its own end. Whenever we proceed to do something because we *can* do it—without asking if we should do it, why we should do it, what end it serves, whether that end is good, and how good is to be defined—then technique is at work in us. Ellul’s book *La technique ou l’enjeu du siècle* (1954), translated into English as *The Technological Society* (1964), expounds this argument in detail. A subsequent book, *Propagandes* (1962), translated into English as *Propaganda* (1965), demonstrates how technique manifests itself in the sphere of communication. Since its publication in 1962, scholars have

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viewed this book as one of the most important studies of this subject, possibly the most important.

But what more particularly does it mean if propaganda is a method or technique for achieving results, rather than a way of knowledge that seeks to make things understood? In a famous remark, Joseph Goebbels, the chief of the Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda in Nazi Germany, observed, “We do not talk to say something, but to obtain a certain effect.”<sup>446</sup> Some theorists define propaganda as all persuasion-oriented discourse. This definition seems to me to be so all-encompassing as to be unhelpful if not meaningless. In this paper I will use the definition set forth by the scholar Stanley Cunningham. Propaganda, he suggests, is “a vast and complex modern social phenomenon,

rooted in a series of cognitive disorders in which there is an erosion of superior epistemic values (e.g., truth, truthfulness, rationality and sound reasoning, understanding, evidence along with its procedural safeguards, critical review and evaluation) in favour of cultivating lesser epistemic forms (e.g. attention, impressions, belief, images, infor-

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<sup>444</sup> Jacques Ellul, “Information and Propaganda.” *Diogenes* 5 (1957): 62.

<sup>445</sup> “Rechercher en toutes choses la methode absolument la plus efficace.” Jacques Ellul, *La Technique* (Paris: Economica, 1990), 18-19.

<sup>446</sup> Quoted in Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda*, trans. Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York: Knopf, 1966), x note.

mation bytes or factoids), as well as downright negative states (confusion, ignorance, misunderstanding, error and falsity).<sup>447</sup>

Let us now consider what Ellul calls the close relationship between information and propaganda. His argument can be expressed in four steps.

## Propaganda Uses (True) Information

Information is a constituent of both propaganda and, what I will call, following Cunningham, higher-epistemic discourse. No less a propagandist than Vladimir Lenin stated that “in propaganda, truth pays off.” The US government during World War II provided this instruction to its agents: “When there is no compelling reason to suppress a fact, tell it. [...] Aside from considerations of military security, the only reason to suppress a piece of news is if it is unbelievable.”<sup>448</sup> Propaganda and higher-epistemic discourse do not differ according to the presence or absence of information but to how information is used. “We must make a radical distinction,” Ellul says,

between a fact on the one hand and intentions or interpretations on the other; in brief between the material and the moral elements. The truth that pays off is in the realm of *facts*. The necessary falsehoods, which also pay off, are in the realm of *intentions* and *interpretation*.

This is a fundamental rule for propaganda analysis.<sup>449</sup>

Where higher-epistemic discourse uses information in the service of careful reasoning and evaluation, propaganda uses information—even the same piece of information—in lower-epistemic ways. Information is used to create the desired psychological conditions, and then it is discarded. “The facts, the data, the reasoning—all are forgotten, and only the impression remains.”<sup>450</sup>

## Information Is Necessary to Propaganda

Access to information is therefore a prerequisite of propagandistic effect. Ellul sees the rise of propaganda in its modern form as coincident with the rise of literacy, education, and the mass media. “A man who cannot read will escape most propaganda,” Ellul notes, “as will a man who is not interested in reading”:

People used to think that learning to read evidenced human progress; they still celebrate the decline of illiteracy as a great victory. [...] They think that reading is a road to freedom. All this is debatable, for the important thing is not to be able to read,

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<sup>447</sup> Stanley B. Cunningham, “Reflections on the Interface between Propaganda and Religion.” In *The Future of Religion*, ed. Paul Rennick et al. (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 84. For a full discussion of this definition, see Cunningham’s excellent book *The Idea of Propaganda: A Reconstruction* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2002).

<sup>448</sup> Ellul, *Propaganda*, 53.

<sup>449</sup> Ellul, *Propaganda*, 53.

<sup>450</sup> Ellul, *Propaganda*, 86.

but to understand what one reads, to reflect on and judge what one reads. Outside of that, reading has no meaning (and even destroys certain automatic qualities of memory and observation).<sup>451</sup>

Educated readers, Ellul notes, are more apt to recognize that the information brought to their attention may not be what is most important (and that “importance” is a highly contingent concept), that it may contradict other information, and that “chance plays a large part in the access one has to [particular] information.”<sup>452</sup> He suggests that the information we receive is rapidly flowing, atomized, and often ambiguous. It does not, on its own, provide explanatory power for human life.

Ellul also notes that the educated person’s information comes mostly second-hand, via publications and the pronouncements of experts. It is not received from those who are personally known and trusted, nor can it be verified directly. Most likely, it concerns matters that only a specialist could verify—and today no intellectual is a specialist beyond a narrow domain. Thus such a person’s “opinion will ultimately be formed solely on the basis of the facts transmitted to him, and not on the basis of his choice and his personal experience.”<sup>453</sup>

Ellul describes the educated class of today as a mass of highly mobile and solitary individuals whose psychic reality is to feel entirely responsible for their own decisions, thrown upon their own resources, in a world that appears more and more complex and even catastrophic, and without the meaning offered in previous eras by family, village, or religious community. (Ellul does not say that traditional sources of meaning were necessarily accurate or good for human freedom, only that they did provide a framework of meaning for the members of those societies.) Although Ellul states that “a high intelligence, a broad culture, a constant exercise of the critical faculties, and full and objective information are still the best weapons against propaganda,”<sup>454</sup> these conditions are exceedingly difficult and rarely achieved. Since information serves mostly to heighten anxiety and enervate will, the primary experience of most so-called well-informed persons is “inferiority and fear.”<sup>455</sup> Propaganda then steps in and offers relief for this intolerable condition.

## In Turn, Information Renders Propaganda Necessary

“Information actually generates the problems that propaganda exploits and for which it pretends to offer solutions,” Ellul says. “In fact, no propaganda can work until the moment when a set of facts has become a *problem*.”<sup>456</sup> Ellul speaks of what he calls *integration propaganda*, the soft enfolding of our thoughts, beliefs, and actions

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<sup>451</sup> Ellul, *Propaganda*, 108.

<sup>452</sup> Ellul, “Information and Propaganda,” 68.

<sup>453</sup> Ellul, *Propaganda*, 87.

<sup>454</sup> Ellul, *Propaganda*, 111.

<sup>455</sup> Ellul, “Information and Propaganda,” 75.

<sup>456</sup> Ellul, *Propaganda*, 114.

into a complete outlook or way of life that is offered to us readymade and comforting. It offers its patients a total explanation and a conviction of personal significance. It operates by means of *myth*, another important concept for Ellul, an “all-encompassing, activating image” that serves to situate and valorize human lives.<sup>457</sup> A human being “needs explanations, broad answers to general problems. He needs coherence, an affirmation of his own worth.”<sup>458</sup> All this propaganda provides. Because propaganda responds to such a deep need in the human psyche, Ellul suggests that people “collude” in their propagandization.

## Propaganda Ultimately Triumphs Over Information

Democratic societies cohere not primarily by force but by the cultivation of public opinion. Coherence is attained via adhesion to social myths and to the attitudes and commitments they engender. The educated class is the most necessary for the cultivation of public opinion. It would seem that here we have an opportunity for higher-epistemic forms of persuasion that seek to honor and preserve human dignity and freedom. But Ellul points out that the battle between propaganda and higher-epistemic discourse cannot be an equal one. “The man who informs honestly must say: ‘Here are the facts, believe them or not as you see fit.’”

And so from this point on [...] propaganda will always triumph over information. [...] Wherever there is propaganda, information, if it is to survive, must utilize the same weapons. [...] It] forces the informant to engage in counterpropaganda. If one wishes to avoid this conflict and preserve independence, objectivity, the dispassionateness of information, then all kinds of propaganda must be forbidden. Strict control must be exerted over the press, the radio, and so forth. This would call for a rigorous censorship. [...] In other words, the guaranty that information would have its full educational effect would rest on authoritarian measures.<sup>459</sup>

Because democratic government must be concerned with self-legitimation, it cannot survive without the use of propaganda.

Let us consider a specific example. A government could observe that if the desired result in the context of global warming is a population that supports alternative energy sources, then that population’s actual understanding of the complex science of global warming is irrelevant. Which is more important, the government might ask itself: getting the results we want by propaganda, or making an idol of knowledge and venturing on an unnecessary and possibly futile detour into educating the people so that they will be able to make an informed decision about global warming— particularly when we know that other interested parties will be asserting their own propaganda in the service of their own ends? The plausibility of the propagandistic approach to driving

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<sup>457</sup> Ellul, *Propaganda*, 31.

<sup>458</sup> Ellul, “Information and Propaganda,” 76.

<sup>459</sup> Ellul, “Information and Propaganda,” 66-7.

public opinion can tend to draw even non-totalitarian institutions. Simply making an abundance of information easily accessible does not guarantee a future for civilizational concern for knowledge and understanding.

## Application

I now offer several observations for our profession. First, we can observe that library science as a profession is deeply enmeshed in what Ellul has called *technique*. Library science arose in the late nineteenth century, when technique was asserting itself across all domains of life. Melvil Dewey (1851-1931), one of the founders of American library science, strongly embodied technique. His passion for efficiency drove his Library Bureau and other library-related innovations, as did his support of the metric system and spelling reform.<sup>460</sup> Ellul does not argue that technique is intrinsically bad, but he reminds us that people tend to believe that “when difficulties concerning the organization of information are resolved, everything will be resolved. This is a dangerous illusion.”<sup>461</sup>

Much of our effort within the academic library profession continues to focus on making library-based scholarship more efficient. But what is in fact the relationship between scholarship and efficiency? The University of Chicago sociologist Andrew Abbott has performed an extremely valuable service to our profession by suggesting that since we have not developed an adequate theory of library-based scholarship, we have no way to judge whether these efficiencies do in fact benefit it.<sup>462</sup> We are not able to assess the relationship between means and end.

Second, we can note that our professional concern to oppose censorship—the withholding of information—has obscured for us the equally important concern to understand and oppose propaganda—the use of information in inferior epistemic ways. My recent search in *Library, Information Science, and Technology Abstracts* database produced 2,377 entries with the subject word *censorship* and just 176 with the subject word *propaganda*. This inattention to the reality of propaganda is particularly troubling when we note Ellul’s comment that “all serious propagandists know that censorship should be used as little as possible.”<sup>463</sup>

And third, I suggest that by accepting *information* as the matter with which our profession is concerned, we directly strengthen the power of propaganda by obscuring the distinction between higher-and lower-epistemic forms of communication. Philip Agre, formerly professor of information studies at UCLA, notes that “the term ‘information’

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<sup>460</sup> Ellul specifically mentions card files and libraries (*fichiers, bibliothèques*) as examples of intellectual technique. Ellul, *La Technique*, 19.

<sup>461</sup> Ellul, “Information and Propaganda,” 62.

<sup>462</sup> Andrew Abbott, “The Traditional Future: A Computational Theory of Library Research.” *College & Research Libraries* 69 (2008): 524-45.

<sup>463</sup> Ellul, *Propaganda*, 16n.

rarely evokes the troubling questions of epistemology that are usually associated with terms like 'knowledge' and 'belief.'<sup>464</sup> If we made knowledge the focus of our profession, rather than information, we would be more interested as a profession in questions of epistemology: how people come to know rightly anything that they do know.

Of course, librarians have adopted the information paradigm because it enables them to render the particular carrier irrelevant: books *per se* are no longer librarians' particular concern. But Agre reminds us that scholarly communities orient not to information but to "literatures." A literature, he notes,

has a history (founders, milestones, rise and fall) and a structure (founding texts, survey articles, textbooks). Each of these in turn reflects a set of practices (research methods, standards of evidence, forms of argument) and a system of institutional relationships (dominant and dissident lines of thought, powerful and marginal research groups, politics of publication and funding). A research community's insiders read its literature with such things in mind.

[... A literature is a map of] a complex and differentiated terrain.<sup>465</sup>

The information terrain, by contrast, is flat and featureless. We librarians morselize information so that it can be tagged, stored, and retrieved—directly reinforcing this impression of equality between one citation and the next. "The ideology of information [...] serves to position librarianship as a neutral profession," Agre notes, and "the library presents itself largely as a blank screen upon which particular communities can project their own practices and projects."<sup>466</sup> Ellul, however, would question whether our professional neutrality is even possible, regardless of whether it is desirable. After the informant (let us say, the collection-development librarian,)

has chosen, more or less wisely, the facts which he will bring to the public's attention, he runs up against a second difficulty: how should he present these facts? All on the same level, in the same way, giving them equal importance, so that it will be entirely up to the reader to select and establish his own scale of values? [...] Despite appearances, this would not constitute true objectivity; one would be caught in the following dilemma: either to present facts of unequal importance as if they were all alike, and thus falsify reality, or to establish a hierarchy of facts—emphasizing certain ones and giving them a prominent place.<sup>467</sup>

Before we conclude that Ellul would urge us to adopt an educational rather than a neutrality model of librarianship, he goes on to note that if the informant does attempt to establish a hierarchy of facts, "there is no assurance that his decisions would be valid," that is, objectively true.<sup>468</sup> Problems adhere to both the educational and the neutrality models.

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<sup>464</sup> Philip E. Agre, "Institutional Circuitry: Thinking about the Forms and Uses of Information." *Information Technology and Libraries* 14 (1995): 225.

<sup>465</sup> Agre, "Institutional Circuitry," 226.

<sup>466</sup> Agre, "Institutional Circuitry," 226.

<sup>467</sup> Ellul, "Information and Propaganda," 69-70.

<sup>468</sup> Ellul, "Information and Propaganda," 70.

## Conclusion

One definition of *information* often used in our profession is “that which reduces uncertainty.”<sup>469</sup> Ellul points to the world’s inherent uncertainty and ambiguity and notes that information in itself does not resolve these conditions. But he also shows us that the problems of information for human freedom are important and interesting. As a profession, we need to move beyond our sole reliance on what we could call the Enlightenment view of information—the argument that truth inexorably overcomes falsity if only it has the opportunity to be proclaimed. This view is transmitted through such classic works as Milton’s *Areopagitica* and John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty*, works that are widely taught in library schools as foundational to our professional self-understanding. I would like to encourage us to make Jacques Ellul’s *Propaganda* as well known and important to library science as these works are.

## Addendum: Fatalism and Freedom

On first encountering his ideas, one may conclude that Ellul is a pessimist, even a fatalist. If he is right in thinking that democracy has in fact a greater need to deploy propaganda than do other forms of government, and if those who are most motivated to understand and respond to their situation may be most propagandized, doesn’t this mean that our best hopes for human freedom are illusory? To respond to this good question would require another essay. But to pique your interest, and, I hope, prompt you to read Ellul for yourself, let me close by quoting a few lines from Ellul’s introduction to *Propaganda*:

I shall devote much space to the fact that propaganda has become an inescapable necessity for everyone. In this connection I have come upon a source of much misunderstanding. Modern man worships “facts”—that is, he accepts “facts” as the ultimate reality. [...] He obeys what he believes to be necessity.

In my opinion, necessity never establishes legitimacy; the world of necessity is a world of weakness, a world that denies man. To say that a phenomenon is necessary means, for me, that it denies man: its necessity is proof of its power, not proof of its excellence.

Confronted by a necessity, man must become aware of it, if he is to master it. As long as man denies the inevitability of a phenomenon, as long as he avoids facing up to it, he will go astray. [...] Only when he realizes his delusion will he experience the beginning of genuine freedom.

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<sup>469</sup> As for example in Allen Kent, “Education for Information Science.” In *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science*, ed. Allen Kent, 47 (New York: Dekker, 1968-), v. 41, supp. 6. This definition is usually traced to Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1949).

I tend to believe in the pre-eminence of man and, consequently, in his invincibility.<sup>470</sup>

## Media Ethics and Global Justice in the Digital Age by Clifford G. Christians

Randal Marlin

**Christians, Clifford G.** *Media Ethics and Global Justice in the Digital Age*. Cambridge University Press, 2019, 408pp.

Clifford Christians needs no introduction to longtime IJES members. The collection of essays he edited with Jay M. Van Hook in 1981, *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays*, remains of enduring value, and under his editorship the *Ellul Forum* thrived from 2000 to 2012. David Gill, then associate editor, wrote in the fall 2008 issue on “Practical Politics” that “[t]his has to be one of the most interesting issues in the twenty-year history of the *Ellul Forum*.” Christians has had a long and distinguished career as a professor of communications at the University of Illinois, Urbana, retiring around 2008 but continuing his scholarly work since then. *Media Ethics and Global Justice in the Digital Age* is a work of breathtaking erudition, bringing a lifetime’s preoccupation with philosophy and journalistic ethics to bear on the current upheaval in journalistic financing and practices caused by the latest developments in Information Communication Technology (ICT).

In light of the sea change in the contemporary media brought about by the internet and social media, including “networking, search engines, computer databases, online and cyberspace,” Christians argues for a whole new re-theorizing of media ethics, one that takes into account globalization and the consequent interfacing of so many different cultural traditions.

It is well known that ICT has changed consumers’ journalistic reading habits. Search engines spare scholars days of work trying to track down some newspaper or broadcast item. We can connect with foreign language newspapers instantly. With blogs, retired journalists or specialists in other fields compete for attention with reporters in long-standing media. Often the former are more knowledgeable. But along with the knowledgeable you get blowhards and charlatans who also create followings, and you get misinformation, pornography, slander, and descent to hitherto-suppressed depths of vulgarity, insults, and lack of basic human decency.

Marlin, Randal. Review of *Media Ethics and Global Justice in the Digital Age*, by Clifford G. Christians. *Ellul Forum* 65 (Spring 2020): 45-49. © Randal Marlin, CC BY-NC-ND.

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<sup>470</sup> Ellul, *Propaganda*, xv-xvi.



Christians reminds readers of this, in case they have forgotten, on page 152 where he expounds on Jurgen Habermas's ethical norms of communication. There is a tacit validity claim that a person's speech acts should be socially appropriate or just, and that they show right treatment of others. He gives examples where President Donald Trump's speech acts violate this norm.

Questions involving justice, such as who gets access to media, are part of the re-theorizing. But more ambitiously he also wants the ethics to incorporate an ontological dimension, in other words, judgements about what it means to be a human being—not just objectively, as some kind of machine, biological organism, or statistic—but also subjectively, in terms of our aspirations, worries, choices, and freedom.

The latter kind of thinking may recall the existentialist movement: Kierkegaard, Heidegger and—very topically, with the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic—Camus. Christians sees Ellul as within this tradition: “For Ellul, the existential problem in advanced industrial societies is the disappearance of ends themselves. In its preoccupation with mechanical systems, public life ignores moral imperatives” (64).

Christians's human-centred approach to technology rejects the “neutral” or “instrumentalist” approach, where engineering experts are allowed “tunnel vision” regarding the morally relevant consequences of their inventions. He opposes the idea that the use of Facebook for ridicule, the excess of pornography on websites, out-of-control surveillance, and the like, are things for which the enablers of the relevant technology should be blame-free. What gets lost in the preoccupation with technological wizardry so viewed, he notes, is pursuit of the common good.

Heidegger's insight into truth as a kind of unveiling or disclosure (*ale-theia*), as distinct from mere correctness, figures importantly in the new, justice-incorporating media ethics. There is one particular passage that is worth quoting at length, incorporating as it does one of Ellul's central [Book Reviews] insights.

[Ellul's] *la technique* goes beneath the surface to the basic issues underneath. The problem is not technological products per se, but *la technique*, the mystique of efficiency that underlies them. The issue is not machines first of all, but the spirit of machineness, the instrumental worldview on which systems depend. When efficiency, speed, and productivity dominate, morality rooted in human life becomes alien to us. Ellul's *la technique* is an academic version of *aletheia*, disclosing the heart of the matter: in the process of constructing the digital order, moral purpose is sacrificed to maximizing technical ends. (161-62)

Reflecting on this passage, I was reminded of a story told to me by a US government worker, how during the 9/11 attack on the Pentagon, when smoke and flames were billowing, workers were hesitant to move because of a strict standing-order not to leave before a certain time. One woman did not hesitate: “My mama didn't raise me no fool,” she announced, leaving immediately and inspiring others to do the same, possibly saving some lives.

There is a pre-theoretical, pre-conceptual understanding of the world that needs to be revisited when basic values like self-preservation become obscured. Martin Buber

distinguished the pre-conceptual, open, dialogical relation with the other (I-Thou), from the conceptualized, closed, and objectifying understanding (I-It). Christians's global media ethics would attend to the pre-theoretical as a way of finding common ground with other cultures.

Christians's media ethics reaches out to many different cultural backgrounds for what they can contribute to our understanding. From Confucius he brings in the idea of *He*, harmony, harmonization, with its link to music. I recall philosopher Frank Knopfmacher's appeal to the "culturally well-formed ear" in answer to the problem of meta-institutional ethical guidance. What seemed fifty years ago a very weak appeal today seems to me to get some traction from the notion of harmony, or *He*.

Among the many interesting ideas Christians explores is what he calls "interpretive sufficiency." This separates in-depth, quality reporting from interpretations that merely string together news items with some superficial narrative.

Sufficiency requires grounding interpretations historically and biographically, "so that they represent complex events and multilayered cultures adequately" (170). "The cases and illustrations that are selected for in-depth stories must be representative of the class, ethnicity, social unit, or organization to which they actually belong" (170-71). That of course requires a level of knowledge, understanding, and skill that doesn't come cheap. But spelling out what high-quality journalism entails may usefully inspire both producers and consumers who might find some way of reaching each other in the fluid media scene today.

Of course, when it comes to political interpretation, there can be differences of opinion about what is "sufficiency." For example, in my reckoning, all the indignation against Russian leader Vladimir Putin's interference in the US election deserves to be tempered by awareness of the help American advisors gave to get Yeltsin re-elected in 1996, with disastrous consequences for Russia (see *Time's* cover story for July 15, 1996, "Yanks to the Rescue: The Secret Story of How American Advisors Helped Yeltsin Win").

I mention this because Christians pays attention, through the work of Anton Shekhovtsov and Estonian Kristina Muur, to Russia's information-warfare apparatus that sought to justify the military invasion and annexation of Crimea "while ridiculing Ukrainians as fake Russians, fascists, and Western puppets, and Ukraine as a failed state" (153). I agree that there was a violation of one of Jurgen Habermas's truthfulness norms of public communication. But the example reinforces a prevailing media narrative that leaves out some key elements of the overall picture.

These elements include, for example, Ukraine's repudiation of an agreement with Russia to continue to lease the major Russian naval base at Sebastopol, the wishes of Russian-speaking Crimeans, the undoubted involvement of the US in guiding the political outcome of the 2014 Maidan protests, and the expansion of NATO member states up to Russia's borders, contrary to a reported tacit understanding between Russia and the US at the time of the breakup of the Soviet Union.

Christians has given us a magisterial work, full of valuable expositions and incisive analyses of the contributions of others to media ethics and its philosophical underpinnings. His bibliography runs to 52 pages, and references abound on nearly every page.

Scholars will delight in this rich supply of ancient, modern, and very contemporary tributaries to the theme of his book. The ordinary reader may find the work daunting, but the scholar will appreciate his widely cast survey of the field, synchronic and diachronic, and the numerous leads for pursuing items of particular interest.

Fortunately, Christians has formulated a memorable triad of concepts for bringing the reader back to the new media ethics in the age of global, technically advanced information-communications technology. These are “truth-telling, human dignity, and nonviolence” (22). These follow from a pre-theoretical reverence for life and universal human solidarity (132). The philosophy of technology he espouses produces a “human-centered theory of media technology that is integrated into research and case studies. An agenda emerges for a new theory of communication ethics that is international, multicultural, and gender inclusive” (22).

Readers of the *Ellul Forum* will be gratified to see the ideas of Jacques Ellul woven so neatly into the overall fabric of Christians’s justice-oriented and globally situated media ethics in the digital age.

## Jacques Ellul and Bernard Charbonneau in French Surveys of the Degrowth Movement

Christian Roy

**Biagini, Cedric, David Murray, Pierre Thiesset, eds.** *Aux origines de la décroissance: cinquante penseurs*. Montreal: Ecosociete / Paris: Le Pas de cote & L’Echappee, 2017, 318pp.

**Cerezuelle, Daniel.** *Bernard Charbonneau ou la critique du developpement exponentiel*. Paris: Le passager clandestin, “Les precurseurs de la decroissance” series (S. Latouche, ed.), 2018, 112pp.

**Latouche, Serge.** *Jacques Ellul contre le totalitarisme technicien*. Paris: Le passager clandestin, “Les precurseurs de la decroissance” series (S. Latouche, ed.), 2013, 112pp.

**Latouche, Serge.** *Le pari de la decroissance*. Paris: Pluriel, 2006, 2010 (with a new foreword), 302pp.

**Latouche, Serge.** *Renverser nos manieres de penser. Metanoia pour le temps present. Entretiens avec Daniele Pepino, Thierry Paquot et Didier Harpages sur la genese et la portee d’une pensee alternative*. Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2014, 192pp.

Since the turn of the century, initially centred in francophone countries (though it quickly spread to Italy, Spain, and Latin America as its main hubs), a radical current

within political ecology has been rallying under the banner of *decroissance*—a straightforward French word that is yet hard to translate beyond Romance languages. Rather than literal “decrease,” the corporate-sounding “downsizing,” or the more individual-centred “downshifting,” the neologism “Degrowth” is most often used in English<sup>471</sup> to refer to a movement whose members wittily call themselves *objecteurs de croissance* (a play on *objecteurs de conscience* for “conscientious objectors”), as naysayers to the established religion of endless growth that is the self-evident common tenet of all other ideologies, whether right, left, or even mainstream ecological. The newspaper launched by *Adbusters* in 2004 that serves as the movement’s irreverent mouthpiece (in the tradition of *Charlie Hebdo*, where Bernard Charbonneau felt at home), *La Decroissance*, published in its (soon out-of-print) July 2014 issue a supplement presenting twenty-eight thinkers from the two previous centuries that were critical of industrialism, defending human-scale societies that eschewed the predatory premise of ever-expanding production. The Quebec publisher Ecosociete joined with two like-minded French publishers, Le Pas de cote and L’Echappee (which had already included Ellul and Charbonneau in *Radicalite, 20 penseurs vraiment critiques* in 2013), to put out in book form an expanded version of that overview of Degrowth thinkers in the modern era. *Aux origines de la décroissance* covers fifty of them and features three contributors familiar to English-speaking Ellulians: Frederic Rognon on Lanza del Vasto, Daniel Cerezuelle on Bernard Charbonneau, and Patrick Chastenet on Jacques Ellul.

Roy, Christian. “Jacques Ellul and Bernard Charbonneau in French Surveys of the Degrowth Movement.” *Ellul Forum* 65 (Spring 2020): 51-64. © Christian Roy, CC BY-NC-ND.

The latter essay seems a little off topic at times, as though equating Degrowth with ecology as such. For instance, Chastenet’s answer to those who point out how little Ellul wrote about nature is to stress his ecological credentials, apparently consisting in having exposed the combination of sacralized Technique with State power as the major threat to nature (whereas the threat to the human spirit always takes centre stage until late in his life). Chastenet goes on to attribute to Ellul himself this original idea of Charbonneau’s of a technologized second nature overtaking the first nature that man needs in order to concretely experience his freedom.<sup>472</sup> He more aptly notes how Ivan Illich recognized his indebtedness to Jacques Ellul for his concepts of threshold and convivial austerity, and how *decroissants* explicitly claimed both thinkers’ legacy in later developing their own concepts of voluntary simplicity and frugal abundance. It is clear that this line of thinking can be traced much further back than Ellul’s 1982 book *Changer de revolution*, whose theses Chastenet sums up—indeed half a century earlier, to the *Directives for a Personalist Manifesto* co-written with Charbonneau in 1935. “This manifesto states quite openly that economic growth is not synonymous

<sup>471</sup> Serge Latouche, *Lepari de la de’croissance* (Paris: Pluriel, 2010 [2006] ), 25n1.

<sup>472</sup> Patrick Chastenet, “Jacques Ellul,” in Cedric Biagini, David Murray, Pierre Thies-set, eds. *Aux origines de la décroissance: cinquante penseurs* (Montreal: Ecosociete / Paris: Le Pas de cote & L’Echappee, 2017), 107.

with personal development and ends with a call to build ‘an ascetic city so that man may live.’”<sup>473</sup>

Technique would then be used to limit tiresome, repetitive, and dangerous tasks, to reduce work time, and not to indefinitely pursue the race for growth.<sup>474</sup> This text thus prefigures the positions of 1970s political ecology (Dumont, Gorz, Illich, Moscovici, Schumacher), revolving around the principle of voluntary austerity, and the more recent ones of the *objecteurs de croissance*.<sup>475</sup>

Most of the thinkers Chastenet mentions here have their own entries in the same book. In his 2006 book on the wager of Degrowth, Serge Latouche includes another one covered there, Francois Partant, alongside Ivan Illich and Jacques Ellul, as part of that era’s small “International” of critics of industrial development as a bad idea in itself, but above all for the so-called Third World defined in terms of “underdevelopment.”<sup>476</sup> It was as an heir to that group that Latouche, thinking of the book *Demain la décroissance*

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<sup>473</sup> Chastenet, “Jacques Ellul,” 105.

<sup>474</sup> Space does not allow me to do more here than note in passing that this idea and many of its specifics were eagerly appropriated by the Gascon Personalists from the usually overlooked Paris-based *Ordre Nouveau* movement where Personalism was first articulated as a revolutionary doctrine, and particularly from its main theorist, Arnaud Dandieu (1897-1933), highly regarded by both Charbonneau and Ellul, though for strategic reasons they were formally associated with Emmanuel Mounier’s *Esprit* movement until they seceded in 1937. As many of the sometimes hard-to-find texts anthologized in the books under review testify, from their earliest writings to the end of their lives, both thinkers always came back to Dandieu’s two-pronged institutional blueprint to master Technique and make it work for every person’s benefit in the “necessary revolution”—a phrase Ellul borrowed from Dandieu’s testament *La Revolution necessaire* (Grasset 1933, reprint Place 1993). There, Dandieu described the combination of a guaranteed basic income (uncoupling revenue from the wage slavery of technologically doomed full-time jobs) with a civilian labour service (to distribute through the whole citizenry rather than leave to a proletarian class the decreasing residue of alienating tasks left by automation), that Ellul and especially Charbonneau would further refine to enable the widest array of humanly meaningful activity to flourish in the gaps deliberately left open in the technical drive for efficient performance, once the latter was unshackled from the profit motive and the growth imperative to reinvest productivity gains in more production, as opposed to freeing up time for truly human pursuits. The idea of basic income has fitfully resurfaced since then in public discourse and, even before being widely bandied about as part of policy responses to the paid work shortages due to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, it had already gained renewed traction due to the predictable obsolescence of most jobs by automation. This challenge thus drove entrepreneur Andrew Yang to enter the race for US presidential candidate in 2020 with basic income as his core plank, of which other Democratic candidates have been supportive (not to mention the interest it has sparked among many Trump voters moved by distrust of the global socioeconomic order). I have tried to introduce Dandieu’s prescient but forgotten contribution to these debates on the future of work in two texts available on my webpage roychristian.academia.edu: “Civilian Service for Social Security? Basic Income and Labor-Sharing in the Thought of Arnaud Dandieu,” for the Seventh Congress of the U.S. Basic Income Guarantee Network, as part of the Eastern Economic Association Conference, Boston, March 8, 2008 ([www.usbig.net/pa-pers/183-Roy-BIGServiceDandieu.doc](http://www.usbig.net/pa-pers/183-Roy-BIGServiceDandieu.doc)), and “Taking Back Risk and Credit to Spread the Gift of Trust: Arnaud Dandieu’s Anti-Utilitarian Case for Basic Income,” given at the 15th International Congress of the Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN): “Re-democratizing the Economy,” June 28, 2014, McGill Faculty of Law, Montreal, Quebec.

<sup>475</sup> Chastenet, “Jacques Ellul,” 104.

<sup>476</sup> Latouche, *Lepari de la de’croissance*, 24.

by Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen<sup>477</sup>—another maverick (i.e., atypically sane) economist included in that anthology, had made Degrowth the rallying cry of new generations as an antidote to the oxymoron of sustainable development in a famous 2002 article.<sup>478</sup> The next year, Latouche discovered another kindred spirit with the French translation of the magnum opus of Gunther Anders (first husband of Hannah Arendt—who follows him alphabetically in *Aux origines de la décroissance*) on the obsolescence of man when consumption passes for citizenship: “many of his ideas can be found again in Illich and already in Jacques Ellul,”<sup>479</sup> Latouche admits in a book of interviews on “turning around our ways of thinking” as the conversion our times demand. (The title even uses the Patristic word *metanoia*, tellingly for an atheist who, despite having had many people of faith such as Ellul and Illich as fellow travellers beyond the productivist consensus, feeling closer to Castoriadis and invoking Thoreau as a Degrowth forerunner, has come to see “the need for a non-religious spiritual dimension” to “reenchant the world” with “a form of secular spirituality or some kind of immanent tran-scendence.”<sup>480</sup>) He also says he met both Ellul and Charbonneau, found much in common with Illich in their work, though he always had some trouble reading Charbonneau.<sup>481</sup> That may be one reason he reserved for himself the first installment on Ellul in a series of short books he has been editing since 2013 as introductions to the forerunners of Degrowth, and where several of the usual suspects soon to be featured in *La Decroissance* already appear in the same combinations (Cerezuelle on Charbonneau, Rognon on Lanza del Vasto, etc.). An important difference is that the range of authors covered reaches further afield and in time to the “great ancestors”:

Those who, although living in a different society than ours, laid down philosophical bases that objectors to growth cannot overlook. Behind its provocative wording, the phrase “degrowth” refers to a break with the *Westernization of the world*<sup>482</sup>; it therefore results in the reopening of history to diversity; beyond this diversity, Degrowth builds on a kind of “universal common treasury,” close to what was traditionally called wisdom. All “wisdoms” are based on the capacity for self-limitation, be it Stoicism, Epicureanism, Buddhism, African wisdoms, Native American wisdoms, etc.<sup>483</sup>

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<sup>477</sup> Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, *Demain la de'croissance: entropie, ecologie, economie* (Lausanne: Favre, 1979). Translation of *The Entropy Law and the Economic Process* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

<sup>478</sup> Serge Latouche, “A bas le developpement durable, vive la décroissance conviviale.” *Silence* 280 (2002), cited in Serge Latouche, *Renverser nos manieres depenser. Meta-noi'a pour le temps present. Entretiens avec Daniele Pepino, Thierry Paquot et Didier Harpages sur la genese et la portee d'une pensee alternative* (Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2014), 133.

<sup>479</sup> Latouche, *Renverser nos manieres de penser*, 122.

<sup>480</sup> Latouche, *Renverser nos manieres depenser*, 186-87.

<sup>481</sup> Latouche, *Renverser nos manieres de penser*, 119.

<sup>482</sup> See Serge Latouche, *L'Occidentalisation du monde. Essai sur la signification, la portee et les limites de l'uniformisation planetaire* (Paris: La Decouverte/Poche, 2005 [1989], “Essais” series, No. 203, 170 pp).

<sup>483</sup> Latouche, *Renverser nos manieres de penser*, 120.

Christianity is conspicuously absent from this array of converging wisdom traditions. It is thus no surprise that the way Ellul's faith informs his germane assumptions appears as something of a stumbling block to Latouche's otherwise deep appreciation of this thinker. He begins his short introduction to Ellul, preceding a selection of texts for which he largely depended on Frederic Rognon,<sup>484</sup> by acknowledging that, from the start, Ellul was considered one of the main thinkers of Degrowth, even though he never used the word; but then again, neither did equally important forerunners such as Ivan Illich or Cornelius Castoriadis. Latouche claims that Charbonneau by contrast explicitly adopted the term *decroissance*.<sup>485</sup> (Indeed, one of the gems in Daniel Cerezuelle's own sampling in a following volume on Bernard Charbonneau is a March 1974 article on "the costs of growth and the gains of degrowth" that he published in the regular column "Chronique de l'an deux mille" that Ellul gave him as editor of the Protestant review *Foi et Vie*.<sup>486</sup>) In a footnote, Latouche takes up from Rognon a list of the "impressive number" of references to Ellul in his own works,<sup>487</sup> to which new titles would no doubt be added now, such as last year's overview of *La Decroissance* for the venerable "Que sais-je?" series of brief introductions to thousands of specialized topics by top authorities in the field (e.g., Ellul did the one on *Histoire de la propagande* in 1967, as Mounier had done the one on *Le Personnalisme* in 1949 for Presses universitaires de France). Here, Latouche can start the chapter on "Degrowth themes in the thought of Jacques Ellul" by stating that the intellectual framework that would lead him to Degrowth theory was to a large extent already established in *La Megamachine* (1995), a book dedicated to the memory of Jacques Ellul.

The critique of technique drawn from his stimulating and hard-hitting analyses was already joined in it to a critique of development and growth inspired by the ideas of Ivan Illich and the philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis, both of them forerunners of Degrowth as well. Ellul favourably refers to the latter fairly often and Illich regarded Ellul as his master ("*Maitre Jacques*").<sup>488</sup>

Castoriadis and Illich are the only two thinkers Latouche ever refers to as his own masters in his lectures,<sup>489</sup> so Ellul would seem to come into play for him as an implicit second-degree master acknowledged by his own master (in a way that may call to mind the many people who came to Charbonneau due to Ellul's insistence that he owed his key insights into modern society to his old friend). Latouche goes through

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<sup>484</sup> Serge Latouche, *Jacques Ellul contre le totalitarisme technicien* (Paris: Le passager clandestin, "Les precurseurs de la decroissance" series, 2013), 52n3.

<sup>485</sup> Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 9.

<sup>486</sup> Daniel Cerezuelle, *Bernard Charbonneau ou la critique du developpement exponentiel* (Paris: Le passager clandestin, "Les precurseurs de la decroissance" series, 2018), 79-84. On a more skeptical note, the only occurrence I know of in Charbonneau's books is just an ironic quip from 1980 in the one I translated as *The Green Light. A Self-Critique of the Ecological Movement* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 180, to point out that "zero growth" is as conceptually empty as would be the equivalent "zero degrowth."

<sup>487</sup> Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 10n1.

<sup>488</sup> Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 12.

<sup>489</sup> Latouche, *Renverser nos manieres depenser*, 116-17.

five major themes of Degrowth that he finds very much present in Ellul: the critique of geometric reason (exponential growth), the reduction of work time (still through Technique in Ellul—but Latouche prefers the popular rejection of work discipline for festive pursuits), an indictment of the disvalue generated by technical progress (an Illichean term for the forced replacement of perfectly fine older techniques and materials), the bankruptcy of modernity’s promise of happiness (with a call for more frugal yet fulfilling ways), the colonization of imagination by technique as a source of consumerist addiction (to prosthetic enhancements that atrophy our capacity for enjoyment).<sup>490</sup> “Jacques Ellul’s analysis thus concurs with the diagnosis of objectors to growth, namely that a growth society is neither desirable nor sustainable.”<sup>491</sup> And yet, Ellul’s exclusive focus on Technique makes him miss some aspects of the Degrowth approach,<sup>492</sup> such as the issue of the plutocratic oligarchy of multinational corporations, since market considerations often weigh more in the ways technology develops than a supposedly autonomous, actually dubious “rationality,” let alone central State planning. “Even as technical frenzy entails globalization and the end of national regulations as the last substitutes of community functioning, Ellul persists in seeing the State as the *bete noire* as much as Technique,”<sup>493</sup> his vision skewed by Gaullist State-directed modernization, which he can see culminating only in totalitarian world dictatorship. Sometimes touted by some today as “the man who foresaw almost everything,”<sup>494</sup> he for instance did not see the “neoliberal counter-revolution” coming and proved unable to revise his Cold War-era assumptions accordingly.<sup>495</sup> Latouche quotes the entry on “Technique” that Castoriadis wrote for *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, where Ellul is pictured as a “negative Marxist” for the primacy he gives to technical determinism—only for the worst, while the later Mumford’s idea of the Megamachine takes a broader view of what is involved in the modern system, beyond what Langdon Winner calls Ellul’s “technological sleepwalking.”<sup>496</sup>

There is an element of world-weary fatalism in the way he looks at history. Something like Muslim predetermination—mektub—and Calvinist predestination, even if he totally rejected the latter as a theologian.

For we must not overestimate Technique’s performances, nor underestimate the flaws and numerous failures of large technical systems. The catastrophes they sometimes generate—major risks can unfortunately never be ruled out—are also opportunities to put into question, at least partially, Technique and the underlying beliefs in

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<sup>490</sup> Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 12-13ff.

<sup>491</sup> Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 29.

<sup>492</sup> Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 30.

<sup>493</sup> Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 36.

<sup>494</sup> Jean-Luc Porquet, *Jacques Ellul, L’homme qui avait presque tout prévu* (Paris: Cherche Midi, 2012).

<sup>495</sup> Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 39.

<sup>496</sup> Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 34-35, citing Frederic Rognon, ed., *Generations Ellul: soixante heritiers de la pensee de Jacques Ellul* (Geneva: Labor et Fides / Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2012), 273.



science and progress. There is such a thing as a *pedagogy of catastrophes* which Ellul hardly considers at all.<sup>497</sup>

Even then, as Virginia Landgraf points out, Ellul can find some new relativized place for Technique and money in the alternative social vision of *Changer de revolution*, but none whatsoever for the State,<sup>498</sup> unlike objectors to growth—not to mention Charbonneau (even though he is the one who insisted on writing the book on *L'Etat* and delegated to Ellul the task of writing the one on *La Technique*, to treat what had initially been his own big idea). It would seem that for Ellul, ethics excludes politics of any kind and ought to substitute for it as an ethics of non-power, boiling down to the conscientious objection of faithful individuals to politics as the exercise of power. “*A l’espoir du militant, il oppose l’esperance du croyant*”<sup>499</sup>—to the dismay of many secular activists. Latouche for his part may echo Ellul in his insistence that *decroissance*, like the related Native-led Andean movements pursuing *buen vivir* or “living well” as opposed to “a better life,” should not seek to seize power but keep working as a *contre-pouvoir* to any and all powers that be.<sup>500</sup> Yet he still finds it “reasonable for a secular person to follow Gramsci in tempering the pessimism of reason with the optimism of the will,”<sup>501</sup> open to the kind of historical surprises Ellul would rather keep for God to make as a foretaste of a better world only to be found beyond this one. Thus, the unforeseen “collapse of the Soviet world goes to show that technical society and ‘hard’ totalitarianism do not form the best alloy to ensure the permanence of the technical system,” as Ellul tends to assume. On the other hand, it is just that the “soft” totalitarianism of consumer society is so much better at this,<sup>502</sup> which underlines all the more clearly the inherent limit of exclusive reliance on the demand for ethical autonomy: “the will that must orient techniques is itself oriented by techniques,”<sup>503</sup> as Daniel Cerezuelle writes—a point that George Grant could have made, but which Latouche does not dwell on. Thus, it does not prevent him or La-touche—who quotes him at length—from being less pessimistic than Ellul about the prospects of countering the remaking of man by Science and Technique, by way of the kind of moratorium Charbonneau often called for.

Today, morality requires not only that we refrain from performing certain actions but also from having certain means at our disposal.<sup>504</sup> Making IT ethics-compliant may demand the collective definition of power thresholds not to go beyond and the adherence to an “ethics of non-power.”<sup>505</sup>

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<sup>497</sup> Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 39.

<sup>498</sup> Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 40, citing Frederic Rognon, ed., *Generations Ellul*, 215.

<sup>499</sup> Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 48.

<sup>500</sup> Latouche, *Renverser nos manieres de penser*, 127-29, 163.

<sup>501</sup> Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 43-44.

<sup>502</sup> Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 44.

<sup>503</sup> Daniel Cerezuelle, *La technique et la chair. Essais de philosophie de la technique* (Lyon: Parangon/Vs, 2011), 136, cited in Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 46n2.

<sup>504</sup> Cerezuelle, *La technique et la chair*, 135, cited in Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 45.

<sup>505</sup> Cerezuelle, *La technique et la chair*, 158, cited in Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 46.

"This is exactly the hope [*espoir*] that the Degrowth project holds out,"<sup>506</sup> adds Latouche, for whom, "since the final triumph of boundless power [*sur-puissance*] is not unavoidable, a society of prosperity without growth may be possible. But Ellul's hope [*esperance*] does not really allow the prospect on this earth."<sup>507</sup> This is why there is more than such an ethic to this project, as it "contains a practical action side that is almost absent in Ellul. The Ellulian project of transformation remains confined to necessary resistance and individual dissidence, closer to voluntary simplicity than to the radical metamorphosis of Degrowth."<sup>508</sup>

By contrast, Bernard Charbonneau usually makes a point of providing often fairly detailed examples of concrete, gradual steps to be taken outside the treadmill of growth to have a shot at a relatively soft landing on terrain more conducive to human flourishing. A more generic approach that Cerezuelle likes to dwell on in his treatments of Charbonneau is a moratorium on R & D,<sup>509</sup> but also on economic growth itself, for the sake of balance. "The sufferings inherent in expansion: conversion and repurposing, the disruption of customs, and the adaptation effort that any change entails, would be paid for at their fair price; we would then see which businesses are humanly profitable and those that are not,"<sup>510</sup> taking capitalism at its word by factoring in those costs until externalities are no longer offloaded to the environment and the general public. The former's transformation has limits that are beyond the latter's capacity to foresee. Enforcing these limits with a view to balance instead of growth would remove the economy from the driver's seat to consider man's physical and spiritual needs instead, in a more complete accounting of its effects, so that any damage to human or environmental well-being would incur massive fines. "The emphasis would shift from economic means to human ends: from production to consumption, or rather to use, from power and profit to happiness, from the State to the person."<sup>511</sup> If, like Ellul's, "Charbonneau's thought is very close to Ivan Illich's reflections on power thresholds beyond which our tools become counterproductive," his assumptions remain more clearly grounded in common sense.

Charbonneau is neither a primitivist nor a reactionary; he is convinced that there cannot be human freedom without a minimum of power to act: to live humanly, man needs efficient techniques, he needs dependable knowledge, he needs to produce and exchange goods and services, he needs political institutions. But, beyond a certain threshold, the accelerated multiplication of the power of these mediations has negative

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<sup>506</sup> Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 46.

<sup>507</sup> Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 50.

<sup>508</sup> Latouche, *Jacques Ellul*, 52.

<sup>509</sup> Cerezuelle, *Bernard Charbonneau*, 49-51.

<sup>510</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Le système et le chaos* (Paris: Le Sang de la Terre, 2012), cited in Cerezuelle, *Bernard Charbonneau*, 52, as well as to conclude Cerezuelle, "Bernard Charbonneau," in Biagini, Murray, and Thiesset, eds., *Aux origines de la décroissance*, 65.

<sup>511</sup> Charbonneau, *Le système et le chaos*, cited in Cerezuelle, *Bernard Charbonneau*, 52, as well as in Cerezuelle, "Bernard Charbonneau," in Biagini, Murray, and Thiesset, eds., *Aux origines de la décroissance*, 65.

effects; the growth of industrial production, technoscientific development, and the proliferation of social controls end up threatening both the natural equilibriums that man needs and the freedom without which life loses its meaning.<sup>512</sup>

—Not to mention its flavour, indistinguishable from the meaning of life for Charbonneau, and whose keenly felt loss always drove him to fight “the end of local identities, of landscapes, of food variety, of diverse ways of life,” coming along with “the rise of bureaucratization and the increasing blandness of existence.”<sup>513</sup>

All of these processes are interrelated and mutually reinforcing as “the unleashing of a power-mindedness [*esprit de puissance*] that is no longer able to give itself limits”<sup>514</sup> since the beginning of what he calls mankind’s Great Moulting. This shedding of the natural environment of culture for an encompassing man-made social whole represents but the unchecked, ever-accelerating increase of that same power to act that Charbonneau sees as a condition of freedom but that now turns against it as total organization—one that is more intimately internalized than the strictures of nature this system has overcome and replaced as the all-pervasive model of a sacred social order. “Technical and economic growth is at once the chief fact and the fundamental dogma of our time. Just as the immutability of an order that was at once natural and divine was that of the past.”<sup>515</sup> Even though economic references now play the same socially binding role that religious ones used to, Charbonneau finds they colour too much the concept of growth invoked by boosters and detractors alike; he argues that the idea of development better captures

the multidimensional character of the process. Thus, when in 1973 he publishes *Le système et le chaos*, his only book solely devoted to the critique of accelerated growth which everyone celebrated during the *Trente Glorieuses* [“Thirty Glorious Years” of post-war boom], he gives it as a subtitle “critique du développement exponentiel.”<sup>516</sup>

It is unfortunate that this eloquent title was dropped in later editions, as there can be no better nutshell statement of the no-brainer untenability of the supposedly serious business-as-usual that now goes unchallenged as universal religion. The world economy is wholly premised on the mirage of sticking to an increasingly steep asymptotic curve with diminishing returns and the certainty of collapse at a point in time just over the deceptive horizon of that seemingly boundless ascent. But as Charbonneau warned in the original blurb of that book written between 1950 and 1967:

Unfortunately, at a production rate that rises by 6%, and then by another 6% the next year, the curve tends to the vertical, that is to the absolute, or the absurd in human terms. The question is not whether the growth rate will go down or not, but when and how: deliberately or as a result of a crisis. For the economy does not develop in a vacuum as economists believe, but in meat: in nature and the social. The

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<sup>512</sup> Cerezuella, *Bernard Charbonneau*, 45.

<sup>513</sup> Cerezuella, *Bernard Charbonneau*, 41.

<sup>514</sup> Cerezuella, *Bernard Charbonneau*, 45.

<sup>515</sup> Charbonneau, *Le système et le chaos*, 7, cited in Cerezuella, *Bernard Charbonneau*, 28.

<sup>516</sup> Cerezuella, *Bernard Charbonneau*, 32.

exploding economy wreaks havoc on space-time, breaks natural and human equilibriums. Systematic growth spawns chaos, and the only way to master it is to refine the industrial system: to increase production even more so as to perfect control. But by the same token, where it fails, troubles and revolt flare up. Thus, as organization and its opposite mutually generate each other, our society finds itself on the horns of a dilemma, in both cases inhuman, between total system and total chaos. Unless . . .<sup>517</sup>

—Unless, that is, a way out is found along the lines of a deliberate slowing-down and rechanneling of resources to convivial degrowth, averting the otherwise guaranteed rude awakening of a shrieking halt to growth (not to mention catastrophic demographic “adjustment”): imagine a racing car running out of gas at full speed on a near-vertical trajectory aimed beyond space-time, which suddenly gives way to freefall to the devastated surface of a small world after all. Before this breaking point is reached,

it will be the various culprits in the ruin of the earth who will organize the rescue of what little of it will be left, and who, after plenty, will manage shortage and survival. For these people have no prejudices, they do not believe in development any more than in ecology: they only believe in power, which is that of doing what cannot be done any other way.<sup>518</sup>

In this, they will not hesitate to call upon and co-opt the expertise and authority of environmental specialists. “Charbonneau therefore wonders if the emergence of an ecological movement (and this may also apply to the *decroissant* movement) will actually enable resistance to ‘the techno-industrial system’s totalitarian tendencies,’”<sup>519</sup> a totalitarianism that he always saw as primarily social, unobtrusively embedded in daily life more than in political structures that may long retain the democratic veneer of the “electoral ritual.” True to the book where he found his original ideas validated early on (and whose author would fittingly be instrumental in the belated reception of Ellul’s *La Technique*), Charbonneau concurs here with the insights of Aldous Huxley, “who, in *Brave New World* (1932), described the totalitarian potential of a society that has given up growth and entrusted its steady state to a scientific elite.”

Charbonneau’s warning to ecologists also applies to *decroissants*. Indefinite growth in a finite world is an impossibility, and decreasing [ *decroitre* ] is likely to be forced upon us by necessity. Entrusted to specialists of economic matters, a hierarchical, centralized, and authoritarian management of decrease [ *decroissance* ] (in the literal sense of a regression of production/consumption) may very well boost the risk of social totalization and a swallowing up of freedom against which Bernard Charbonneau has spent his whole life trying to protect us.<sup>520</sup>

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<sup>517</sup> Charbonneau, *Le système et le chaos* (original edition, Paris: Anthropos, 1973, back cover), cited in Cerezuelle, *Bernard Charbonneau*, 32-33.

<sup>518</sup> Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 121, cited in Cerezuelle, *Bernard Charbonneau*, 47.

<sup>519</sup> Cerezuelle, *Bernard Charbonneau*, 46, misquoting “industrial” as “techno-industrial” from a passage in Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 98.

<sup>520</sup> Cerezuelle, *Bernard Charbonneau*, 48.

To conclude, Daniel Cerezuelle and Serge Latouche have both done a fine job of giving *decroissants* a sense of what they owe to, and could still find in, Charbonneau and Ellul as the direct forerunners of a movement that comes closest to directly addressing many of the issues they were among [Book Reviews] the first to raise and are becoming increasingly difficult to ignore. Conversely, Ellulians therefore ought to avail themselves of the opportunity provided by these introductory surveys to get acquainted with the contemporary movement that is the most explicitly aligned with the priorities first outlined by the Bordeaux School almost a century ago.

## About the Contributors

Randal Marlin is a member of the IJES board and its former vice president. He is adjunct research professor in the department of philosophy at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada, and author of *Propaganda and the Ethics of Persuasion*, 2d ed. (Broadview, 2013).

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Jacob Marques Rollison is an independent scholar living in Strasbourg, France. He holds a PhD in theological ethics from the University of Aberdeen. He is co-author of *Jacques Ellul* in the Cascade Companions series, as well as *A New Reading of Jacques Ellul: Presence and Communication in the Postmodern World* (Lexington Books, 2020). He has recently translated Ellul's two-volume *To Will & To Do: An Introduction to Christian Ethics* (Cascade). He is a member of the IJES board of directors.

Christian Roy (PhD, McGill, 1993) is a Montreal-based cultural historian, art and film critic, and multilingual translator. He has recently completed translations of Bernard Charbonneau's *The Green Light* (Bloomsbury, 2018) and Jacques Ellul's *Theology and Technique* (Wipf and Stock, forthcoming). His research focuses on the Personalist intellectual tradition, especially its pre-war roots in France.

## About the International Jacques Ellul Society

The International Jacques Ellul Society, founded in 2000 by former students of Ellul, links scholars, students, and others who share an interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), longtime professor at the University of Bordeaux. Along with promoting new publications related to Ellul and producing the *Ellul Forum*, the Society sponsors a biennial conference. IJES is the anglophone sister society of the francophone Association internationale Jacques Ellul.

The objectives of IJES are threefold:

Preserving a Heritage. The Society seeks to preserve and disseminate Ellul's literary and intellectual heritage through republication, translation, and secondary writings.

Extending a Critique. Ellul is best known for his penetrating critique of *la technique*, of the character and impact of technology on our world. The Society seeks to extend his social critique particularly concerning technology.

Researching a Hope. Ellul was not only a social critic but also a theologian and activist in church and community. The Society seeks to extend his theological, biblical, and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

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# The **Ellul Forum**

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About

Jacques Ellul (1912-94) was a French thinker and writer in many fields: communication, ethics, law and political science, sociology, technology, and biblical and theological studies, among others. The aim of the *Ellul Forum* is to promote awareness and understanding of Ellul's life and work and to encourage a community of dialogue on these subjects. The *Forum* publishes content by and about Jacques Ellul and about themes relevant to his work, from historical, contemporary, or creative perspectives. Content is published in English and French.

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## **Editor's Letter**

This issue of the *Forum* offers a meditation by Sue F. Wentworth responding to "The Dialogue of Sign and Presence" that appeared in our Spring 2020 issue. Following this, we provide two essays on Bernard Charbonneau's relationship with the Christian faith, by Frederic Rognon and by Patrick Chastenet. We are especially grateful to Christian Roy for providing English translation of the two essays originally written in French. You may have noticed the "CC BY-NC-ND" that appears in each article's citation and wondered what this refers to. This is a Creative Commons license, informing you that the author retains copyright to his or her work but grants you permission to copy, reprint, or distribute the work to others, as long as you cite the author (BY), you do not profit financially (NC, non-commercial), and you do not modify the work (ND, no derivatives). All work published in the *Forum* is accompanied by a Creative Commons license. To learn more, please visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/>. All work published in the *Forum* is also made available in open access. There is no paywall. In order to honor the members of the Ellul Society who contribute financially to making the *Forum* possible, each issue is posted online with a one-issue delay, which

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## Real Presence

Sue F. Wentworth

Stirred by a gentle breeze, the water lapping the logs and rocks submerged at the pond’s edge ripples in concentric circles from every protruding point. The circles meet and overlap in widening patterns, a graceful dance of wind, water, and earth, of what moves and what stands. Nature’s art, at once ephemeral and timeless.

Jacob Marques Rollison’s suggestion in his introduction to Ellul’s “Dialogue of Sign and Presence” that Ellul is not first a thinker of technique, but a thinker of presence, locates the heart of Ellul’s thought in a dynamic center that also ripples outward, tending to the whole, deepening mystery.<sup>521</sup> I look forward to reading Rollison’s just-published *A New Reading of Jacques Ellul: Presence and Communication in the Postmodern World* for his extended exploration. In the interim, I am intrigued. If we begin by hearing Ellul as a thinker of presence, what do we hear? What are the concentric circles that ripple outward in dynamic patterns?

What follows is a meditation on this center and these circles. What is “presence,” I wonder, for Ellul? *How* is presence? How is it manifest in his life and thought? And if, as Rollison proposes, “*technique* can be understood as *anti-presence*,” how might presence inform our perspective on and response to technique?<sup>522</sup> What is the relation between presence and hope? How might we *live* presence, in this world of absences and absencing?

Wentworth, Sue F. “Real Presence.” *Ellul Forum* 66 (Fall 2020): 5-26. © Sue F. Wentworth, CC BY-NC-ND.

## I

Long ago you laid the foundations of the earth  
and the heavens are the work of your hands.  
They will perish but you endure;  
They wear out like garments;  
but you are the same and your years have no end.  
—Psalm 102:26-28

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<sup>521</sup> Jacob Marques Rollison, “The Dialogue of Sign and Presence: Introduction.” *Ellul Forum* 65 (Spring 2020), 14.

<sup>522</sup> Rollison, “The Dialogue of Sign and Presence,” 14.

A defining event in Jacques Ellul's life, now familiar to his readers, was one of which he rarely spoke. Some sixty years after the fact he told his interviewer, Patrick Chastenet:

Suddenly, and I have not doubts on this at all, I knew myself to be in the presence of a something so astounding, so overwhelming that had entered me to the very center of my being. That's all I can tell you. I was so moved that I left the room in a stunned state. In the courtyard there was a bicycle lying around. I jumped on it and fled. I have no idea whatsoever how many dozens of kilometers I must have covered. Afterwards I thought to myself: "You have been in the presence of God." And there you are.<sup>523</sup>

Chastenet asks, "Could you physically see or hear this presence?" Ellul responds, "No. No words were uttered. I saw nothing. Nothing. But the presence was unbelievably strong. I knew with every nerve in my body that I was in the presence of God."<sup>524</sup> The immediacy of this unexpected, unsought, astonishing, unquestionable encounter, registered in a profoundly physical way, rings throughout Ellul's life and work. Asked at another time by Chastenet to look back on his life and name the most significant experience of his life, Ellul responded by mentioning this moment, "when God came to me," as well as a second, when he met Yvette Lensfelt, the person who was to become his wife: "These have been the decisive experiences of my life."<sup>525</sup> That Ellul tells of initially *running* from this first momentous encounter shatters any comforting notions we may have about it: ". . . I realized God had spoken, but I didn't want him to have me. I fled."<sup>526</sup> He "set about reading antichristian writers"; "I wanted to avoid God's presence in my life."<sup>527</sup> This Presence was no consoling experience to be clung to and sought again; it precipitated a struggle that lasted, according to Ellul, for ten years.<sup>528</sup>

Another decisive experience came later, while Ellul was reading the eighth chapter of Romans, when "for the first time [...] a biblical text really became God's Word to me," "a living, contemporary Word."<sup>529</sup> This Word "*seized*" him; here he "encountered the Absolute and Eternity."<sup>530</sup> This time, the chief fruits of the encounter were *freedom* and *hope*. If before he had assumed that relationship with "God" meant a curtailing

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<sup>523</sup> Patrick Troude-Chastenet, *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Christianity, and Technology*, trans. Joan Mendes France (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005), 52.

<sup>524</sup> Troude-Chastenet, *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Christianity, and Technology*, 52.

<sup>525</sup> Troude-Chastenet, *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Christianity, and Technology*, 93.

<sup>526</sup> Jacques Ellul, *In Season, Out of Season: An Introduction to the Thought of Jacques Ellul: Interviews by Madeleine Garrigou-Lagrange*, trans. Lani K. Niles (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982), 14, quoted in Andrew Goddard, *Living the Word, Resisting the World: The Life and Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2002), 10.

<sup>527</sup> Troude-Chastenet, *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Christianity, and Technology*, 52-53.

<sup>528</sup> Jacques Ellul, *In Season, Out of Season*, 14.

<sup>529</sup> Jacques Ellul, "How I Discovered Hope," trans. Alfred Krass and Martine Wessel. *Ellul Forum* 65 (Spring 2020), 5.

<sup>530</sup> Ellul, "How I Discovered Hope," 5.

of freedom, a narrowing of life, in this encounter he feels life immeasurably broadened and enriched. “Life and freedom, freedom and salvation, that’s what Paul is writing about in this chapter”; the person is set on “the path of freedom,” a freedom inseparable from *hope*.<sup>531</sup> “The world [...] *will* be set free from its bondage to corruption. [...] The world consists of darkness. No light remains. But at the heart of this dark world, Paul tells us, hope is nevertheless to be found.”<sup>532</sup> We wait for the healing which *is* to come. Behind, beneath, beside, above, before stands *le Vivant*, this Living One who *is* love. “I saw with blinding certainty that ‘If God is for us, who can be against us?’”<sup>533</sup>

Reflecting back on this second moment of living encounter, Ellul writes, “Today, as I reread this text, I realize that Romans 8, indirectly, without my knowing it, has inspired all the research I’ve done over the last fifty years. One day, many years ago, it gave me an indestructible certainty.”<sup>534</sup> This certainty, we realize, was not the certainty we reflexively equate with “possession,” with “nailing something down”; it was the intangible, ungrasp-able, liberating certainty of a *being-in-relation*, being-with. “I describe a world with no prospects, but I believe that God accompanies man through his whole existence.”<sup>535</sup> “God descends to humanity and joins us where we are.”<sup>536</sup> This relationship is not a supplement to life; it is life itself: “To be alive is the complete situation of human beings placed before God”<sup>537</sup> *Divine Presence* is the vital center of *presence*. Created being itself is shot through with a mysterious relationality, a “betweenness.” One hears echoes here of Kierkegaard’s utterly definitive “God-relation.”<sup>538</sup> This is God deeper than God: no object, but the fertile ground of created being.

These encounters became the point of departure for Ellul’s life, his own presence in the world, as well as for his passion for the Christian’s presence in the world. And here we engage with the seminal 1936 essay “The Dialogue of Sign and Presence (Notes for a Christianity Learned by Heart),” already mentioned, and just published thanks to Rollison’s investigations and the Ellul family’s generosity. Ellul begins the article by quoting parallel accounts from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke:

Matt 26:26: And while they were eating, Jesus took bread and having given thanks, broke it, and gave it to them saying: Take, eat, this is my body.

Luke 24:30: And as they were at the table with him, he took bread and gave thanks, then having broken it, he gave it to them. In this way their eyes were opened and they recognized him.

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<sup>531</sup> Ellul, “How I Discovered Hope,” 6.

<sup>532</sup> Ellul, “How I Discovered Hope,” 7-8.

<sup>533</sup> Ellul, “How I Discovered Hope,” 8.

<sup>534</sup> Ellul, “How I Discovered Hope,” 8.

<sup>535</sup> Troude-Chastenet, Jacques Ellul on Politics, Christianity, and Technology, 1.

<sup>536</sup> Jacques Ellul quoted in Willem H. Vanderburg, ed., *Perspectives on Our Age: Jacques Ellul Speaks on His Life and Work*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (Toronto: Anansi, 2004), 78.

<sup>537</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*, trans. Lisa Richmond (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016), 61.

<sup>538</sup> See, for example, Soren Kierkegaard, “Love Is the Fulfilling of the Law.” In *Works of Love*, trans. Howard and Edna Hong (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 99-136.

We notice that the first recounts a pre-Crucifixion moment at the Last Supper: Jesus takes bread and, having given thanks, breaks it and gives it to those gathered, inviting them to eat, identifying this with his own body. It is a moment of real presence and a moment of signification. In the second, in a post-Crucifixion moment, two disciples invite a stranger they meet on the way to Emmaus to stop with them for supper: this stranger takes bread and gives thanks; having broken the bread, he gives it to them. And in this act (“in this way”), the risen Christ is present with them: “their eyes were opened and they recognized him.” If before, in his presence, the taking, thanking, breaking, and giving were to be for them a sign of his presence (“This is my body”), afterward, the taking, thanking, breaking, and giving *become* his very presence with them.

In these two verses, Ellul begins an essay on the dialogue of sign and presence with a richly layered dialogue of presence and sign and sign and presence! His attention is focused not on words of institution that become a sacrament in an institution; he is captivated by these actual moments of lived and living communion. *Presence* is what matters. “Dogma affirms a presence superior to itself”; “Christian dogma always comes down to this idea of the constant presence of Christ.”<sup>539</sup> “Dogma is only meaningful to the extent that for each [person], Christ is temporally near [...]”—present in the present.<sup>540</sup>

Significantly here, *presence* is a matter of flesh and blood inseparable from spirit, spirit united with flesh and blood:

I would like to remind you that this gift of God took on a human form, that the blood of Christ was not mystical blood but red blood, the blood of a carpenter, who planed boards from city to city until he was thirty years old, who worked his muscles on the plane and jointer plane.<sup>541</sup>

Consecrated to his ministry, this carpenter healed bodies and souls—most often through physical touch, showing, as Richard Rohr writes,

that healing cannot be done through the head, through explanations, theories and theologies, or quick, “logical” conclusions. It must somehow be a communication of life and love energy, held even at the cellular level.<sup>542</sup>

He teaches, challenges, and comforts in living encounters, talking with people, preaching to crowds pressing close against him, sharing meals, hosting meals himself. When he raises the dead body of his friend Lazarus, his own body becomes the target of the authorities, and he “turns his face” toward Jerusalem, where he endures the excruciating physical, mental, and spiritual agony of being put to death at the hands of men.

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<sup>539</sup> Jacques Ellul and Yvette Ellul, “The Dialogue of Sign and Presence,” trans. Jacob Marques Rollison. *Ellul Forum* 65 (Spring 2020), 24-25.

<sup>540</sup> Jacques Ellul and Yvette Ellul, “Dialogue,” 25.

<sup>541</sup> Jacques Ellul and Yvette Ellul, “Dialogue,” 25.

<sup>542</sup> Fr. Richard Rohr, OFM, Daily Meditations (Sept. 14, 2020), <https://cac.org/god-uses-everything-2020-09-14/>.

And then, himself called forth from the dead, he makes his disciples “touch and feel him,” “comes time and again, [... and] walks alongside them”; Ellul comments, “As to the importance of this presence, I need no other testimony than the fact of his showing himself to the disciples after his resurrection.”<sup>543</sup> He invites them to a breakfast he has prepared for them. Again he *feeds* them. And now, he is the One who is *there* “[w]here two or three are gathered in [his] name.”<sup>544</sup>

”Mysticism” will not do. Something much earthier is happening here, something irreducible—a something that *matters* (the word is instructive) for human beings and for the whole of creation. “In [ Jesus Christ] there is the very presence of God inseparably connected with man ”<sup>545</sup> The absence into which human beings drift or drive has been permanently invaded: “For Ellul the incarnation is nothing less than God’s rupturing of man’s world set apart from God [...] ‘God in his totality has localized himself in flesh.’”<sup>546</sup> Each word of Christ “is a revolt against the detachment of the spirit from the flesh.”<sup>547</sup> “Dissociation is impossible. [...] All is indissolubly linked.”<sup>548</sup>

## II

Quite abruptly I realized that reasoning with the intellect alone and reasoning based on living experience

are simply worlds apart.—Ellul<sup>549</sup>

[T]he norm of all human knowledge [... is] the meeting between persons.—Hans Urs von Balthasar<sup>550</sup>

Divine Presence is a circle whose radiant center is everywhere (Empedocles). First and last, this surely brings us to rich silence.

In between and within this silence, what might meditation on this resonant Presence yield? We notice, first, that Presence is iconoclastic. It shatters preconceptions, conceptions, representations (re-present-ations), possessed knowledge. Presence is “a power escaping all codification”; “it cannot be translated into defined rules”; “models can no longer be applied.”<sup>551</sup> It is no object, but living, relational, immediate. Presence is the revelation of mystery: revelation, yes, but of infinite knowability. It is not an “experience” that can be grasped, carried from the past forward into some future. We cannot be present in advance, or after. We hear reverberations of the risen Christ’s admonition to Mary—“Do not hold onto me.”

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<sup>543</sup> Jacques Ellul and Yvette Ellul, “Dialogue,” 26.

<sup>544</sup> Jacques Ellul and Yvette Ellul, “Dialogue,” 26.

<sup>545</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, trans. Dennis Pardee (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 136, quoted in Goddard, *Living the Word, Resisting the World*, 95.

<sup>546</sup> Goddard, *Living the Word, Resisting the World*, 95-96.

<sup>547</sup> Jacques Ellul and Yvette Ellul, “Dialogue,” 26.

<sup>548</sup> Jacques Ellul and Yvette Ellul, “Dialogue,” 27.

<sup>549</sup> Troude-Chastenet, Jacques Ellul on Politics, Christianity, and Technology, 54.

<sup>550</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The God Question and Modern Man* (New York: Seabury, 1967), 32.

<sup>551</sup> Jacques Ellul and Yvette Ellul, “Dialogue,” 24.

At the same time that Presence shatters, Presence establishes. It establishes its truth (I AM). Moreover, it establishes the truth of the human being as *person*, as one named, called, beloved (You Are). In the presence of God, the person comes into being. Ellul comments on this link between presence and personhood in “Dialogue” when he asserts that “presence is above all a testimony of the person.”<sup>552</sup> *Of* the person—“of” here meaning both *by* the person and *about* the person, as Ellul spells out. The *means through which* communication happens and *what is communicated* are a unity. This resonates with Ellul’s emphasis in *Presence au monde moderne* on the relation of ends and means: “Our starting point is that in the work of God, end and means are brought together. [... In] God’s action the means never appears except as the realized presence of the end.”<sup>553</sup> In divine action, there is no such thing as mere instrumentality. Body and soul, how and what, sign and presence, form and content, method and meaning, means and meaning, are *one*. What and how co-inhere. Sofia Cavalletti puts it this way in another context:

In our estimation, the choice of method is related to the question of content. There are certain contents that cannot be communicated except by certain methodologies. The method is not like an empty box that can be filled with anything whatsoever; the method has a soul, and this soul should correlate to the content that is being transmitted through the method. Between method and content there should be a profound accord, an affinity of nature; otherwise there is the risk of distorting the content.<sup>554</sup>

Presence presents the unity that pertains in meaning. It has to do with the *whole*. And here a comment of Yvette Ellul in “Dialogue” is particularly astute: “Let’s not forget that ‘the body,’ bodily presence is always linked to spiritual presence; it is presence that you hold to; it is not the body.”<sup>555</sup> She continues: “No spiritual presence without bodily presence either, which will be perhaps unreal in the sense of unpalpable, but magnificently real by virtue ‘of the whole’ that it engenders.”<sup>556</sup> She refers to what seems to have been her own holistic experience of Presence, which sends her to the Bible, to a passage about the resurrection of Christ. She reads this with astonishment, meditating on the resurrection of the flesh, “which will be the resurrection of the being.”<sup>557</sup> And she hits the limit of *thought* about presence:

From here, we plunge into the domain of the unreal and our fingers cling to nothingness and sand. Reason rebels and the spirit withdraws. *But we must have the courage to live this instability . . . so close. There is no longer anything but God.*<sup>558</sup>

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<sup>552</sup> Jacques Ellul and Yvette Ellul, “Dialogue,” 26.

<sup>553</sup> Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*, 51.

<sup>554</sup> Sofia Cavalletti, *The Religious Potential of the Child*, trans. Patricia M. Coulter and Julie Coulter (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1992), 158.

<sup>555</sup> Jacques Ellul and Yvette Ellul, “Dialogue,” 28.

<sup>556</sup> Jacques Ellul and Yvette Ellul, “Dialogue,” 28.

<sup>557</sup> Jacques Ellul and Yvette Ellul, “Dialogue,” 28.

<sup>558</sup> Jacques Ellul and Yvette Ellul, “Dialogue,” 28.



It is Jacques Ellul who underlines these last two sentences, and adds: “oh my Christian friend!” This is, for both, a “Christianity Learned by Heart.” Ellul’s living experience and knowledge of God gave birth both to his person and to his personalism, his insistence upon the value and meaning of the person. He knows in his bones that each person dwells in an intimate and inexpressible relationship with Divine Presence. Insofar as persons matter, scale matters, proportion matters, real relation in time and space matters, time and space matter, flesh and blood matter, locality matters, particularity matters.

Immediately after observing that “presence is a testimony of the person,” Ellul speaks of another wholeness, noting “the complete engagement of the being in this gift that one person is to another,” “complete engagement of God in this gift of God.”<sup>559</sup> Presence engages the whole of the participant in the wholeness of the larger relation. Whether between God and humanity or between human beings, this “complete engagement” is a vital unity of giving and being-a-gift.

Finally, we notice elsewhere that for Ellul, Presence is “dimensional.” In a 1956 article entitled “Le pessimisme et la presence au monde,” he insists that “We have to make the dimension of the Wholly Other penetrate and make a breach in the closed universe that man constantly wishes to re-build.”<sup>560</sup> In *Hope in Time of Abandonment* he asserts that with hope, “we are in the presence of an entirely different dimension.”<sup>561</sup> Christians are to be “bearers of a dimension that no one else has,” agents of “the insertion of a completely new and unexpected dimension, the incognito.”<sup>562</sup> The rendering of John and Peter hastening to Jesus’ tomb, featured on the cover of the Spring 2020 *Ellul Forum*, poignantly conveys something of the vitality of encounter with the “entirely different dimension” of the Wholly Other, as did Ellul’s own experiences of encounter with *le Vivant*. The dimensions of our lives matter. *New York Times* editorial writer Michelle Goldberg, fighting despair about the political and cultural condition in the US in the summer of 2020, and looking to the late congressman John Lewis’s example of hope, confesses that she has “started to envy those like Lewis who are able to believe in God.”<sup>563</sup>

We recall that “dimension” is grounded in space (e.g., height, length, width) and time (e.g., musical measures); the word, with its root *me*, means “to measure out.” Derivatives include meal (time for eating), measure, immense, diameter, geometry, moon (time being measured by), menstruate, menopause, semester. This is the dimensional, mortal, world in which we are born, the world we feel, see, touch, hear, taste,

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<sup>559</sup> Jacques Ellul and Yvette Ellul, “Dialogue,” 26.

<sup>560</sup> Ellul, “Le pessimisme et la presence au monde.” *Le Semeur* 55.2 (1956), 52, quoted in Goddard, *Living the Word, Resisting the World*, 105.

<sup>561</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, trans. C. Edward Hopkin (New York: Seabury, 1973), 217.

<sup>562</sup> Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 250, 296.

<sup>563</sup> Michelle Goldberg, “John Lewis Believed America Would Survive Trump.” *New York Times* (July 31, 2020), A25, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/30/opinion/john-lewis-legacy.html>.

and smell. Time and space are not just secondary—qualities added to our being—but its “intimate substance.”<sup>564</sup> “Spacing” is our reality.<sup>565</sup> Our hearts keep time even as we read these words.

At the same time, dimension functions metaphorically, dialectically, and/ or analogically to gesture toward that which is “beyond” time and space. “Deep calls to deep” (Ps 42:7). Augustine suggests that God is *interior intimo meo et superior summo meo*.<sup>566</sup> Limits point to their own limit, toward the unlimited. “The encounter with Christ, primordial sign, opens to [human [Real Presence] beings] the infinite space of the transcendent.”<sup>567</sup> Or again, as Marilynne Robinson writes,

An early Christian writer, Gregory of Nyssa, said of God, “That which is without quality cannot be measured, the invisible cannot be examined, the incorporeal cannot be weighed, the limitless cannot be compared, the incomprehensible does not admit of more or less.” From antiquity, insistence on the ontological unlikeness of God to the categories to which the human mind has recourse is at the center of theological reflection.<sup>568</sup>

The tradition bears witness to this unthinkable dimension of the “Wholly Other” as being *fully within* and yet *not bound* by the dimension in which we move. We speak of the “transcendence” of God and at our best do not mean remoteness, distance-from; we mean the unity of absolute otherness and absolute nearness. This is impossible Incarnation.

### III

It is a presence, then, whose margins are our margins; that calls us out over our own fathoms.

—R. S. Thomas<sup>569</sup>

I suggest that we see at least three “vitalities” emerge in Ellul’s life and thought, rooted as they are in Presence: a deeply grounded “feeling for presence”; a capacity for the unheld; and deep regard for the personal.

Not surprisingly, this first is hard to put into words—yet it is what Ellul was engaged by in “The Dialogue of Sign and Presence”! If the carnal and the spiritual are one, keen

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<sup>564</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought: Essays on the Religious Philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa*, trans. Mark Sebanc (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 28.

<sup>565</sup> Von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 28.

<sup>566</sup> The whole translated sentence reads, “Yet all the time You were more inward to me than the most inward place of my heart and loftier than the highest” (perhaps more familiar to us as, “You are closer to me than I am to myself”). Augustine of Hippo, *The Confessions of St. Augustine, Books I-X*, trans. F. J. Sheed (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1942), 41.

<sup>567</sup> Cavalletti, *The Religious Potential of the Child*, 167.

<sup>568</sup> Marilynne Robinson, *Absence of Mind: The Dispelling of Inwardness from the Modern Myth of the Self* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 4-5. She cites von Balthasar’s *Presence and Thought*, 27, as her source for the quotation from Gregory of Nyssa.

<sup>569</sup> R. S. Thomas, “A.D.” In *Collected Later Poems: 1988-2000* (Glasgow: Bloodaxe, 2004), 118.

sensitivity to, curiosity about, and respect for *the whole* prevails—and this, not merely conceptually, but vitally. Two extra-Ellulian examples shed light here. Wendell Berry, farmer and writer, once half-joked about forming “the Society for the Preservation of Tangibility.” This society would have “no dues, no meetings, no fund drives, no newsletter”—only, as his interviewer Erik Reece muses, “a state of mind, a desire to preserve what’s authentic, what holds substance, what aspires to the whole.”<sup>570</sup> Reece, again:

The tangible—that which has actual form and substance. In a culture of avatars, electronic friends, and financial “products” that have no basis in reality, such a fundamentally human society sounds attractive indeed.<sup>571</sup>

A second is from Stephen Leslie, also (tellingly) a farmer, who works with horses to cultivate land in Vermont. Leslie, often asked why he does so when using a tractor would be so much faster (“Don’t they take a lot more time?”), responds that using the horses actually gives time back, because they “restore to us the life of the senses.”<sup>572</sup> Further, he says,

”From an ecological standpoint, it’s just so clean, versus burning fossil fuel, and the compaction you get with a tractor,” he said. “But on that other level, there is just this unending learning curve that keeps you engaged. It’s a window into an instinctual world that is also entirely present. When I’m with the horses they are entirely present to me and to the task at hand. ‘Here we are, this is it, this is what we’re doing.’”<sup>573</sup>

The second, related “vitality”—a capacity for the unheld—is positive, primary regard for that which cannot be grasped by thought or action. This is Yvette and Jacques Ellul’s “courage to live this instability . . . so close.” It is “openness of thought toward that which surpasses it,” a capacity for being in the presence of what cannot be comprehended without straining after comprehension (literally, “taking around”), for *staying with* this reality.<sup>574</sup> To say that this regard is “positive” and “primary” is to make the significant distinction between acknowledging that there are limits to what human beings can comprehend, and actually valuing this unknown edge as key, essential, and elemental, thus allowing it to relativize everything else.<sup>575</sup>

For Ellul, thinker of presence, this/that which cannot be grasped is *primary*. Or, to put this more positively, living encounter is primary. It establishes the whole, informs the whole, and gives meaning to the whole. We see this in his relentlessly dialectical mode of thought:

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<sup>570</sup> Erik Reece, “Wendell Berry’s Wild Spirit.” *Garden and Gun* (Aug.-Sept. 2011), 81.

<sup>571</sup> Reece, “Wendell Berry’s Wild Spirit,” 81.

<sup>572</sup> I have been unable to verify the source of this quotation.

<sup>573</sup> Anne Raver, “Farm Equipment that Runs on Oats.” *New York Times* (May 15, 2013) <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/16/garden/farm-equipment-that-runs-on-oats.html>.

<sup>574</sup> Von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 171.

<sup>575</sup> A salient contrast is Francis Bacon’s acknowledgment of what he called “the Kingdom of Heaven” and the “Kingdom of Politics,” both of which he then firmly puts aside, calling for a focus instead on the “Kingdom of Nature.” This Kingdom, he argued, was one over which human beings had been given *dominion*; the “new organon” he proposed was a way of looking at and moving in the world appropriate

I have sought to confront theological and biblical knowledge and sociological analysis without trying to come to any artificial or philosophical synthesis; instead, I try to place the two face to face, in order to shed some light on what is real socially and real spiritually.<sup>576</sup>

We see it in his exhortation to remember, in dialogue, that “the one is made [Real Presence] for the other.”<sup>577</sup> We see it in his refusal to be prescriptive. We see it in his profound awareness of the distinction between the work of the Wholly Other and human work. We see it in his insistence that this way can only be *lived*. He urges the creation of a new *presence* that can emerge only in time and space in unique and personal real relation with the Wholly Other.

This brings us to the third vitality, also touched on above: deep regard for the personal. In Ellul, this is the Mario factor: “We must not think about ‘human beings’ but about my neighbor Mario.”<sup>578</sup> Persons matter, in the particularity of body-and-soul. This awareness pertains to the rest of the natural world as well: the mystery of the Wholly Other underwrites, informs, and pervades every being. No wonder the initial and sustained context of Ellul and Charbonneau’s conversations with others was camping trips, immersion in the natural world! Ellul clearly treasured this world, seeing its depth, its mystery, its manifestation of Glory.

## IV

You absolutely insist on maintaining your independence in the material realm.—  
Ellul, “Dialogue”

To approach Ellul’s life and thought in this way casts his attitude toward *technique* in sharper relief, exposing more clearly the ways in which the instrumental mentality of modern technology stands in active opposition to presence. As he acknowledges in *Hope*, discerning God’s presence (glory) in all things “obviously calls for a tremendous reversal of all our habitual concepts and of the collective technological trend.”<sup>579</sup>

Here, I propose a thought experiment. Keeping in mind Rollison’s proposal that technique is *anti-presence*, and thinking in terms of presence as considered above, what might presence’s opposite be? What is anti-presence in this context, and what light or shadow is thereby cast on modern technology? Taking each of our themes above in turn, we simply briefly sketch out the following:

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to this dominion. It is a perceptual framework that excludes whatever cannot be rationally grasped. See Francis Bacon, *The New Organon* [1620], ed. Fulton H. Anderson (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1960).

<sup>576</sup> Quoted by David Cain in his introduction to *Dying unto Life* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013), 2.

<sup>577</sup> Jacques Ellul, *What I Believe*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 78.

<sup>578</sup> Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*, 79.

<sup>579</sup> Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 236.

- Where presence is rooted in Divine Life, so that created being itself is shot through with a mysterious relationality, a “betweenness,” anti-presence confines itself to . . . itself.

Where presence is iconoclastic, shattering pre-conceived notions and images, anti-presence is invested in “rationality” narrowly conceived and in managing and curating images. It thrives on grasp, control, predictability, and the capacity to manipulate.

Where presence reveals mystery, anti-presence denies this paradox and stakes its claim on knowledge as that which “gets to the bottom of things,” whether immediately or eventually.

**Where presence establishes, anti-presence scatters and trivializes.**

**Where presence resonates with wholeness, anti-presence separates, isolates, sets in opposition.**

Where presence is the origin and home of the personal, anti-presence promotes the impersonal and the anonymous and “is particularly oriented to the destruction of personal relationships.”<sup>580</sup>

Where presence introduces a dimension that cannot be measured, anti-presence has an affinity for literal dimensions, that which can be measured (shedding light on the drive to efficiency as the single dimension in which our merely representational thought moves), or one dimension (flatness).

We recognize, too, in this thought experiment, that anti-presence can also manifest as false presence. Ellul was keenly aware of this: False Presence in the Modern World was his response to the misunderstandings that met Presence in the Modern World; many readers of the latter assumed that presence in the modern world could be equated with social action, social programs, or political solutions. But, unless originating from Presence, these simply devolve into more sterile techniques. What medieval philosophers and theologians called “false similitude” is potentially illuminating here. For example, if the direct opposite of the virtue of hope is despair, its “false similitude” is presumption. Using this template, having explored presence’s “opposites,” what might its “false similitudes” look like?

Where presence is rooted in Divine Life, a false similitude of presence might promise, promote, and afford access to and dependence on a power generated from and by human beings. Ellul refers frequently to the drive of human power, “the methods of power,” human “pride and power.”<sup>581</sup> Rather than manifest the glory of God, these “express the glory of man.”<sup>582</sup>

- Where presence is irreducibly “between,” a false similitude of presence might emphasize “connection,” and where presence is iconoclastic, a false similitude

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<sup>580</sup> Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*, 84.

<sup>581</sup> It is striking in this context to consider the names of “power companies”: Dominion, EverSource, UniSource, Reliant, Sempra, [Locale] Power & Light. It is clear the extent to which technology in general is looked upon as a “savior.”

<sup>582</sup> Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 236.

of presence might celebrate “disruption.” Where presence is the revelation of mystery, a false similitude of presence might offer great wonders, a sense of enchantment, the seemingly miraculous.

- Where presence establishes the person in freedom, a false similitude of presence might offer freedom in terms of the “unlimited”; where presence is the origin and home of the person, a false similitude of presence might valorize “the individual,” whether the “me/I/mine” or the “you.”
- Where presence resonates with wholeness, a false similitude of presence might celebrate “success,” “accomplishment,” material ease and abundance; where presence introduces a dimension that cannot be measured, a false similitude of presence might offer a hall of mirrors.

Artificiality—which Ellul cites as one of the primary characteristics of modern technology—is false presence. We tend to call it “virtuality,” or “virtual presence,” without registering this as an oxymoron. Edward Engel-man writes,

The term “artificial” traditionally refers to something which resembles a natural or original thing, but which is ontologically inferior to it. It is made to resemble the original. The computer pioneer Herbert Simon, in *The Sciences of the Artificial*, articulates such a notion when he says that the artificial is an imitation involving resemblance from without rather than from within. The imitation resembles the real insofar as it turns the same face to the external system.<sup>583</sup>

The technological *has* no interior dimension; as Ellul observes, technical products mean nothing by themselves.<sup>584</sup>

In this thought experiment, we must also acknowledge the full-stop negation of presence, which is absence. This would cohere with “the will to death, the will to suicide,” which Ellul identifies as being at the heart of the world as it turns its back on *le Vivant*.<sup>585</sup>

What this overall schematic of presence/anti-presence lacks in subtlety it can perhaps make up for as a stark perspective from which to see and engage with modern technology. It is a sobering view. As Ellul reminds us early in *Presence in the Modern World*, communion with Christ “brings Christians face to face with the world’s spiritual reality, not its material might. [... T]hey struggle not against flesh and blood but against ‘thrones, powers, dominations.’”<sup>586</sup> Further, it is a reminder of the extent to which this communion remains a scandal in the world, an opposition that cannot be attenuated.<sup>587</sup>

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<sup>583</sup> Edward M. Engelmann, *Nature and the Artificial* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2017), 158.

<sup>584</sup> Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 236.

<sup>585</sup> Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*, 15.

<sup>586</sup> Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*, 1-2.

<sup>587</sup> Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*, 7.

In his very absence, this absent God is the one who gives meaning.

—Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*

Nothing was more true for Ellul than the presence of *le Vivant*. This presence IS truth. For “the mass of people in the Western world,” however, “God is no longer present.”<sup>588</sup> The Wholly Other has turned away, refuses to speak, is the Absent Other. “God makes himself absent in this world of absences, which modern man has put together with enthusiasm.”<sup>589</sup> It is this widespread sense of and choice for absence that defines the modern world.

In the face of this absence, one sensible option is despair, faithlessness, hopelessness. Another more socially acceptable option is the “false similitude” of hope that Ellul, I think, would equate with the purely human-driven “search for means, for a solution to the problem, for a rational decision, for personal commitment.”<sup>590</sup> Ellul urges the decision, instead, for authentic hope—hope that does not come from humanity. “The Wholly Other” acts first to recreate the world; this is the incomprehensible origin of hope. And now, according to Ellul, in the face of God’s felt absence, hope becomes the human being’s “answer to God’s silence.”<sup>591</sup> It is this hope—given and chosen, expressed through waiting, prayer, and realism—that becomes the face of presence in a bereft world.<sup>592</sup> Hope alone is what “now [...] really nourishes,” “supplies the bread and the wine with their meaning.”<sup>593</sup>

This hope is by no means optimism. It is not even recognizable as “hope.” Ellul proposes “the incognito” as “perhaps the genuine, serious, and profound form of hope today,” insofar as “the incognito” corresponds with [Real Presence] God’s incognito in Jesus (more lovely echoes here of Kierkegaard, and of the Gospel of John), as well as with God’s incognito in God’s contemporary silence.<sup>594</sup> This form of hope will expose and leave a “gap,” make “a break in the conversation,” insert “a completely new and unexpected dimension.”<sup>595</sup> This incognito will live out a relationship, one that gives shape and meaning to all other relationships, without trying to “externalize” that relationship verbally with those who are not interested. In this context, we may remember Ellul’s description of his mother when he tells her of his conversion to Christianity. They are in the kitchen; she is standing at the sink with her back to him. According to Ellul, “She replied without even turning round that she was not at all surprised and that she had been praying each night for that to happen ever since I was born.”<sup>596</sup> Without even turning around!

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<sup>588</sup> Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 130.

<sup>589</sup> Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 125.

<sup>590</sup> Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 204.

<sup>591</sup> Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 176.

<sup>592</sup> Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 258.

<sup>593</sup> Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 168.

<sup>594</sup> Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 288.

<sup>595</sup> Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 296.

<sup>596</sup> Troude-Chastenet, Jacques Ellul on Politics, Christianity, and Technology, 41.

She had kept her promise to her husband not to teach their son her faith.

Yet her life was rooted in hope. She was living the incognito in its poverty and power.

In the absence at the heart of the modern world, the Christian, and the Church, are called to this way of presence, “what we first have to live as a relation with God.”<sup>597</sup> There *is* no vital Christian response to technology outside of this immediately lived personal and communal relation. The Christian, and the Church, are not fundamentally anti-technique, nor are they pro-technique; the Christian, and the Church, are fundamentally *for* presence/Presence. They can be for technology only insofar as technology serves the glory of God, when it is “put back into the movement of hope,” “a movement toward the Lord who is coming, in which we include things as well.”<sup>598</sup> We begin with Presence and end there too: *Parousia*, the “Second Coming,” we remember, literally means “presence,” “being alongside.”

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Now I am revealing new things to you, things hidden and unknown to you, created just now, this very moment. Of these things you have heard nothing until now so that you cannot say, O yes, I knew this.—Isaiah 48:6-7

If presence is the beginning, middle, and end, how might this shape the life of the Christian in the world? One can imagine, but never imagine!

Out of a lived relation with *le Vivant*, one can imagine a revolution in the human experience of time and space. “Present,” after all, attests at once to time and to space and so to the unity of this medium in which we move. To be present is to recover time and space, time-space, as the medium in which the Holy moves. Ellul asserts that hope “produces a restructuring of our time,” is “constructive of true time.”<sup>599</sup> Hope, as “the meeting place of the future with eternity,” “causes this future-eternity relation to intervene in the present instant and in the current event. Hope is that which establishes the right relation between a future [...] and a present.”<sup>600</sup>

Coming to regard time and space as our “intimate substance,” we may be able to see and live it at once as limit *and* as possibility: as von Balthasar observes, “It is important to consider that the limits of a finite being are at the same time its contours, its form, indeed, its beauty.”<sup>601</sup> This is what it means to be a creature, and to have a place in a larger living reality. As Gregory of Nyssa said, Divine Wisdom “has circumscribed each being within its own proper dimensions, by giving it a suitable rhythm as a limit, so to speak, so that it may be included in the rightful harmony of the universe.”<sup>602</sup> This is antithetical to the ways in which a technological society works to compress time—“save” time—and collapse space. By working to bring the distant close—how many relatively

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<sup>597</sup> Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 238.

<sup>598</sup> Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 233-38.

<sup>599</sup> Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 230-31.

<sup>600</sup> Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 230-31.

<sup>601</sup> Von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 29.

<sup>602</sup> Von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 29.



freshly minted words begin with the prefix *tele-* (literally, “far off, distant”)!—are we obscuring what is actually present?

One aspect of this redeemed relation to time and space would be an alert sensitivity to *what it is time for*. This is waiting in open poverty for *le Vi-vant*. Waiting, instead of being an unfortunate anomaly, a breakdown in the system, would be experienced as the *locus* of action.<sup>603</sup> And prayer, far from being a pious exercise, would be the arena of relation, vital attunement in time to the movement of *le Vivant*. As Eastern Orthodox Christians are exhorted, “Every morning put your mind into your heart and stand in the presence of God all the day long.”<sup>604</sup>

One can imagine deep, abundant attentiveness, an attentiveness that is not a “what,” a technique, but radical relation. As Iain McGilchrist suggests in his studies in neuropsychology,

Attention [...] intrinsically is a *way in which*, not a thing: it is intrinsically a relationship, not a brute fact. It is a “howness,” a something

between, an aspect of consciousness itself, not a “whatness,” a thing [Rea]l [Presence] in itself, an object of consciousness. It brings into being a world and, with it, depending on its nature, a set of values.<sup>605</sup>

One can imagine here a revolution in our ways of seeing the “artificial.” Out of a lived relation with *le Vivant*, a living distinction might emerge between the “inspired” artificial, that which is made by human beings *in concert with* the Wholly Other, which bears witness to another life-giving, unfathomable, generative dimension of human life (e.g., great art, great technology?), and the “flat” or “dead” artificial (e.g., bad art, technology that finally bears witness to nothing but itself). The former is the truly creative; the latter, the merely manufactured. One plays freely in the arena of the whole; the other only fractures and exploits.

With this, lived relation with *le Vivant* might energize perception of a more fundamental distinction between the artificial and the natural. The ancient Greeks observed a difference between things that “grow by themselves into whatever they become” and

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<sup>603</sup> “The Archdeacon was still gazing at the chalice as if in a trance. But now he was conscious of some slight movement on his own part towards which he was impelled; he knew the signs of that approaching direction, and awaited it serenely.

By long practice he had accustomed himself in any circumstances—in company or alone, at work or at rest, in speech or in silence—to withdraw into that place where action is created. The cause of all action there disposed itself according to that Will which was its nature, and, so disposing itself, moved him easily as a part of its own accommodation to the changing wills of men, so that at any time and at all times its own perfection was maintained, now known in endurance, now in beauty, now in wisdom, now in joy. There was no smallest hesitation which it would not solve, nor greatest anxiety which it did not make lucid” (Charles Williams, *War in Heaven* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968], 117-18).

<sup>604</sup> Quoted in *Enfolded in Love: Daily Readings with Julian of Norwich*, ed. Robert Llewelyn (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1980), 70.

<sup>605</sup> Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 29.

things that owe their existence to human mak-ing.<sup>606</sup> They also saw another difference with clear relevance here: “Artifacts have merely accidental forms that are imposed on them, in contrast to the substantial, intrinsic forms of natural things.”<sup>607</sup> To appreciate such a living distinction between the natural and the artificial would stand in piquant contrast to the contemporary, shifting distinction between the virtual and “IRL.”

If *le Vivant* is the wellspring, presence is life flowing forth. Those animated by the truth of presence will stand *for* presence by *being* present. They will know themselves as people who need to break bread together to know what communion is.<sup>608</sup> They will know that how their beings are physically engaged in the world matters. Where “everything has become means” and “the end no longer exists,” they will not give up questioning means and considering ends.<sup>609</sup> They will move with freedom and hope, trusting life to be infinitely undergirded. They will know what moves and what stands, and the dance between. Especially, they will know that the primary work is God’s, the Wholly Other, so close.

## Bernard Charbonneau et le christianisme

Frederic Rognon

Les relations de Bernard Charbonneau a la foi chretienne sont tout sauf simples et univoques. Apres avoir grandi dans un milieu chretien (son pere est protestant et sa mere catholique) et avoir vecu une experience de scoutisme unioniste (de dix a seize ans) qui s’avere decisive pour sa sensibilite a la nature et a la liberte, il se dira agnostique et post-chretien, tout en recitant le « Notre Pere » tous les jours jusqu’a la fin de sa vie... Par ailleurs, son reuvre est petrie de references bibliques et d’allusions a la tradition chretienne, qu’il connait fort bien, davantage sans doute que bien des croyants, alternant des mentions respectueuses, voire elogieuses, et de vives critiques. Enfin, on ne peut saisir la teneur des affinites et des points de rupture entre Bernard Charbonneau et le christianisme, sans integrer dans l’analyse sa confrontation avec Jacques Ellul. On sait que les deux amis, unis pendant une soixantaine d’annees « par une pensee commune », se distinguaient sur plusieurs questions dont celle de la foi chretienne, et entraient a ce sujet en une *disputatio* continue que seules autorisaient, une estime mutuelle et une gratitude reciproque sans bornes.

Je me propose donc d’eclairer quelque peu le rapport paradoxal entre Bernard Charbonneau et le christianisme en examinant successivement: 1) les references chretiennes, implicites et explicites ; 2) la critique du christia-nisme ; 3) l’eloge du christianisme ;

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<sup>606</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 150-51.

<sup>607</sup> Engelmann, *Nature and the Artificial*, 8.

<sup>608</sup> Jacques Ellul and Yvette Ellul, “Dialogue,” 25-26.

<sup>609</sup> Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*, 40.

- 4) la these de l'ambivalence du christianisme dans ses relations a la nature ; et enfin
- 5) le dialogue avec Jacques Ellul au sujet du christianisme.

Rognon, Frederic. "Bernard Charbonneau et le christianisme." *Ellul Forum* 66 (Fall 2020): 27-50. © Frederic Rognon, CC BY-NC-ND.

## I. Les references de Bernard Charbonneau a la Bible et a la tradition chretienne

L'inventaire des motifs issus des corpus scripturaires, symboliques et theologiques, dans l'ensemble de l'oeuvre devrait nous permettre de prendre la mesure du referentiel chretien dans la pensee charbonnienne, et de tenter d'elucider le statut contraste de la foi et de la tradition chretiennes dans son positionnement existentiel.

Les references de Bernard Charbonneau a la Bible et a la tradition chretienne sont innombrables, et servent generalement soit d'objets d'analyse historique, soit d'exemples, au prix d'un deplacement semantique, d'une reconfiguration ou d'un detournement de sens. Nous n'en citerons que quelques-unes, a titre d'exemples, parmi des centaines, en commençant par les references explicites et en poursuivant par les references implicites.

A. *References explicites* (assez rarement, Bernard Charbonneau donne la reference scripturaire precise):

- La colere de l'Eternel contre le denombrement d'Israel et de Juda, relatee en 2 Samuel 24, est appliquee a l'informatisation<sup>610</sup>.
- Un presage de la mort du roi Baltasar dans le livre du prophete Daniel, est applique a la mystique du developpement a tout prix<sup>611</sup> (exceptionnellement, Bernard Charbonneau a recours a une note de bas de page pour expliciter une citation biblique sollicitee a l'appui de sa demonstration).
- Des versets tires de l'episode de la tour de Babel en Genese 11 permettent d'illustrer la menace totalitaire contre la liberte<sup>612</sup>.
- Dans un eloge a la nourriture savoureuse, une reference explicite a la premiere epitre aux Corinthiens rappelle que l'apotre Paul a libere les chretiens des tabous alimentaires<sup>613</sup>.

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<sup>610</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Le totalitarisme industriel*, Paris, L'Echappee (coll. Le pas de cote), 2019, p. 86-87.

<sup>611</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Sauver nos regions. Ecologie, re'gionalisme et socie'te's locales*, Paris, Le Sang de la terre (coll. Les dossiers de l'ecologie), 1991, p. 164.

<sup>612</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>613</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Un festin pour Tantale. Nourriture et societe industrielle* [1997], Paris, Le Sang de la terre (coll. La pensee ecologique), 2011<sup>2</sup>, p. 78.

- Et lorsqu'il s'agit de montrer que Dieu se distingue de la toute-puissance matérielle, Bernard Charbonneau multiplie les références bibliques en note de bas de page<sup>614</sup>.

B. *References implicites* (plus généralement, Bernard Charbonneau fait une simple allusion à un motif biblique, ce qui pose un problème de lisibilité et de compréhension aux générations détachées de toute familiarité avec la tradition scripturaire, surtout lorsque le message biblique fait l'objet d'un détournement de sens):

- Bernard Charbonneau ose un parallèle suggestif entre Charlie Chaplin et Jésus... Nous couvrons dorénavant Charlot, ce Pauvre que nous avons enrichi: « Il en est d'ailleurs un autre auquel cette aventure est arrivée. Sans doute était-il plus redoutable ; car avant de couvrir d'or son image et de l'offrir dans de vastes salles à l'admiration du public, nous l'avons solidement cloué à une croix »<sup>615</sup>.
- Dans sa critique de la science, Bernard Charbonneau cite cette parole « d'un sous-développé semite »: « Aimez-vous les uns les autres », et commente: « Je ne pense pas qu'il ait découvert ce principe à l'aide d'un radiotélescope »<sup>616</sup>.
- Au sujet de Napoléon: « La Matière s'est faite chair »<sup>617</sup>, par référence implicite au prologue de Jean<sup>618</sup>.
- Au sujet des paysans: « En eux pour toujours le Verbe s'est incarné »<sup>619</sup>, par référence au même texte.
- Au sujet du foyer: « Ou trouver ailleurs la vie, la vérité et la voie? »<sup>620</sup>, détournant le sens de la formule de Jésus dans les derniers entretiens avec ses disciples<sup>621</sup>.
- La même référence est implicite au sujet de la voiture: « La bagnole, c'est la vérité et la vie, mais surtout la Voie, à laquelle tout doit être sacrifié, et le sacrifice humain est le plus haut de tous »<sup>622</sup>.

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<sup>614</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Le totalitarisme industriel, op. cit.*, p. 107, 111.

<sup>615</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Lexique du verbe quotidien*, Genève, Editions Heros-Li-mite (coll. Feuilles d'herbe), 2016, p. 68. Cf. aussi Bernard Charbonneau, *Prométhée reenchaine*, Paris, La Table Ronde (coll. La petite Vermillon), 2001, p. 227.

<sup>616</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Le totalitarisme industriel, op. cit.*, p. 91.

<sup>617</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Comment ne pas penser*, Bordeaux, Opales, 2004, p. 105.

<sup>618</sup> Cf. Jean 1, 14.

<sup>619</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Le Jardin de Babylone* [1969], Paris, Editions de l'Encyclopédie des nuisances, 2002, p. 79.

<sup>620</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Prométhée reenchaine, op. cit.*, p. 124.

<sup>621</sup> Cf. Jean 14, 6.

<sup>622</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *L'homme auto* [1967], Paris, Denoel, 2003, p. 106.

- Au sujet de la liberte: elle « n'apporte pas la paix mais l'epee »<sup>623</sup>, par allusion a l'expression que Jesus emploie au sujet de lui-meme<sup>624</sup>.
- La meme expression est sollicitee a propos de la science: « Elle n'est pas venue apporter la paix mais l'epee, qu'elle perfectionne sans cesse »<sup>625</sup>.
- Elle est egalement convoquee pour constater que tout imperatif reli-gieux ne peut exhorter les hommes a depasser leur nature que par une forme de violence spirituelle<sup>626</sup>.
- Au sujet de l'esprit: « Nul ne sait ou va ni d'ou vient qui tombe pour lui avoir obei »<sup>627</sup>, par reference au saint Esprit dans l'entretien de Jesus avec Nicodeme<sup>628</sup>.
- La meme reference est convoquee au sujet de la voiture: « L'automo-bile ideale, c'est le Saint-Esprit, qui va et souffle ou il veut »<sup>629</sup>.
- Et toujours au sujet de la voiture: « Il est dit que l'hommauto ne vivra pas seulement de Super »<sup>630</sup>, par allusion a la repartie de Jesus au tenta-teur, selon laquelle l'homme ne vivra pas de pain seulement<sup>631</sup>.
- La liberte est dite « folie pour la chair, scandale pour l'esprit »<sup>632</sup>, reconfiguration totale du verset qui prechait Christ crucifie, « scandale pour les Juifs et folie pour les pai'ens »<sup>633</sup>.
- « Comme un cerf altere brame », « l'homme a soif de verite »<sup>634</sup>, dit

Bernard Charbonneau, citant le Psaume 42 qui concernait l'ame du psalmiste assoiffee du Dieu vivant<sup>635</sup>.

- La meme reference est sollicitee dans un vibrant eloge de l'eau, afin d'etablir que l'eau n'est pas seulement source de vie physique, mais de vie spirituelle, et que toutes les traditions religieuses aspirent au flot qui apaisera enfin leur soif<sup>636</sup>.

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<sup>623</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Je fus. Essai sur la liberte* [1980] , Bordeaux, Opales, 20002, p. 105.

<sup>624</sup> Cf. Matthieu 10, 34.

<sup>625</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Le totalitarisme industriel*, op. cit., p. 96.

<sup>626</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Finis Terrae*, La Bache, A plus d'un titre editions (coll. La ligne d'horizon), 2010, p. 126.

<sup>627</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Je fus*, op. cit., p. 129.

<sup>628</sup> Cf. Jean 3, 8.

<sup>629</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *L'hommauto*, op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>630</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>631</sup> Cf. Matthieu 4, 4 ; Luc 4, 4.

<sup>632</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Je fus*, op. cit., p. 165.

<sup>633</sup> 1 Corinthiens 1, 23.

<sup>634</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Je fus*, op. cit., p. 168.

<sup>635</sup> Cf. Psaume 42,2-3.

<sup>636</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Le totalitarisme industriel*, op. cit., p. 127.

- Dans le meme plaidoyer en faveur d'un retour a la purete de l'eau, notre auteur cite la formule de Jesus a Nicodeme<sup>637</sup>: « Si un homme ne nait d'eau et desprit, il n'entrera pas au Royaume de Dieu »<sup>638</sup>, et afin de mieux denoncer la pollution de l'eau, c'est par reference au bapteme de Jean-Baptiste pres de Salim<sup>639</sup> qu'il annonce dramatiquement que le Jourdain pourrait aujourd'hui devenir de sang<sup>640</sup>.
- Dans une denonciation des nouveaux rapports de l'homme a la terre, Bernard Charbonneau subvertit et prolonge la formule du Christ<sup>641</sup> pour dire que « nous ne laissons plus les morts enterrer les morts, nous les deterrons »<sup>642</sup>.
- Substituant l'homme, l'espace et le temps, a la loi<sup>643</sup>, notre auteur evo-que la nostalgie d'un regne ou « l'espace et le temps, l'homme, ne seraient pas abolis mais accomplis »<sup>644</sup>.
- Par le rappel de l'episode dans lequel Josue avait arrete le cours du soleil<sup>645</sup>, Bernard Charbonneau met une reference biblique au service d'un certain epi-curisme, en affirmant que nous pouvons ralentir le temps en etant presents a soi, au prochain et a l'univers<sup>646</sup>.
- Afin de mettre en scene les rapports d'ingratitude entre l'homme et le nature, c'est la parabole du fils prodigue<sup>647</sup> qui est evoquee: « C'est la nature qui a engendre ce fils prodigue qui la renie, et il lui reste lie pour ce qui est de son existence physique et meme spirituelle »<sup>648</sup>.
- Dans sa critique de l'idolatrie de l'argent, Bernard Charbonneau n'hesite pas a subvertir l'expression evangelique au sujet de l'impot du a lempereur<sup>649</sup>, en declarant: « Il arrive parfois qu'on doive rendre a Rothschild ce qui est a Cesar. On voit a peu pres ce qui reste a Dieu »<sup>650</sup>.

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<sup>637</sup> Cf. Jean 3, 5.

<sup>638</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Le totalitarisme industriel, op. cit.*, p. 127.

<sup>639</sup> Cf. Jean 3, 23.

<sup>640</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Le totalitarisme industriel, op. cit.*, p. 127.

<sup>641</sup> Cf. Matthieu 8, 22.

<sup>642</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *L'homme en son temps et en son lieu* [1960], Paris, R&N Editions, 2017<sup>2</sup>, p. 36.

<sup>643</sup> Cf. Matthieu 5, 17.

<sup>644</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *L'homme en son temps et en son lieu, op. cit.*, p. 51.

<sup>645</sup> Cf. Josue 10,12-14.

<sup>646</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Finis Terrae, op. cit.*, p. 80.

<sup>647</sup> Cf. Luc 15, 11-32.

<sup>648</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Le totalitarisme industriel, op. cit.*, p. 190.

<sup>649</sup> Cf. Matthieu 22, 21.

<sup>650</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Il court, il court, le fric...*, Bordeaux, Opales, 1996, p. 35.

- La meme reference biblique apparait dans la critique de l'Etat et de Jean-Jacques Rousseau: « Comment rendre a Cesar ce qui est a Cesar sans lui rendre un peu ce qui est a Dieu, souverain de tout? »<sup>651</sup>.
- Et dans une critique du deferlement technologique, Bernard Charbonneau cite la phrase de Jesus qui met en tension le monde et l'ame<sup>652</sup>, afin de l'actualiser et d'en prolonger la meditation: « “Que servirait-il a un homme de gagner le monde, s'il se detruisait ou se perdait lui-meme?” Et nous savons qu'aujourd'hui il pourrait bien perdre le monde en se perdant »<sup>653</sup>.
- Les dernieres lignes de *Notre table rase* associent une formule anony-misee de Luther (somme de se retracter devant la Diete de Worms en 1521): « Je ne puis autrement... »<sup>654</sup>, que notre auteur assume pour legitimer son engagement et celui de son lecteur en faveur de la terre, a une reference implicite aux murailles de Jericho<sup>655</sup>: « Quand retentit cet air de trompette, parfois les murs s'ecroulent »<sup>656</sup>, afin de donner a son lecteur l'esperance d'une efficacite de cet engagement.

Ces exemples montrent la recurrence et la variete des references bibliques et theologiques, surtout implicites, dans le corpus charbonnien. Il nous faut a present rendre compte, de maniere plus systematique, de la critique directe du christianisme elaboree par notre auteur.

## La critique charbonnienne du christianisme

Le premier livre publie par Bernard Charbonneau est une deconstruction impitoyable de l'une des icones theologiques du moment et de sa mythologie: Pierre Teilhard de Chardin<sup>657</sup>. Le reproche cardinal qu'il enonce a l'encontre de la pensee de ce dernier est la menace quelle fait peser sur la liberte: Teilhard de Chardin a construit un systeme ferme, tourne vers le tout et l'absolu<sup>658</sup>. Toute contradiction est en effet appelee a se resoudre a un niveau superieur, le monde s'unifiant finalement en Dieu<sup>659</sup>. Teilhard de Chardin s'est ainsi place du point de vue de Dieu<sup>660</sup>. Toute chose se trouve ainsi reconciliee en un grand tout divin ; l'Eglise n'a donc plus qu'a consacrer la realite du monde, en lui ajoutant simplement le nom de Dieu: socialisme chretien, cinema chre-

<sup>651</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Quatre te'moins de la liberte. Rousseau, Montaigne, Berdiaev, Dostoievski*, Paris, R&N Editions, 2019, p. 46.

<sup>652</sup> Cf. Matthieu 16, 26 ; Marc 8, 36 ; Luc 9, 25.

<sup>653</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Lexique du verbe quotidien, op. cit.*, p. 104.

<sup>654</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Notre table rase. Essai*, Paris, Denoel, 1974, p. 205.

<sup>655</sup> Cf. Josue 6, 20.

<sup>656</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Notre table rase, op. cit.*, p. 205.

<sup>657</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Teilhard de Chardin, prophete d'un age totalitaire*, Paris, Denoel, 1963.

<sup>658</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>659</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 22-24.

<sup>660</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 62.

rien, pourquoi pas des camps de concentration chrétiens? « Le substantif n'appartient plus au christianisme, il ne lui reste plus que le qualificatif »<sup>661</sup>. Cette critique, typiquement kierkegaardienne, laisse sous-entendre la légitimité d'alternatives chrétiennes à Teilhard de Chardin. Bernard Charbonneau n'hésite d'ailleurs pas à formuler une critique théologique de frappe éminemment orthodoxe, traquant ainsi les contradictions internes à la pensée teilhardienne sur son propre terrain: « Si dans ce système le Mal n'est plus le Mal, la Croix n'est plus la Croix »<sup>662</sup>. Or, la Mort a été vaincue à la Croix, et « le Christ nous a ordonné de nous reconnaître pécheurs »<sup>663</sup> (soulignons le « nous » inclusif sous la plume de notre auteur):

Le Mal n'étant pas essentiel, la Rédemption devient superflue: quelle est la place de la Croix dans le Progrès? (...) Le sacrifice du Christ perd son prix, et la vie du chrétien sa gravité. Il n'y a plus de salut parce qu'il n'y a plus de perte. Rien ne saurait empêcher le triomphe total du Bien<sup>664</sup>.

La première critique du christianisme est donc la critique d'une certaine théologie au nom du christianisme. Elle s'élargit ensuite pour englober le puritanisme protestant d'une part, et l'ensemble du catholicisme de l'autre. La haine puritaine de la nature pécheresse de l'homme est absente de l'Évangile<sup>665</sup>, tonne un Bernard Charbonneau encore soucieux, en kierkegaardien fidèle, de distinguer la source chrétienne de sa subversion par la chrétienté. Le culte de l'argent dénonce par le christianisme (c'est-à-dire dans les textes du Nouveau Testament) règne à l'évidence dans la société chrétienne<sup>666</sup>. Et depuis la fin de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, les Églises, ayant raté le coche à vapeur, « ont trop peur de manquer le coche à essence. L'ancienne théologie niait la machine, la nouvelle la consacre: un coup de goupillon donnera à Total une odeur d'eau bénite »<sup>667</sup>. La liquidation de l'agriculture et de la campagne se joue avec le soutien de l'Église catholique, qui veut ainsi faire oublier ses compromissions avec le « retour à la terre » pétainiste<sup>668</sup>. Ainsi se manifeste, à chaque période, le conformisme du catholicisme à l'égard de l'ordre dominant. Les Églises survivantes ont donné trop de preuve de leur manque d'imagination et de « leur lâcheté devant le monde industriel »<sup>669</sup>.

Mais les griefs de Bernard Charbonneau à l'encontre du christianisme se font plus incisifs, plus substantiels et plus fondamentaux. Il reproche notamment aux textes bibliques de dire tout et son contraire<sup>670</sup>. La conception chrétienne du travail, par

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<sup>661</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>662</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>663</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>664</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>665</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Le Jardin de Babylone*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>666</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Il court, il court, le fric...*, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

<sup>667</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *L'homme auto*, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

<sup>668</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Le Jardin de Babylone*, *op. cit.*, p. 122, 140 ; *Un festin pour Tantale*, *op. cit.*, p. 136-37 ; *Sauver nos régions*, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

<sup>669</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Notre table rase*, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

<sup>670</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Le totalitarisme industriel*, *op. cit.*, p. 106.



exemple, oscille entre malediction et salut<sup>671</sup>: manger du pain a la sueur de son front est ainsi vecu comme une malediction benie puisqu'elle est infligee par Dieu<sup>672</sup>. Par ailleurs, le changement pour le changement est devenu une valeur du fait du christianisme, qui se situe a l'origine de l'inquietude et de l'agitation occidentale: la vie chretienne est conversion, mutation permanente<sup>673</sup>. De meme, l'expression « Croissez et multipliez ! »<sup>674</sup>, justifiant la croissance exponentielle, interroge Bernard Charbonneau: « Quelle divinite ou nature a impose a l'homme ce destin? »<sup>675</sup>, alors que croire, c'est perir. L'hypocrisie chretienne a « pollue » le mot « amour »<sup>676</sup>. Plus grave encore, notre auteur reproche au christianisme sa mise en cause de la liberte: le chretien est l'homme de la bonne conscience, de l'esquive de la mort, du conformisme spirituel et donc social, et finalement de la justification, qui rend superflu de transformer le monde et soi-meme ; or, la liberte est le refus de toute justification<sup>677</sup>. Et finalement, dans *Comment ne pas penser*, Bernard Charbonneau fait du christianisme le second (apres le nombrilisme) des seize remedes contre la propension a penser<sup>678</sup>. Le principal grief deploye a son encontre est sa complaisance face a l'histoire: « Dieu est amour »: voila qui arrange bien les choses, et permet de justifier toutes les reuvres des hommes, jusqu'a la bombe atomique. S'il y a une banque chretienne, pourquoi pas une Gestapo...? « Bienheureux les pauvres »: le pauvre y trouve une dignite eminente, tandis que le milliardaire ne s'en formalisera pas. On a beaucoup calomnie le christianisme, ajoute Bernard Charbonneau, en l'accusant d'avoir apporte le trouble dans la societe ; en realite, le degat est moins grand qu'il ne semble au premier abord. Et notre auteur d'ajouter sarcastiquement: l'univers actuel demontre tout entier que le christianisme, loin d'apporter le trouble, a seulement porte au plus haut point l'aptitude humaine a se defendre de la pensee. Et cependant, dans un raisonnement vigoureusement dialectique, Bernard Charbonneau releve que le christianisme offre a la fois le mal et son meilleur remede, la pensee et la non-pensee, le poison et le contrepoison. Nous retrouverons cette ambivalence au sujet du rapport du christianisme a la nature.

La critique charbonnienne du christianisme culmine en une profession de foi agnostique. Bernard Charbonneau evoque souvent un « Dieu inconnu »<sup>679</sup>. Et cependant, l'affirmation nietzscheenne de la mort de Dieu y est plus recurrente encore dans son

<sup>671</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Dimanche et lundi. Essai*, Paris, Denoel, 1966, p. 21-34.

<sup>672</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Finis Terrae, op. cit.*, p. 84-85.

<sup>673</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Le changement*, Vierzon, Le Pas de cote, 2013, p. 14-15. La parole du Christ: « Si le grain ne meurt... » (Jean 12, 24) est ici convoquee a grande distance de sa signification dans le contexte evangelique de son enonciation.

<sup>674</sup> Genese 1, 28.

<sup>675</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Le totalitarisme industriel, op. cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>676</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Sauver nos regions, op. cit.*, p. 149.

<sup>677</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Jefus, op. cit.*, p. 176-78, 195-98, 204.

<sup>678</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Comment ne pas penser, op. cit.*, p. 21-34.

<sup>679</sup> Cf. par exemple Bernard Charbonneau, *Le totalitarisme industriel, op. cit.*, p. 239 (la liberte y est qualifiee comme etant le don soit de la nature, soit d'un Dieu inconnu). Cf. aussi Bernard Charbonneau, *Quatre temoins de la liberte, op. cit.*, p. 152.

reuvre. Ce constat est toujours orienté vers la découverte d'une créativité nouvelle, de facture quasi-divine, en soi-même: « Dieu est mort?—Ce n'est ni le premier ni le dernier. Qu'en nous, il ressuscite ! Si ton cri est assez fort, peut-être l'entendra-t-il la-haut »<sup>680</sup>. C'est sur un mode on ne peut plus paradoxal que Bernard Charbonneau exalte ainsi la responsabilité humaine, sans pour autant exclure l'hypothèse Dieu. « C'est en soi que réside la source »<sup>681</sup>, déclare-t-il pour nier tout intérêt à changer simplement de religion, à passer du christianisme au bouddhisme ou vice-versa.

Enfin, la critique du christianisme s'élargit en une critique de toute religion et du phénomène religieux en tant que tel. La dénonciation se fait plus acerbe lorsqu'il s'agit de mettre en cause les ravages de la religion comme phénomène collectif: lorsqu'elle s'identifie à la société, elle s'avère délétère, car « à plusieurs on se persuade mutuellement »<sup>682</sup>. Et Bernard Charbonneau de redoubler de sarcasmes, pour pointer la fonction maternante de la société: « Maman est pieuse mais a-t-elle la foi? J'en doute. S'il n'y a pas plus dévot, il n'y a pas plus sceptique. (...) Elle fait mieux que tuer Dieu (...) elle l'enterme muni des sacrements de l'Eglise »<sup>683</sup>. « La société a de tout temps nourri les corps et les esprits car pour enchaîner les corps il lui faut enchaîner les âmes. (...) Depuis des siècles, Sainte Maman dupe la faim spirituelle de son bébé en lui faisant prendre l'ombre pour la proie »<sup>684</sup>.

La critique charbonnienne du christianisme, en tant que religion plutôt qu'en tant que foi, s'avère ainsi radicale. Et cependant, elle trouve son contrepoint dans un éloge au moins aussi éloquent.

## L'éloge charbonnien du christianisme

Bernard Charbonneau salue vigoureusement l'apport du christianisme dans différents domaines qui lui tiennent à cœur. Le premier est sa mise en exergue de principes de vie oubliés ou négligés par la science, dont ils reviennent finalement à contester les présomptions. C'est bien entendu le cas de l'amour: « Aimez vos ennemis »<sup>685</sup> ne s'est guère vérifié par la pratique et par l'histoire, et en ce sens ce n'est pas une vérité scientifique; « mais ce n'est pas “ $E = mc^2$ ” ou la double hélice qui donneront un sens à notre vie »<sup>686</sup>. Les exhortations du Christ ne sont donc pas à recevoir sur le plan démonstratif, mais comme une orientation de l'existence. Le seul reproche que notre auteur s'autorise à faire au « pur christianisme » (après tous les vifs griefs que nous

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<sup>680</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Finis Terrae, op. cit.*, p. 289. Cf. aussi Bernard Charbonneau, *Notre table rase, op. cit.*, p. 192.

<sup>681</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Finis Terrae, op. cit.*, p. 288.

<sup>682</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Bien aimer sa maman*, Bordeaux, Opales, 2006, p. 56.

<sup>683</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58-59.

<sup>684</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>685</sup> Matthieu 5, 44.

<sup>686</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Le totalitarisme industriel, op. cit.*, p. 100. Notre auteur ajoute: « “Aimez-vous les uns les autres” n'est pas une vérité scientifique » (*ibid.*, p. 110).

avons exposes plus haut, sans doute adresses a des parodies de christianisme), c'est son exigence extreme ; la loi d'amour depasserait l'homme de trop haut<sup>687</sup>: cette critique ne sonne-t-elle pas bien comme un bel eloge? A cette celebration generale des principes du christianisme s'ajoutent quelques evaluations positives du protestantisme, telle que sa critique justifiee du gaspillage, et par consequent son sens des responsabilites liees a nos modes de vie<sup>688</sup>.

Neanmoins, la principale vertu du christianisme, aux yeux de Bernard Charbonneau, concerne son invention de la liberte. Notre auteur le dit sans ambages:

S'il faut dater la liberte, c'est de l'an I de J.-C. Seul un Dieu pouvait creer le nouvel homme. Pour diviniser ainsi non pas l'Homme, mais celui qui vit et meurt chaque jour, il fallait que Dieu s'humanisat: que l'esprit divin s'incarnat en un corps et que l'amour du Pere fut cloue sur la croix de son fils<sup>689</sup>.

Cette analyse conduit notre auteur a ne pas craindre d'etablir le lien etroit entre le Dieu biblique et la liberte:

Qu'est-ce que Dieu? L'Absolu, la Perfection? Comment un homme, fini et imparfait, pourrait-il les connaitre? Au moins dans cet Extreme Occident, nous ne savons qu'une chose: c'est que Dieu est quelqu'un ; et que, victime ou juge, en personne il jugera des personnes. Il n'est pas Liberte pure, mais cette liberte vivante et mortelle qui perit et triompha un jour: un vendredi de l'an 33, quelque part au nord-est du Cedron. Structure de notre religion, cette liberte l'est de notre justice<sup>690</sup>.

Contrairement aux apparences, il ne s'agit pas la d'une confession de foi, mais d'un examen rigoureux de l'heritage chretien en Occident. Tout d'abord, Bernard Charbonneau nuance quelque peu le propos en precisant que l'homme libre est issu d'une rencontre entre le judeo-christianisme et la tradition grecque<sup>691</sup>. Ensuite, il montre que c'est moins la liberte elle-meme, que l'exigence de liberte, qui a ete portee au plus haut point par la foi chretienne en un Dieu transcendant<sup>692</sup>. Enfin, le message essentiel de *Je fus* est que cette exigence ne peut etre honoree qu'en la revelant en soi-meme et a soi-meme, sans aucune justification, en refusant notamment celle qui s'opere au nom de la liberte<sup>693</sup>. Or, nous avons vu combien la justification etait pre-cisement la marque du chretien. Seule l'existence individuelle, radicalement subjective, peut etre une existence libre, avec toute la teneur tragique et angoissante que cette experience implique: « Hors de toi tu ne trouveras rien, sinon le vide que ton pas doit franchir. Helas ! toi seul peux le faire. Il n'y a pas de liberte, mais une liberation, et surtout un

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<sup>687</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Le Feu vert. Autocritique du mouvement ecologique* [1980] , Lyon, Parangon/Vs (coll. L'apres-developpement), 2009<sup>2</sup>, p. 86. Cf. aussi Bernard Charbonneau, *Le totalitarisme industriel, op. cit.*, p. 108.

<sup>688</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>689</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Je fus, op. cit.*, p. 212.

<sup>690</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>691</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Le Jardin de Babylone, op. cit.*, p. 251.

<sup>692</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Finis Terrae, op. cit.*, p. 253-54.

<sup>693</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Je fus, op. cit.*, p. 204.

libérateur »<sup>694</sup>. « L'in-carnation n'a qu'un lieu, qu'un auteur: toi. Si tu le dis toi-même tu diras: moi »<sup>695</sup>. « Si la liberté est un défi jete au ciel et à la terre, je suis ce défi »<sup>696</sup>. La dernière page de *Je fus*, tout en confirmant cette irréductibilité de l'existence libre à toute instance extérieure, renoue néanmoins avec des accents plus dialectiques: « Choisis ta liberté, ne t'en justifie plus. Il est encore temps, tu es encore vivant sur terre. Nul ne peut le faire à ta place ; ni la Nature qui n'a pas d'esprit hors du tien, ni Dieu qui, s'il existe, te veut libre à son image »<sup>697</sup>. La liberté est donc à la fois l'expérience de la singularité absolue, et l'écho d'une hypothèse Dieu jamais totalement disqualifiée, encore moins recusée. L'un des tout derniers écrits de Bernard Charbonneau, intitulé: *Quatre témoins de la liberté. Rousseau, Montaigne, Berdiaev, Dostoïevski*<sup>698</sup>, publiée à titre posthume vingt-trois ans après sa mort, semble infléchir sa pensée vers une orientation résolument christologique. Il serait fort instructif de confronter ce dernier titre avec son *Je fus*, consacré à la même thématique de la liberté, mais comme on vient de le voir, dans une toute autre approche, de frappe agnostique. Au sujet de Berdiaev, notre auteur manifeste combien sa pensée lui est proche, avant de préciser:

N'était-ce une foi chrétienne hautement proclamée par Berdiaev, qu'un incroyant post-chrétien n'a aucune raison de recuser. Car la foi de Berdiaev est d'abord la puissance qui meut sa pensée sur son chemin, et l'aide à dépasser certains faux dilemmes de droite et de gauche ou d'autres chrétiens s'embourbent<sup>699</sup>.

Levocation de Berdiaev paraît faire la transition entre les dernières lignes de *Je fus*, et celles des *Quatre témoins*, consacrées à Dostoïevski:

La liberté chrétienne n'est pas une vérité qu'on possède, une solution donnée d'avance (...) Sommes-nous de taille à nous convertir à Kappel d'un Dieu de liberté sans être soutenus par la foi—qui est aussi humainement croyance—en un Dieu-homme? Est-ce possible, à une époque prise entre la mort de Dieu et l'angoisse religieuse qui travaille encore notre espèce?<sup>700</sup>

Au soir de sa vie, Bernard Charbonneau ne se serait-il pas laissé convaincre par la pertinence inégalable du christianisme, pour tracer un authentique chemin de liberté?

Comme toujours avec Bernard Charbonneau, les choses ne sont pas si simples. Plutôt que d'un saut de la foi à la Kierkegaard, mieux vaut discerner chez lui un rapport dialectique au christianisme, puissamment étayé par l'analyse du caractère foncièrement ambivalent de ce dernier. Cette dimension paradoxale du christianisme, qui invite à une relation paradoxale avec lui, se manifeste tout particulièrement dans son lien à la nature.

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<sup>694</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>695</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 224.

<sup>696</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226.

<sup>697</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 235.

<sup>698</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Quatre témoins de la liberté*, op. cit.

<sup>699</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>700</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138-39.

## La these de l'ambivalence du christianisme dans ses relations a la nature

Religion du paradoxe, le christianisme entretient des relations ambivalentes avec bien d'autres objets qu'avec la nature. En voici deux exemples. Avec la pensee, que le christianisme produit autant que la non-pensee, comme nous l'avons vu: Jesus-Christ « designe a la fois l'essentiel du mal et son meilleur remede »<sup>701</sup>. « Nous devons au christianisme en meme temps qu'une aggravation du mal de la pensee, un approfondissement des reflexes qui nous en defendent »<sup>702</sup>. Second exemple d'ambivalence, et meme de trivalence: la nourriture. Selon Bernard Charbonneau, le refus du formalisme alimentaire des juifs a pu conduire les chretiens aussi bien aux exces du laisser-aller, a l'indifference, qua la liberation de l'esprit<sup>703</sup>. Ainsi la revolution chretienne a-t-elle encore des consequences plurivoques sur les comportements d'au-jour'd'hui. Notre auteur affine ensuite son analyse, sur un mode fort stimulant: l'absence d'orthodoxie alimentaire en christianisme a paradoxalement conduit a la multiplication des orthodoxies dans l'Occident post-chretien, qui vont du mepris a la sanctification des nourritures<sup>704</sup>: la liberte produit en realite la proliferation des orthopraxies contradictoires.

Les relations entre le christianisme et la nature sont elles aussi fonciere-ment ambivalentes. La « Nature » est nee en Judee avec la notion de « Creation »: il devient alors possible de la connaitre et d'agir sur elle. « Alors grandirent parallelement la maitrise et le sentiment de la nature », explique Bernard Charbonneau<sup>705</sup>. La Creation chretienne est donc l'une des sources de ce sentiment<sup>706</sup> ; mais la liberte de l'homme vis-a-vis de la nature n'a de sens qu'en acceptant la responsabilite qu'elle suppose et implique<sup>707</sup> ; sinon, la dialectique entre liberte et responsabilite se trouve brisee, et la liberte dechainee n'en est plus une: telle est notre situation aujourd'hui.

La science, aux yeux de Bernard Charbonneau, est donc nee de la foi en un Dieu transcendant et createur, que l'on a appris a distinguer de la Creation. Car, « que serait la Science sans la theologie franciscaine de Roger Bacon, le jansenisme de Pascal et le protestantisme de Newton? »<sup>708</sup> Notre auteur nuance neanmoins quelque peu son propos: le christianisme n'est pas le seul responsable de l'exploration, de l'exploitation et de la devastation de la nature ; cependant, sans le christianisme, le phenomene n'aurait pas pris cette ampleur ; il ne s'agit donc ni de l'accabler, ni de nier son role<sup>709</sup>. Mais l'es-sentiel, pour Bernard Charbonneau, ne consiste pas a instruire un proces, a aiguiser son requisitoire ou a affuter ses plaidoiries. Le noyau decisif de son analyse

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<sup>701</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Comment ne pas penser*, op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>702</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>703</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Un festin pour Tantale*, op. cit., p. 98.

<sup>704</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>705</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Le Jardin de Babylone*, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>706</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>707</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>708</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Finis Terrae*, op. cit., p. 185.

<sup>709</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Le Feu vert*, op. cit., p. 88-89.

reside dans les perspectives d'ouverture pratique et par consequent d'issue a la crise ecologique:

Car cette liberte de l'homme qui menace de le detruire avec sa terre contient son antidote. C'est dans les societes memes ou la science et l'individualisme issus du christianisme se sont le plus developpes que le sentiment de la nature puis le mouvement ecologique ont pris naissance. Ce n'est pas par hasard que Rousseau est fils de la Rome calviniste. Le cote egalitaire, pacifiste et libertaire d'un mouvement ecologique ou les chretiens plus ou moins sortis de l'Eglise sont nombreux est directement issu de l'Evangile<sup>710</sup>.

Bernard Charbonneau developpera dans plusieurs textes cette these d'une ambivalence du christianisme dans son rapport a la nature: a la fois poison et contrepoison, a l'image de l'antique *pharmakbn*. Il evoque le mythe du jardin d'Eden, la condamnation des villes dans l'Ancien Testament, la splendeur de la Creation rappee a Job par Dieu, le choix de la campagne pour la predication de Jesus, le cadre champetre de ses paraboles, la solli-citude de Dieu envers le moindre des animaux, et il conclut: « D'ou l'eveil de l'amour de la nature dans les societes occidentales les plus marquées par la Bible »<sup>711</sup>. Les puissances occidentales sont donc tout aussi bien les premieres a s'etre lancees dans l'aventure productiviste la plus echevelee, et les premieres a avoir donne naissance a des mouvements de resistance con-tre la devastation de la planete. C'est ce qui conduit Bernard Charbonneau a l'analyse suivante:

On voit donc que le christianisme est a la fois a l'origine du pou-voir actuel de l'homme sur la nature, et de la prise de conscience de ses consequences negatives. D'ou la necessite pour l'opposition ecologique de s'interroger sur les racines chretiennes du developpe-ment et de sa critique, sans cela le mouvement ecologiste risquera d'eclater entre un pantheisme naturiste et un progressisme techno-scientifique, seulement destine a s'integrer dans l'evolution actuelle. (...) Le meilleur de la foi chretienne nous rappelle que nous fumus petris de terre, a l'accepter et nous accepter pour ce que nous som-mes: a la fois serfs et libres de la nature. En quelque sorte le mal est fait, l'ancienne loi, celle de la crainte et de la necessite, est abolie. Reste l'autre: mais le Christ n'a-t-il pas place la barre trop haut pour un homme a demi *sapiens*? C'est le seul reproche qu'on peut lui faire. A la veille de l'an 2000 comme autrefois devant l'arbre, Adam est libre. C'est-a-dire de se sauver ou de se perdre<sup>712</sup>.

Dans un article intitule: « Quel avenir pour quelle ecologie? »<sup>713</sup>, Bernard Charbonneau reprend a nouveaux frais le debat ouvert par Lynn White en 1966 sur les responsabilites du judeo-christianisme dans la crise ecologique. Il y developpe son approche dialectique du probleme: « La meme societe qui detruit avec le bison l'Indien, pleure

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<sup>710</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87-88.

<sup>711</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Le totalitarisme industriel, op. cit.*, p. 107.

<sup>712</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>713</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, « Quel avenir pour quelle ecologie? », *Foi & Vie*, 37, n°3-4, juillet 1988, p. 129-38.

sur sa disparition »<sup>714</sup>. Les reproches que certains ecologistes, comme Carl Amery, font au christianisme, ne sont donc pas faux, mais reducteurs: en profanant la nature, le christianisme a déchaîné la volonté de connaissance et de puissance dans l'Occident post-chrétien, et c'est là que la modernité s'est développée. Mais aussi sa critique. Car la tradition chrétienne est formelle pour ce qui est de condamner l'obsession de connaître et d'exploiter. La volonté de puissance est tenue pour malefique et destructrice, le dénuement, le refus de la puissance et de la richesse, la pauvreté pour salvateurs. Dans l'Évangile, c'est la beauté fragile du lys des champs qui est offerte en modèle à l'homme: « Le christianisme est à la fois responsable de la dévastation de la nature à l'Ouest et à l'Est, et porteur de la seule force qui puisse y mettre fin, à la fois poison et contrepoison »<sup>715</sup>.

Ainsi, Bernard Charbonneau perce la tradition chrétienne comme un véritable *pharmakon*, tout à la fois venin et antidote: le principal vecteur de la « Grande Mue » et sa seule issue. Le caractère paradoxal du rapport de Bernard Charbonneau au christianisme culmine dans cette analyse, et dans les ambivalences qu'elle met en exergue. Sans doute le long compagnon-nage avec son ami Jacques Ellul y est-il pour quelque chose.

## Le dialogue avec Jacques Ellul au sujet du christianisme

Les références de Bernard Charbonneau à Jacques Ellul, et de Jacques Ellul à Bernard Charbonneau, sont relativement rares. Et cependant, nous savons que leur amitié fidèle, longue de près de soixante ans, n'a pas pu ne pas avoir d'impact sur la pensée de l'un comme sur celle de l'autre. Bernard Charbonneau évoque cette relation en ces termes: après la Seconde Guerre mondiale, « je prenais conscience de l'origine chrétienne de mon amour de la nature et de la liberté. D'où une communion de pensée plus étroite qu'avant-guerre »<sup>716</sup>. Quant à Jacques Ellul, il témoigne en ce sens: « Des le début, nous nous sommes opposés, parfois très durement, dans le domaine de la foi »<sup>717</sup>. Mais il reconnaît

l'influence décisive de mon ami Charbonneau. Il a été à la fois le reproche incarné de ce que je ne suivais pas, en tant que chrétien, le commandement impératif: « Il faut faire quelque chose », et un coup de réil critique: « Ce que tu fais ne signifie rien ». J'ai tenté de faire échapper la foi chrétienne à ses critiques par mes engagements<sup>718</sup>.

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<sup>714</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>715</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>716</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, « Unis par une pensée commune », *Foi & Vie*, 93, n°5-6, décembre 1994, p. 19-28 (ici p. 23).

<sup>717</sup> Jacques Ellul, *A temps et à contretemps. Entretiens avec Madeleine Garrigou-La-grange*, Paris, Le Centurion (coll. Les interviews), 1981, p. 66.

<sup>718</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65-66.

Il serait judicieux de relire en parallele *Je fus*<sup>719</sup> et *Quatre temoins de la liberte*<sup>720</sup>, et la trilogie ellulienne sur la liberte (*Le Vouloir et le Faire*<sup>721</sup>, *Ethique de la liberte*<sup>722</sup> et *Les combats de la liberte*<sup>723</sup>) ; *Promethee reenchaine*<sup>724</sup> et la trilogie ellulienne sur la revolution (*Autopsie de la revolution*<sup>725</sup>, *De la revolution aux revoltes*<sup>726</sup> et *Changer de revolution*<sup>727</sup>) ; *L'Etat*<sup>728</sup> et *L'illusion politique*<sup>729</sup> ; *Dimanche et lundi*<sup>730</sup> et *Pour qui, pour quoi travaillons-nous?*<sup>731</sup> ; *Il court, il court, le fric...*<sup>732</sup> et *L'homme et l'argent*<sup>733</sup> ; *Le totalitarisme industries*<sup>734</sup> et *Le bluff technologique*<sup>735</sup> ; et enfin les articles sur l'ecologie rediges en alternance, ou en echo, dans *Combat Nature* entre 1983 et 1985<sup>736</sup>. Les tensions et les recoupements seraient ainsi reperes et problematises.

<sup>719</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Je fus*, op. cit.

<sup>720</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Quatre te'moins de la liberte*, op. cit.

<sup>721</sup> Cf. Jacques Ellul, *Le Vouloir et le Faire. Une critique theologique de la morale* [1964], Geneve, Labor et Fides, 2013<sup>2</sup>; *Les sources de l'ethique chretienne. Le Vouloir et le Faire*, parties IV et V, Geneve, Labor et Fides, 2018.

<sup>722</sup> Cf. Jacques Ellul, *Ethique de la liberte* [1973, 1975] , Geneve, Labor et Fides, 2019.

<sup>723</sup> Cf. Jacques Ellul, *Les combats de la liberte*, Paris / Geneve, Le Centurion / Labor et Fides, 1984. Cf. aussi Jacques Ellul, *Vivre et penser la liberte*, Geneve, Labor et Fides, 2019.

<sup>724</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Promethee reenchaine*, op. cit.

<sup>725</sup> Cf. Jacques Ellul, *Autopsie de la revolution* [1969] , Paris, La Table Ronde (coll. La petite Vermillon n°312), 2008.

<sup>726</sup> Cf. Jacques Ellul, *De la revolution aux revoltes* [1972] , Paris, La Table Ronde (coll. La petite Vermillon n°345), 2011.

<sup>727</sup> Cf. Jacques Ellul, *Changer de revolution. L'ineluctable proletariat* [1982] , Paris, La Table Ronde (coll. La petite Vermillon n°405), 2015.

<sup>728</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *L'Etat* [1949] , Paris, R&N Editions, 2020[3] .

<sup>729</sup> Cf. Jacques Ellul, *L'illusion politique* [1965] , Paris, La Table Ronde (coll. La petite Vermillon n°214), 2004[3] .

<sup>730</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Dimanche et lundi*, op. cit.

<sup>731</sup> Cf. Jacques Ellul, *Pour qui, pour quoi travaillons-nous?*, Paris, La Table Ronde (coll. La petite Vermillon n°379), 2013.

<sup>732</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Il court, il court, le fric...*, op. cit.

<sup>733</sup> Cf. Jacques Ellul, « L'homme et l'argent » [1954] , in *Le defi et le nouveau. ttuvres theologiques 1948—1991*, Paris, La Table Ronde, 2007[3] , p. 199-345.

<sup>734</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Le totalitarisme industriel*, op. cit.

<sup>735</sup> Cf. Jacques Ellul, *Le bluff technologique* [1988] , Paris, Hachette (coll. Pluriel), 2012[3] .

<sup>736</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, « La nature et la liberte, fondements du mouvement ecologique », in *Combat Nature*, n°54, jan.-fev. 1983, p. 14-15 ; Jacques Ellul, « La responsabilite du christianisme dans la nature et la liberte », n°54, jan.-fev. 1983, p. 16-17 ; BC, « Sexualite et famille », n°55, mars-avr. 1983, p. 12-13 ; JE, « Crois-sance demographique et societe de masse », n°55, mars-avr. 1983, p. 13-14 ; BC, « Ecologie et agriculture », n°56, mai-juin 1983, p. 16-17 ; JE, « L'absurde economique », n°56, mai-juin 1983, p. 17-18 ; BC, « Defendre les societes locales contre le centralisme economique », n°57, aout 1983, p. 20-21 ; JE, « La classe politique », n°57, aout 1983, p. 21-22 ; JE, « Relations internationales: l'imbroglio », n°58, oct. 1983, p. 11-12 ; BC, « Guerre et guerre nucleaire », n° 58, oct. 1983, p. 12-13 ; JE, « Les contradictions de la communication », n°59, dec. 1983, p. 15 ; BC, « Acceleration des transports et consommation de l'espace », n°59, dec. 1983, p. 16 ; JE, « Crise de la culture, un exemple: l'art contemporain », n°60, fev. 1984, p. 23-24 ; BC, « Masse, education et culture de masse », n°60, fev. 1984, p. 25-26 ; JE, « Sciences, technique, desordres », n°61, mai 1984, p. 19-20 ; JE, « Qu'est-ce que la technique? », n°61, mai 1984, p. 20 ; BC, « Vers un desor-dre total », n°61, mai 1984, p. 21-22



Parmi moult thematiques communes, on pourrait indiquer: la disqualification de la ville dans l'Ancien Testament<sup>737</sup> ; la tension entre Verite et Rea-lite<sup>738</sup> (mais le binome se trouve secularise dans la conscience humaine) ; la necessite de profaner l'idole automobile<sup>739</sup> (mais par la poesie, et non par la foi dans le Dieu de Jesus-Christ) ; la tension entre revolte et revolution<sup>740</sup>, et leur recuperation par l'Etat<sup>741</sup> ; vraie et fausse presences du chretien au monde<sup>742</sup> (mais Bernard Charbonneau ironise sur la presence qui se double d'une bien commode absence par appartenance a un autre monde) ; le ca-ractere decisif du choix d'un style de vie<sup>743</sup> (mais que notre auteur ne qualifie pas de specifiquement chretien) ; l'absence de morale chretienne<sup>744</sup> (mais Bernard Charbonneau s'empresse d'ajouter, sans doute en reponse implicite a Jacques Ellul, que la creature ne s'y retrouve plus) ; la tension entre parole et image<sup>745</sup> ; la trahison du Christ par les chretiens, et la necessaire subversion de la societe par l'anarchisme evangelique<sup>746</sup>.

Mon hypothese est la suivante: c'est ce dialogue sans fard mene sur plus d'un demi-siecle par un chretien confessant, converti brutalement a seize ans apres avoir grandi hors de tout climat religieux, et un agnostique post-chretien marque par une education chretienne et fort erudit en la matiere, qui explique en grande partie la radicalite de leurs positions respectives sur la question de la foi chretienne. Le chiasme que constitue le croisement de leurs itineraires intellectuels et de leurs cheminements spirituels respectifs s'avere a ce propos revelateur. Ce serait notamment l'insistance de Bernard Charbonneau pour que son ami rende compte des errements du christia-nisme qui eclair-

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; BC, « Ecologie et menaces de guerre nu-cleaire », n°61, mai 1984, p. 23 ; JE, « L'incertitude de la science », n°65, aout 1984, p. 32-33 ; BC, « Vers un meilleur des mondes », n°65, aout 1984, p. 34-35 ; JE, « L'ideologie de l'interet prive et l'ideologie de l'interet public », n°66, nov. 1984, p. 37-38 ; BC, « L'ecologie ni de droite ni de gauche », n°66, nov. 1984, p. 38-39 ; JE, « Conclusion sous forme de theses », n°67, fev. 1985, p. 22-23 ; BC, « Necessite de l'impossible », n°67, fev. 1985, p. 24.

<sup>737</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Le totalitarisme industriel*, op. cit., p. 106.

<sup>738</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, Teilhard de Chardin, prophete d'un age totalitaire, op. cit., p. 105.

<sup>739</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *L'hommauto*, op. cit., p. 133.

<sup>740</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Promethee reenchaîne*, op. cit., p. 13-14, 272, 310-11.

<sup>741</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 28-29, 31, 197-98, 279-81, 287-88, 320-22. Notre auteur ose meme ironiser en ces termes: « Bientot, pour faire la Revolution, il faudra demander des subventions » (Bernard Charbonneau, *Le Feu vert*, op. cit., p. 151).

<sup>742</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, Teilhard de Chardin, prophete d'un age totalitaire, op. cit., p. 90 ; Comment ne pas penser, op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>743</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Le Jardin de Babylone*, op. cit., p. 258.

<sup>744</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Finis Terrae*, op. cit., p. 205.

<sup>745</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Le Feu vert*, op. cit., p. 179 (un an avant la publication de *La parole humiliee*: cf. Jacques Ellul, *La parole humiliee* [1981] , Paris, La Table Ronde [coll. La petite Vermillon n°391] , 2014<sup>2</sup>).

<sup>746</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Le Feu vert*, op. cit., p. 85 (quatre ans avant la publication de *La subversion du christianisme*: cf. Jacques Ellul, *La subversion du christia-nisme* [1984] , Paris, La Table Ronde [coll. La petite Vermillon n°145] , 2011[3] ; et huit ans avant celle d'*Anarchie et christianisme*: cf. Jacques Ellul, *Anarchie et chri-stianisme* [1988] , Paris, La Table Ronde [coll. La petite Vermillon n°96] , 20183).

eraient la vigueur corrosive de *La subversion du christianisme*<sup>747</sup>. De même, l'attestation résolue, jusqu'à l'outrance, d'un Jacques Ellul en faveur de l'exclusivisme chrétien en matière de liberté authentique, jetterait une lumière nouvelle sur la tension incisive propre à *Je fus*<sup>748</sup>, ainsi qu'en-tre *Je fus* et *Quatre témoins de la liberté*<sup>749</sup>. La dialectique n'aurait ainsi pas seulement joué à l'intérieur de chacune des deux œuvres, mais entre elles, et entre nos deux auteurs, sous les modalités d'une fécondation mutuelle.

## Conclusion

Il est temps de conclure. Les références, parfois explicites mais généralement implicites, au corpus scripturaire et à la tradition chrétienne, foisonnent dans la pensée de Bernard Charbonneau, et sont égrenées tout au long de son œuvre. Elles peuvent être mises au service d'une analyse historique ou socioreligieuse, mais le plus souvent, aux côtés de références à la mythologie antique, à la littérature ou à l'histoire politique du monde entier, se trouvent détournées de leur signification originelle pour illustrer une autre idée, sur un mode humoristique ou sarcastique, dans le style inimitable de leur auteur.

La critique charbonneuvienne du christianisme se décline selon diverses modalités : critique impitoyable de la théologie de Teilhard de Chardin, en pointant ses velléités totalitaires, mais aussi en se plaçant (par stratégie ou par conviction) sur le terrain de l'argumentation théologique la plus orthodoxe ; vifs reproches envers les falsifications du message du Christ par les chrétiens au cours de l'histoire, et notamment envers le conformisme technophile, voire technolâtre, de l'Église catholique au XXe siècle ; griefs plus radicaux adressés au christianisme en tant que tel, dans ses contradictions, son hypocrisie, ou son besoin permanent de justification ; enfin, critique du phénomène religieux en général, dans sa dimension sociale, et du fait même de son caractère sociologique substantiel qui porte irréremédiablement atteinte à la liberté de penser. Bernard Charbonneau déploie de ce fait un positionnement agnostique foncièrement individualiste, qui n'exclut cependant pas (mais il s'agit moins d'une contradiction que d'un paradoxe, voire d'une conséquence logique de l'agnosticisme) l'hypothèse de travail « Dieu ».

En parallèle à cette critique, notre auteur s'emploie à faire l'éloge du christianisme. Il lui sait gré d'avoir proposé aux hommes des principes d'une extrême exigence (peut-être d'une exigence excessive, ce qui est à la fois vice et vertu, ou plus exactement ce qui révèle les vices de ses vertus). Mais sa gratitude envers le christianisme tient essentiellement à l'héritage de liberté qu'il lui reconnaît : il s'agit là d'un trésor inestimable offert à l'humanité. Aussi Bernard Charbonneau oscille-t-il entre une conception sec-

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<sup>747</sup> Cf. Jacques Ellul, *La subversion du christianisme*, op. cit.

<sup>748</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Je fus*, op. cit.

<sup>749</sup> Cf. Bernard Charbonneau, *Quatre témoins de la liberté*, op. cit.

ularisee de la liberte, dont la source serait purement subjective et autonome, et une version christocentree qui surgit dans ses tout derniers textes.

Le regard que Bernard Charbonneau porte sur le christianisme est fon-cierement dialectique: que ce soit pour la pensee, la nourriture, ou tout specialement le rapport a la nature, le christianisme lui semble etre d'un caractere ambivalent, poison et antidote, a l'instar de l'antique *pharmakon*. Il exhorte donc les mouvements ecologistes a assumer les ressources proprement chretiennes de leur engagement, car il ne voit pas d'autres issues a la crise que, paradoxalement, la meme tradition chretienne a declenchee.

Il est plus que probable que ce regard subtil et complexe porte sur le chri-stianisme, con^u comme une realite dialectique, soit en grande partie debi-teur du long com-pagnonnage que Bernard Charbonneau entretint avec Jacques Ellul. Leur estime re-ciproque n'empeche pas en effet, et meme autorisa plutot, de vives disputes a l'endroit de la foi chretienne. Tout se passe comme si les positions opposees des deux hommes, produits d'un croisement biographique saisissant, aient incite chacun, dans un dia-logue permanent et sans fard, a affiner sa reflexion et son argumentaire, au prix, sinon d'insignes radicalisations, du moins d'incontestables déplacements.

En fin de compte, il me semble possible de discerner dans les rapports entre Bernard Charbonneau et le christianisme une configuration inedite: celle d'une reconfiguration ininterrompue, en raison des determinations famili-ales, de la revelation du sens de la nature et de la liberte par le truchement du scoutisme protestant, des aleas d'un chem-inement existentiel et de diverses fortunes et infortunes editoriales, du genie personnel propre a l'au-teur, et enfin, *last but not least*, de la fidelite et de l'amitie.

## Bernard Charbonneau and Christianity

Frederic Rognon

Bernard Charbonneau's relationship to Christian faith is anything but simple and one-sided. Having grown up in a Christian milieu (his father was Protestant and his mother Catholic) and experienced the Protestant Scout movement (from age ten to sixteen), which would prove crucial to his sensibility to nature and freedom, he would describe himself as agnostic and post-Christian, while reciting the "Our Father" every day until the end of his life. Moreover, his work is rife with biblical references and allusions to Christian tradition, which he knows very well, probably more than many believers, alternating respectful, even laudatory, mentions and sharp criticisms. Finally, it is impossible to grasp the nature of the affinities and differences between Bernard Charbonneau and Christianity without factoring in his dealings with Jacques Ellul. It is known that the two friends, united for over sixty years "by a common thought," differed on many issues, including that of Christian faith, and engaged about this one in an ongoing *disputatio* that was enabled solely by mutual esteem and boundless mutual gratitude.

I therefore propose to throw some light on the paradoxical relationship between Charbonneau and Christianity by examining in turn: 1) the Christian references, implicit and explicit, 2) the critique of Christianity, 3) the praise of Christianity, 4) the thesis of the ambivalence of Christianity in relation to nature, and finally 5) the dialogue with Ellul about Christianity.

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## I. Bernard Charbonneau's References to the Bible and to Christian Tradition

An inventory of motifs drawn from scriptural, symbolic, and theological corpuses in all his work should allow us to take stock of references to Christianity in Charbonneau's thought and to attempt to work out the variegated status of Christian faith and tradition in his existential positioning.

Bernard Charbonneau's references to the Bible and to the Christian tradition are numerous and are generally used either as objects of historical analysis or as examples, at the price of a semantic displacement, of a reconfiguration or a distortion of meaning. We will cite only a few, as some examples among hundreds, by beginning with explicit references and continuing with implicit references.

A. *Explicit references* (only rarely does Charbonneau give a precise Scripture reference):

- The Eternal's wrath against the numbering of Israel and Judah, as related in 2 Samuel 24, is applied to computerization.<sup>750</sup>
- An omen of the death of King Belshazzar in the prophetic book of Daniel is applied to the mystique of development at any cost<sup>751</sup> (exceptionally, Charbonneau resorts to a footnote to make explicit a biblical quotation called up in support of his demonstration).
- Verses drawn from the tower of Babel episode in Genesis 11 exemplify the totalitarian threat against freedom.<sup>752</sup>
- In a paean to tasty food, an explicit reference to the First Epistle to the Corinthians reminds readers that the Apostle Paul freed Christians from dietary taboos.<sup>753</sup>

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<sup>750</sup> See Bernard Charbonneau, *Le totalitarisme industriel* (Paris: L'Echappée, 2019), 86-87.

<sup>751</sup> See Bernard Charbonneau, *Sauver nos régions: Ecologie, régionalisme et sociétés locales* (Paris: Le Sang de la terre, 1991), 164.

<sup>752</sup> See *ibid.*, 23.

<sup>753</sup> See Bernard Charbonneau, *Un festin pour Tantale: Nourriture et société industrielle* [1997] (Paris: Le Sang de la terre, 2011), 78.

- And when it comes to showing how God is distinct from material omnipotence, Charbonneau multiplies biblical references as footnotes.<sup>754</sup>

B. *Implicit references* (more generally, Charbonneau merely alludes to a biblical motif, which raises an issue of readability and understanding for generations completely cut off from any familiarity with scriptural tradition, especially when the biblical message's meaning is altered):

- Charbonneau hazards a suggestive parallel between Charlie Chaplin and Jesus. We throw gold at Charlie Chaplin, this pauper we have made rich: “Incidentally, the same misadventure happened to someone else. To be sure, he was more redoubtable; for before covering his image in gold and offering it to the public’s admiration in vast halls, we had securely nailed it to a cross.”<sup>755</sup>
- In his critique of science, Charbonneau quotes this saying from an “underdeveloped Semite”: “Love one another,” commenting, “I don’t think he discovered this principle using a radio telescope.”<sup>756</sup>
- About Napoleon: “Matter became flesh,”<sup>757</sup> implicitly referring to the prologue of John.<sup>758</sup>
- About peasants: “In them the Word has forever become incarnate, referring to the same text.”<sup>759</sup>
- About the home: “Where else would we find life, truth, and the way?,”<sup>760</sup> altering the meaning of Jesus’ formula in his last conversations with his disciples.<sup>761</sup>
- The same reference is implicit about the car: “The car is truth and life, but especially the Way, to which everything must be sacrificed, and human sacrifice is the highest of all.”<sup>762</sup>
- About freedom: it “does not bring peace, but the sword,”<sup>763</sup> alluding to the expression Jesus uses about himself.<sup>764</sup>

<sup>754</sup> Charbonneau, *Le totalitarisme industriel*, 107, 111.

<sup>755</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Lexique du verbe quotidien* (Geneva: Editions Heros-Lim-ite, 2016), 68. See also Bernard Charbonneau, *Promethee reenchainee* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 2001), 227.

<sup>756</sup> Charbonneau, *Le totalitarisme industriel*, 91.

<sup>757</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Comment ne pas penser* (Bordeaux: Opales, 2004), 105.

<sup>758</sup> See John 1:14.

<sup>759</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Le Jardin de Babylone* [1969] (Paris: Editions de l’ency-clopedie des nuisances, 2002), 79.

<sup>760</sup> Charbonneau, *Promethee reenchainee*, 124.

<sup>761</sup> See John 14:6.

<sup>762</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *L’homme auto* [1967] (Paris: Denoel, 2003), 106.

<sup>763</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Je fus: Essai sur la liberte* [1980] (Bordeaux: Opales, 2000), 105.

<sup>764</sup> See Matt 10:34.

- The same expression is called upon about science: “It did not come to bring peace, but the sword, which it constantly improves.”<sup>765</sup>
- It is also called upon in acknowledging that any religious imperative can only exhort men to overcome their own nature by a kind of spiritual violence.<sup>766</sup>
- About the spirit: “No one knows where the one who falls for having obeyed it goes nor whence he comes,”<sup>767</sup> referring to the Holy Spirit in the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus.<sup>768</sup>
- The same reference is called upon about the car: “The ideal car is the Holy Spirit, who comes and goes as he wills.”<sup>769</sup>
- And again, about the car: “It is said that automan will not live by Premium alone,”<sup>770</sup> alluding to Jesus’ retort to the tempter, according to which man will not live by bread alone.<sup>771</sup>
- Freedom is said to be “folly for the flesh, a scandal for the mind,”<sup>772</sup> a total reconfiguration of the verse that preached the crucified Christ, “a scandal to Jews and folly for the pagans.”<sup>773</sup>
- “As a thirsty deer pants,” “man is thirsty for truth,”<sup>774</sup> says Charbonneau,

quoting Psalm 42, which was about the soul of the psalmist thirsting for the living God.<sup>775</sup>

- The same reference is called upon in a heartfelt paean to water, so as to establish that water is not just a source of physical life, but of spiritual life, and that all religious traditions yearn for the stream that will at last slake their thirst.<sup>776</sup>
- In the same plea for a return to water purity, our author quotes Jesus’ words to Nicodemus<sup>777</sup>: “Unless a man is born of water and spirit, he will not enter

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<sup>765</sup> Charbonneau, *Le totalitarisme industriel*, 96.

<sup>766</sup> See Bernard Charbonneau, *Finis Terrae* (La Bache: A plus d’un titre editions, 2010), 126.

<sup>767</sup> Charbonneau, *Je fus*, 129.

<sup>768</sup> See John 3:8.

<sup>769</sup> Charbonneau, *L’hommauto*, 27.

<sup>770</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>771</sup> See Matt 4:4; Luke 4:4.

<sup>772</sup> Charbonneau, *Je fus*, 165.

<sup>773</sup> 1 Cor 1:23.

<sup>774</sup> Charbonneau, *Je fus*, 168.

<sup>775</sup> See Ps 42:2-3.

<sup>776</sup> See Charbonneau, *Le totalitarisme industriel*, 127.

<sup>777</sup> See John 3:5.

the Kingdom of God,<sup>778</sup> and the better to denounce water pollution, it is with reference to the baptism of John the Baptist near Salim<sup>779</sup> that he dramatically announces that the Jordan might today turn to blood.<sup>780</sup>

- In denouncing man's new relationship to the earth, Charbonneau subverts and extends Christ's formula<sup>781</sup> to say that "we no longer let the dead bury the dead, we dig them up."<sup>782</sup>
- Substituting man, space and time, for the law,<sup>783</sup> our author evokes nostalgia for a realm where "space and time, man, would not be abolished, but accomplished."<sup>784</sup>
- By recalling the episode where Joshua halted the course of the sun,<sup>785</sup> Charbonneau puts a biblical reference at the service of an Epicurean impulse, stating that we can slow time down by being present to oneself, the neighbor, and the universe.<sup>786</sup>
- In order to dramatically display the relations of ingratitude between man and nature, it is the parable of the prodigal son<sup>787</sup> that is recalled: "It is nature that spawned this prodigal son who disowns it, and he remains bound to it as far as his physical and even spiritual existence is concerned."<sup>788</sup>
- In his critique of the idolatry of money, Charbonneau does not hesitate to subvert the Gospel expression about the taxes due to the emperor,<sup>789</sup> by declaring, "It sometimes happens that we must render unto Rothschild what belongs to Caesar. That gives you an idea of what is left for God."<sup>790</sup>
- The same biblical reference appears in the critique of the State and of Jean-Jacques Rousseau: "How do we render unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar without rendering unto him a little of what belongs to God, sovereign of all?"<sup>791</sup>

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<sup>778</sup> Charbonneau, *Le totalitarisme industriel*, 127.

<sup>779</sup> See John 3:23.

<sup>780</sup> See Charbonneau, *Le totalitarisme industriel*, 127.

<sup>781</sup> See Matt 8:22.

<sup>782</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *L'homme en son temps et en son lieu* [1960] (Paris: R&N Editions, 2017),

36.

<sup>783</sup> See Matt 5:17.

<sup>784</sup> Charbonneau, *L'homme en son temps et en son lieu*, 51.

<sup>785</sup> See Josh 10:12-14.

<sup>786</sup> See Charbonneau, *Finis Terrae*, 80.

<sup>787</sup> See Luke 15:11-32.

<sup>788</sup> Charbonneau, *Le totalitarisme industriel*, 190.

<sup>789</sup> See Matt 22:21.

<sup>790</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Il court, il court, le fric . . .* (Bordeaux: Opales, 1996), 35.

<sup>791</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Quatre témoins de la liberté: Rousseau, Montaigne, Berdiaev, Dostoïevski* (Paris: R&N Editions, 2019), 46.

- And in a critique of the technological surge, Charbonneau cites Jesus' statement creating a tension between the world and the soul,<sup>792</sup> to update it and extend its meditation: “‘What would it serve a man to win the world if he destroyed or lost himself?’ And we know today that he may well lose the world by losing himself.”<sup>793</sup>
- The last lines of *Notre table rase* [Our Tabula Rasa] associate an anonymized statement by Luther (summoned to retract himself before the Diet of Worms in 1521): “I cannot do anything else . . . ,”<sup>794</sup> that our author takes up to legitimize his commitment and that of his reader toward the earth, in implicit reference to the walls of Jericho<sup>795</sup>: “When this trumpet tune sounds, sometimes the walls crumble,”<sup>796</sup> so as to give his reader some hope in that commitment's efficacy.

These examples show the recurrence and the variety of—mostly implicit—biblical and theological references in Charbonneau's body of work. We must now give a more systematic account of the direct critique of Christianity developed by our author.

## Charbonneau's Critique of Christianity

The first book published by Bernard Charbonneau is a ruthless deconstruction of one of the theological icons at the time and of his mythology: Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.<sup>797</sup> The key reproach he states against the latter's thought is the threat it poses to freedom: Teilhard de Chardin has built a closed system, turned towards the whole and the absolute.<sup>798</sup> For any contradiction is destined to be resolved at a higher level, the world finally becoming one in God.<sup>799</sup> Teilhard de Chardin thus assumes God's viewpoint.<sup>800</sup> All things are therefore reconciled in a great divine whole; all that is left for the Church is to consecrate the world's reality, by simply adding God's name to it: Christian socialism, Christian cinema, . . . why not Christian concentration camps? “The noun no longer belongs to Christianity, all that is left to it is the adjective.”<sup>801</sup> This typically Kierkegaardian critique implicitly suggests the legitimacy of Christian alternatives to Teilhard de Chardin. Charbonneau also does not hesitate to formulate a theological critique that is eminently orthodox in tenor, thus hunting down the internal

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<sup>792</sup> See Matt 16:26, Mark 8:36, Luke 9:25.

<sup>793</sup> Charbonneau, *Lexique du verbe quotidien*, 104.

<sup>794</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Notre table rase:Essai* (Paris: Denoel, 1974), 205.

<sup>795</sup> See Josh 6:20.

<sup>796</sup> Charbonneau, *Notre table rase*, 205.

<sup>797</sup> See Bernard Charbonneau, *Teilhard de Chardin, prophete d'un age totalitaire* (Paris: Denoel, 1963).

<sup>798</sup> See *ibid.*, 8.

<sup>799</sup> See *ibid.*, 22-24.

<sup>800</sup> See *ibid.*, 62.

<sup>801</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.



contradictions of Teilhard's thought on its own turf: "If in this system Evil is no longer Evil, the Cross is no longer the Cross."<sup>802</sup> Now, Death was vanquished on the Cross, and "Christ commanded us to acknowledge we are sinners"<sup>803</sup> (let us note the inclusive "we" under our author's pen):

Since Evil is inessential, Redemption becomes superfluous: what place can the Cross have in Progress? [...] Christ's sacrifice loses its price, and the Christian's life its weightiness. There is no longer any salvation, because there is no longer any loss. Nothing can prevent the total triumph of the Good.<sup>804</sup>

The first critique of Christianity is thus the critique of a certain theology in the name of Christianity. It then widens to include Protestant Puritanism on one side, and Catholicism as a whole on the other. The Puritan hatred of man's sinful nature is absent from the Gospel,<sup>805</sup> thunders Charbonneau, again taking care, as a faithful Kierkegaardian, to distinguish the Christian source from its subversion by Christendom. The cult of money denounced by Christianity (i.e., in New Testament texts) obviously rules Christian so-ciety.<sup>806</sup> And since the end of the Second World War, the Churches, having missed the steamboat, "are too afraid of missing the gas-propelled boat. The old theology denied the machine, the new one blesses it: a sprinkle from the aspergillum will give Total an odor of holy water."<sup>807</sup> The elimination of agriculture and the countryside plays out with the support of the Catholic Church, hoping that this way people are going to forget its compromising involvement in the Vichy regime's "back to the land."<sup>808</sup> Thus is verified in every period Catholicism's propensity to conform to the dominant order.

Surviving Churches have given too many proofs of their lack of imagination and of "their cowardice before the industrial world."<sup>809</sup>

But Bernard Charbonneau's grievances toward Christianity become sharper, more substantial, more basic. Among other things, he points out how biblical texts seem to say everything and its opposite.<sup>810</sup> The Christian understanding of work, for instance, wavers between a curse and salvation<sup>811</sup>: earning one's bread by the sweat of one's brow is thus experienced as a blessed curse, since it was inflicted by God.<sup>812</sup> Moreover, change

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<sup>802</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>803</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>804</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>805</sup> See Charbonneau, *Le Jardin de Babylone*, 20.

<sup>806</sup> See Charbonneau, *Il court, il court, le fric . . .*, 39.

<sup>807</sup> Charbonneau, *L'hommauto*, 130, referring to the Total Group, a French multinational founded in 1924 that is now one of the world's seven Supermajor oil companies.

<sup>808</sup> See Charbonneau, *Le Jardin de Babylone*, 122, 140; *Un festin pour Tantale*, 136-37; *Sauver nos régions*, 95.

<sup>809</sup> Charbonneau, *Notre table rase*, 192.

<sup>810</sup> See Charbonneau, *Le totalitarisme industriel*, 106.

<sup>811</sup> See Bernard Charbonneau, *Dimanche et lundi: Essai* (Paris: Denoel, 1966), 21-34.

<sup>812</sup> See Charbonneau, *Finis Terrae*, 84-85.

for change's sake is seen as a value on account of Christianity, which is at the root of the West's anxiety and agitation: Christian life is a conversion, a permanent mutation.<sup>813</sup> Likewise, the call to "Grow and multiply!",<sup>814</sup> justifying exponential growth, bothers Charbonneau: "What is the deity or nature that imposed this fate on man?"<sup>815</sup> when to grow means to perish. Christian hypocrisy has "polluted" the word "love."<sup>816</sup> Graver still, our author holds against Christianity that it calls freedom into question: the Christian is the man of good conscience, of denial of death, of spiritual and therefore social conformity, and finally of justification, which dispenses with changing the world and oneself; but freedom is the refusal of any justification.<sup>817</sup> And finally, in *Comment ne pas penser* [How to Not Think], Bernard Charbonneau presents Christianity as the second (after navel-gazing) of sixteen cures against the propensity to think.<sup>818</sup> The main grievance deployed against it is its indulgence toward history: "God is love": this is very convenient, and makes it possible to justify all the works of men, down to the atom bomb. If there is a Christian bank, why not also a Gestapo . . .? "Blessed are the poor": the poor find in this an eminent dignity, while billionaires will not be bothered by it. Christianity has been much maligned, adds Charbonneau, by those who accuse it of causing trouble in society; actually, the damage is far less than it might seem at first glance. And our author then adds sarcastically: today's world entirely demonstrates that Christianity, far from causing trouble, has only brought to the highest pitch the human ability for self-defense against thought. And yet, in a robustly dialectical reasoning, Bernard Charbonneau notes that Christianity offers at once the disease and its best cure, thought and non-thought, the poison and the counterpoison. We will find this ambivalence again about Christianity's relationship to nature.

Charbonneau's critique of Christianity culminates in a profession of agnostic faith. Charbonneau often mentions an "unknown God."<sup>819</sup> And yet, the Nietzschean assertion of the death of God occurs even more frequently in his work. This statement of fact is always oriented toward the discovery of a new creativity, of almost divine provenance, in oneself: "God is dead?— He wouldn't be the first nor the last one. Let him rise again in us! If your cry is strong enough, perhaps he will hear it up there."<sup>820</sup> It is in a mode of utter paradox that Charbonneau thus extolls human responsibility, without

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<sup>813</sup> See Bernard Charbonneau, *Le changement* (Vierzon: Le Pas de cote, 2013), 14-15. Christ's saying, "Except a corn of wheat die . . ." ( John 12:24), is here called upon at a considerable distance from its meaning in the Gospel sense of its utterance.

<sup>814</sup> Gen 1:28.

<sup>815</sup> Charbonneau, *Le totalitarisme industriel*, 34.

<sup>816</sup> See Charbonneau, *Sauver nos re'gions*, 149.

<sup>817</sup> See Charbonneau, *Je fus*, 176-78, 195-98, 204.

<sup>818</sup> See Charbonneau, *Comment ne pas penser*, 21-34.

<sup>819</sup> See for instance Charbonneau, *Le totalitarisme industriel*, 239 (freedom is described there as the gift either of nature or of an unknown God). See also Charbonneau, *Quatre temoins de la liberte*, 152.

<sup>820</sup> Charbonneau, *Finis Terrae*, 289. See also Charbonneau, *Notre table rase*, 192.

for all that excluding the God hypothesis. “It is in oneself that the source resides,”<sup>821</sup> he declares in denying there might be any point in simply changing one’s religion, going from Christianity to Buddhism or vice versa.

Finally, the critique of Christianity widens into a critique of any religion and of the religious phenomenon as such. His denunciation becomes more caustic when it comes to pointing to the ravages of religion as a collective phenomenon: when it becomes identified with society, it proves harmful, for “people in the aggregate persuade each other.”<sup>822</sup> And Bernard Charbonneau multiplies sarcasms, to highlight society’s mothering function: “Mummy is pious, but does she have the faith? I doubt it. If no one is as devout as she, there is also no greater sceptic. [...] She does better than kill God [...], she gives him a proper Church burial.”<sup>823</sup> “Society has always fed bodies and minds, needing to bind bodies in order to bind souls. [...] For centuries, Saint Mummy has been deceiving her baby’s spiritual thirst by making it confuse a shadow with substance.”<sup>824</sup>

Charbonneau’s critique of Christianity, as a religion rather than as a faith, thus proves a radical one. And yet, it finds a counterpoint in no less eloquent praise.

## Charbonneau’s Praise for Christianity

Bernard Charbonneau robustly salutes Christianity’s contribution in several areas close to his heart. The first one is its highlighting of life principles that had been forgotten or neglected by science, whose conceits they come down to questioning. It is of course the case of love: “Love your enemies”<sup>825</sup> has hardly been proven by practice and history, and in this sense it is not a scientific truth; “but it is not ‘ $E = mc^2$ ’ or the double helix that are going to give meaning to our life.”<sup>826</sup> Christ’s exhortations are thus not to be received at a demonstrative level but as an orientation of existence. The only thing our author holds against “pure Christianity” (after all the sharp grievances we have presented above, no doubt aimed at parodies of Christianity) is its extreme demands; the law of love he sees as too far above man’s level<sup>827</sup>: doesn’t this critique sound more like beautiful praise? This general celebration of Christianity’s principles is supplemented by a few positive valuations of Protestantism, such as its justified critique of waste and thus its sense of the responsibilities bound up with our lifestyles.<sup>828</sup>

Nevertheless, Christianity’s main virtue in Bernard Charbonneau’s eyes has to do with its invention of freedom. Our author says it plainly:

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<sup>821</sup> Charbonneau, *Finis Terrae*, 288.

<sup>822</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Bien aimer sa maman* (Bordeaux: Opales, 2006), 56.

<sup>823</sup> *Ibid.*, 58-59.

<sup>824</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>825</sup> Matt 5:44.

<sup>826</sup> Charbonneau, *Le totalitarisme industriel*, 100. Our author adds: “‘Love one another’ is not a scientific truth” (*ibid.*, 110).

<sup>827</sup> See Bernard Charbonneau, *Le Feu vert: Autocritique du mouvement écologique* [1980] (Lyon: Paragon/Vs, 2009), 86. See also Charbonneau, *Le totalitarisme industriel*, 108.

<sup>828</sup> See *ibid.*, 52.

If freedom is to be dated, it is from the year A.D. 1. Only a God could create the new man. To divinize in this way not Man but the one who lives and dies every day, it was necessary that God become human: that divine spirit become incarnate in a body and that the Father's love be nailed on his son's cross.<sup>829</sup>

This analysis leads our author to be so bold as to assert the close bond between the biblical God and freedom:

What is God? The Absolute, Perfection? How could a man, finite and imperfect, know these? At least in this Far West, we know only one thing: it is that God is someone; and that, victim or judge, he will judge persons in person. It is not pure Freedom, but this living and mortal freedom, that once perished and triumphed: one Friday in the year 33, somewhere to the northeast of Kedron. As the structure of our religion, this freedom is that of our justice.<sup>830</sup>

Contrary to appearances, this is not a confession of faith but a rigorous examination of the Christian inheritance in the West. To begin with, Charbonneau brings some nuance to his assessment by specifying that free man is born of the meeting between Judaeo-Christianity and Greek tradition.<sup>831</sup> Then, he shows that it is less freedom itself than the demand for freedom that was taken to its highest pitch by the Christian faith in a transcendent God.<sup>832</sup> Finally, the central message of *Je fus* [I Was] is that this demand can be honored only by revealing it in oneself and for oneself, without any justification, refusing in particular the one that is done in the name of free-dom.<sup>833</sup> Now, we have seen how justification was precisely the mark of the Christian. Only individual, radically subjective existence can be a free existence, with all the tragic and anxious tenor that this experience implies: "Outside of yourself you will find nothing but the void to be crossed by your step. Alas! you alone can take it. There is no such thing as liberty, only a liberation, and above all a liberator."<sup>834</sup> "Incarnation has but one locus, one author: you. If you say it yourself, you will say: me."<sup>835</sup> "If freedom is a challenge uttered to heaven and earth, I am this challenge."<sup>836</sup> The last page of *Je fus*, while it confirms this irreducibility of free existence to any outside authority, still recovers a more dialectical tone:

Choose your freedom, stop justifying yourself for doing it. There is still time; you are still alive on earth. No one can do it in your place; neither Nature that has no spirit save for your own, nor God who, if he exists, wants you free in his own image.<sup>837</sup>

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<sup>829</sup> Charbonneau, *Je fus*, 212.

<sup>830</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>831</sup> See Charbonneau, *Le Jardin de Babylone*, 251.

<sup>832</sup> See Charbonneau, *Finis Terrae*, 253-54.

<sup>833</sup> See Charbonneau, *Je fus*, 204.

<sup>834</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>835</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>836</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>837</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

Freedom is thus at once the experience of absolute singularity and the echo of a God hypothesis that is never totally dismissed, still less disputed.

One of Bernard Charbonneau's very last writings, entitled *Quatre temoins de la liberte* [Four Witnesses to Freedom]: *Rousseau, Montaigne, Berdiaev, Dostoievski*,<sup>838</sup> published twenty-three years after his death, seems to inflect his thought in a distinctly Christological direction. It would be very instructive to compare this final title with *Je fus*, devoted to the same theme of freedom but, as we have just seen, with a quite different approach, in an agnostic vein. About Berdyaev, our author shows how close is the proximity he feels to his thought, before adding,

were it not for the Christian faith loudly touted by Berdyaev, which a post-Christian unbeliever has no reason to dispute. For Berdyaev's faith is first and foremost the power that moves his thought along its path and helps him go beyond some false dilemmas of right and left in which other Christians get mired.<sup>839</sup>

The reference to Berdyaev appears to make a transition between the last lines of *Je fus* and those of *Quatre temoins*,<sup>840</sup> devoted to Dostoyevsky:

Christian freedom is not a truth one possesses, a solution given in advance [...]. Are we up to converting to the call of a God of freedom without being sustained by the faith—which is humanly speaking a belief—in a God-man? Is this possible, in a time that is stuck between the death of God and the religious anxiety that still troubles our species?<sup>841</sup>

At the sunset of his life, could it be that Charbonneau allowed himself to be won over by Christianity's unequalled relevance for opening a genuine path of freedom?

As always with Bernard Charbonneau, things are not that simple. Rather than a Kierkegaardian leap of faith, it would be better to discern in him a dialectical relationship to Christianity, powerfully buttressed by the analysis of the latter's fundamentally ambivalent character. This paradoxical dimension of Christianity, which calls for a paradoxical relationship with it, manifests with special clarity in its ties to nature.

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<sup>838</sup> See Charbonneau, *Quatre te'moins de la liberte*.

<sup>839</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>840</sup> Translator's note: In a note included in a package sent to Christian Roy on June 20, 1990, Bernard Charbonneau described the enclosed type double of a ten-page text entitled "Individu et personne. Contribution a la pensee de Berdiaev" as supposed to appear in *Foi & Vie* and meant to be added as a postscript to the then still only privately printed *Je fus*. This goes to show how intimately the chapter "Berdiaev. Le chretien, individu ou personne?" in *Quatre temoins de la liberte* is tied to *Je fus: essai sur la liberte*. For not only is the former book described in its foreword as adding some refinements to the latter, but Charbonneau had once considered his Berdyaev essay his last word on freedom as the central issue of his life and thought. It also shows Charbonneau still grappling at the end of his life with the core concepts of personalism, under whose umbrella his revolutionary venture had initially found a political home in his youth, remaining shaped by that context even though he had become increasingly critical of the movement on which he had first pinned his hopes.

<sup>841</sup> *Ibid.*, 138-39.

## The Thesis of Christianity's Ambivalence in Relation to Nature

As a religion of paradox, Christianity maintains ambivalent relations with many objects other than nature. Here are two examples. With thought, which Christianity produces as much as non-thought, as we have seen: Jesus Christ “refers at once to the essence of the disease and to the best cure against it.”<sup>842</sup> “We owe to Christianity, at the same time as a worsening of the disease of thought, a deepening of the reflexes that defend us against it.”<sup>843</sup> Second example of ambivalence, and even of trivalence: food. According to Charbonneau, the rejection of the Jews’ dietary formalism could lead Christians as much to overindulgence, to indifference, as to the liberation of the spirit.<sup>844</sup> Thus, the Christian revolution still has multivocal effects on current behavior patterns. Our author then refines his analysis, in decidedly stimulating fashion: the absence of dietary orthodoxy within Christianity has paradoxically led to the multiplication of orthodoxies in the post-Christian West, ranging from contempt for food to its hallowing<sup>845</sup>: freedom ends up spawning a host of mutually exclusive orthopraxies.

The relationship between Christianity and nature is also fundamentally ambivalent. “Nature” was born in Judea with the idea of “Creation”: it then becomes possible to know it and act upon it. “It was then that mastery of and feeling for nature started growing in parallel,” Charbonneau explains.<sup>846</sup> Christian Creation is thus one of the sources of this feeling<sup>847</sup>; but man’s freedom vis-a-vis nature has meaning only if he accepts the responsibility it entails and implies<sup>848</sup>; otherwise, the dialectics between freedom and responsibility is broken and freedom unbound is no longer freedom: such is our situation today.

Science, as Bernard Charbonneau sees it, is thus born of the faith in a transcendent Creator God, which people learned to distinguish from Creation. For “what would Science be without Roger Bacon’s Franciscan theology, Pascal’s Jansenism, and Newton’s Protestantism?”<sup>849</sup> Our author nevertheless brings some nuance to his argument: Christianity is not alone responsible for the exploration, exploitation, and devastation of nature; without Christianity, however, this phenomenon would not have taken such proportions; it is thus a matter neither of condemning it nor of denying its role.<sup>850</sup> But the main thing, for Charbonneau, is not to conduct a trial, to sharpen his indictment, or to hone his pleas. The crucial kernel of his analysis resides in prospects for practical openings and thus for a way out of the environmental crisis:

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<sup>842</sup> Charbonneau, *Comment ne pas penser*, 22.

<sup>843</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>844</sup> See Charbonneau, *Un festin pour Tantale*, 98.

<sup>845</sup> See *ibid.*, 100.

<sup>846</sup> Charbonneau, *Le Jardin de Babylone*, 10.

<sup>847</sup> See *ibid.*, 20.

<sup>848</sup> See *ibid.*, 25.

<sup>849</sup> Charbonneau, *Finis Terrae*, 185.

<sup>850</sup> See Charbonneau, *Le Feu vert*, 88-89.

For this freedom of man that threatens to destroy him with his earth contains its antidote. It is in the very societies where the science and individualism born of Christianity have developed the furthest that feeling for nature, and eventually the ecological movement, were born. It is no coincidence that Rousseau is a son of the Calvinist Rome. The egalitarian, pacifist, and libertarian side of the ecological movement, in which Christians who have more or less left the church are many, comes straight out of the Gospel.<sup>851</sup>

Bernard Charbonneau would develop in many texts his thesis of an ambivalence of Christianity in its relationship to nature: at once poison and counterpoison, like the ancient *pharmakbn*. He mentions the myth of the garden of Eden, the condemnation of cities in the Old Testament, the splendor of Creation recalled to Job by God, the choice of the countryside for Jesus' preaching, the rural setting of his parables, God's care toward the least of animals, and he concludes, "Hence the awakening of love for nature in Western societies that are the most shaped by the Bible."<sup>852</sup> Western powers were thus the first to have launched upon the most frenzied productivist adventure and the first to have given birth to movements of resistance against the devastation of the planet. This is what leads Charbonneau to the following analysis:

We therefore see that Christianity is at once at the origin of man's current power over nature and of the rising awareness of its negative consequences. Hence the necessity for the ecological opposition to question itself about the Christian roots of development and of its critique; otherwise, the ecological movement is likely to be torn apart between a naturist pantheism and a technoscientific progressivism, solely destined to become integrated into the current evolution. [...] The best of the Christian faith reminds us that we were formed from the earth, to accept ourselves for what we are: at once slaves to nature and freed from it. The damage is done, as it were; the old law, that of fear and necessity, is abolished. Which leaves the other one: but did not Christ put the bar too high for half-*sapiens* man? This is the only thing we can hold against him. On the eve of the year 2000, as long ago before the tree, Adam is free. Which means to either save himself or lose himself.<sup>853</sup>

In an article entitled "Quel avenir pour quelle ecologie?"<sup>854</sup> [What Future for Which Ecology?] Bernard Charbonneau takes up anew the debate opened by Lynn White in 1966 about Judaeo-Christianity's responsibilities in the environmental crisis, wherein he develops his dialectical approach to the issue: "The same society that destroys the Indian along with the buffalo cries out about his disappearance."<sup>855</sup> The criticisms that some ecologists, such as Carl Amery, level at Christianity are thus not wrong, only

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<sup>851</sup> *Ibid.*, English translation by Christian Roy as *The Green Light: A Self-Critique of the Ecological Movement* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 73.

<sup>852</sup> Charbonneau, *Le totalitarisme industriel*, 107.

<sup>853</sup> Ellul *Forum* 104. *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>854</sup> See Bernard Charbonneau, "Quel avenir pour quelle ecologie?" *Foi & Vie* 37.3-4 (July 1988): 129-38.

<sup>855</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

reductive: by profaning nature, Christianity has unleashed the will to knowledge and to power in the post-Christian West, and it is there that modernity has developed. But also, its critique. For Christian tradition is categorical when it comes to condemning the obsession with knowing and exploiting. The will to power is held to be evil and destructive, while deprivation, the rejection of power and wealth, poverty are accounted salvific. In the Gospel, it is the fragile beauty of the lilies of the field that is given as a model to man: “Christianity is at once responsible for the devastation of nature in the West and in the East and the vector of the only force that can put an end to it, at once poison and counterpoison.”<sup>856</sup>

Thus, Charbonneau views the Christian tradition as a true *pharmakon*, venom and antidote all at once: the main driver of the “Great Moulting” and the only way out of it. The paradoxical character of Charbonneau’s relationship to Christianity culminates in this analysis, and in the ambivalences it highlights. His long companionship with his friend Jacques Ellul no doubt has something to do with it.

## The Dialogue with Jacques Ellul about Christianity

Bernard Charbonneau’s references to Jacques Ellul, like Ellul’s to Charbonneau, are relatively rare. And yet, we know that their faithful friendship, nearly sixty years long, could not fail to have had an impact on the thought of the one as much as of the other. Charbonneau would describe this relationship as follows: after the Second World War, “I was becoming aware of the Christian origin of my love for nature and freedom. Hence a communion of thought [with Ellul] that was closer than before the war.”<sup>857</sup> As for Ellul, he testifies along these lines: “From the beginning, we clashed with each other, sometimes quite sharply, in the area of faith.”<sup>858</sup> But he acknowledges

the crucial influence of my friend Charbonneau. He has been at once the embodiment of a reproach for what I was not following, as a Christian, the urgent command: “Something has to be done,” and a critical glance: “What you do doesn’t mean anything.” I have attempted to rescue the Christian faith from his criticisms through my commitments.<sup>859</sup>

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<sup>856</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>857</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, “Unis par une pensée commune.” *Foi & Vie* 93.5-6 (Dec. 1994): 19-28 (here page 23).

<sup>858</sup> Jacques Ellul, *A temps et a contretemps: Entretiens avec Madeleine Garrigou-La-grange* (Paris: Le Centurion, 1981), 66.

<sup>859</sup> *Ibid.*, 65-66.



It would be fitting to read again in parallel *Je fus*<sup>860</sup> and *Quatre temoins de la liberte*<sup>861</sup> and Ellul's trilogy on freedom (*Le Vouloir et le Faire*,<sup>862</sup> *Ethique de la liberte*,<sup>863</sup> and *Les combats de la liberte*<sup>864</sup>); *Promethee reenchainee*<sup>865</sup> and Ellul's trilogy on revolution (*Autopsie de la revolution*,<sup>866</sup> *De la revolution aux revolt-es*,<sup>867</sup> and *Changer de revolution*<sup>868</sup>); *L'Etat*<sup>869</sup> and *L'illusion politique*<sup>870</sup>; *Di-manche et lundi*<sup>871</sup> and *Pour qui, pour quoi travaillons-nous?*<sup>872</sup>; *Il court, il court, le fric . . .*<sup>873</sup> and *L'homme et l'argent*<sup>874</sup>; *Le totalitarisme industriel*<sup>875</sup> and *Le bluff technologique*<sup>876</sup>; and finally, the articles on ecology written alternating-ly, or as if to echo each other, in *Combat Nature* between 1983 and 1985.<sup>877</sup> The tensions and overlaps would then be located and problematized.

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<sup>860</sup> See Charbonneau, *Je fus*.

<sup>861</sup> See Charbonneau, *Quatre te'moins de la liberte*.

<sup>862</sup> See Jacques Ellul, *Le Vouloir et le Faire: Une critique theologique de la morale* [1964] (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2013); *Les sources de l'ethique chretienne: Le Vouloir et le Faire, parties IV et V* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2018).

<sup>863</sup> See Jacques Ellul, *Ethique de la liberte* [1973, 1975] (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2019).

<sup>864</sup> See Jacques Ellul, *Les combats de la liberte* (Paris / Geneva: Le Centurion / Labor et Fides, 1984). See also Jacques Ellul, *Vivre et penser la liberte* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2019).

<sup>865</sup> See Charbonneau, *Promethee reenchainee*.

<sup>866</sup> See Jacques Ellul, *Autopsie de la revolution* [1969] (Paris: La Table Ronde, 2008).

<sup>867</sup> See Jacques Ellul, *De la revolution aux revolt-es* [1972] (Paris: La Table Ronde, 2011).

<sup>868</sup> See Jacques Ellul, *Changer de revolution: L'ineluctable proletariat* [1982] (Paris: La Table Ronde, 2015).

<sup>869</sup> See Bernard Charbonneau, *L'Etat* [1949] (Paris: R&N Editions, 2020).

<sup>870</sup> See Jacques Ellul, *L'illusion politique* [1965] (Paris: La Table Ronde, 2004).

<sup>871</sup> See Charbonneau, *Dimanche et lundi*.

<sup>872</sup> See Jacques Ellul, *Pour qui, pour quoi travaillons-nous?* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 2013).

<sup>873</sup> See Charbonneau, *Il court, il court, le fric . . .*

<sup>874</sup> See Jacques Ellul, "L'homme et l'argent" [1954] . In *Le dfi et le nouveau: ttuvres theologiques 1948-1991* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 2007), 199-345.

<sup>875</sup> See Charbonneau, *Le totalitarisme industriel*.

<sup>876</sup> See Jacques Ellul, *Le bluff technologique* [1988] (Paris: Hachette, 2012).

<sup>877</sup> See Bernard Charbonneau, "La nature et la liberte, fondements du mouvement ecologique." *Combat Nature* 54 (Jan.-Feb. 1983): 14-15; Jacques Ellul, "La re-sponsabilite du christianisme dans la nature et la liberte." 54 (Jan.-Feb. 1983): 16-17; BC, "Sexualite et famille." 55 (Mar.-Apr. 1983): 12-13; JE, "Croissance demographique et societe de masse." 55 (Mar.-Apr. 1983): 13-14; BC, "Ecologie et agriculture." 56 (May-June 1983): 16-17; JE, "L'absurde economique." 56 (May-June 1983): 17-18; BC, "Defendre les societes locales contre le centralisme economique." 57 (Aug. 1983): 20-21; JE, "La classe politique." 57 (Aug. 1983): 21-22; JE, "Relations internationales: l'imbroglio." 58 (Oct. 1983): 11-12; BC, "Guerre et guerre nucleaire." 58 (Oct. 1983): 12-13; JE, "Les contradictions de la communication." 59 (Dec. 1983): 15; BC, "Acceleration des transports et consommation de l'espace." 59 (Dec. 1983): 16; JE, "Crise de la culture, un exemple: l'art contemporain." 60 (Feb. 1984): 23-24; BC, "Masse, education et culture de masse." 60 (Feb. 1984): 25-26; JE, "Sciences, technique, desordres." 61 (May 1984): 19-20; JE, "Qu'est-ce que la technique?" 61 (May 1984): 20; BC, "Vers un desordre total." 61 (May 1984): 21-22; BC, "Ecologie et menaces de guerre nucleaire." 61 (May 1984): 23; JE, "L'incertitude de la science." 65 (Aug. 1984): 32-33; BC, "Vers un meilleur des mondes." 65 (Aug. 1984): 34-35; JE, "L'ideologie de l'interet prive et l'ideologie de l'interet public." 66 (Nov. 1984): 37-38; BC, "L'ecologie ni de droite ni

Among many common theme clusters, we might point out: the disqualification of the city in the Old Testament,<sup>878</sup> the tension between Truth and Reality<sup>879</sup> (but this pairing comes to be secularized in human consciousness), the need to profane the automobile idol<sup>880</sup> (but through poetry and not by faith in the God of Jesus Christ), the tension between revolt and revolution<sup>881</sup> and their recycling by the State,<sup>882</sup> true and false presence of the Christian to the world<sup>883</sup> (but Charbonneau gets ironic about a presence that goes along with a very convenient absence through belonging to another world), the crucial character of the choice of a lifestyle<sup>884</sup> (but which our author does not portray as specifically Christian), the absence of a Christian morality<sup>885</sup> (but Charbonneau hastens to add, no doubt in implicit answer to Ellul, that the creature ends up feeling lost), the tension between word and image,<sup>886</sup> the betrayal of Christ by Christians, and the needed subversion of society by Gospel anarchism.<sup>887</sup>

My hypothesis is as follows: it is this unadorned dialogue carried on over more than half a century by a confessing Christian, converted all of a sudden at the age of sixteen after having grown up outside any kind of religious climate, and a post-Christian agnostic, shaped by a Christian education and very well versed in that department, that largely explains the radicalness of their respective stances to the Christian faith. The chiasmus constituted by the crossing of their intellectual paths and their respective spiritual journeys proves revealing in this regard. Among other things, Charbonneau's insistence that his friend account for the errors of Christianity would throw light on the corrosive force of *La subversion du christianisme*.<sup>888</sup> Likewise, the resolute attestation, even to excess, of Ellul in favor of Christian exclusivism when it comes to authentic freedom would throw in a new light the incisive tension peculiar to *Je fus*,<sup>889</sup> as well as between *Je fus* and *Quatre temoins de la liberte*.<sup>890</sup> The dialectics would then have

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de gauche." 66 (Nov. 1984): 38-39; JE, "Conclusion sous forme de theses." 67 (Feb. 1985): 22-23; BC, "Necessite de l'impossible." 67 (Feb. 1985): 24.

<sup>878</sup> See Charbonneau, *Le totalitarisme industriel*, 106.

<sup>879</sup> See Charbonneau, *Teilhard de Chardin*, 105.

<sup>880</sup> See Charbonneau, *L'hommauto*, 133.

<sup>881</sup> See Charbonneau, *Promethee reenchaine*, 13-14, 272, 310-11.

<sup>882</sup> See *ibid.*, 28-29, 31, 197-98, 279-81, 287-88, 320-22. Our author even dares being ironic, to wit: "Pretty soon, to do a revolution, we are going to have to apply for subsidies" (Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, 133).

<sup>883</sup> See Charbonneau, *Teilhard de Chardin*, 90; *Comment ne pas penser*, 27.

<sup>884</sup> See Charbonneau, *Le Jardin de Babylone*, 258.

<sup>885</sup> See Charbonneau, *Finis Terrae*, 205.

<sup>886</sup> See Charbonneau, *Le Feu vert*, 179 (one year before the publication of *The Humiliation of the Word*; see Jacques Ellul, *La Parole humiliee* [1981][Paris: La Table Ronde, 2014] ).

<sup>887</sup> See Charbonneau, *Le Feu vert*, 85 (four years before the publication of *The Subversion of Christianity*; see Jacques Ellul, *La subversion du christianisme* [1984][Paris: La Table Ronde, 2011] and eight years before that of *Anarchy and Christianity*; see Jacques Ellul, *Anarchie et christianisme* [1988][Paris: La Table Ronde, 2018] ).

<sup>888</sup> See Ellul, *La subversion du christianisme*.

<sup>889</sup> See Charbonneau, *Jefus*.

<sup>890</sup> See Charbonneau, *Quatre temoins de la liberte*.

played out not just within each of the two bodies of work but between them, and between our two authors, in a mode of mutual fertilization.

## Conclusion

It is time to conclude. References, sometimes explicit but usually implicit, to Scripture and Christian tradition abound in Bernard Charbonneau's thought and are strewn all through his work. They can be put in the service of an historical or socioreligious analysis, but most often, beside references to ancient mythology, to literature, or to the political history of the entire world, they undergo a distortion of their original meaning to illustrate another idea, in a humorous or sarcastic mode, in their author's inimitable style.

Charbonneau's critique of Christianity can be broken down following various modalities: a ruthless critique of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's theology, pointing out its totalitarian proclivities, but also by situating himself (be it strategically or out of conviction) on the turf of the most orthodox theological argumentation; sharp criticisms of the falsifications of Christ's message by Christians throughout history, especially aimed at the techno-philic or even technolatrous conformism of the Catholic Church in the twentieth century; more radical grievances against Christianity as such, in its contradictions, its hypocrisy, or its constant need for justification; finally, the critique of the religious phenomenon in general, in its social dimension, and on account of the very fact of its substantial sociological character that inevitably harms freedom of thought. Charbonneau thereby deploys a fundamentally individualistic agnostic positioning, which however does not exclude (but this is not so much a contradiction as a paradox, or even a logical consequence of agnosticism) "God" as a working hypothesis.

In parallel to this critique, our author engages in praising Christianity. He is grateful to it for having proposed to men some highly demanding principles (perhaps too demanding, which is both a vice and a virtue, or more accurately, what reveals the vices of its virtues). But his gratitude toward Christianity essentially concerns the legacy of freedom he acknowledges as its own: this is an inestimable treasure offered to mankind. Charbonneau therefore wavers between a secularized understanding of freedom, whose source would be purely subjective and autonomous, and a Christocentric version that makes its appearance in his very last texts.

Bernard Charbonneau's gaze on Christianity is fundamentally dialectical: be it for thought, food, or most especially the relationship to nature, Christianity seems to him to have an ambivalent character, as both poison and antidote, like the ancient *pharmakon*. He therefore urges ecological movements to accept their commitment's specifically Christian resources, since he does not see any other way out of the crisis that, however paradoxically, said Christian tradition has triggered.

It is more than likely that this subtle and complex view of Christianity as a dialectical reality is indebted to a considerable extent to Charbonneau's long companionship with Jacques Ellul. For their mutual esteem did not prevent, but actually enabled,

sharp disputes about the Christian faith. It is as though the two men's opposite stances, as products of a startling biographical cross-wiring, prompted each one, in a permanent and unvarnished dialogue, to refine his reflection and his argumentation, at the price if not of extraordinary radicalizations then at least of undeniable shifts.

In the final analysis, it seems to me we can discern in the relationship between Bernard Charbonneau and Christianity a novel configuration—an unceasing reconfiguration, due to his family background, the revelation of a sense of nature and freedom through the Protestant Scout movement, the vagaries of an existential journey and a range of editorial fortunes and misfortunes, the personal genius specific to that author, and *last but not least*,<sup>891</sup> faithfulness and friendship.

*Translated by Christian Roy.*

## Bernard Charbonneau a *Foi & Vie*: Un theologien agnostique chez les protestants

Patrick Chastenet

La collaboration de Bernard Charbonneau a la revue de culture protestante *Foi & Vie* a commence en 1951 pour s'achever en decembre 1994 a l'occasion d'un numero special consacre a la memoire de Jacques Ellul<sup>892</sup>. En depit d'un silence de onze ans, entame durant l'hiver 1960 et rompu a l'hiver 1971 lors de la creation d'une chronique annoncee par la redaction comme permanente, cette collaboration n'a vraiment rien de circonstanciel tant par sa duree—quarante-trois ans en ignorant les interruptions—que par son volume (25 articles pour un total de plus de 350 pages) et son contenu (des articles particulierement denses evouquant des questions fondamentales dans un style d'une grande qualite litteraire et poetique).

Ces articles peuvent se diviser en trois grandes categories: « Chronique de l'An deux mille » (12), questions ecologiques *stricto sensu* hors « Chronique » (3) et sujets divers (10). Hormis peut-etre la « Chronique de l'An deux mille », et a l'exception des textes reedites ulterieurement sous forme de livres, ces articles de *Foi & Vie* constituent la partie la plus meconnue d'une reuvre foisonnante encore trop souvent ignoree du grand public. Nous emettons l'hypothese que la lecture des articles de Charbonneau dans cette revue protestante est indispensable pour les chercheurs, et pour tous ceux qui souhaitent entreprendre un examen systematique de son reuvre. En effet, cette serie d'articles ne vient pas doublooner son reuvre livresque mais la completer et l'eclairer, aux plans diachronique et synchronique ; elle merite donc une grande consideration<sup>893</sup>.

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<sup>891</sup> Translator's note: In English in the original.

<sup>892</sup> Le documentaliste Roland de Miller a etabli une bibliographie quasi exhaustive de ses publications que l'on retrouve dans les annexes de Jacques Prades (Dir.), *Bernard Charbonneau: une vie entiere a denoncer la grande imposture*, Toulouse, Eres, 1997, p. 213-20.

<sup>893</sup> L'article « Rendez a Cesar » est une sorte de condense des theses de *LEtat* (1951). Il faudrait

C'est aussi vrai lorsqu'un article paru dans *Foi & Vie* est repris partiellement ou intégralement dans un livre

Chastenet, Patrick. "Bernard Charbonneau a Foi & Vie: Un théologien agnostique chez les protestants." *Ellul Forum* 66 (Fall 2020): 75-93. © Patrick Chastenet, CC BY-NC-ND. 75

**Ellul Forum** publie ultérieurement ; l'étude comparée des deux versions constitue, en soi, un objet de recherche digne d'intérêt tant les écarts peuvent toucher à des questions fondamentales. Par exemple, pour la plupart de ses lecteurs, l'agnosticisme de l'auteur du *Jardin de Babylone*<sup>894</sup> est un fait acquis. Cependant, l'examen attentif de ces articles vient bousculer les certitudes en la matière. On le sait, Charbonneau se définit généralement comme « post-chrétien » ou agnostique. Or, il s'avère que dans *Foi & Vie* il lui arrive d'employer des formules pour le moins équivoques, parfois gommées lorsque l'article est fondu dans un livre.

Du reste, n'est-il pas symptomatique que ses quatre premiers articles dans cette revue protestante concernent des questions métaphysiques, pour ne pas dire expressément théologiques? En particulier pour le second article intitulé: « Progres et liberté. I. La liberté des enfants de Dieu ou le progres justifie Dieu. II. La sphere et la croix » (1957) comme son premier ouvrage publié<sup>895</sup>, *Teilhard de Chardin, prophete d'un age totalitaire* (1963). Sa dénonciation des mythes modernes et des nouvelles formes de sacralité peut également s'inscrire dans cette perspective. Nous voudrions appliquer ici à Charbonneau la méthode qu'il avait fait subir à Teilhard, à savoir: « aussi souvent que possible, le laisser parler lui-même<sup>896</sup> » et nous cantonner, pour l'essentiel, à la revue. À défaut d'une analyse systématique des 25 articles et de leur mise en perspective avec l'intégralité de l'œuvre livresque, ce qui se-rail la condition *sine qua non* pour élaborer des conclusions définitives, nous formulerons de simples hypothèses à partir d'extraits que nous jugeons suffisamment significatifs pour constituer un idéaltype. Nous avons bien conscience que la présente communication ne constitue qu'une première étape qui mériterait d'être prolongée. Pour guider notre démarche nous re-tiendrons quatre des cinq questions fondamentales du modèle d'Harold Lasswell: Qui parle à qui? (I) Pour dire quoi et comment? (II)

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pouvoir comparer ligne à ligne « L'homme dans son temps et dans son lieu » (1960), réédité par R&N en 2017, avec plusieurs chapitres de *Je fus* (1980), « L'Adieu aux armes » (1982), « Sur *Belle du Seigneur* d'Albert Cohen » (1989) avec *Finis Terrae* (2010), les « Chroniques de l'An deux mille » avec *Le Feu vert* (1980).

<sup>894</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Le Jardin de Babylone*, Paris, Gallimard, 1973.

<sup>895</sup> Le manuscrit de *Par la force des choses* aurait été achevé en 1948. Cf. Daniel Cerezuelle, *Ecologie et liberté. Bernard Charbonneau précurseur de l'écologie politique*, Parangon/Vs, Lyon, 2006.

<sup>896</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, « Progres et liberté », *Foi & Vie* 56 (1957), p. 495.

## Rien qu'un homme, qui parle a son prochain

Lorsqu'il s'adresse a son lecteur, Charbonneau se presente souvent comme un homme—sans (autres) qualites—et il lui arrive souvent de le faire a la premiere personne du singulier car c'est de lui, et de lui seul qu'il s'agit. Partant de sa propre experience, il s'adresse a ces « quelques-uns » distingues jadis par deux autres Aquitains celebres, tout comme lui epris de liberte: Etienne de la Boetie et Elisee Reclus. Plus exactement, il vise ce qu'il y a d'unique en l'homme: sa liberte, cette liberte incarnee qui fonde son universalite. On en trouve un premier exemple dans la declaration a la premiere personne du singulier qui lui sert d'incipit de l'article intitule: « Seul meurt le vivant »<sup>897</sup>: « Je suis ne, j'aime et je mourrai: je ne peux rien dire de plus reel, ni de plus vrai (...) ».

Dans l'article publie l'annee suivante, en 1960, intitule « L'homme en son temps et en son lieu », l'utilisation du « je » et du « nous » signifie que l'auteur ne pretend pas s'eriger en juge impartial, en pur logicien ou en sociologue objectif. Il n'entend pas se placer en surplomb et, tel Baudelaire<sup>898</sup>, il s'adresse a son—« hypocrite lecteur,—mon semblable,—mon frere ! »:

Je ne peux nier l'enigme du temps: ce sourd fremissement n'est pas une abstraction, mais le cours de ma vie (.) Vient meme un age qui realise la disparition du present, qui ne peut plus dire: je vis, mais: j'ai vecu ; ou rien n'est sur, sinon que tout est deja fini<sup>899</sup>.

Lorsque l'on fait un saut dans le temps, et dans le genre litteraire, on constate qu'il n'a pas varie de posture. Cela se confirme avec cet extrait de l'avertissement qui precede la toute premiere « Chronique de l'An deux mille », en decembre 1971:

Persuade qu'il est au creur de l'homme un tresor intangible, et qu'il peut le sauver ou le perdre, ancre dans le torrent, je me demande d'ou il vient et ou il va: j'interroge l'actualite afin de ne pas m'y engloutir<sup>900</sup>.

A cette occasion, du reste, on notera que Bernard Charbonneau se situe indirectement par rapport a ce qu'il tient pour deux abdications opposees mais qui en realite se combinent: la tentation reactionnaire de s'accrocher au passe, l'illusion progressiste de s'adapter au present.

Lorsqu'il commente la declaration de la Federation protestante de France intitulee « Eglise et Pouvoirs » en 1972, il parle de lui a la troisieme personne: « Il ne parle qu'en son nom. Il n'est pas chretien, seulement postchretien comme tout le monde l'est peu ou prou (.) »<sup>901</sup> croit-il bon d'ajouter. Les qualites de l'auteur sont ainsi declinees

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<sup>897</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, « Seul meurt le vivant », *Foi & Vie*, 58, n°1, janv.-fev. 1959, p. 44-61, qui constitue le chapitre 5 de la premiere partie du livre *Je fus*.

<sup>898</sup> Charles Baudelaire, « Au lecteur », in *Les Fleurs du mal* [1857], Paris, Garni-er-Flammarion, 1964, p. 34.

<sup>899</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, « L'Homme en son temps et en son lieu », *Foi & Vie*, 59, n°5, sept.-oct. 1960, p. 321. Article partiellement fondu dans le chapitre 3 de la premiere partie du livre *Je fus*.

<sup>900</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, « Chronique de l'An deux mille », *Foi & Vie*, 70, n°6, dec. 1971, p. 40-59.

<sup>901</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, « Le regard de l'autre », *Foi & Vie*, 71, n°2/3, mars-juin 1972, p. 103-10.

negativement. « Pas plus qu'il n'est docteur en theologie, il ne l'est en sciences ou en sociologie. Il n'a aucune specialite et n'est meme pas philosophe. Il n'est qu'un home seul. » Dans la seconde « Chronique », sa subjectivite n'a pas disparu meme si elle se fait plus discrete. Evoquant les doses de radioactivite: « On me parle de rem, mais qu'en sais-je? J'en suis reduit a faire confiance comme autrefois aux autorites »<sup>902</sup>. Et lorsqu'il s'adresse plus particulierement a son lecteur chretien, il assume sinon son materialisme du moins son gout des bonnes choses:

Je lui repondrai que si le Francais supporte qu'on le prive de pain pour lui en donner l'apparence insipide, et que sous le nom de vin on lui fournisse un jus de fruit alcoolise, demain il supportera qu'on le prive de corps au nom du progres rentable<sup>903</sup>.

Aux plans materiel et spirituel, il parle toujours en connaissance de cause, et a titre personnel. Puisque la chimie envahit nos assiettes, ne faudrait-il pas communier sous les especes du DDT et du mazout? Car, ecrit-il, « il est dit quelque part que l'Esprit s'est fait chair. Mais non pas proteines »<sup>904</sup>.

Dans le preambule de sa troisieme « Chronique » il definit son lecteur comme son « compagnon muet » et s'excuse aupres de lui d'errer « de la cave au grenier de la maison que nous habitons provisoirement<sup>905</sup> ». Et c'est a la premiere personne du singulier qu'il conclut son article en racontant que pour vivre il a autant besoin de beaute que d'air. Il veut contempler de sa fenetre le bleu du ciel et non pas dans un musee d'art moderne. Et tant pis pour les ciels de Rene Magritte et le bleu outremer d'Yves Klein, le Bear-nais prefere la lumiere naturelle de sa vallee. Dans le numero special de *Foi & Vie* consacre au dossier « Ecologie et Theologie », il adopte essentiellement un point de vue analytique, plus distancie, qui lui permet d'offrir un historique, un panorama des diverses tendances actuelles au sein du mouvement ecologique et divers scenarios pour l'avenir, mais il choisit de conclure son article a la premiere personne<sup>906</sup>. Qu'il emploie le « je » ou le « nous », Charbonneau s'adresse toujours a chaque « un ». Il l'exprime tres clairement dans sa sixieme « Chronique »: « Mon lecteur (je n'en ai qu'un mais, y en aurait-il plusieurs, il est unique) (...) »<sup>907</sup>. De ce point de vue, il existe une congruence parfaite avec la demarche exposee dans son essai sur la liberte. Dans les quelques lignes placees en exergue de *Je fus*<sup>908</sup>, ouvrage redige au debut des annees 1950, l'auteur expliquait deja que son reuvre n'etait dediee a personne: « Elle est ecrite pour une personne dont j'ignore le nom. » Et apres avoir evoque, a la premiere personne du singulier, la coupe de vin qui le fit naitre et dont il meurt, il declare quelle est dediee a son prochain. La premiere ligne de l'incipit du meme ouvrage utilise egalement la

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<sup>902</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, « Chronique de l'An deux mille », *Foi & Vie*, 71, n°6, dec. 1972, p. 90.

<sup>903</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>904</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>905</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, « Chronique de l'An deux mille », *Foi & Vie*, 72, n°5/6, dec. 1973, p. 73.

<sup>906</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, « Un nouveau fait social: Le mouvement ecologique », in *Foi & Vie*, 73, n°5/6, dec. 1974, p. 82-92.

<sup>907</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, « Chronique de l'An deux mille », *Foi & Vie*, 75, n°5/6, dec. 1976, p. 97.

<sup>908</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Je fus. Essai sur la liberte* [1980], Bordeaux, Opales, 2000.

premiere personne du singulier pour s'adresser au lecteur: « Dans ce livre je parlerai de la liberte...».

Ce qui nous permet d'aborder a present le contenu indissociable de la forme de son discours, etant entendu que du point de vue du locuteur, il ne s'agit pas d'un quelconque discours litteraire ou philosophique mais d'une pensee incarnee.

### « Pour connaitre la liberte il faut l'avoir perdue<sup>909</sup> »

Le ton est donne en 1951 des le premier article intitule: « Rendez a Cesar<sup>910</sup> ». Evoquant la cesure caracterisant la vie du chretien dans un monde qui ne l'est plus, Charbonneau rappelle au croyant que « le scandale de l'es-prit infini ne se manifeste jamais aussi bien que lorsqu'il doit s'incarner dans un monde fini ! ». On note ici la presence d'une formule qui sera de-clinee ulterieurement sous diverses formes et dans d'autres contextes. Son auteur nous dit en substance que dans ce monde apparemment rationalise et desenchante subsistent une aspiration religieuse, un besoin de Verite qui s'expriment via le culte etatique et l'idolatrie nationaliste.

C'est toutefois avec le second article, six ans plus tard, titre « Progres et liberte », que le style de ses interventions est definitivement fixe. « L'eveil de la conscience chretienne ne peut etre que celui de la contradiction entre une exigence infinie et une existence finie<sup>911</sup>. » Un style qui presente trois caracteristiques: priorite a la phrase a sentence et a l'aphorisme plutot qu'a la demonstration logique, souci de concision pour le fond et de symetrie pour la forme, recours aux figures de rhetorique permettant de souligner le parallelisme d'idees, comme ici le recours a l'assonance, figure d'elocution par consonance<sup>912</sup>. Avec le theologien Teilhard de Chardin, il s'attaque a l'un de ces « geants qui marquent la fin d'une espece », pour reprendre ses propres termes. Il est difficile d'imaginer aujourd'hui la place occupee apres la Liberation par l'auteur du *Phenomene humain* (1955), bien au-dela des cercles catholiques. Tandis qu'a usage du public cultive la revue mensuelle de reference<sup>913</sup> *La Table Ronde* lui avait consacre un numero special aux allures de long dithyrambe, le quotidien populaire *France-Soir* s'etait mis pour loccasion a la theologie. C'est done parce qu'il y voit un fait social, sinon un symptome, que Charbonneau se met en demeure de le decortiquer. Il le caracterise comme l'un des systemes les plus monstrueux que l'homme ait jamais invente. Teilhard etant pere jesuite et paleontologue, « le metier et la tradition de son ordre

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<sup>909</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Jefus, op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>910</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, « Rendez a Cesar », *Foi & Vie*, 67, n°2, mars 1951, p. 13761.

<sup>911</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, « Progres et liberte », *Foi & Vie*, 55, n°6, nov.-dec. 1957, p. 493.

<sup>912</sup> Pierre Fontanier, *Les figures du discours* [1818-1830], Paris, Champs/Flammarion, 1977. On songe ici du reste a son autre formule qui, celle la, fera flores ulterieurement: « On ne peut poursuivre un developpement infini dans un monde fini ».

<sup>913</sup> Comite de redaction: Raymond Aron, Albert Camus, Andre Malraux, Thierry Maulnier, Jean Paulhan, Denis de Rougemont, Jules Roy, Henri Troyat puis Franfois Mauriac, Gabriel Marcel, Jean Mistler, Jacques Duhamel, Charles Oren-go, Roland Laudenbach.



le poussaient à élever l'évolution à hauteur d'une théologie<sup>914</sup> ». Homme de Dieu et de science, il a l'intuition fondamentale de l'Un. « Ici-bas comme en Dieu rien n'est séparé et rien n'est perdu: tout procède d'un Centre suprême auquel tout aboutit ». Il accorde à Teilhard d'avoir senti l'inconfort du chrétien dans le monde moderne condamné à choisir entre trahir le monde ou trahir Dieu. Parce que la religion s'est séparée de la vie et la vie de la religion, Teilhard propose d'apporter une religion à la Science et un savoir à l'Église. Jadis la foi chrétienne avait su faire la synthèse entre l'aristotélisme et l'humanisme de la Renaissance, il convient selon lui d'opérer une nouvelle synthèse reconciliant l'esprit et la matière. Si Teilhard acquiesce à la formule du biologiste Julian Huxley: « L'Homme n'est autre chose que l'Évolution devenue consciente d'elle-même », Charbonneau n'adhère pas aux concepts de « noosphère » et de « Christ cosmique », à cette pensée en majuscules qui considère la vie des hommes concrets « comme pourrait la voir un aviateur volant dans la stratosphère ». Il s'agit en définitive d'un pur système de justification qui, prétendant réunir la sphère et la croix, menace le libre arbitre de l'homme. Dans « Seul meurt le vivant », il est aussi question de l'homme et de Dieu puisque « après la mort de Dieu, le dernier sacré est la mort de l'homme<sup>915</sup> ». C'est en cela que Charbonneau opère comme un théologien agnostique, en ce qu'il interroge les mythes modernes, explore les nouveaux territoires du sacré. On retrouve sous sa plume plusieurs figures de rhétorique. L'ellipse: « On ne meurt pas, mais quelqu'un » (p. 44). Le paradoxe, de très loin sa figure préférée: « Mais l'homme refuse la mort en même temps qu'il la découvre » (p. 47), « La mort n'est jamais naturelle » (p. 49) ; « Au désespoir de qui n'a plus rien à attendre s'ajoute l'angoisse de qui peut tout redouter » (p. 50) ; « La fuite devant la mort va de pair avec le goût du morbide » (p. 56) ; « La vie, c'est la mort: les cadavres ne la connaissent point. La reconnaissance de la mort est la condition de toute révolte contre elle » (p. 56) ; et enfin, ce qui constitue l'une des idées-forces de cet article: « Toute la grandeur de l'homme naissant rigoureusement de toute sa misère » (p. 57).

Cette formule évoque celle de Boileau disant d'un noble fier mais désargenté, obligé à s'allier au bourgeois, qu'il « rétablit son honneur à force d'in-famie. »<sup>916</sup> La distance entre le paradoxe rhétorique permettant de susciter la réflexion et le paradoxisme aux allures d'oxymore, au sens de Fontanier, est parfois tenue. On pense alors à deux de ses augustes prédécesseurs: Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa (« Tout doit changer pour que rien ne change ») et Jacques Prévert (« Paris est tout petit, c'est sa vraie grandeur »). Après avoir observé une coïncidence entre l'allongement de la durée de la vie et un mouvement d'opinion en faveur de l'euthanasie, Charbonneau nous dit en substance que (la conscience de) la mort est consubstantielle à (la conscience de) la liberté. La mort de Dieu devait émanciper l'homme, mais elle a débouché sur une nouvelle foi: le culte du progrès matériel, de l'organisation centralisée et de l'efficacité économique:

<sup>914</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, « Progrès et liberté », *Foi & Vie*, *op. cit.*, p. 494.

<sup>915</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, « Seul meurt le vivant », *op. cit.*, p. 44.

<sup>916</sup> Fontanier, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

« L'Etat totalitaire est un sous-produit de notre refus de la mort » (p. 52). Il faut donc les desacraliser tous les deux, ramener le but au moyen. En realite, l'homme ne craint pas la mort mais l'angoisse qu'elle suscite car elle nous oblige a « naitre enfin a notre vie personnelle » (p. 57). Paradoxalement, c'est par la conscience de notre mort physique que nous accedons a notre verite spiritu-elle. Vivre avec cette realite insupportable, « cette folie que rien ne justifie », est le propre de la condition humaine. Soulignant l'ambivalence fonciere de la vie et de la mort, Charbonneau se fait lyrique:

Ce point d'amertume dans la douceur, voici le sel de l'existence ; du pourpre de cette blessure saigne l'aube de toute vie. Divin soir d'ete tu declines ; et, ce rai de gloire dont tu me perces est le cri de ton agonie<sup>917</sup>.

Il precise ensuite que c'est parce que nous savons nos jours comptes que nous devons nous sauver de la mort, par notre vie, et non au seul instant de mourir. Une idee qu'il developpera longuement dans « L'homme en son temps et en son lieu » (p. 320-22). Cette democratie de la mort est donc la seule universalite pouvant nous reunir tout en conservant nos differences. Le dernier paragraphe est entierement consacre au Dieu chretien, et il est troublant de constater que non seulement l'auteur ne se demarque pas du recit biblique mais qu'il ne prend pas ses distances avec le phenomene surnaturel de la resurrection. Apres avoir rappele le celebre cri *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?*, Mon Dieu, mon Dieu, pourquoi m'as-tu abandonne?, il con**Ellul Forum** clut ainsi: « La ou le fils de Dieu est passe, chaque homme doit passer ; parce qu'il est ne, mais aussi parce qu'il doit renaitre. Celui qui vit, meurt: mais le sepulcre est le lieu de la resurrection<sup>918</sup>. »

En realite, sa posture semble strictement agnostique dans la mesure ou elle ne tranche pas. Si l'on se souvient de la formule de l'ethnologue Jean Pouillon: « Seul l'incroyant croit que le croyant croit »<sup>919</sup>, et que l'on veut bien admettre que l'athee, lui aussi, croit—en l'inexistence de Dieu—Charbonneau laisse la porte ouverte aux deux croyances dans « L'Homme en son temps et en son lieu »:

Quant a l'appel du Christ, l'individu s'eveille, la nostalgie de l'eter-nite l'envahit (...) Mais l'Infini appartient-il a Dieu ou a l'homme? (...) le Temps et l'Espace de la Science *n'existentpas*: ils n'existent, avec la Creation, que par un Createur. (.) cette immensite n'est pas a notre taille. Seule une presence divine pourrait la peupler<sup>920</sup>.

Il use toutefois d'une formulation des plus equivoque lorsque, apres avoir rappele que la memoire est indispensable a la constitution de la personne, il ajoute: « et au maintien de l'homme cree par Dieu<sup>921</sup> ». Cet article consacre au paradoxe du temps et de l'espace aborde egalement quatre themes si-gnificatifs: la surpopulation, le tourisme de masse, l'acceleration et l'en-racinement. Charbonneau adopte des positions que l'on pourrait qualifier de neo malthusiennes huit ans avant *The Population Bomb* de Paul

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<sup>917</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, « Seul meurt le vivant », *op. cit.*, p. 57.

<sup>918</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61 et *Je fus*, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

<sup>919</sup> Jean Pouillon, *Le Cru et le su*, Paris, Seuil, 1993.

<sup>920</sup> *Art. cite*, pp. 322-24,327.

<sup>921</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 338.

Ehrlich, edite par le Sierra Club en 1968 aux USA, et par les Amis de la Terre en 1971 en France. « L'espace humain se condense en un globe fini et surpeuple » (p. 319) ; « l'homme disparaîtra dans un univers concentrationnaire, surpeuple et surorganise » (p. 320) ; « le plus grand nombre s'accumule dans des sociétés surpeuplées et surorganisées » (p. 327) ; « Nous sommes tous là, les uns sur les autres » (p. 334) ; « Nous sommes trop nombreux d'ailleurs (.) Ainsi, dans ces villes surpeuplées ou l'espace se vend à prix d'or » (p. 334) ; « Nos univers concentrationnaires éliminent la liberté en entassant les individus (.) il faudrait une population moins dense » conclut l'auteur qui préconise la maison plutôt que l'immeuble, le bourg plutôt que la ville. Qu'il soit marin, nomade ou montagnard, jadis l'homme libre parcourait l'espace alors qu'aujourd'hui « la masse des touristes a suivi l'avant-garde des explorateurs » (p. 323). Nous n'avons plus le temps de voir venir, Chi-nois de Taïchen et boutiquiers du Lot, parcourent en tout sens la même planète. « Les machines qui nous aident à franchir l'espace dressent aussi les obstacles qui nous les rendent infranchissables. (...) les moyens qui nous permettent de fuir permettent de nous poursuivre encore plus vite » (p. 334). Cette veine sera creusée dans *Le Jardin de Babylone*: « La foule fuit la foule, le civilise la civilisation. C'est ainsi que la nature disparaît, détruite par le sentiment même qui l'a fait découvrir (...) Parce qu'il y a des machines, sur sa machine l'homme fuit la machine<sup>922</sup> ». Charbonneau pratique à merveille l'art de l'ellipse ou l'anacoluthie: « Car en même temps que la ville se développe le besoin d'en sortir<sup>923</sup> ». Il est convaincu que le sens de la durée manquera de plus en plus dans un monde où le temps s'accélère (p. 319). Dans ce courant qui tourbillonne de plus en plus vite nous perdons pied. Mais si la technique nous fait gagner du temps pour parcourir l'espace, « le temps et l'espace nous fuient avec la rapidité de l'éclair, quand nous les poursuivons à la vitesse de la foudre » (p. 329). Le temps nous manque mais lorsque nous l'avons, il faut le tuer. Nos loisirs sont plus extenuants que la fuite que nous pratiquons dans notre travail, et l'agenda du retraité est plus rempli que celui du premier ministre. L'avion nous mystifie car il a beau retrécir le monde, c'est seulement la distance géographique qu'il supprime et pas celle qui nous sépare de l'étranger. Comme Jésus, « nous n'avons plus ni feu ni lieu, nous sommes perpétuellement en marche vers un ailleurs » (p. 335), nous dit Charbonneau qui vante les vertus de l'enracinement. Mais attention, sa conception de la patrie n'est pas identitaire car l'homme la retrouve à l'issue d'une longue quête (p. 327). Alors que le monde moderne s'attaque à l'homme par deux voies apparemment contradictoires, en l'attachant aux biens matériels d'une part et en coupant ce corps sans âme de toute relation profonde avec la nature d'autre part, Charbonneau définit la liberté comme la faculté de « s'enraciner dans un lieu plutôt que de se disperser en surface » (p. 339). Si nous voulons en finir avec notre stérile agitation, il nous faut d'abord trouver une patrie mais « toute trouvaille est le fruit d'une quête ». Si nous ne la trouvons pas

<sup>922</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Le Jardin de Babylone*, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>923</sup> Une formulation à mettre en parallèle avec celle-ci extraite d'un article consacré à l'écologie: « La même société qui détruit avec le bison l'Indien, pleure sur sa disparition », *Foi & Vie*, n°3-4, juil. 1988, p. 131.

sur notre lieu de travail, le voyage peut devenir l'occasion d'une « recherche lente et approfondie du lieu ou nous pourrions durablement nous arrêter ». La liberté se risque autant qu'elle se situe. Elle suppose un minimum d'espace mais pour que l'homme ait un minimum de place, « il lui en faut trop: dans son pays et dans sa maison », alors que partout nos sociétés entassent les individus. Ce n'est qu'avec une population moins dense et une économie reinventée que l'homme pourra retrouver le chemin de la liberté. Charbonneau nous dit en substance qu'il faut d'abord fonder son port d'attache pour pouvoir voyager avec profit, et avoir envie d'ouvrir la porte aux étrangers.

Pour terminer, imaginons l'hypothèse improbable d'un lecteur exclusif de *Foi & Vie*, sans radio, journaux ou télévision, il n'aurait pu ignorer ce qui à l'aube des années 1970 apparaissait comme un nouveau fait social: l'émergence d'un mouvement écologique. Grâce à Charbonneau et à sa « Chronique de l'An deux mille » inaugurée dès 1971, ainsi qu'aux trois articles de fond (1974, 1977, 1988) spécialement consacrés à cette thématique, ce lecteur imaginaire disposerait, en la personne de l'auteur du *Feu vert*, d'un informateur de choix, capable de le renseigner de l'intérieur d'un mouvement dont il est partie prenante mais en mesure aussi de porter un regard extérieur car refusant l'étiquette « écologiste ». Avec le recul du temps essayons de restituer aujourd'hui les grands axes de son argumentaire en prenant trois thèmes pour fil rouge: la responsabilité du christianisme dans la crise écologique, l'intégrisme naturiste et le risque d'écofascisme. Le qualificatif d'écologiste permet de désigner une révolte contre le développement exponentiel mais aussi, par sa forme scientifique, de la réintégrer dans le système qu'elle menace. Ce mot est trop réducteur pour désigner la relation homme/nature. L'homme ne peut détruire la nature sans se détruire lui-même, car toutes ses joies lui sont données par la terre qu'il habite. La grande nouveauté de ce mouvement conservatoire, sinon conservateur, est de prendre une tonalité révolutionnaire. Le gauchisme non marxiste renoue ainsi avec la tradition rousseauiste et son rêve libertaire d'une vie heureuse et simple. En chassant Zeus de l'Olympe, en désacralisant le Cosmos, en présentant la nature comme une création de Dieu, et en faisant de l'homme, créé à son image, son lieutenant sur terre, le christianisme a permis à la science de se saisir d'un objet profane. La maîtrise spirituelle ayant précédé la maîtrise pratique, la pente du christianisme a été d'oublier que la création était l'œuvre de Dieu. Il a en effet déchainé la volonté de connaissance et de puissance caractérisant ce que l'on nomme en Occident la « modernité ». Charbonneau se réfère non pas aux thèses de l'américain Lynn White<sup>924</sup> mais à celles de l'écologiste bavarois Carl Amery<sup>925</sup>, son collègue d'ECO-ROPA. Il lui oppose cependant le fait que la tradition chrétienne fait de l'homme le maître de la nature et non son créateur, et à ce titre il n'est pas chargé de détruire son royaume mais de le transmettre à sa descendance. Sans le citer, il

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<sup>924</sup> Lynn White, Jr., 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis', *Science*, 155, no. 3767 (Mar. 1967), pp. 1203-207.

<sup>925</sup> Carl Amery, *Das Ende der Vorsehung. Die gnadenlosen Folgen des Christentums* [La fin de la Providence. Les conséquences impitoyables du christianisme], Reinbek, Rowohlt, 1972. Traduction française: *Fin de la Providence*, Paris, Seuil, 1976.

rejoint Ellul pour rappeler que cette tradition condamne l'obsession de connaître et d'exploiter, la volonté de puissance alors qu'elle glorifie le dénuement, l'humilité, la frugalité. C'est même la beauté fragile du lys des champs qui est offerte en modèle dans les Évangiles. C'est aussi l'Occident qui a inventé l'écologie scientifique comme le protestantisme a engendré le sentiment de la nature et les premières associations de protection. Et Charbonneau de souligner le paradoxe des choses par le paradoxe des mots: « La même société qui détruit avec le bison l'Indien, pleure sur sa disparition<sup>926</sup> ». Nous avons questionné plus haut l'agnosticisme déclaré de l'auteur. Soulignons alors cette assertion datée de 1988, dans le tout dernier article consacré à la nature parue dans la revue protestante: « Le christianisme est à la fois responsable de la dévastation de la nature à l'Ouest et à l'Est, et porteur de la seule force qui puisse y mettre fin »<sup>927</sup>. Autrement dit, la solution à la crise écologique ne réside pas dans ce qu'il dénonce comme un intégrisme naturiste, illustré notamment par le naturaliste suisse Robert Hainard. Le christianisme ayant choisi la culture contre la nature, les sociétés post-chrétiennes ont engendré un naturisme répliquant la matrice originelle. La pente du mouvement dit écologiste est un paganisme rebouilli, une sorte de panthéisme aboutissant au culte de la nécessité, à l'*amor fati*, pour parler comme Nietzsche, faisant disparaître la personne, divine ou humaine, dans la totalité du groupe ou de la nature. Pour l'auteur du *Miracle d'être* et du *Guetteur de lune*, la nature est une déesse qu'il faut protéger à tout prix de ses plus farouches ennemis: au premier rang desquels le chrétien, l'agriculteur, et partant l'homme ordinaire, qu'il conviendrait de maintenir à bonne distance d'authentiques réserves naturelles, ouvertes à quelques spécialistes patentés et à diverses personnalités de première importance. Quelle que soit l'estime qu'il porte à ces naturalistes, écologistes de la première heure, Charbonneau s'insurge contre cette volonté de mettre des petits morceaux de nature sauvage sous cloche pour mieux dévaster l'ensemble, c'est-à-dire le véritable environnement de l'homme moderne dans les sociétés techno-industrielles. Or ce n'est pas en éliminant l'homme que l'on sauvera la nature, qui n'est autre que le fruit de la création humaine, c'est en le réintroduisant dans l'équation. Le « système » peut tout aussi facilement s'accommoder du ghetto naturiste que du rayon bio.

Enfin, et Charbonneau anticipe ce risque des 1970, un « écofascisme » pourrait voir le jour à la suite d'une catastrophe ou d'une crise, organisant « la grande communion de la horde sous la direction de ses chefs<sup>928</sup> ». Une hypothèse qu'il développe encore trois ans plus tard alors que les candidats écologistes obtiennent 7% à Paris et 10% en Alsace. « Sommes de penser dans une maison qui commence à brûler<sup>929</sup> », face à l'urgence écologique on doit se hâter lentement sous peine d'accident. Le demi-tour

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<sup>926</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, « Quel avenir pour quelle écologie? », *Foi et Vie*, 87, n°3/4, juil. 1988, p. 131.

<sup>927</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>928</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, « Un nouveau fait social: le mouvement écologique », *Foi & Vie*, 73, n°5/6, déc. 1974, p. 91.

<sup>929</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, « Problèmes théoriques et pratiques du mouvement écologique », *Foi &*

doit se faire en douceur. « Il ne peut y avoir de developpement indefiniment accelere dans un espace fini<sup>930</sup> ». La croissance mene a une impasse, certes, mais on risque un jour de manquer autant de liberte et d'egalite que d'oxygene. « L'eco-fascisme est une possibilite moins lointaine qu'on pourrait le croire: sauver le bien commun, la terre et l'homme, vaut bien qu'on lui sacrifie la liberte comme en temps de guerre<sup>931</sup> ». Idee a mettre en parallele avec l'une des theses exposees anterieurement dans sa critique du mouvement ecologiste. Ce n'est pas tant la planete que l'organisation sociale menace que la liberte et l'egalite.

Les gouvernements seront de plus en plus contraints d'agir pour gerer des ressources et un espace qui se rarefient. (...) La preservation du taux d'oxygene necessaire a la vie ne pourra etre assuree qu'en sacrifiant cet autre fluide vital: la liberte<sup>932</sup>.

Charbonneau refuse quant a lui de choisir entre le chaos et le systeme. La defense de la nature qu'il entend promouvoir est aussi celle de l'egalite dans la liberte, du milieu de vie contre le totalitarisme industriel, de l'existant contre l'utopie, du *topos* face a l'abstrait.

## Conclusions

Bernard Charbonneau se presente le plus souvent comme « un homme parmi d'autres<sup>933</sup> ». Il n'est certes pas le premier a user de la premiere personne du singulier mais, a la difference de saint Augustin, s'il livre lui aussi sa verite sans fard, il ne confesse jamais un Dieu personnel pour mieux edifier les fideles. A l'instar de son compatriote Montaigne, son ton est souvent ironique voire caustique, mais il est plus grave et surtout nettement plus nostalgique. S'il partage avec lui le « je » existentiel, il se tient a bonne distance de l'*ego* metaphysique de Descartes. A la difference de l'auteur des *Meditations metaphysiques*, Charbonneau ne pourrait pas sou-tenir: « Je ne suis qu'une chose qui pense ». Il detourne meme le fameux « Je pense donc je suis » en « Je ne suis que si je pense », ou encore en « Tu ne penses pas donc tu n'es pas » car, dirait Charbonneau, pour peu que j'y pense, je decouvre que ma pensee n'est pas personnelle. A trois siecles de distance, il s'est pose les memes questions que Blaise Pascal—lecteur atten-tif de Montaigne—quant au temps et a l'espace, mais il n'a pas fait sien le pari de l'auteur des *Pensees*. Chez Rousseau, il prefere resolument « Jean-Jacques », mais il ne porte pas, comme lui, son creur meurtri en bandouliere. S'il annonce le Swann de Proust, l'auteur des *Confessions* a le double

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*Vie*, 76, n°2/3, av. 1977, p. 113. On attribue generalement a Jean-Paul Deleage, fondateur de la revue *Ecologie & Politique*, la paternite de la formule prononcee par le president Jacques Chirac en 2002, lors du Sommet de la terre de Johannesburg: « Notre maison brule et nous regardons ailleurs ».

<sup>930</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, « Quel avenir pour quelle ecologie? », *op. cit.*, p. 114.

<sup>931</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>932</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Le Feu vert. Autocritique du mouvement ecologique* [1980] , reedition Parangon/Vs, 2009, p. 100.

<sup>933</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

tort de gratter complaisamment sa plaie et de réserver la démocratie à un peuple de dieux. Comme Nietzsche, Charbonneau a le style poétique et le goût de l'aphorisme mais pas la conception de l'homme. De Jean Giono, il a souvent le lyrisme, mais il raille le caractère lenifiant de sa littérature bucolique. Bref, s'il fallait à tout prix lui trouver un prédécesseur sinon un inspirateur, c'est peut-être du côté de Kierkegaard qu'il faudrait se tourner. L'auteur de *Crainte et tremblement* ne refuse-t-il pas, lui aussi, le statut du philosophe? Le Bearnais n'est-il pas, comme le Danois, une sorte de « poète-dia-lecticien » amoureux des paradoxes, un simple « écrivain amateur » n'offrant aucun système de pensée? Toutefois, le nom de Kierkegaard n'apparaît que très rarement sous la plume de Charbonneau, qui se présente par ailleurs comme n'étant ni parieur ni (« chevalier de la foi ») sauteur. Faut-il dire que la foi en Dieu le sépare de Pascal tout autant que de Kierkegaard<sup>934</sup>, même si le doute subsiste.

Il nous faut donc continuer de mettre en perspective les articles de Charbonneau publiés dans *Foi & Vie* avec l'ensemble de son œuvre si l'on veut risquer quelques hypothèses. Après *Je fus*<sup>935</sup> et *Une seconde nature* (1981), la lecture de son troisième et dernier opus sur la liberté<sup>936</sup> permet d'écarter définitivement la thèse d'un Charbonneau opportuniste offrant à son lectorat les antennes qu'il ressasse. Ses articles de *Foi & Vie* s'adressent à un public majoritairement chrétien dont il connaît la culture, l'histoire, l'axiologie et les attentes, mais qu'il lui offre de régénérer et de sublimer. Aux problèmes métaphysiques abordés dès ses premiers articles dans la revue protestante répond le questionnement existentiel de toute une vie. Son intuition centrale voulant que le développement accéléré des sciences et des techniques menace la liberté de l'homme autant que l'équilibre du vivant ne doit pas faire oublier le fait que tout son raisonnement s'inscrit dans le cadre d'une société qu'il définit comme « post-chrétienne ». Le concept ne doit rien à l'improvisation, car il renvoie dos à dos les qualificatifs de « païenne » et de « chrétienne »<sup>937</sup>. Il implique une véritable incorporation du christianisme, non comme éthique au quotidien dans toute son exigence, non comme une appropriation culturelle en profondeur de ses valeurs, de ses rites et de ses règles, mais à titre d'héritage vivant et indépassable prévenant que toute tentative de retour au panthéisme, par la voie d'un quelconque intégrisme naturiste, ne débouche que sur de nouvelles formes de barbarie<sup>938</sup>.

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<sup>934</sup> Sur les affinités entre Pascal et Kierkegaard, et en particulier sur leur rapport singulier au christianisme, cf. André Clair, « Pascal et Kierkegaard face à face », *Les Etudes philosophiques*, 96, no. 1, 2011, pp. 3-18.

<sup>935</sup> Rédigé au début des années 1950, *Je fus. Essai sur la liberté* fut publié à compte d'auteur en 1980, puis à titre posthume: Bordeaux, Opales, 2000.

<sup>936</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Quatre témoins de la liberté. Rousseau, Montaigne, Berdiaev, Dostoïevski*, Paris, R&N Editions, 2019. Daniel Cerezuelle indique dans sa préface que ce livre a été rédigé « au soir de sa vie ».

<sup>937</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>938</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, « Christianisme, science et technique, sectes et écologie », *Combat Nature*, n°110, août 1995, p. 47. (Repris sous le titre « Raison scientifique et réaction sectaire » dans Bernard Charbonneau, *Le totalitarisme industriel*, Paris, L'Échappée, 2019, p. 109-11.)

En outre, toute leuvre de Charbonneau presuppose une bonne connaissance de la Bible tant les references directes ou indirectes, aux Evangiles en particulier, y sont abondantes<sup>939</sup>. Lorsque sur la question de la liberte Charbonneau se choisit quatre temoins irrecusables pour echapper au reproche d'exces de subjectivisme, c'est bien dans la tradition chretienne qu'il s'inscrit. Rompant avec l'expose chronologique, il presente Rousseau avant Montaigne. Fils de la Rome calviniste ayant vecu l'essentiel de sa vie en terre catholique, heritier fidele et infidele des Evangiles *intus et in cute*, selon une formule qu'affectionne Charbonneau, ce citoyen de Geneve est parfois regarde comme l'Antechrist. La realisation du contrat social, tel que decrit par Rousseau, exige des qualites exceptionnelles hors de portee du commun des mortels. Charbonneau lui prefere Montaigne, lequel juge toujours « a hauteur d'homme » et se reconnaît dans Pascal se reconnaissant dans Montaigne. « Ce n'est pas dans Montaigne, mais dans moi que je trouve tout ce que j'y vois<sup>940</sup> ». Leurs cas respectifs ne resument-ils pas l'humaine condition? Dans l'auteur des *Essais*, Charbonneau aime cette quete de l'individu incarne, cette exposition sans fard d'une humanite fortement individualisee, cette invitation a etre soi par le biais de l'examen de conscience. Il partage avec lui cette vision de l'homme comme etre inacheve et imparfait ne pouvant acceder a l'infini qui est reserve a Dieu. Un Dieu auquel on accede via la communion, la recitation du Patenotre, et non par la demonstration logique.

Chez le personaliste russe Berdiaev, Charbonneau apprecie que la priorite accordee au sujet ne nie pas le lien l'unissant a l'univers, la nature, la societe, a Dieu s'il a la foi, mais le rend paradoxal. Mais pour Charbonneau, l'individu est toujours premier, car il ne peut pas avoir de Dieu s'il n'existe pas d'abord quelqu'un pour le connaitre, alors que l'auteur de *De l'esclavage et de la liberte de l'homme* (1946) met l'accent sur la personne, comprise comme categorie principalement axiologique, et en cela hors de portee de la plupart des individus de chair et d'os. Ce n'est pas pour rien que Charbonneau rappelle a Berdiaev en particulier et aux chretiens en general le sens de la parabole du bon pasteur (Mt 18, 12-13). S'il peut sembler paradoxal d'abandonner la garde de 99 brebis pour retrouver la 100[eme] qui s'est egaree, c'est bien parce qu'a la difference des autres religions, le christianisme entend s'appuyer sur la liberte de l'individu. Le Fils de l'homme est venu sauver ce qui etait perdu.

C'est surtout lorsque Charbonneau aborde Dostoi'evski que l'on s'aperçoit a quel point une bonne connaissance de la Bible est indispensable a celui qui veut saisir la richesse de sa pensee. De la meme facon qu'il est necessaire d'avoir a l'esprit Matthieu 4, 1-11 ou Luc 4, 1-13 lorsqu'on lit la parabole du Grand Inquisiteur si l'on ne veut pas se contenter d'une lecture superficielle de ce passage crucial des *Freres Karamazov*. Ivan, l'athee, imagine pour son moine de frere que le Christ redescende sur terre a

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<sup>939</sup> Frederic Rognon, « Bernard Charbonneau et le christianisme », Communication au colloque Actualite de la pensee de Bernard Charbonneau, Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Bordeaux, 21 & 22 novembre 2019.

<sup>940</sup> *Pensees* (Lafuma, 689), cite dans Bernard Charbonneau, *Quatres temoins de la liberte*, op. cit., p. 65.



Seville au temps de l’Inquisition et qu’il ressuscite un enfant. Il est alors immédiatement arrêté et emprisonné par le cardinal qui veut lui démontrer qu’il n’a rien à faire sur terre, car en apportant la liberté aux hommes Jésus les plonge dans le trouble et le malheur. Dans l’Évangile, lorsqu’il est confronté successivement aux trois grandes tentations, Jésus répond chaque fois à Satan, alors que, dans le poème d’Ivan, il reste muet et que le Grand Inquisiteur ne s’aperçoit même pas qu’il monologue. Ce qui fascine Charbonneau dans ce conte moral, ce n’est pas tant la hantise des personnages de Dostoïevski de ne pouvoir pratiquer leur foi chrétienne comme elle l’exige, que l’expression des contradictions strictement insolubles de la condition humaine. Toute son œuvre, en définitive, s’articule autour de la tension entre le devoir pour l’homme de vivre sa liberté pour être homme et l’impossibilité d’y parvenir. Il aurait suffi que Jésus cède aux trois forces capables de les enchaîner—le miracle, le mystère et la puissance—pour que les hommes trouvent le chemin du bonheur, mais un bonheur satanique. Pour Charbonneau, en prétendant aimer les hommes plus que lui-même Jésus leur en demande trop en leur donnant une liberté qui les dépasse. Le Grand Inquisiteur pense qu’il faut les commander, les rassurer et les distraire, comme les enfants qu’ils sont. La Révélation chrétienne lance à l’espèce humaine un défi qui la dépasse. L’image qui revient à plusieurs reprises sous la plume de l’interprète de Dostoïevski, c’est que Jésus a placé trop haut la barre. L’exigence divine est au-dessus de nos forces. « Sommes-nous de taille à nous convertir à l’appel d’un Dieu de liberté sans être soutenus par la foi en un Dieu-homme<sup>941</sup>? », se demande Charbonneau, témoin indésirable et inflexible de la confrontation douloureuse entre un passé où le Dieu des chrétiens s’est fait homme et un présent où l’homme se fait dieu. Lorsqu’enfin Charbonneau qualifie Dostoïevski d’« athée chrétien », on songe alors à un autoportrait, car l’on se souvient que cet agnostique n’en a pas moins recité le Notre Père, tous les soirs depuis sa prime jeunesse jusqu’à son dernier souffle<sup>942</sup>.

## Bernard Charbonneau at *Foi & Vie*: An Agnostic Theologian among Protestants

Patrick Chastenot

Bernard Charbonneau’s contributions to the Protestant cultural review *Foi & Vie* [Faith & Life] began in 1951 and ended in December 1994 on the occasion of a special issue in memory of Jacques Ellul.<sup>943</sup> In spite of a silence of eleven years, from winter

<sup>941</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Quatre témoins de la liberté*, op. cit., p. 139.

<sup>942</sup> Sur ce point cf. Sébastien Morillon-Brière, « Bernard Charbonneau-Jacques Ellul: correspondance de jeunesse (1933-1946) », *Foi & Vie*, n°1, mars 2012, p. 55-62.

<sup>943</sup> Archivist Roland de Miller has established a nearly exhaustive bibliography of his publications that can be found as an appendix to Jacques Prades, ed., *Bernard Charbonneau: une vie entière a dénoncé la grande imposture* (Toulouse: Eres, 1997): 213-20.

1960 to winter 1971 with the creation of a column advertised as permanent by the editors, there is nothing occasional about either its length—forty-three years if we ignore the breaks—or its volume (twenty-five articles for a total of over 350 pages) or its content (particularly dense articles relating to fundamental issues in a style of great literary and poetic quality).

These articles may be divided into three main categories: “Chronique de l’An deux mille” [Chronicle of the Year 2000] (12), ecological issues strictly speaking outside the “Chronique” (3) and miscellaneous topics (10). Aside perhaps from the “Chronique de l’An deux mille” and with the exception of texts reissued later in book form, these articles for *Foi & Vie* make up the least-known part of a superabundant body of work still too often unknown to the general public. We are hypothesizing here that it is incumbent upon scholars to read Charbonneau’s articles in this review, as for anyone who would undertake a systematic study of his work. For this series of articles is not redundant in relation to his work in book form, but completes it, throwing light on it both diachronically and synchronically; it is therefore worthy of serious consideration.<sup>944</sup> This also holds when an article published in *Foi & Vie* is partly or wholly included in a book published at a later date; the comparative study of the two versions is in my opinion a research topic that is worthy of interest, since disparities sometimes involve key issues. For instance, for most readers, the agnosticism of the author of *Le Jardin de Babylone*<sup>945</sup> [The Garden of Babylon] is a given. However, a careful study of these articles upsets our certainties in that area. As is well known, Charbonneau usually defines himself as “post-Christian” or agnostic. Now, it happens that in *Foi & Vie* he occasionally uses rather ambiguous wording that he sometimes takes out when the article gets integrated into a book. Besides, is it not symptomatic that his first four articles in the Protestant review deal with metaphysical issues, not to say explicitly theological ones? Particularly for the second article, entitled “Progres et liberte. I. La liberte des enfants de Dieu ou le progres justifie Dieu. II. La sphere et la croix” (1957), as for his first published book,<sup>946</sup> *Teilhard de Chardin, prophete d’un age totalitaire* [Teilhard de Chardin, Prophet of a Totalitarian Age] (1963). His denunciation of modern myths and new forms of the sacred may also be viewed from that angle. We would like to apply here to Charbonneau the method he applied to Teilhard, namely, “as often as possible, to let him speak for himself”<sup>947</sup> and confine ourselves, for the most part, to the review. Having to refrain from a systematic analysis

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<sup>944</sup> The article “Rendez a Cesar” is a kind of summary of the theses of *LEtat* (1951). It would be worth comparing line by line “L’Homme en son temps et dans son lieu” (1960), reissued in book form by R&N in 2017, with many chapters of *Je fus* (1980), “L’Adieu aux armes” (1982), “Sur Belle du Seigneur d’Albert Cohen” (1989) with *Finis Terrae* (2010), the “Chroniques de l’An deux mille” with *Le Feu vert* (1980; *The Green Light*, 2018).

<sup>945</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Le Jardin de Babylone* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973).

<sup>946</sup> The manuscript of *Par la force des choses* is thought to have been completed in 1948. See Daniel Cerezuelle, *Ecologie et liberte: Bernard Charbonneau, precurseur de l’ecologie politique* (Lyon: Parangon/Vs, 2006).

<sup>947</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, “Progres et liberte.” *Foi & Vie* 56 (1957), 495.

of the twenty-five articles and their correlation with all the books, which would be the indispensable condition for drawing final conclusions, we will be formulating some simple hypotheses on the basis of extracts we deem significant enough to constitute an ideal type. We are well aware that this paper represents only a first stage that would deserve to be extended. To guide our process, we will rely on four of the five basic questions in Harold Lasswell's model: Who is speaking, to whom? (I) To say what, and how? (II)

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## Just a Man, Talking to His Neighbor

When talking to his reader, Charbonneau often presents himself as a man—without (other) qualities—and he often does it in the first person singular since he, and he alone, is involved. Starting from his own experience, he is talking to the “few” once distinguished by two other famous Aquitainians, like him lovers of freedom: Etienne de la Boetie and Elisee Reclus. More precisely, he aims at what is unique in man: his freedom, that embodied freedom which founds his universality. We find a first example of this in the first person singular declaration that serves as the first word of the article entitled “Only One Who Is Alive Can Die”<sup>948</sup>: “I was born, I love, and I will die: I cannot say anything more real, or truer [...].”

In the article published the following year, in 1960, entitled “Man in His Time and Place,” the use of “I” and “we” means that the author does not claim to stand as an impartial judge, a pure logician, or an objective sociologist. He does not intend to stand aloof, and, like Baudelaire,<sup>949</sup> he tells his—“hypocritical reader,—my fellow,—my brother!”:

I cannot deny the enigma of time: this muffled shudder is not an abstraction, but the course of my life [...]. There even comes an age that realizes the disappearance of the present, that can no longer say: I live, but: I have lived; where nothing is certain, except that everything is already over.<sup>950</sup>

When we take a leap in time, and between literary genres, we realize that his posture never varied. This is confirmed by this excerpt of the warning that precedes the very first “Chronique de l’An deux mille,” in December 1971:

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<sup>948</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, “Seul meurt le vivant.” *Foi & Vie* 58.1 (Jan.-Feb. 1959): 44-61, which makes up chapter 5 of the first part of the book *Je fus*.

<sup>949</sup> Charles Baudelaire, “Au lecteur” in *Les Fleurs du mal* [1857] (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1964), 34.

<sup>950</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, “L’Homme en son temps et en son lieu.” *Foi & Vie* 59.5 (Sept.-Oct. 1960), 321. This article was partially merged into chapter 3 of the first part of the book *Je fus*.

Convinced that there is in the heart of man an intangible treasure, and that he can save it or lose it, anchored in the torrent, I wonder where it comes from and where it is going: I question current events in order not to be swallowed up by them.<sup>951</sup>

We may incidentally notice that Bernard Charbonneau indirectly situates himself with respect to what he considers as opposite abdications that actually combine: the reactionary temptation of hanging on to the past, and the progressive illusion of adapting to the present.

When he comments on the declaration of the Federation protestante de France entitled “Eglise et Pouvoirs” in 1972, he speaks of himself in the third person: “He is only talking in his own name. He is not a Christian, only post-Christian like everyone is more or less [.]”<sup>952</sup> he thinks it fit to add. The author’s titles are thus listed negatively. “No more than he is a doctor in theology is he one in science or in sociology. He has no specialty and is not even a philosopher. He is but a man alone.” In the second “Chronique,” his subjectivity has not disappeared, even if it becomes more discreet. Referring to doses of radioactivity: “They tell me about rems, but what do I know? I am reduced to trusting authorities as in olden times.”<sup>953</sup> And when he specifically talks to his Christian reader, he owns up not so much to his materialism as to his taste for life’s finer things:

I would answer him that if the Frenchman stands being deprived of bread and being given a flavorless lookalike, and if under the name of wine he is supplied with alcoholic fruit juice, tomorrow he will stand being deprived of a body in the name of profitable progress.<sup>954</sup>

On the material and spiritual planes, he always knows whereof he speaks, on his own behalf. Since chemistry is invading our plates, shouldn’t we communicate under the species of DDT and fuel oil? For, he writes, “it says somewhere that the Spirit became flesh. Not proteins.”<sup>955</sup>

In the preamble of his third “Chronique,” he defines his reader as his “mute companion,” apologizes to him for wandering “from the cellar to the attic of the house we temporarily inhabit.”<sup>956</sup> And it is in the first person singular that he concludes his article by telling how, to live, he needs beauty as much as air. He wants to gaze at the blue of the sky through his window and not in a museum of modern art. And too bad for Rene Magritte’s skies and Yves Klein’s ultramarine blue; our Bearnese prefers his valley’s natural light. In the “Ecologie et Theologie” special issue of *Foi & Vie*, he basically adopts a more distanced analytical viewpoint that allows him to offer a history, a survey of the different current trends within the ecological movement and

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<sup>951</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, “Chronique de l’An deux mille.” *Foi & Vie* 70.6 (Dec. 1971): 40-59.

<sup>952</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, “Le regard de l’autre.” *Foi & Vie* 71.2-3 (Mar.-June 1972): 103-10.

<sup>953</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, “Chronique de l’An deux mille.” *Foi & Vie* 71.6 (Dec. 1972), 90.

<sup>954</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>955</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>956</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, “Chronique de l’An deux mille.” *Foi & Vie* 72.5-6 (Dec. at *Foi & vie* 1973), 73.

different scenarios for the future, but he chooses to conclude his article in the first person.<sup>957</sup> Whether he uses “I” or “we,” Charbonneau is always talking to every “one.” He expresses this very clearly in his sixth “Chronique”: “My reader (I have only one, but even if there were many, s/he is unique) [...]”<sup>958</sup> From this standpoint, there is a perfect congruence with the approach set out in his essay on freedom. In the few lines set as an epigraph to *Je fus* [I Was],<sup>959</sup> a book written in the early 1950s, the author explained that his work was dedicated to no one: “It is written for a person whose name I do not know.” And after having mentioned, in the first person singular, the cup of wine that gave him birth and of which he is dying, he declares that it is dedicated to his neighbor. The first line of the same work’s beginning also uses the first person singular to address the reader: “In this book I will speak of freedom . . .”

This allows us to tackle now the content that remains inseparable from the form of his discourse, since it is understood that from the writer’s standpoint it is not a matter of any kind of literary or philosophical discourse, but of embodied thought.

### “To Know Freedom, One Must Have Lost It”<sup>960</sup>

The tone is given in 1951 from the first article, entitled “Render unto Cae-sar.”<sup>961</sup> Referring to the rift characterizing the Christian’s life in a world that is no longer Christian, Charbonneau reminds the believer that “the scandal of an infinite spirit never manifests as much as when it must be embodied in a finite world!” We note here the presence of a formula that will reappear later on in various guises and in other contexts. Its author is essentially telling us that in this seemingly rationalized and disenchanting world, a religious yearning, a need for Truth, live on, finding expression by way of State-worship and nationalistic idolatry.

It is however with the second article, six years later, entitled “Progress and Freedom,” that the style of his commentary is definitively established. “The awakening of Christian conscience can only be that of the contradiction between an infinite demand and a finite existence.”<sup>962</sup> A style that displays three characteristics: the priority of maxim-like statements and aphorisms over logical demonstration, a concern for concision when it comes to substance and for symmetry when it comes to form, use of figures of speech allowing him to underline the parallelism of ideas, as here with the use of assonance, a figure of speech based on the resonance between certain sounds.<sup>963</sup> With

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<sup>957</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, “Un nouveau fait social: Le mouvement ecologique.” *Foi & Vie* 73.5-6 (Dec. 1974): 82-92.

<sup>958</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, “Chronique de l’An deux mille.” *Foi & Vie* 75.5-6 (Dec. 1976), 97.

<sup>959</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Je fus: Essai sur la liberte* [1980] (Bordeaux: Opales, 2000).

<sup>960</sup> Charbonneau, *Jefus*, 18.

<sup>961</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, “Rendez a Cesar.” *Foi & Vie* 67.2 (Mar. 1951): 137-61.

<sup>962</sup> Charbonneau, “Progres et liberte,” 493.

<sup>963</sup> Pierre Fontanier, *Les figures du discours* [1818-1830] (Paris: Champs/Flammarion, 1977). We thus may think here of his other formula, one that would later become very successful: “We cannot continue an infinite development in a finite world.”

Teilhard de Chardin's theology, he attacks one of those "giants that signal the end of a species," to borrow his own terms. It is difficult to imagine today how large the author of *Le Phenomene humain* [The Phenomenon of Man] (1955) loomed after the Liberation of France, well beyond Catholic circles. While a go-to monthly review for the educated public,<sup>964</sup> *La Table Ronde*, had devoted to him a special issue that came across as a protracted paean, the popular daily *France-Soir* took up theology for the occasion. It is thus because he sees in him a social fact, a symptom even, that Charbonneau undertakes to deconstruct him. He characterizes his system as one of the most monstrous ever devised by man. Teilhard being a Jesuit father and paleontologist, "his trade and his order's tradition drew him to elevate evolution to the level of a theology."<sup>965</sup> As a man of God and of science, he has a basic intuition of Oneness. "Here below as in God, nothing is separate, and nothing is lost: everything proceeds from a supreme Center where everything ends up." He gives Teilhard credit for having felt the Christian's discomfort in the modern world, condemned to choose between betraying the world and betraying God. Because religion has become separated from life and life from religion, Teilhard endeavors to bring a religion to Science and a certain knowledge to the Church. Formerly, the Christian faith had known how to do a synthesis between Aristotelianism and Renaissance humanism; according to him, a new synthesis was called for to reconcile the spirit and matter. If Teilhard agrees with biologist Julian Huxley's formula "Man is nothing more than Evolution become conscious of itself," Charbonneau does not subscribe to the concepts of "noosphere" and "cosmic Christ," to this capitalized thinking that views the life of concrete people "as it might be seen by an aviator flying in the stratosphere." It is in the final analysis a pure system of justification that, pretending to bring together the sphere and the cross, threatens man's free will.

"Only One Who Is Alive Can Die" also deals with man and God, since "after the death of God, the last sacred is the death of man."<sup>966</sup> It is in this that Charbonneau functions like an agnostic theologian, in that he questions modern myths, explores new territories of the sacred. We find under his pen many figures of speech. Ellipsis: "*One* does not die, only someone does."<sup>967</sup> Paradox, by far his favorite figure: "But man refuses death at the same time as he discovers it."<sup>968</sup> "Death is never natural."<sup>969</sup> "To the despair of one who has nothing more to expect is added the anguish of the one who has everything to fear."<sup>970</sup> "Flight before death goes hand in hand with morbid

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<sup>964</sup> Editorial Committee: Raymond Aron, Albert Camus, Andre Malraux, Thierry Maulnier, Jean Paulhan, Denis de Rougemont, Jules Roy, Henri Troyat, then Francois Mauriac, Gabriel Marcel, Jean Mistler, Jacques Duhamel, Charles Oren-go, Roland Laudenbach.

<sup>965</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, "Progres et liberte," 494.

<sup>966</sup> Charbonneau, "Seul meurt le vivant," 44.

<sup>967</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>968</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>969</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>970</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

tastes.”<sup>971</sup> “Life means death: corpses do not know it. The acknowledgment of death is the condition for any rebellion against it.”<sup>972</sup> And finally, what amounts to one of the key ideas of this article: “The whole greatness of man being born strictly from his whole wretchedness.”<sup>973</sup> This formula reminds one of Boileau’s about a proud but penniless nobleman, forced into an alliance with the bourgeois, who thus “restores his honor by dint of villainy.”<sup>974</sup> The distance between the rhetorical paradox that can spark reflection and paradoxism bordering on the oxymoron, in Fontanier’s sense, is sometimes slim. We may then be put in mind of two illustrious forerunners: Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa (“Everything has to change so that nothing changes”) and Jacques Prevert (“Paris is tiny, that is its true greatness”).

After having observed a correlation between the lengthening of lifespans and a trend for the acceptance of euthanasia, Charbonneau tells us in essence that (awareness of) death is consubstantial with (awareness of) freedom. The death of God was supposed to emancipate man, but it ushered in a new faith: the cult of material progress, centralized organization, and economic efficiency: “The totalitarian State is a byproduct of our denial of death.”<sup>975</sup> We must therefore desacralize them both, bring back the end to the means. Man does not actually fear death but the anxiety it triggers, since it forces us to “finally be born to our personal life.”<sup>976</sup> Paradoxically, it is through the awareness of our physical death that we reach our spiritual truth. Living with this unbearable reality, “this madness that nothing justifies,” is the hallmark of the human condition. Underlining the fundamental ambivalence of life and death, Charbonneau waxes lyrical:

This point of bitterness within sweetness, that is the salt of life; from the purple of this wound bleeds the dawn of all life. Divine summer evening, you go down; and this ray of glory with which you pierce me is the cry of your agony.<sup>977</sup>

He goes on to specify that it is because we know our days to be numbered that we must save ourselves from death, through our life, and not just at the moment of death. An idea he would develop at length in “Man in His Time and Place.”<sup>978</sup> This democracy of death is thus the only universality that can bring us together while preserving our differences. The last paragraph is entirely devoted to the Christian God, and it is unsettling to realize not only that its author does not stray from the biblical story but also that he does not bother to distance himself from the supernatural phenomenon of the resurrection. After recalling the famous cry *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?*, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?,” he concludes as follows: “Where the son

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<sup>971</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>972</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>973</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>974</sup> Fontanier, *Les figures du discours*, 138.

<sup>975</sup> Charbonneau, “Seul meurt le vivant,” 52.

<sup>976</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>977</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>978</sup> Charbonneau, “L’Homme en son temps et en son lieu,” 320-22.

of God has gone, every man must go; because he was born, but also because he must be reborn. The one who lives, dies: but the grave is the place of the resurrection.”<sup>979</sup>

His posture actually appears to be strictly agnostic insofar as it does not decide one way or another. If we recall ethnologist Jean Pouillon’s statement, “It is only the unbeliever who believes that the believer believes,”<sup>980</sup> and we are willing to admit that the atheist too believes—in the non-existence of God—Charbonneau is leaving the door open to both beliefs in “Man in His Time and Place”:

As for Christ’s call, the individual awakens, nostalgia for eternity swells in him [...]. But does the Infinite belong to God or to man? [...] The Time and Space of Science *do not exist*: they only exist, with Creation, through a Creator. [...] this immensity is not on our scale. Only a divine presence could people it.<sup>981</sup>

However, he uses a most ambiguous wording when, having reminded the reader that memory is indispensable to the construction of personhood, he adds: “and to the preservation of man as created by God.”<sup>982</sup> This article devoted to the paradox of time and space also tackles four significant topics: overpopulation, mass tourism, acceleration, and rootedness. Charbonneau takes up positions that could be termed neo-Malthusian eight years before Paul Ehrlich’s *The Population Bomb*, published by the Sierra Club in 1968 in the USA and by the Friends of the Earth in France in 1971.<sup>983</sup> “Human space is condensed in a finite and overpopulated globe”<sup>984</sup>; “man will disappear in a concentration world, overpopulated and overorganized”<sup>985</sup>; “the greatest number accumulates in overpopulated and overorganized societies”<sup>986</sup>; “We are all there, one against the other.”<sup>987</sup> “Besides, we are far too many [.]. Thus, in those overpopulated cities where space is sold at astronomical rates,”<sup>988</sup> “our concentration worlds eliminate freedom by crowding individuals [.]. Less population density is called for,” concludes the author who favors the house over the apartment block, the town over the city. Be he a sailor, a nomad, or a highlander, the freeman used to roam through space, while nowadays “the mass of tourists has followed the vanguard of explorers.”<sup>989</sup> We no longer have time to wait for whatever comes, Hakka migrants and Occitan shopkeepers crisscross the same planet. “Machines that help us cross space also raise the obstacles

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<sup>979</sup> *Ibid.*, 61 and *Je fus*, 99.

<sup>980</sup> Jean Pouillon, *Le Cru et le su* (Paris: Seuil, 1993).

<sup>981</sup> Charbonneau, “L’Homme en son temps et en son lieu,” 322-24, 327.

<sup>982</sup> *Ibid.*, 338.

<sup>983</sup> Translator’s note: Bernard Charbonneau questioned even more pointedly the biblical command to “be fruitful and multiply” (asking if that was an order) a few weeks later in another Protestant periodical whose pages Ellul opened to him: “Le Probleme de la limitation des naissances. ‘Croyez et multipliez.’ Est-ce un ordre?” *Reforme* 16.824 (Dec. 31,1960): 6-7.

<sup>984</sup> Charbonneau, “L’Homme en son temps et en son lieu,” 319.

<sup>985</sup> *Ibid.*, 320.

<sup>986</sup> *Ibid.*, 327.

<sup>987</sup> *Ibid.*, 334.

<sup>988</sup> *Ibid.*, 334.

<sup>989</sup> *Ibid.*, 323.



that make them impossible to cross. [...] The means that allow us to flee allow us to be pursued even faster.”<sup>990</sup> This vein would be explored in *Le Jardin de Babylone*: “The crowd flees the crowd, civilized people flee civilization. Thus it comes about that nature disappears, destroyed by the very sense that caused it to be discovered. [...] Because machines exist, man flees the machine on his machine.”<sup>991</sup> Charbonneau is a past master at the art of ellipsis or anacoluthon: “For at the same time as the city, the need to get out of it develops.”<sup>992</sup> He is convinced that the sense of duration will run out more and more in a world where time accelerates.<sup>993</sup> In this stream that swirls faster and faster, we are losing our footing. But if technique makes us save time to roam space, “time and space flee us at the speed of lightning, when we run after them at the speed of a thunderbolt.”<sup>994</sup> We lack time, but when we do have it, we have to kill it. Our leisure is more exhausting than the flight we practice in our work, and the pensioner’s agenda is fuller than the prime minister’s. The airplane mystifies, because however smaller it makes the world, it is only geographic distance that it eliminates and not that separating us from strangers. Like Jesus, “we have nowhere to lay our head anymore, we are perpetually on the way to somewhere else,”<sup>995</sup> says Charbonneau as he praises the virtues of rootedness. But beware, his conception of the homeland is not identitarian, because man finds it again only at the end of a long quest.<sup>996</sup> While the modern world attacks man from two apparently contradictory angles, by attaching him to material goods on the one hand and by cutting off this soulless body from any deep relationship with nature on the other hand, Charbonneau defines freedom as the faculty “to root oneself in a place instead of getting scattered on the surface.”<sup>997</sup> If we want to go beyond our sterile agitation, we must first find a homeland, but “any find is the fruit of a quest.” If we do not find it in our workplace, travel can become the occasion of a “slow and in-depth search for a place where we might durably stop.” Freedom is to be risked as much as it is to be located. It assumes a minimum of space, but so that man have a minimum of place; “he needs too much: in his country and in his house,” while everywhere our societies pile up individuals. It is only with a less dense population and a reinvented economy that man may find again the road to freedom. Charbonneau is telling us in essence that one must first find one’s port of call in order to profitably travel, and to feel like opening the door to strangers.

Finally, let us imagine the improbable hypothesis of an exclusive reader of *Foi & Vie*, without radio, newspapers, or television; he could not have failed to know that in the early 1970s there appeared a new social fact: the emergence of an environmental

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<sup>990</sup> *Ibid.*, 334.

<sup>991</sup> Charbonneau, *Le Jardin de Babylone*, 10.

<sup>992</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>993</sup> Charbonneau, “L’Homme en son temps et en son lieu,” 319.

<sup>994</sup> *Ibid.*, 329.

<sup>995</sup> *Ibid.*, 335.

<sup>996</sup> *Ibid.*, 327.

<sup>997</sup> *Ibid.*, 339.

movement. Thanks to Charbonneau and his “Chronique de l’An deux mille” launched as early as 1971, as well as three in-depth articles (1974, 1977, 1988) devoted especially to this topic, this imaginary reader has in the person of the author of *The Green Light* a choice informant, able to give him inside knowledge about a movement of which he was an active member, but also able to cast on it the gaze of an outsider, since he refused to be called an “ecologist.” With the benefit of hindsight, let us reconstruct today the main outlines of his argumentation by taking three themes as a red thread: Christianity’s responsibility for the environmental crisis, naturist fundamentalism, and the risk of ecofascism. The term “ecologist” makes it possible to refer to a rebellion against exponential development but also, by its scientific form, to reintegrate it within the system it threatens. This word is too reductive to refer to the relationship between man and nature. Man cannot destroy nature without destroying himself, for all his joys are given to him by the earth he inhabits. The great novelty of this conserving—if not conservative—movement is that it adopts a revolutionary tone. Non-Marxist leftism thus reconnects with Rousseauist tradition and its libertarian dream of a happy and simple life. By driving Zeus out of Olympus, by desacralizing the Cosmos, by presenting nature as a creation of God, and by making man, created in his image, his vicar on earth, Christianity has enabled science to take hold of a profaned object. Spiritual mastery having preceded practical mastery, Christianity’s bent has been to forget that creation was the work of God. For it has unleashed the will to knowledge and to power characterizing what is called in the West “modernity.” Charbonneau is referring not only to the theses of American historian Lynn White<sup>998</sup> but to those of Bavarian writer and ecologist Carl Amery,<sup>999</sup> his colleague at ECOROPA. He however counters this line of thinking by pointing to the Christian tradition that makes man the master of nature and not its creator, so that he is not entrusted with destroying his kingdom but with transmitting it to his descendants. Without citing him, he joins Ellul in reminding readers that this tradition condemns the obsession with knowing and exploiting, the will to power, while it glorifies poverty, humility, frugality. It is even the fragile beauty of the lilies of the field that is offered as a model in the Gospel. It is also the West that has invented scientific ecology, just as Protestantism has spawned feeling for nature and the first conservancy associations. And Charbonneau underlines the paradox of things with the paradox of words: “The same society that destroys the Indian along with the buffalo cries out about his disappearance.”<sup>1000</sup> We have questioned above the

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<sup>998</sup> Lynn White, Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis.” *Science* 155.3767 (Mar. 10, 1967): 1203-207.

<sup>999</sup> Carl Amery, *Das Ende der Vorsehung. Die gnadenlosen Folgen des Christentums* [The End of Providence: The Merciless Consequences of Christianity] (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1972). Translator’s note: The contrasting reception of the French translation of Carl Amery’s book (*Fin de la Providence* [Paris: Seuil, 1976] ) by Jacques Ellul and Bernard Charbonneau is examined in the second section of Christian Roy, “Nature and Scripture in Bernard Charbonneau’s *The Green Light*.” *Ellul Forum* 64 (Fall 2019): 5-16.

<sup>1000</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, “Quel avenir pour quelle ecologie?” *Foi & Vie* 87.3-4 (July 1988), 131.

agnosticism claimed by the author. Let us then underline this statement from 1988, in his very last article devoted to nature to appear in the Protestant review: “Christianity is at once responsible for the devastation of nature in West and East, and the bearer of the only force that might end it.”<sup>1001</sup> In other words, the solution to the environmental crisis does not reside in what he denounces as a naturist fundamentalism, illustrated, for example, by Swiss naturist Robert Hainard. Christianity having chosen culture against nature, post-Christian societies have spawned a naturism replicating the original matrix. The default attitude of the so-called ecological movement is a rehashed paganism, a kind of pantheism issuing in a cult of necessity, an *amor fati*, to speak like Nietzsche, causing the person, divine or human, to disappear within the totality of the group or of nature. For the author of the 1986 books *Le Miracle d’être* [The Miracle of Being] and *Le Guetteur de lune* [The Moon Watcher], nature is a goddess who must be protected at any cost from its fiercest enemies: beginning with the Christian, the agriculturalist, and hence the ordinary man, whom it would be best to keep at a distance from authentic nature reserves, open only to a few accredited specialists and VIPs. Regardless of his esteem for these naturists as pioneering environmentalists, Charbonneau rebels against this willingness to put small pieces of wilderness under a dome the better to lay waste to the whole of nature, that is, to modern man’s true environment in techno-industrial societies. Now it is not by eliminating man that we will save nature, which is none other than the fruit of human creation, but by reintroducing him into the equation. The “system” may just as well accommodate naturist ghettos as organic aisles.

Finally, as a risk that Charbonneau anticipates as early as 1974, an “ecofascism” may arise as a result of a catastrophe or crisis, organizing “the great communion of the horde under its leaders.”<sup>1002</sup> He develops this hypothesis further three years later when ecological candidates rake in 7 percent of votes in Paris and 10 percent in Alsace. “Summoned to think in a house that is beginning to burn,”<sup>1003</sup> in the face of the environmental emergency, we must hurry slowly if we want to avoid crashing. The U-turn must be performed smoothly. “It is impossible to have indefinitely accelerated development within finite space.”<sup>1004</sup> Growth leads to a dead end, to be sure, but we are at risk of one day running out as much of freedom and equality as of oxygen. “Ecofascism is a less distant possibility than we might believe: saving the common good, the earth and man, is well worth sacrificing freedom to it as in wartime.”<sup>1005</sup> An

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<sup>1001</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>1002</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, “Un nouveau fait social: le mouvement écologique.” *Foi & Vie* 73.5-6 (Dec. 1974), 91.

<sup>1003</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, “Problemes theoriques et pratiques du mouvement écologique.” *Foi & Vie* 76.2-3 (before 1977), 113. Jean-Paul Deleage, founder of the review *Ecologie & Politique*, is widely regarded as the originator of the statement made by President Jacques Chirac in 2002, during the Johannesburg Earth Summit: “Our house is burning, and we look elsewhere.”

<sup>1004</sup> Charbonneau, “Quel avenir pour quelle ecologie?,” 114.

<sup>1005</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

idea to be put in parallel with one of the theses set out before in his critique of the ecological movement. It is not so much the planet as freedom and equality that social organization threatens.

For governments will increasingly find themselves compelled to act in order to manage dwindling resources and space. [...] It will be possible to ensure the preservation of the oxygen level needed for life only if another vital fluid is sacrificed, namely freedom.<sup>1006</sup>

Charbonneau for his part refuses to choose between chaos and system.<sup>1007</sup> The defense of nature that he means to promote is also that of equality within freedom, of the life-world against industrial totalitarianism, of what exists against utopia, of the *topos* against the abstract.

## Conclusions

Bernard Charbonneau most often presents himself as “one man among others.”<sup>1008</sup> He certainly was not the first to use the first person singular, but, unlike St. Augustine, if he too discloses his truth unadorned, he never confesses a personal God to better edify the faithful. Like his countryman Montaigne, his tone is often ironic or even caustic, but it is sterner, and above all, clearly more nostalgic. If he shares with him the existential “I,” he keeps a good distance from Descartes’s metaphysical *ego*. Unlike the author of the *Metaphysical Meditations*, Charbonneau could not maintain, “I am only a thing that thinks.” He even twists the famous “I think, therefore I am” into “I am only if I think,” or even, “You do not think, therefore you are not” for, as Charbonneau would say, if I just think about it, I discover that my thinking is not personal. At three centuries’ remove, he asked himself the same questions as Blaise Pascal—a careful reader of Montaigne—about time and space, but he has not made his own the wager of the author of the *Pensees*. As for Rousseau, he definitely prefers “Jean-Jacques,” but unlike him, does not wear his bleeding heart in a cast. If he anticipates Proust’s Swann, the author of *Confessions* has the twin faults of self-indulgently scratching his wound and of reserving democracy for a people of gods. Like Nietzsche, Charbonneau has a poetic prose style and a taste for aphorisms but does not share his understanding of man. He often shares Jean Giono’s lyricism, but he mocks the soothing character of his bucolic literature. In short, if one absolutely had to find him a predecessor, if not an inspirer, one might have to look to Kierkegaard. Does not the author of *Fear and Trembling* also reject the status of a philosopher? Is the Bearnese not, like the Dane, a kind of “dialectician-poet,” a lover of paradoxes, a mere “amateur writer” offering no system of thought? However, Kierkegaard’s name appears only very rarely under

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<sup>1006</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *The Green Light: A Self-Critique of the Ecological Movement* [1980] , trans. Christian Roy (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 84-85.

<sup>1007</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Le Systeme et le Chaos* [1973, subtitled *Critique du de'veloppement exponentiel*] (Paris: Economica, 1990).

<sup>1008</sup> Charbonneau, *The Green Light*, xxxv.

Charbonneau's pen, while he presents himself as neither a gambler nor a jumper (as in the knight of faith's famous leap). A way of saying that faith in God separates him from Pascal as much as from Kier-kegaard,<sup>1009</sup> even if some doubt remains.

We therefore need to continue to put into perspective the articles Charbonneau published in *Foi & Vie* with the whole of his work if we want to hazard a few hypotheses. After *Je fus*<sup>1010</sup> and *Une Seconde nature* (1981), reading his third and last opus about freedom<sup>1011</sup> allows us to rule out for good the thesis of an opportunistic Charbonneau who serves up to his readers the refrains familiar to them. His articles for *Foi & Vie* are aimed at a mostly Christian public whose culture, history, axiology, and expectations he knows but which he offers to regenerate and sublimate. The metaphysical problems tackled in his first articles in the Protestant review correspond to his lifetime of existential probing. His central intuition to the effect that the accelerated development of sciences and techniques threatens man's freedom as much as the balance of living beings must not make us forget the fact that his whole reasoning is inscribed within the framework of a society that he defines as "post-Christian." The concept owes nothing to improvisation, for it equally rejects the labels "pagan" and "Christian."<sup>1012</sup> It implies a genuine integration of Christianity, not as an ethos in daily life in all its demandingness, nor as an in-depth cultural appropriation of its values, its rites, and its rules, but as a living and unsurpassable legacy, as he warns that any attempt to go back to pantheism, by way of some kind of naturist fundamentalism, can only issue in new forms of barbarism.<sup>1013</sup>

Moreover, Charbonneau's entire work assumes a good knowledge of the Bible, since direct or indirect references to the Gospel in particular abound.<sup>1014</sup> When, on the question of freedom, Charbonneau chooses for himself four unimpeachable witnesses so as not to incur the charge of excessive subjectivism, it is after all within the Christian tradition that he situates himself. Breaking with a chronological exposition, he presents Rousseau before Montaigne. As a son of the Calvinist Rome who spent most of his life in Catholic lands, a faithful and unfaithful heir of the Gospel *intus et in cute*,

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<sup>1009</sup> On the affinities between Pascal and Kierkegaard, and in particular on their peculiar relationship to Christianity, see Andre Clair, "Pascal et Kierkegaard face a face." *Etudes philosophiques* 96.1 (2011): 3-18.

<sup>1010</sup> Written for the most part in the early 1950s, *Je fus: Essai sur la liberte* was privately printed in 1980 before it was finally published in Bordeaux by Opales in 2000.

<sup>1011</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Quatre temoins de la liberte: Rousseau, Montaigne, Berdiaev, Dostoievski* (Paris: R&N, 2019). Daniel Cerezuelle mentions in his foreword that this book was written "in the evening of his life."

<sup>1012</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>1013</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, "Christianisme, science et technique, sectes et ecologie." *Combat Nature* 110 (Aug. 1995), 47 (included under the new title "Raison scientifique et reaction sectaire" in Bernard Charbonneau, *Le totalitarisme industriel* [Paris: L'Echappee, 2019], 109-11).

<sup>1014</sup> Frederic Rognon, "Bernard Charbonneau et le christianisme." Paper given at the conference *Liberte, nature et politique a l'ere de l'Anthropocene: Actualite de la pensee de Bernard Charbonneau*, Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Bordeaux, November 21-22, 2019.

as Charbonneau likes to put it, this citizen of Geneva is sometimes regarded as the Antichrist. The realization of the social contract, as described by Rousseau, demands exceptional qualities that are out of reach of most mortals. Charbonneau prefers to him Montaigne, who always judges at a human level, and he identifies with Pascal identifying with Montaigne. "It is not in Montaigne but in me that I find all that I see in him."<sup>1015</sup> Do not their respective cases sum up the human condition? In the author of the *Essays*, Charbonneau likes this quest of the embodied individual, this unadorned presentation of a strongly individualized humanity, this invitation to be oneself by way of self-examination. He shares with him this vision of man as an unfinished and imperfect being, unable to reach the infinite that is the preserve of God. A God one reaches through communion, the recitation of the Our Father, and not through logical demonstration.

In the Russian personalist Berdyaev, Charbonneau likes that the priority granted to the subject does not deny the ties uniting it to the universe, to nature, to society, to God if he has faith, but makes them paradoxical. For Charbonneau, however, the individual always comes first, because there cannot be a God if there is not first someone to know him, whereas the author of *Slavery and Freedom* (1944) emphasizes the person, understood as a mainly axiological category and thus beyond the reach of most flesh-and-blood individuals. It is not for nothing that Charbonneau reminds Berdyaev in particular and Christians in general of the meaning of the parable of the Good Shepherd (Matt 18:12-13). If it may appear paradoxical for him to leave his watch over ninety-nine sheep to find the hundredth one that got lost, it is indeed because, unlike other religions, Christianity means to rely on freedom of the individual. The Son of Man has come to save what was lost.

It is especially when Charbonneau tackles Dostoevsky that we realize how much a good knowledge of the Bible is required for anyone who wishes to grasp the richness of his thought. In the same way, it is necessary to bear in mind Matthew 4:1-11 or Luke 4:1-13 when reading the parable of the Grand Inquisitor if one does not want to remain content with a superficial reading of this crucial passage of *The Brothers Karamazov*. Ivan, the atheist, imagines for his monk brother that Christ comes back down to earth in Seville at the time of the Inquisition and that he resurrects a child. He is then immediately arrested and jailed by the cardinal, who wants to demonstrate to him that he has no business on earth, for by bringing freedom to men, Jesus plunges them into turmoil and unhappiness. In the Gospel, when he is faced in turn by the three great temptations, Jesus answers Satan each time, whereas in Ivan's poem he remains silent, and the Grand Inquisitor does not even realize that he is soliloquizing. What fascinates Charbonneau in this moral tale is not so much how Dostoevsky's characters are constantly troubled by their inability to practice their Christian faith as it demands, but the expression of the strictly insoluble contradictions of the human condition. In

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<sup>1015</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Pense'es* (Lafuma edition, 689), cited in Charbonneau, *Quatre te'moins de la*

the final analysis, the crux of his entire oeuvre is the tension between man's duty to live his freedom to be a man and the impossibility of succeeding in this. It would have been enough for Jesus to yield to the three forces—wonders, mystery, and power—able to bind men for them to find the road to happiness, albeit of a satanic happiness. For Charbonneau, by purporting to love men more than himself, Jesus is asking too much of them by giving them a freedom that is beyond them. The Grand Inquisitor thinks that they must be commanded, reassured, and distracted, like the children that they are. The Christian Revelation gives the human species a challenge that is too much for it. The image that comes back many times under the pen of Dostoevsky's interpreter is that Jesus put the bar too high. The divine demand is above our strength. "Are we up to converting to the call of a God of freedom without being supported by faith in a God-man?"<sup>1016</sup> Charbonneau asks himself, as the unwelcome and inflexible witness of the painful comparison between a past where the God of Christians became man and a present where man makes himself a god. When Charbonneau ends up calling Dostoevsky a "Christian atheist," we may think of this as a self-portrait if we recall that, agnostic though he was, he nevertheless recited the Our Father every evening from his early youth to his last breath<sup>1017</sup>

*Translated by Christian Roy.*

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*liberte*, 65.

<sup>1016</sup> Charbonneau, *Quatre temoins de la liberte*, 139.

<sup>1017</sup> On this point see Sebastien Morillon-Briere, "Bernard Charbonneau-Jacques Ellul: correspondance de jeunesse (1933-1946)." *Foi & Vie* 1 (Mar. 2012): 55-62. Translator's note: A key to this seeming paradox may be provided by Charbonneau on the page facing his lengthy quotation of Montaigne's defense of the Our Father as the one needful prayer that could dispense with all others, suitable for every occasion of any given day, when he describes in the third person a clearly personal experience: "The spiritual foundation of a man and of his world is not invented, it reaches him from a deep origin that is beyond time; and if it is revealed to him, it is not through some earthly authority, but in the silence and the night of a solitary prayer" (*Quatre temoins de la liberte*, 71-72), like the one he is known to have made as a child in his room, promising this unknown ground of his being and of his need for freedom to address it as Our Father every remaining night of his long life.

# Book Reviews

## Review of Jacques Ellul: A Companion to His Major Works

David Lovekin

Van Vleet, Jacob E., and Jacob Marques Rollison. *Jacques Ellul: A Companion to His Major Works*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2020, 196 pp.

Jacques Ellul is an enigma, claiming to be a one-book author. What, then, to make of the some fifty other books and the thousand essays of biblical, sociological, and historical studies? One approach follows Ellul's claim that the modern age suffers from an anxiety over God's absence and that the technological society is the attempt to find meaning in this absence. Science and technology since 1750 extolled the virtues of reason, progress, and method, and religion and the humanities were challenged to mend their ways of superstition and ornament. Technology, or *la technique* in Ellul's sense, is a mentality that breaks with science in the twentieth century by trumping the virtues of efficiency over reason and method. The state and the system that technology has become is sustained by cacophonies of propaganda, illusion, and irrelevance. Technology then becomes the new sacred, an absolute in a supposedly secular and freedom-loving age. Irrationality, regression, and chaos have been the result. A reliance on natural resources has led to their depletion and decay, and the promise of political freedom has taken an abrupt turn, for example in the rise of a skewed nationalism, xenophobia, and resentment. The openness and creativity that prompted initial technological and scientific investigations is constrained and debilitated by procedures, cliches, and tweets. The rules of law and method have emptied into a dizzying relativity, into the ethos of what Ellul called *n'importe quoi*, or "whatever." A successful social milieu provides a center, a sense of place, a guide for meaningful action, ritual, and a feeling of community. Instead, in the technological society, anxiety, insecurity, and alienation abide.

Lovekin, David. Review of Jacques Ellul: A Companion to His Major Works, by Jacob E. Van Vleet and Jacob Marques Rollison. *Ellul Forum* 66 (Fall 2020): 115-119. © David Lovekin, CC BY-NC-ND. 115

Ellul's sociological and theological studies are mutually supportive and broadly based, although sociology and theology do not adequately describe Ellul's path. He is influenced notably but not exclusively by Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Reinhold Niebuhr, but also by Soren Kierkegaard, Max Weber, and Karl Marx. We should



remember his remark that introduces his extensive bibliography in *The Technological Society*: books are meant to be read and not consulted. Jacob E. Van Vleet and Jacob Marques Rollison in *Jaques Ellul: A Companion to His Major Works* have provided a valuable tool for a reading of Ellul's works. They examine the following: *Presence in the Modern World* ; *Violence: Reflections from a Christian Perspective* ; *The Meaning of the City* ; *Hope in Time of Abandonment* ; *Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation* ; *To Will and to Do* (and his ethics); *The Technological Society* ; *Propaganda: The Formation of Human Attitudes* ; *The Political Illusion* ; *Autopsy of Revolution* ; *The New Demons* ; and *The Humiliation of the Word*. Six theological works are balanced against six sociological studies, although *Humiliation* fits in both areas. Van Vleet and Rollison provide a companion for visiting some of Ellul's work. As Ellul often asks: "Is it so, or not?" In this spirit I will engage the *Companion* with page references to that work.

For Ellul, the Bible reveals God's word without actually being that word (38). The Bible provides a symbolic narrative of Christ's life and teaching with the understanding that Christ is at once a man and God's incarnation (42-43, 63). Thus the Bible is not a machine to be manipulated by the literal minded. Ellul's observations are often in metaphors, indeed, the language of the Bible. In the world but not of the world, the Christian is salt, a flavoring and a preservative, a light that illuminates the many illusions and idolatries of the world, and a lamb in the role of sacrifice among wolves to adopt the values of community and non-violence (11-12). The Christian refuses to be trapped in the various necessities of time, such as fatality and death, to live a life that is valuable in itself and not as a mere means to an end (15-23). The Bible is read as a unified whole that embraces the many contradictions and tensions that arise between humanity and God, humanity and humanity, and humanity and the city or place of dwelling. God allows the human to choose and offers possibilities like the city for that freedom to manifest, but the human rebels and establishes its own necessities [Book Reviews] ties such as technology, efficiency, money, and a politics that supports them.

God's offering of freedom and presence as Wholly Other is denied (40-44).

The city is born in violence, with Cain as its architect (38), and is sustained by it to become an absolute like technology, which, too, is a continuous, reciprocal ("eye for an eye") sameness proclaiming noble ends with a tiresome rationality where identities exclude differences (31-36). Once used, a means like poison gas becomes the standard, until other more efficient methodologies are established. Means become ends. Efficiency is the watchword and is the fetish that supports violence both physically and psychologically promulgating fear and hatred (29). In denial we may find affirmation; a denial of God or gods typically establishes false gods or the desire to become God itself. Desire and anxiety bed together. But like Christ who is God and not God but God's presence, and who felt God's abandonment on the cross, the human must find a place among others and before the Wholly Other while feeling abandoned. God's ways were and are mysterious but never without signs, symbols, and prospects for hope (47-49). This

hope is founded in the understanding that God is a God of love and that redemption is forever possible (67). Love is the real violence as an opposition to violence in the embrace of Otherness (36).

Hope (*esperance*) is not wishful thinking (54-56) but a perseverance against existential odds, aided by prayer, not as a “heavenly telephone” but as a “fearful engagement with the divine” (50). Ellul’s theology proceeds by faith and by careful textual readings set in historical contexts but not limited by them. His theology is not established by abstract theological arguments. He adopts Kierkegaard’s view, certainly a fearful thinker, that the eternal is revealed in time and that Christ’s messages are forever relevant, given the power to see and to hear them, embedded as they are in contradiction and irony and in the development of an expanded self (63-64). The Christian, in Ellul’s sense, has to be ready to transcend the ethical, social strictures, as Kierkegaard saw in the story of Abraham as a teleological suspension of the ethical. *A priori* rules may obscure the encounter with an embodied eternal. Ellul finds in the Apocalypse a renewed relevance for the four horses: the white horse is still God’s word, but the black horse as famine becomes the economic; the red horse, war, becomes the state and political power; and

**Ellul Forum** the pale horse remains death (62-65). “These are the powers revealed in the scroll of history that revitalize the Christian need to engage the whole symbolic structure of the Bible. Christ is the center, God’s embodiment, eternal and present, that brings the church through history beyond the recounting of facts, dates, events (58-63). The treatment of the Apocalypse in the *Companion* is a reminder of the complexity of Ellul’s work and its subject.

Ellul’s ethics was a work in progress. “Morality is made in a fallen world, the world of necessity,” the *Companion* states (75). And yet we must act. “The true good is the will of God” (82), we read, which leaves the human, again, in the presence of the Other. Nonetheless, the Holy Spirit, faith has it, is biblically revealed to a person who is a member of a community in a particular immediacy at a specific point in time fraught with contradictions (78-79). Therefore, the truth, which goes beyond the real, must be realistically situated. Ellul’s sociology here is needed.

Ellul’s sociology owes much to Weber and certainly a great deal to Marx. Marx’s understanding that history is made by tensions arising in an enslaved and alienated manufacturing economy is granted but is considered too narrow (46-47, 63-65, 126-36). Marx hoped that labor, properly owned and shared, would liberate. He did not see the humiliation of labor by the power of technology to produce an all-encompassing mentality enthralled by the necessity of efficiency and the mathematics-like abstractions in and for which the other, Otherness, is denied. Technology as a mentality makes choices automatically that expand geometrically to become the only form of judgment allowed (88-94). “What can be done will be done,” is the pronouncement of monism, one of the seven characteristics of the technical phenomenon exuded by technique as it turns concepts into objects. Only technology can be god-like (142-50). A god outside the process is banished. “Is this process, or method, or object efficient?” are the only

relevant questions. Efficiency, though absolute and god-like, can be defined only within the process or system of which it is a member and thus provide no real validation beyond feelings of alienation and ennui. The answer of no answer is: the next moment, which is endlessly streamed. The novelist can say their best work is their next novel, because it is their work in the struggle to enact standards that guide the process that is an other and an outside. The technician or the consumer can say only “whatever” and “what’s next,” like the twenty-four-hour evening news. “What is the best memo?” is a question that makes sense only outside the system of communication like an office that drives it. “What is the best product?” is answered by: what sells or doesn’t sell but provides a tax write-off.

Technique produces a necessary ephemeral as it turns objects and natural processes into technical phenomena that are images or image-like. Their ability to refer is cancelled, as noted above. Stories on the evening news are taken as forever new (note the continual flashing sign—Breaking News), why they can be repeated without boring an audience that expects nothing more than what flashes before it. For many, milk and cream come in cartons and cans; meat is found in supermarkets. Fast food restaurants initially understood this clearly by greeting customers with pictures of the food they are to eat; the picture becomes the food. Thus, the state is tied to the ephemeral that propaganda unifies to a level previously unknown (98-113). Revolution becomes impossible; a mentality that would accomplish it now enables it (126-36). As Weber argued, the political is what controls force, and the current force is technique (119). An appeal to force and violence reinforces the technical mentality.

The human word, Ellul reminds, is like God’s word that reaches and refers to a beyond of meaning, to a space where human freedom in the encounter with various objectivities can manifest. God, through Christ, becomes an Other to himself. For a number of readers, Ellul’s notion of Christianity as a viable response to technique is problematic. Weber noted that in the disenchanting modern world, church doors are always open. But all of Ellul’s readers might agree that without an Other, freedom falters and fails. I take this to be the basis of Ellul’s dialectic, which is central to Van Vleet’s and Rollison’s study, taking us back to Ellul and his texts and to our current places in a technical world with or without the Other.

## Review of Introduction a Jacques Ellul

David W. Gill

Chastenet, Patrick. *Introduction a Jacques Ellul*. Paris: Editions la De-couverte, 2019, 123 pp.

Since it was published in 1992, many of us have wished that Patrick Chastenet’s *Lire Ellul: Introduction a l’œuvre socio-politique de Jacques Ellul*<sup>1</sup> would be translated

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<sup>1</sup> Presses universitaires de Bordeaux.

and made available to English readers. It has never happened, but now twenty-seven years later we have an even better, updated, successor introduction from the world's leading expert on the thought of Jacques Ellul: *Introduction a Jacques Ellul*.

Patrick Chastenet was Jacques Ellul's assistant as a graduate student in the 1970s. Throughout his own years as a professor of political science (now at the University of Bordeaux, where Jacques Ellul spent his whole career), Chastenet has explored, critiqued, appropriated, and extended Ellul's perspectives. Chastenet's interviews of Ellul<sup>2</sup> remain the best, most comprehensive and insightful in the genre. Chastenet is the founding president, since 2000, of the Bordeaux-based Association internationale Jacques Ellul and is a founding board member, also in 2000, of the International Jacques Ellul Society. All of this is important background for a deep appreciation of the readiness of the author to deliver a rich, accurate, and helpful introduction to the complex and far-ranging thought of Jacques Ellul.

Chastenet begins with a chapter on Jacques Ellul's biography, dividing it into the formative years of 1912-45 and then the post-WWII period as a busy professor and writer, 1945-94. We are reminded of Ellul's debts to Kierkegaard, Marx, Barth, and the Bible, and of the formative influences of the Great Depression, Personalism, the rise of fascism, the Resistance, and the Reformed Church of France.

*Introduction a Jacques Ellul* is organized around five topics, each of which gets a chapter: technique, propaganda, politics, revolution, and ecology. What is Ellul's thought in each of those areas? In his chapter on technique, Chastenet clarifies the basic definitions and issues and their development through Ellul's three big books on the topic. In our age of media chaos and claims of fake news, the chapter on propaganda has renewed relevance. So too the chapters on politics and revolution (and political change) helpfully clarify Ellul's contribution. The final chapter on ecology did not have an antecedent parallel in Chastenet's 1992 introduction, so this is a welcome addition in our time of climate devastation.

Throughout the introduction, the core concept of technique weaves through the various topics. Chastenet also brings in Ellul's theological insights as a counterpoint to the sociology, just as Ellul planned—though one could argue for an even greater attention to this half of Ellul's life work, to get the full picture. Chastenet skillfully brings a robust list of classic and contemporary thinkers (including several from the years since Ellul's death) into the discussion to show their similarities and differences with Ellul.

*Introduction a Jacques Ellul* is a compact little volume of 123 pages, but don't let that fool you. The font size is small, and there is little space between lines. Furthermore, Chastenet does not waste words. Every paragraph, every line, is carefully crafted to enlighten us about Ellul's thinking. Even veteran Ellul readers and scholars will enjoy and profit from this book. Newcomers to Ellul will be helped immensely. And let's push to get this book translated into English and other languages as soon as possible!

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<sup>2</sup> Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology, and Christianity: Conversations with Patrick Chastenet

## About the Contributors

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**David W. Gill** is president of the International Jacques Ellul Association and retired from the faculty of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Massachusetts. He is the co-editor with David Lovekin of *Political Illusion and Reality: Engaging the Prophetic Insights of Jacques Ellul* (2018).

David Lovekin is emeritus professor of philosophy at Hastings College in Nebraska. He is the author of *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul* (1991), co-translator of *Ellul's Empire of Non-Sense: Art in the Technological Society* (2014), and co-editor with David Gill of *Political Illusion and Reality: Engaging the Prophetic Insights of Jacques Ellul* (2018).

Frederic Rognon is professor of philosophy at the University of Strasbourg, France, and publication director of the periodical *Foi & Vie*. He is the author of *Jacques Ellul: Unepensee en dialogue* (2007, 2d ed., 2013), *Generations Ellul: Soixante heritiers de la pensee de Jacques Ellul* (2012), and *Le defi de la non-puissance: L'e'cologie de Jacques Ellul et Bernard Charbonneau* (2020).

**Sue F. Wentworth** is an independent scholar living in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She holds a PhD in religion from Emory University and an MTS from Harvard Divinity School.

## About the International Jacques Ellul Society

The International Jacques Ellul Society, founded in 2000 by former students of Ellul, links scholars, students, and others who share an interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), longtime professor at the University of Bordeaux. Along with promoting new publications related to Ellul and producing the *Ellul Forum*, the Society sponsors a biennial conference. IJES is the anglophone sister society of the francophone Association internationale Jacques Ellul.

The objectives of IJES are threefold:

**Preserving a Heritage.** The Society seeks to preserve and disseminate Ellul's literary and intellectual heritage through republication, translation, and secondary writings.

**Extending a Critique.** Ellul is best known for his penetrating critique of *la technique*, of the character and impact of technology on our world. The Society seeks to extend his social critique particularly concerning technology.

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[1994] (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005).

Researching a Hope. Ellul was not only a social critic but also a theologian and activist in church and community. The Society seeks to extend his theological, biblical, and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

IJES is a nonprofit organization, fully reliant on membership fees and donations from supporters worldwide. For more information or to become a member, please visit [ellul.org](http://ellul.org).

**Issue #67 Spring 2021 –(Guest  
edited by Richard Stivers and J.M.  
van der Laan)**

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# The **Ellul Forum**

Number 67 Spring 2021



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[The] Ellul Forum

About

Jacques Ellul (1912-94) was a French thinker and writer in many fields: communication, ethics, law and political science, sociology, technology, and biblical and theological studies, among others. The aim of the *Ellul Forum* is to promote awareness and understanding of Ellul's life and work and to encourage a community of dialogue on these subjects. The *Forum* publishes content by and about Jacques Ellul and about themes relevant to his work, from historical, contemporary, or creative perspectives. Content is published in English and French.

Subscriptions

The *Forum* is published twice a year. Annual subscriptions are \$40 usd for individuals/ households and \$80 usd for institutions. Individual subscriptions include membership in the International Jacques Ellul Society, and individual subscribers receive regular communications from the Society, discounts on IJES conference fees, and other benefits. To subscribe, please visit [www.ellul.org](http://www.ellul.org).

Submissions

The *Forum* encourages submissions from scholars, students, and general readers. Submissions must demonstrate a degree of familiarity with Ellul's thought and must engage with it in a critical way. Submissions may be sent to [toellulforum@gmail.com](mailto:toellulforum@gmail.com).

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## Guest Editors' Letter

Richard Stivers and J.M. van der Laan

The theme of this issue is a Christian response to late-modern technology. The preeminence of technology in all its expressions today is not something that Christians should, but too often do, take for granted. The pervasive presence of digital technology alone calls for examination and evaluation, not least by Christians. In his prophetic work *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, Jacques Ellul argues that the Church needs to rethink its position on technology in terms of abandonment/hope. He asserts that we live in a time, not unprecedented, in which we have abandoned God, and, because we have done so, he us. We are left to our own devices, notably technology. Technology undeniably offers or promises to provide us human beings with remedies for all our problems, cures for all our diseases, and solutions to all our woes. While accepting real technological benefits, Christians must refuse to hope in a technological salvation. Christian hope, a hope trusting in God's abiding love and desire to be present in our lives, must fill the void of God's abandonment of the Church and the world.

We need to clarify our starting position, rather than work out a detailed ethic, Ellul stated. In consequence, the following essays do not prescribe any specific course of action. They explore how Christians have responded and are to respond to technology,

from various perspectives, sometimes as critique, sometimes as proposition. They vary in approach and theme, but they each address the question less in an academic than in an existential way; that is, they write with a view to how we properly live in and with technology. While they offer their own points of view, they also pose questions for readers to consider and weigh and find their own answers.

Rather than summarize the contents of each contribution, we describe them here only briefly so as to direct the reader to the authors' own words. In the first piece, Paul Stock discusses how manual labor on Catholic Worker farms asserts a separation from the all-encompassing realm of computer systems. Conscious decisions to employ appropriate technology, even to limit involvement with technology, promote health for the community and the land. What is more, the farms offer Christians models for living in hope. With the second essay, John Paul Russo addresses remote learning and the Zoom phenomenon as it emerged during the coronavirus pandemic. The virtuality of Zoom contrasts with the reality of face-to-face instruction; its disconnected connections allow only for absent presences. As he indicates, Zoom epitomizes the technological system, and as it parodies the Transcendent, it induces us to live without hope.

By comparing the work of Neil Postman with that of Ellul, Rick Clifton Moore yields insights about a uniquely Christian response to technology in his contribution. He inquires whether Christians consider the actual role of technology in our lives all that carefully, whether we can truly acknowledge the culturally corrosive effects of technology. Overwhelmed by technology, we too readily accept its confusion of means with ends. And as we fail to limit the overabundance of information produced by technology, we similarly fail to counteract false and misleading information.

Richard Stivers's article directs attention to the specifically spiritual problems technology creates for believers. With its manifold gifts and great appeal, it subtly fosters idolatry. Technology defines reality and asserts itself in place of God's truth and meaning. Above all, its power eliminates Christian freedom and threatens Christian hope.

Lastly, J.M. van der Laan calls for the Church to be in, but not of, the world, a world devoted to technology and to the false values and false meaning it offers. If the Church is to be a witness to that world, it cannot uncritically accept and adopt whatever technology becomes available, as it has so often done to date. Rather than follow the world, the Church must with Christian hope provide a light through the darkness of the technological system enfolding us.

While the essays in this issue do not necessarily offer explicit recommendations for Christians to adopt or enact, they challenge them to consider whether they have thought carefully and critically about living according to the parameters of technology. Each author recognizes the autonomy of modern technology, acknowledges our need to free ourselves from its domination and imperatives, and points to hope, a hope born only of faith in God's boundless love, a hope asking for God's presence in our lives, as the antidote to a misplaced and mistaken trust in technology.

# The Green Revolution Response to Modern Technology: The Catholic Worker Farms and Jacques Ellul

Paul V. Stock

In 1983, Katherine Temple, in her role as one of the editors of the *Catholic Worker* newspaper of the New York City Catholic Worker house of hospitality, wrote an editorial concerning her ambivalence at the recent acquisition of a home computer because the addressograph machine was made obsolete.<sup>3</sup> “Secretly, I have felt a bond with the Luddites who wanted to smash the new machines in the 18th century.”<sup>4</sup> Temple, who had interviewed and written about Ellul for her dissertation, imbued the *Catholic Worker* newspaper (and thus the movement as a whole) with an overt Ellulian critique of technique, continuing a consistent skepticism of technology that had begun with Peter Maurin in the 1930s and his brand of French personalism that emphasized dignity and direct action.<sup>5</sup> Temple’s ambivalence over (what many thought “small potatoes”) the computer offered a glimpse at the everyday tension of working with and against technology at the same time. As Ellul argues in *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, “If one refers hope to the possible, then the computer is the true figure of hope. [...] It possesses all the eventualities. In a given situation nothing escapes the computer.”<sup>6</sup> Temple gives us a concrete contradiction from which to wrestle with the role of modern technology in our lives. Further, she argued, “Just as money—dollars and cents—cannot be divorced from capitalism, so this home computer or that little video game cannot be divorced from our enslavement to technology.”<sup>7</sup> Like her assessments about the computer, agriculture in the twentieth century took on the mantra “There is no other way,” such that horsepower, manual labor, and smaller-scale growing seem not just quaint but backwards and immoral.

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<sup>3</sup> Parts of this essay are based on Paul V. Stock, *The Original Green Revolution: The Catholic Worker Farms and Environmental Morality* (Fort Collins, CO: Colorado State University, 2009) as well as observations during the 2013 National Catholic Worker Gathering (February 15-18) in Dubuque, Iowa, and visits and correspondence with New Hope CW Farm and St. Joseph’s Catholic Worker Farm in Kai-kohe, Aotearoa New Zealand.

<sup>4</sup> Katherine Temple, “Our Computer Dilemma.” *The Catholic Worker* (December 1983), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Temple herself drew a comparison between Maurin and Ellul (despite their many differences): “Each has turned against the tide to develop critical analyses that move us beyond ideologies and state power; each is rooted in a Christianity that pre-dates confidence in ‘life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness’; each has understood the Christian response as one of personalism, self-sacrifice, poverty, the daily works of mercy; each is a Christian intellectual in the true sense.” Katherine Temple, “Jacques Ellul: A Catholic Worker Vision of Culture.” *Ellul Forum* 7 (July 1991), 6.

<sup>6</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012), 196n.

<sup>7</sup> Temple, “Our Computer Dilemma,” 7.

Stock, Paul V. “The Green Revolution Response to Modern Technology: The Catholic Worker Farms and Jacques Ellul.” *Ellul Forum* 67 (Spring 2021): 7-17. © Paul V. Stock, CC BY-NC-ND.

The Catholic Worker movement, founded by journalist Dorothy Day and itinerant theologian Peter Maurin, emerged in the midst of the Great Depression to fill a vacuum between state-level responsiveness and individual charity. The early Worker ministered to striking seamen and those evicted, while documenting other social ills in the pages of the *Catholic Worker* newspaper. Within just a few years, the Catholic Worker expanded from a newspaper and sometime coffee and soup lines to providing housing and clothing. This Catholic-inspired movement often confounded both liberals and conservatives alike. While many observers may recognize the affinity between Ellul and the Catholic Worker movement’s personalism, critiques of capitalism, and faith-filled witness, readers of the *Ellul Forum* may not be as familiar with the long tradition of Catholic Worker farms that exhibit hope despite the fact that “We are living in a situation which we think has no way out and is hopeless.”<sup>8</sup> That hope comes in the form of a philosophy of work, consistent and ethical engagement with technology, and an emphasis on the dignity of persons through hospitality and communication.

My own journey to the Catholic Worker is through these farms. While writing about organic farmers in Illinois, I came across a mention (probably a footnote) about these Catholics concerned about the poor who also like to farm; maybe it was an offhand reference to Peter Maurin. I haven’t seen it since and can’t tell you where it was from. But it never let go, and I’m pretty sure I might be the only person to have learned about Dorothy Day because of the green revolution and not the reverse. But what is this green revolution? Isn’t the green revolution where we sent seeds, pesticides, artificial fertilizers, and irrigation materials, along with the credit-financing systems, to India, ostensibly to grow more food but which actually impoverished Indian farmers? Yes, and, in fact, it represents technique at its most insidious. And yet, Peter Maurin named his idea for a socio-theological revamp “the green revolution” to counter the Communist “red revolution” gripping the globe in the 1920s and 1930s (more on this below).

When I attended the 2013 National Catholic Workers Farm Gathering, people would ask, What farm are you from? None. Where do live? Lawrence, Kansas (where there is not a Catholic Worker farm). And then the confusion sets in. I’m a professor at the University of Kansas that studies the Catholic Worker and sustainable farmers internationally. When deciding to do my PhD but after volunteering and living in community in Selma, Alabama for a year, I tried to discern a project that combined my intellectual curiosity with my own faith journey.<sup>9</sup> In the Catholic Worker farms, I found not only an important intellectual topic but one that offers daily challenges to my own wrestling with technology and faith.

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<sup>8</sup> Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 192.

<sup>9</sup> Stock, *The Original Green Revolution*.

## The Catholic Worker's Green Revolution

Chris Montesano, one of the co-founders of the Sheep Ranch Catholic Worker Farm in the 1970s, described the day he went to begin building his home, with a hammer in one hand and a book in the other. At that very moment and without Chris having any knowledge of how to build a house, a man stopped his pickup in the road and asked, “What are you building?”

”A house.”

”Mind if I help? I’ve been looking for a project, and I’m a builder.”<sup>10</sup>

The serendipitous meeting changed both men’s lives. These journeys in the green revolution involve such serendipity—or maybe the work of angels.

When Dorothy Day met Peter Maurin, observers would have been hard-pressed to anticipate that a movement that would last for at least eighty-seven years was about to begin. And those that purported to know Dorothy would also be hard-pressed to predict that rural communes or farms would become a major proposed solution to the social ills of capitalism. Dorothy was a journalist by training and a burgeoning activist as well as a recent convert to Catholicism in 1933. Peter, born a peasant in France, flirted with theological and philosophical circles in Paris before emigrating to Canada and then floating through the US before settling in New York City. Within three years of meeting one another, the Catholic Worker published an eponymous newspaper, ran houses of hospitality in multiple cities, and began searching for a farm. These three points of the green revolution (again, as opposed to a red one)—of clarification of thought (newspapers, public lectures, teach-ins, conversation, prayer), hospitality (coffee, soup, vegetables, donated food, vegan lifestyles), and communes or farms (for food provisioning, restoration, retreat)—compose over eighty-seven years of Catholic Worker tradition that exhibit a long history of ambivalence and contradiction regarding technology.<sup>11</sup>

The *Catholic Worker* newspaper printed out of the New York house could be considered, like the *New York Times*, the paper of record. While not officially the mouthpiece of all the houses, farms, and those involved, it is often an expression of both the tradition and the contemporary challenges of those involved in the Catholic Worker movement. To that end the *Catholic Worker* publishes the movement’s Aims and Means every May, celebrating the May 1 anniversary of the publication of the first issue. The 2020 issue declares as one of the movement’s means:

A “green revolution,” so that it is possible to rediscover the proper meaning of our labor and our true bonds with the land; a distributist communitarianism, self-sufficient through farming, crafting and appropriate technology; a radically new society, where

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<sup>10</sup> Chris Montesano, “Panel Discussion of Catholic Worker Farms.” National Catholic Workers Farm Gathering, Dubuque, Iowa, February 15-18, 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Paul V. Stock, “The Perennial Nature of the Catholic Worker Farms: A Reconsideration of Failure.” *Rural Sociology* 79.2 (2014): 143-73. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ruso.12029>.

people will rely on the fruits of their own toil and labor; associations of mutuality, and a sense of fairness to resolve conflicts.<sup>12</sup>

Thus Catholic Workers are explicit about their stance toward technology, emphasizing the writings of Ellul but also those of Ivan Illich, Paul Goodman, Helen and Scott Nearing, and Peter Kropotkin, among others, whose words were quoted throughout the newspaper but also in the newsletters, zines, pamphlets, and speeches of Catholic Workers since the 1930s.

Peter Maurin, for his part, while never leaving the kind of written corpus that we often associate with significant thinkers, favored conversation and interpersonal interaction to impart an emphasis on work and labor that drew from medieval guilds and peasant-village models of societal organization. Catholic Worker-aligned priest Fr. Clarence Duffy interpreted Peter's vision thus:

The object of the project is to build up healthy human beings on healthy soil and with healthy food and to make as many of them as possible, free men and free women who can live as God intended them, and as they desire to live in a world of peace and reasonable abundance on their way to eternity.<sup>13</sup>

From the inception of what we might call the first Catholic Worker farm in 1936 in Easton, Pennsylvania, farms have played a significant, if not large, part of the movement. By 1940, there were upwards of twelve farms. The US entrance into World War II and the pacifist stance taken by Dorothy Day (and many Catholic Workers) created a rift and diminishment of the movement. The split between conscientious objectors and peace activists versus pragmatists and anti-fascists cleaved the movement for decades. It took the emergence of the anti-war left and the back-to-the-landers of the 1960s to fully restore the Catholic Worker to its previous popularity.

Multiple farms established soon after the movement's founding, though, offered good examples of what the farms could look like within the movement. Two farms named St. Benedict emerged early in the farm experiments, one in Michigan by the Murphy family, and the other in Upton, Massachusetts. At Upton, the farm merged three families, with some remaining on the land through the 1990s. The Gauchat couple led a push to establish a farm outside Cleveland that today, while not a Catholic Worker farm, still serves those differently abled. Other efforts sprouted and wilted over the decades, sharing consistent goals of limiting technological involvement, local interest as paramount, and with different goals related to hospitality and husbandry.<sup>14</sup>

Prominent peace activists who moved to rural Catholic Worker houses offer an example of the dynamism of the green revolution. Brian Terrell and Betsy Keenan moved to Maloy, Iowa, with an emphasis on local food production and rural advocacy as well as engaged peace work against nuclear weapons and other injustices. Their newsletter, *The Sower*, often details Chris's latest imprisonment for one of these actions.

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<sup>12</sup> "Aims and Means," *The Catholic Worker* (May 2020), 3.

<sup>13</sup> Fr. Clarence Duffy, "Food, Farming, and Freedom." *The Catholic Worker* (October 1952), 3.

<sup>14</sup> For a take on the perennial-ness of the farms see Stock, "The Perennial Nature of the Catholic Worker Farms."

Tom Cornell, famous for his involvement in burning draft documents during the anti-Vietnam movement, and his family moved to the most recent iteration of a Catholic Worker farm affiliated with the New York City house of hospitality in 1979. At Peter Maurin Farm, Tom and his wife Monica and son Tommy, Jr. host those in need of hospitality while also actively farming the land.

Early on in the Easton Catholic Worker Farm, three men tried to plant peas. One held a book, another a ruler, and the third a bag of seeds. John Filligar approached with a sense of disbelief and asked, “What are you doing?”

”Planting seeds. The book says they are supposed to be an inch apart.”

Filligar grabbed the seeds from the young men and proceeded to finish the planting.<sup>15</sup>

This anecdote speaks to the divide between the scholar and the worker that Maurin so loathed when it comes to the land. In my scholarship of the Catholic Worker, I might as well have been one of the early Catholic Workers trying to farm out of a book just as Chris Montesano tried to build a house—a little out of my depth. Here I sit in my university/home office without an ounce of agrarian experience, and yet, as many have identified, the land, the rural, and the people connected to both are a vital fount for community, as well as socio-ecological health and well-being. As a pair of geographers writing under the pen name J.K. Gibson-Graham argue,

Our interest in building new worlds involves making credible those diverse practices that satisfy needs, regulate consumption, generate surplus, and maintain and expand the commons, so that community economies in which interdependence between people and environments is ethically negotiated can be recognized now and constructed in the future.<sup>16</sup>

For Gibson-Graham, the Catholic Worker farms would be an example of diverse economies, both persisting within and also resisting consumerism and capitalism.

But they are also trying to farm. And farm well. As Sirach 7:15 says, “Hate not laborious tasks, nor farming, which was ordained by the Most High.” Just as each Worker has their own journey of discernment, serendipity, community, conflict, and resignation, so too do the movement’s farms as a whole. As the editors wrote under a banner labelled “The Land—There is no unemployment on the Land”:

We have never held that life on the land is a Utopia. Our fellow workers on the farm are confronted by endless work, lack of tools, seed, lack of variety and stimulus in their daily work. They are indeed leading a hard life and a poor life. But they are trying to rebuild within the shell of the old, a new society, wherein the dignity and freedom and responsibility of man is emphasized. And there is no place better to do it than on the land.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Peggy Scherer, “John the Farmer.” *The Catholic Worker* (June-July 1982), 3.

<sup>16</sup> J.K. Gibson-Graham, “Diverse Economies: Performative Practices for Other Worlds.” *Progress in Human Geography* 32.5 (2008), 623. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132508090821>.

<sup>17</sup> “Farming Commune.” *The Catholic Worker* (October 1939), 8.



## The Re-Emergence of the Catholic Worker Farm in the Driftless Region

Not only do the farms continue to exist, they may just be fulfilling McKanan's assessment that, "Though the Catholic Worker has in recent decades been more associated with issues of war and homelessness, the decentralized economics of Peter Maurin's green revolution provide one of the most promising solutions to global warming."<sup>18</sup> The farms are also growing in number and stability. The growth in numbers of new communities and the increasing number of Catholic Worker farmers led to a new annual gathering of the farms that—while they discuss typical Catholic Worker conversations such as Peter's historical role in the movement, women in the Church, Dorothy Day and sainthood, and the decay of civilization, among others—also discuss the politics of seed catalogs and manure. Talk about shitty theology. One of the more promising areas of growth is the emergence of multiple Catholic Worker farms in the Driftless bioregion in the upper Midwest of the United States. The Catholic Workers of New Hope (Dubuque, Iowa), Lake City, Minnesota, Anathoth (Luck, Wisconsin), and St. Isidore (Cuba City, Wisconsin) farms embody a new energy for the collective greening of the movement.<sup>19</sup> While they all maintain significant food-growing efforts, they also minister to the poor and work for Indigenous and environmental justice. The Greenhorns, themselves an activist organization that celebrates growing food as part of a peaceful future, documents some of the Catholic Worker efforts in a video with an emphasis on intergenerational sharing.<sup>20</sup>

As Eric Anglada describes it in volume 3 of *The Isidorian*, the handmade zine published by the Workers on the farm, "The uneven landscape of the Driftless [bioregion] contains myriad springs, sinkholes, massive Oaks, and bluffs containing spectacular views of the Great River."<sup>21</sup> Anglada describes his life as a home-comer, following E.F. Schumacher, in the following terms:

Much of the work with which I engage is the quotidian work of supporting the home: splitting firewood with an ax, gardening with hand-tools, tending chickens and cows, hanging laundry, cooking over wood, and cleaning the almost endless mountain of dishes a kitchen full of home-grown ingredients inevitably produces. These satisfying labors are the ways I can join my body with my ethics.<sup>22</sup>

That ethical work includes these skill-based jobs as well as community engagement through a new Community Supported Agriculture scheme and hospitality. In addition

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<sup>18</sup> Dan McKanan, *The Catholic Worker after Dorothy: Practicing the Works of Mercy in a New Generation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 221.

<sup>19</sup> Paul V. Stock and Lukas Szrot, "Justice." In *Routledge Handbook of Sustainable and Regenerative Food Systems*, ed. Jessica Duncan, Michael Carolan, and Johannes S.C. Wiserke, 98-112 (New York: Routledge, 2021), 106.

<sup>20</sup> Available at <https://vimeo.com/204248108>.

<sup>21</sup> Eric Anglada, "Homecoming." *The Isidorian* 3 (2019), 13.

<sup>22</sup> Eric Anglada, "Homecoming," 14.

to farm work split between the two families and rotating cast of interns and temporary residents, St. Isidore Catholic Worker farm prioritizes peacemaking work in conjunction with other Workers and a local Catholic university, cooperation with a local group of Catholic sisters, anti-racist and decolonizing work with local tribes and guests, and peace and non-violent resistance. Brenna Anglada, specifically, took part in an action called the Four Necessity Valve Turners, in which they entered the property of a pipeline shut-off valve to protest the company's and government's infringement on tribal, sacred lands as well as to bring to light the urgency of climate change.<sup>23</sup> In mid-2020, felony charges were dropped. As Anglada describes the Driftless Region and their work there, "People here, more than anywhere else I've ever lived, are extracting themselves bit by bit from the extractive economy."<sup>24</sup>

## Conclusions

If we return to Temple's dilemma with the computer, she asked, "Is it possible to propagate the dignity of manual labor if the only means available is a computer?"<sup>25</sup> She offered, "We are constantly caught between pure means and necessities, and it is hard to know where the point of assimilation comes. As Peter also said, 'At least it arouses the conscience.'"<sup>26</sup> And so do these Catholic Workers that continue to build the green revolution with hopes of arousing consciences as witnesses for us to see and be challenged by. Through their lives they prove that the trappings of computers, technique, and capitalism are fictions unnecessary to live a fulfilling, loving life, whether Christian or not. As Jeff Dietrich wrote in the *Ellul Forum*, "As Christian realists, we must be engaged with a sinful world, but aware that it is not possible to do anything about it."<sup>27</sup>

The focus on community, reconciliation, and love, inspired by Christ and the saints, offers Catholic Worker farms daily opportunities to engage in love without much hope of change. And yet that is the hope. Tom Cornell, Jr., during a talk at the 2013 National Gathering, reflected on the culture of the house that recognizes the tension between visions of grandeur about reshaping the system and the reality of the little way of potatoes, onions, and carrots. Either way, we are called to do the work well. In the wider community, the presence of the Worker farms is a witness—witness not only in solidarity with the poor, but to those ignorant of living otherwise than they do.<sup>28</sup>

The Catholic Workers, especially the farmers, are an example of living incognito, where "[the incognito] is a matter of remaining the firm and constant bearer of a

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<sup>23</sup> Brenna Anglada, "Pipeline Resistance: Four Necessity Valve Turners." *The Isidorian* 3 (2019): 6.

<sup>24</sup> Eric Anglada, "Homecoming," 14.

<sup>25</sup> Temple, "Our Computer Dilemma," 7.

<sup>26</sup> Temple, "Our Computer Dilemma," 7.

<sup>27</sup> Jeff Dietrich, "Jacques Ellul and the Catholic Worker of the Next Century— Therefore Choose Life." *Ellul Forum* 7 ( July 1991), 6.

<sup>28</sup> Stock and Szrot, "Justice," 106.

truth which is no longer uttered.”<sup>29</sup> By doing so, they actively help to keep open a crack of hope and possibility.<sup>30</sup> Through their faith-informed stance toward and with technology, the movement aims to fulfill the relationship to technology along Ellulian lines where “to give to things, to nature and to technology, a specific value, considered in relation to God and not in relation to man, is to treat them with respect, and caution.”<sup>31</sup> The difficult and often contradictory stance of being in the world but actively hoping for another continues to confound observers. As one anarchist author commented about the Catholic Worker as a whole, “If it did not exist I would have thought it impossible.”<sup>32</sup>

But it does exist. So do the farmers at St. Isidore Catholic Worker farm in Cuba City, Wisconsin. And so do the other farms in the Driftless Region. And so do the other farms and houses of hospitality of the Catholic Worker. And so do people like myself and the readers and contributors to the *Ellul Forum*. The Catholic Worker farms offer witness to ways of living with and in spite of technology that show us ways to live in the world that foster hope, dignity, and love.

## Nothing Sacred: The Virtual Classroom in the Age of Zoom

John Paul Russo

In “Locksley Hall” (1840), Alfred, Lord Tennyson heralded the future of Victorian society in the rhetoric of the technological sublime: “Not in vain the distance beacons. Forward, forward let us range. / Let the great world spin for ever down the ringing grooves of change.”<sup>33</sup> Tennyson would do the same for evolution, for he was quintessentially a poet in tune with his age. Yet evolution had its dark side, an overwhelming determinism, in which both individual and type were swallowed up by the oceans of time. With industrialism, people had their hands on the levers, or so it may have seemed in 1840 when the ringing grooves of rail tracks and the sound of train whistles were becoming the epitome of the nineteenth-century Western economy. However, toward the end of his career, reacting to the continued, grinding poverty in the cities and the enormous disillusionment with Victorian optimism, he recanted in “Locksley Hall Tis Sixty Years After.” Its message was: “Let us hush this cry of ‘Forward.’”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 293.

<sup>30</sup> Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 249.

<sup>31</sup> Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 237.

<sup>32</sup> David DeLeon, *The American as Anarchist* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 65.

<sup>33</sup> Alfred, Lord Tennyson, “Locksley Hall” [1840], in *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks (New York: Norton, 1972), 699.

<sup>34</sup> Tennyson, “Locksley Hall,” 1362.

With the mass application of technology to the classroom in 2020, I am one to urge, “Let us hush this cry of ‘Forward.’” It was inevitable that when nature wreaked havoc by the first major pandemic in a century, people would fight back with their greatest technological weapons, on the medical front, in consumer rearrangements, in pedagogical innovation. One should not let slip this opportunity to assess the impact and quality of the online classroom, at least an aspect of it: the videoconferencing platform Zoom. No feature of academic life under the pandemic is more iconic than Zoom, either for classes, one-on-one tutorials and advising, or administrative meetings. Even after vaccines become available, the stimulus that has been given to online learning will have long-term effects.

Among the recent arrivals in social media, Zoom was founded in 2011, launched in 2013, and had ten million daily meeting participants by the end of December 2019. The number rose to two hundred million a day in the first three months of 2020; to three hundred million a day by April 30. The second quarter of 2020 saw \$663.5 million in revenue, a jump of \$517.7 million from the previous year; the stock rose sixfold in the period from January to November. At that time, with the announcement of a vaccine, Zoom shares declined.<sup>35</sup>

Russo, John Paul. “Nothing Sacred: The Virtual Classroom in the Age of Zoom.” *Ellul Forum* 67 (Spring 2021): 19-27. © John Paul Russo, CC BY-NC-ND.

It is early evening, 6:00 p.m.; our seminar is about to open. Admittedly, the in-between hour is not propitious. Normally we have supper in the first twenty minutes of class and the discussion picks up from there. Now, instead of welcoming the students in person, I observe their faces, each framed in a square, as they appear at random on screen over a period of five minutes. These squares constantly reassemble themselves as students enter and fill a square, changing the make-up of the screen like figures on a game board (I am reminded of the television game show *Hollywood Squares*). It lends an edgy if not frenetic quality to what had otherwise been a pleasant face-to-face gathering. Some say hello, others wave, most just sit and stare at the screen, which partly means looking at themselves in a mirror, as they wait for the class to begin.

They arrive from as many as half a dozen time zones, from East Asia, Europe, and the Caribbean; from Florida, California, and Chicago. Their settings differ widely; unequal access remains a problem. Some students sign in from home, where family members may cross behind them; some show up in a mask, since they had gone outside to leave the room free for a roommate to study. Others seem distracted, looking at their screen and checking their cellphone, picking up a coffee, petting the dog in their lap, or muting themselves, closing the screen, and leaving the room. You see on their faces that they tune in and out more easily without the live presence of a classroom. The quality of sound and connectivity varies from square to square; the images are from sharp to blurred, well to poorly lit. All this is a far cry from a class of students in the same room around a large oval table.

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<sup>35</sup> See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zoom\\_Video\\_Communications](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zoom_Video_Communications).

Once their number is near complete, I address them as a group with the aim of bringing a degree of unified attention. So much of the seminar's success depends on how well one overcomes the centrifugal forces of distance, disconnections, glitches, and burnout. Meanwhile, someone has asked a question about a deadline: I try to find the person; the voice is coming from a central speaker, not from her square, and, as sound and image are disassociated by the medium, I find her by the lime-green neon border lighted around her square. All this searching takes long enough to upset the natural process of communication, and after two or three such searches, I am losing the collective attention of the class even before it has been solidly established. All through the seminar, moments like this one occur—what one commentator calls the “halting conversations in Zoom.” The time required to locate and identify the speaker disrupts normal conversation. Moreover, Zoom is non-dialectical; it is rare for any kind of class discussion to take off over an extended period, on account of the difficulty of “breaking in” because there is no “talking over” someone. One's ability to mute and unmute oneself only increases this power of eloinment. Zoom disallows or at least reduces the possibility of the kind of discussion that the give-and-take of a seminar requires. Besides, even where one can see the student's face online, eye-to-eye contact is not possible. The squares make the eye too small and blurred for eye contact; something in the medium resists the eye's reflected glint in communication; and Shakespeare's “most pure spirit of sense”<sup>36</sup> eludes capture.

In some classes, I am told, students show up for attendance in the first five minutes, then turn off their video and mute themselves; their name remaining on the square marks their attendance. Are they still present? Perhaps they have just crawled out of bed and want to participate without being on screen. If one suspects the student is absent, the only way to know is by calling the name and asking a question. Anecdotally, a history instructor at a community college said that often he calls in vain. (To counter such absenteeism, some instructors refuse to record the class; that, however, punishes the good students.) One solution was to let students decide at the outset whether to choose to attend online or in-person. The vast majority of his twenty students chose in-person. Within weeks, the numbers dwindled, as students slipped away on the path of least resistance to online learning. Only two students on the face-to-face track remained at term's end. Yet at the beginning of the following term, the majority again chose the in-person option.

The seminar winds up just after 8:00 p.m. Instead of being energized, most of us are unduly fatigued. Some of this discomfort is surely owed to the daily trial of the pandemic. Yet the stress of the technological apparatus has also taken its toll, wrenching us to adjust to its technological rhythms as opposed to our own human rhythms—greeting, private conversation, aside, counter-argument. Worst of all, some class time is wasted on managing the system itself. Though this is likely to go down with time, for now what was supposed to be a means of overcoming difficulties and making matters

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<sup>36</sup> Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida* III.3.112.

easier has become an implacable kraken that provokes anxiety, frustration, and less than ideal conditions for learning. In a way, this is nothing new. Academic institutions adopt new platforms on a monthly basis, and faculty complain all too frequently of getting locked out, frozen, and on a help line. In the past, when a class broke up, students left in small groups, some to continue the conversation by themselves, others to attend a club meeting or a sporting event. Now people mostly remain where they are: home alone, sitting outside at a cafe with wi-fi, in a dorm room. All I observe is their disappearance, one square at a time. Like phantoms in some modern underworld, they flicker for a time on the screen and then vanish.

In *The Technological Society* Ellul examines the five major characteristics of the technological system.<sup>37</sup> In my tally, Zoom exhibits each of them. *Efficiency*, the “supreme imperative and prime characteristic of technique,” allowed it to seize the field and subdue its competitors. Relative ease of installation and operation was the “one best means” or “least effort” available, and so Zoom imposed itself with lightning speed. Its visuality is completely in keeping with technological principles: “technique requires visually oriented people. And people living in a technical milieu require that everything be visualized.”<sup>38</sup> Second, through its power of *Self-Augmentation* it scaled up quickly and made ever-improved models of itself; its progression was geometric, not arithmetic. A week does not pass but I notice I am approving updated versions of Zoom, as if there were a choice. During the lockdown, when everything else was held back, it seemed as if nothing could stop its growth. Third, *Monism* means that it works the same everywhere, applies everywhere; Zoom connects with computer programs, wi-fi, locations anywhere on the globe. It can be on a large screen in a lecture hall or shrink to the size of a cellphone. One can take exams on Zoom, with its vigilant camera to guard against cheating. Monism entails linkage: “each technological element is adapted to the technological system, and it is in respect to this system that the element has its true functionality, far more so than in respect to a human need or a social order.”<sup>39</sup> Techniques of the classroom (screen sharing, grading) combine with techniques of administration, and advertising. Fourth, the technique of Zoom implies *Universalism*: it grows on all sides, across the planet, and everyone wants it and more and more of it: “as people attain a certain technological level, the same needs appear—spontaneously, it seems—beyond any distinctions of nation or social category”; “social class is no longer

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<sup>37</sup> See John Paul Russo, *The Future Without a Past: The Humanities in a Technological Society* (Missoula: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 27-28.

<sup>38</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 151. For “least effort,” see Russo, *Future Without a Past*, 252. Ellul employs the French *technique* rather than *technologie* to emphasize his focus on the system as a whole as opposed to this or that specific technology; *la technique* is the entire organized and interdependent ensemble dictating the tech-nicization of everyday life. His translators have followed suit.

<sup>39</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Continuum, 1980), 126. “Technique never observes the distinction between moral and immoral use. It tends, on the contrary, to create a completely independent technical morality.” Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Knopf, 1964), 97.

the explicative factor of cultural behavior.”<sup>40</sup> Fifth, Zoom exhibits *Autonomy* because it acts as a law unto itself, “depends only upon itself” and “maps its own route.”<sup>41</sup> Did we have much of a choice in March 2020? We had only time to pay the bills. “The system continues to develop”; “the person [...] lives as though there is nothing he can do about it, as though he has no hope of arriving at the centers of decision.” The sense of loss of control can be overwhelming: “[the person’s] future is more precisely inscribed in the structures than it is in the stars.”<sup>42</sup> This is by far the most serious consequence of the technological system: “the individual is reduced to the level of a catalyst.”<sup>43</sup>

Corporate names are not lightly chosen; leaf through the online brochure of the successful Brand Institute, founded in 1993. There are always attempts to render technology friendlier or less imposing than it really is. Zoom is a popular comic book character, a comic film (2006), a comic signifier, but also a supersonic speed (mach 6 to mach 8). There are Zoom “chat rooms,” for what could be less serious than “chat,” a form of chatter, which also demeans its subject matter; or the “breakout” room, which sounds like kindergarten, but also the “prison” of the very program one uses. Ellul calls attention to infantilizing adjectives in advertising, which he calls putting flowers on an automobile engine.<sup>44</sup>

The word *zoom* was no freak accident; it enshrines speed, efficiency, novelty. As a definition, “to move quickly closer to an object” does not quite do the job, because the speed might be of a breakneck order, and its power threatens violence. Zooming is controlled or focused energy, such as the zoom camera (invented in 1936), which can suddenly and unnaturally collapse the distance between the viewer and the object. It has the quality of being an invented, contextless word for the new, ahistorical, technological society; it first appeared as an echoic coinage in the late nineteenth century, which, as Wolfgang Schivelbusch writes in *The Railway Journey*, was an age highly conscious of speed and schedules.<sup>45</sup> Like *Kodak*, with the crisp, clicking sound of a snapshot (invented by George Eastman to be without a history, in an anagram game); or like *Google*, with its goofy playfulness (it was suggested by the founder’s nine-year-old daughter), *zoom* is short, memorable, and onomatopoeic. The double *oo* sound in English is a sign of eeriness or weirdness (like goofy *Google*): an owl *hooting* at night (“deep” -*oo* sounds) beneath the *moon*; also, *zoom* rhymes with danger words such as *gloom*, *loom*, *boom*, *doom*, *tomb*, and the near-rhyme *bomb*. As a floating signifier, the Zoom label contains its own propaganda.

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<sup>40</sup> Ellul, *The Technological System*, 171. “The technical phenomenon shapes the total way of life.”

<sup>41</sup> Ellul, *The Technological System*, 125.

<sup>42</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, trans. C. Edward Hopkin (New York: Seabury, 1972), 7.

<sup>43</sup> Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 92-93, 135. “Inside the technical circle, the choice among methods, mechanism, organizations, and formulas is carried out automatically” (82).

<sup>44</sup> Ellul, *The Technological System*, 47.

<sup>45</sup> See Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 29, 42-43.

Richard Wilbur employs the *-oom* sound ten times in the forty-four lines of his meditative landscape poem “In a Churchyard,” which revisits Thomas Gray’s “Elegy in a Country Churchyard.” In Wilbur, *-oom* conveys a church bell’s tolling, the moment of summons from one state of being to another:

As when a ferry for the shore of death Glides looming toward the dock, Her engines cut, her spirits bating breath As the ranked pilings narrow toward the shock<sup>46</sup>

In the myths, crossing a wide body of water, one disembarks on the isle of the dead. “Bating breath” means “holding one’s breath,” as in a state of extreme angst, the prelude to the final exhalation. The “shock” symbolizes the soul’s arrival, and also the moment when “the darker dead” like Wilbur’s narrator and readers intimate as much as they can of the unknowability of death from an existential standpoint. The final letter of the alphabet, the *z* in *zoom* emphasizes an inherent property of the word, energy directed toward an endgame, towards finality or ultimacy, i.e., death. All of which brings us to the brink of the religious dimension of the technological system and one of its astonishing avatars named Zoom.

In an age abandoned by God, interpreted by Ellul to mean an age that has abandoned God, substitutes and secret sharers for the sacred power lie near at hand. Tocqueville first identified substitutes in universalizing political ideologies during the French Revolution.<sup>47</sup> Ellul points to the technological system that is grinding the world together and treating ideologies like so much fodder.<sup>48</sup> For all its materiality and amorality, the system mimics qualities of the Transcendent, to borrow the language of Rudolf Otto, qualities of overpoweringness, omnipresence, and *mysterium tremendum*. Otto explored the ineffability of transcendence whose ambient numinousness enables one to grasp by other means what cannot otherwise be conceptualized rationally. The ambiguity of the Transcendent invests the technological system; it engenders both the sublime, lovingkindness, and self-empowerment, but also “numinous horror” and “a personal nothingness and abasement before the awe-inspiring object” or “Wholly Other.”<sup>49</sup> Like the divine, it penetrates everywhere, holding the power of life and death over us. It extends life expectancy, as with its “miracle” drugs; yet it pollutes the air we breathe and the food we eat, cutting down on life expectancy, not to mention its instruments of mass destruction. The technological system excites fascination and terror by its products, like the Transcendent which can create presence in absence, for ex-

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<sup>46</sup> Richard Wilbur, “In a Churchyard,” in *New and Collected Poems* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), 127. The poem was first published in *Walking to Sleep* (1969).

<sup>47</sup> See Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Ancien Regime and the Revolution*, trans. Gerald Bevan (London: Penguin, 2008), 21-25, 150-59 (I.2; III.3).

<sup>48</sup> The Jansenist theme in Ellul recalls the Port-Royal era and Pascal. Cf. Lucien Goldmann, *The Hidden God: A Study of Tragic Vision in the Pensees of Pascal and the Tragedies of Racine* (New York: Humanities Press, 1964).

<sup>49</sup> Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1923), 13, 18-19.



ample, in dangerous places such as deserts and high mountains; and the Transcendent “has wild and demonic forms and can sink to an almost grisly horror and shuddering,” as in acts of violence and in technologically up-to-date horror films with robots and fierce animals such as lions and crocodiles (Leviathan), dinosaurs and dragons: “‘the monstrous’ is just the ‘mysterious’ in gross form.”<sup>50</sup> The numinous can be immanent through parody and allusion, as in the giant Sphinx at the Luxor Resort in Las Vegas or the golden Lion at the old MGM Grand, whose mouth is the main portal that “consumes” its consumers. Would not Zoom make a good name for a casino? Think of what advertisers could do with it.

In all these ways, Zoom epitomizes the technological system and parodies the Transcendent. Ellul mentions YHWH’s “empty, arbitrary sound, having no reference to any meaning (there is no acceptable etymology for YHWH).”<sup>51</sup> The same can be said of the word *zoom*, though it points to the stars.

A college student sits alone awaiting an online class, imagining what will happen. An hour of a teacher talking and an occasional question thrown out, almost mechanically, for discussion? The real danger of the virtual Zoom classroom is that it makes online learning more possible, more plausible, and more “cost effective.” Face-to-machine contact again replaces face-to-face contact. The diminished interplay of the teacher and class in open-ended discussion constitutes a serious loss to learning, which should be taken into account and can be measured against the gains that online platforms offer. It may remind us that we no longer live within the realm of nature but within a technological bubble that thickens with each passing year.

## Christians and the Perils of Technology: Helpful Insights from Neil Postman

Rick Clifton Moore

Scandalous though it might be to admit in this journal, I sometimes wonder if the writings of Jacques Ellul are the best place for people to begin serious consideration of the role of technology in their lives. Granted, the French scholar was a brilliant cultural critic with keen insights into the twentieth-century milieu. Even so, his analysis is often quite profound. Many readers may thus find his ideas difficult to grasp. For Christians, as a subset of those readers, there are additional issues. Roman Catholics might find Ellul’s rejection of natural law to be a non-starter. Some evangelicals might be greatly offended by Ellul’s affinity for Marxism. Finally, believers of various Christian theological stripes might simply find the author’s existentialist outlook to seem, well, a bit too French.

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<sup>50</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 13, 82.

<sup>51</sup> Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, 108.

My experience working with students has led me to believe that a simpler introduction to key issues raised by Ellul can be found in the work of Neil Postman, a US scholar who had a gift for making difficult ideas both interesting and accessible. Postman is probably best known for *Amusing Ourselves to Death*,<sup>52</sup> a book that won an Orwell Award, an annual prize whose full title suggests that it recognizes contributions to “honesty and clarity in public language.”<sup>53</sup> In that work, he began a scholarly analysis of technology that raised questions any college graduate could understand, and should be asking.

Seven years after publishing *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Postman provided another bold insight into technology, moving beyond the specifics of television, and even beyond communication technologies. *Technopoly* broadened

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Postman’s analysis to more general “technological change.”<sup>54</sup> Interestingly, there he paid homage to Jacques Ellul, briefly acknowledging that the French thinker (and others) had previously addressed many of his subjects. Seven years later, Postman penned<sup>55</sup> *Building a Bridge to the 18th Century*, a publication nominally about the Enlightenment but more broadly about “the realities of vast change, especially technological change.”<sup>56</sup>

Within the three books just mentioned, Postman laid out a critique that can be thought-provoking for any who have not carefully considered the role of technology in their lives. In my view, he asked questions that all should be asking today.

In the space I have here, I want to highlight some of those important questions. Even so, as my task is to help us consider how Christians (specifically) should contemplate their relation to technology, I wish to recognize how Postman does not take his critique far enough.

## “Technopoly” and the Question of “What Is Technology for?”

As noted above, Postman’s most abstract analysis is provided in *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*. In that work he argues that civilization has passed through two periods and is now entrenched in a third. The first he labels “tool-using culture.” In that epoch, humans recognized the benefits of technology but placed cultural

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<sup>52</sup> Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin, 2005). Originally published in 1985.

<sup>53</sup> See <https://ncte.org/awards/george-orwell-award/>.

<sup>54</sup> Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Knopf, 1993).

<sup>55</sup> Given the fact that Postman admits to not using a word-processor for his books, this word is both figuratively and literally true.

<sup>56</sup> Neil Postman, *Building a Bridge to the 18th Century: How the Past Can Improve Our Future* (New York: Vintage, 1999), 12.

barriers around it. By no means was technology autonomous; rather it was “subject to the jurisdiction of some binding social or religious system.”<sup>57</sup> At a key juncture of history, though, people became so enamored of their machines that they slowly began to remove the cultural barriers that I previously mentioned. In this domain of “technocracy,” society shifted and became only “loosely controlled by social custom and religious tradition.”<sup>58</sup> There developed a constant motivation to invent and an incessant desire to reap the benefits of any invention available. Postman posits, however, that in technocracy the residue of well-established social systems is strong enough to postpone the complete surrender of culture to technology. Not so in *Technopoly*,<sup>59</sup> which Postman sees as the third era and the one that citizens in most Western democracies now experience. As the portmanteau suggests, in *Technopoly* technology becomes monopolistic. All other cultural elements must submit to it.

In all three books discussed here, Postman explains the repercussions of the shift to the third period of human experience. There is much in his analysis for Christians to seriously consider. The problems of a technopolistic society are manifold, and from a biblical perspective many of them are troubling and worthy of serious discernment.

As an example, though Postman does not necessarily exhibit a clear sense of Christian anthropology, he seems aware that humans have a profound ability to manipulate their social environment, and he argues that they should always do so with caution. Technological change, unfortunately, often entails unintended consequences. In fact, Postman suggests that the consequences are sometimes “ecological.” The introduction of new technologies is such that the resulting world is often more than the old world plus the new technology. The resulting world soon becomes a radically different place. To provide a mundane example, when we think about the introduction of the automobile as technology, we often tell ourselves that our cities have merely become “cities plus automobiles.” This, according to Postman, ignores the fact that the automobile drastically changed the space that we previously used the word “cities” to describe.<sup>60</sup> This change might seem inconsequential to the Christian faith, but when we realize that the Church is always embedded in real communities, thinking of the physical nature of those communities becomes important. We do well to consider how our technological choices alter our communities.

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<sup>57</sup> Postman, *Technopoly*, 24.

<sup>58</sup> Postman, *Technopoly*, 41.

<sup>59</sup> Lest the reader presume the uppercase lettering is a mistake, I might mention that in the book he capitalizes this word but not the titles of the earlier epochs.

<sup>60</sup> The drawback to using the example of the automobile (though I think it a useful and important example) is that it might lead readers to think of Postman’s notion of “ecological” change exclusively in the realm of biology and chemistry. To contemplate how technological change is ecological change in Postman’s broader sense, we can consider the introduction of the internet. Most anybody who thinks about it can agree that today’s world is not simply the world of the 1980s plus the internet. Today’s world is radically different from the world of the 1980s because of our facile adoption of such a powerful technology. I will discuss this in more detail later.

Unfortunately, the nature of society, and the nature of technology in our present time, is such that we rarely have time to ask such questions. The societal aspect of this reflects an unwillingness to doubt the goodness of technology. The technological aspect reflects the hyper speed at which we produce and disseminate new devices, a pace that transforms our lack of willingness into a lack of ability. Certainly Christians should, at the very least, attempt to better understand these aspects of their lived experience. Postman provides good introductory thoughts on both.

In *Building a Bridge to the 18th Century*, Postman describes how those with great trust in technology wield a “giddy and aggressive optimism.”<sup>61</sup> They sincerely believe that people will make good choices and (predominantly) use technology wisely. They never stop to ask how or why any particular technology might be valuable in the first place. Often, in fact, their answers to questions are quite circular. A section in *Technopoly* alludes to the constant quest to obtain information more quickly, providing details from Postman’s frequent interactions with “giddy” proponents of that quest. In asking what problem this speedy delivery is intended to solve, for example, he finds that the most consistent answer is, “How to generate, store, and distribute more information, more conveniently, at greater speeds than ever before.”<sup>62</sup> Clearly borrowing an idea from Ellul, Postman alludes to the fact that our technological world now asks us to ignore questions of ends and focus only on means. In fact, as Ellul indicates, technological progress tends to reach a state where the means become the ends. Moreover, as Postman describes it, we thus demonstrate the “elevation of information to a metaphysical status: information as both the end and means of human creativity.”<sup>63</sup>

Postman says we must recognize not only this optimistic ethos that leads to the confusion of means/ends but also the irrepressible pace of technological change that comes with it. Though he typically speaks of “Western civilization,” worth noting is the fact that a sizable portion of that timeline comprises the history of the Christian Church. We might then realize, upon considering such, that most of the Church’s life has occurred in the epoch that Postman called the “tool-using era.” Only recently has the Church seen a progression to technocracy and then to Technopoly. The last of those periods produced an exponential growth in technologies.<sup>64</sup> In *Technopoly*, Postman drives this point home by contrasting inventions in tool-using culture with today. After the invention of the printing press in the mid-1400s, he explains, “something quite unexpected happened.” What was that unexpected thing? In one word, “nothing.”<sup>65</sup> For over two hundred years, people had space to determine the best ways to utilize the new technology without having it overwhelm them. A significant contrast is available

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<sup>61</sup> Postman, *Building a Bridge*, 151.

<sup>62</sup> Postman, *Technopoly*, 61.

<sup>63</sup> Postman, *Technopoly*, 61.

<sup>64</sup> I might note that in computer technology there is actually a “law” that describes this inordinate speed of change. It is called Moore’s Law. To my knowledge, I have no relation to the one who proposed the law.

<sup>65</sup> Postman, *Technopoly*, 65.

to us today. There are members among our congregations who have lived to see the introduction of radio, cinema, television, and the internet, each of which has had an impact on the way we live, relate, and (especially) worship.

Admittedly, we might shrug and ask, Why does it matter that believers in earlier epochs saw little technological change in their lives and we have seen much? Postman suggests that one answer lies in the fact that technologies can be ideological. Another is in their culturally corrosive nature. In regard to the former, Postman argues that we should be very cautious about how technologies modify not only our physical world but also how we conceptualize it. I mentioned earlier that the automobile changed our cities; it also changed what we think about those cities. It altered what we believe about families, government, worship, and other broader concepts. To elaborate on the last of these alterations, I might note that the advent of the automobile created (or, at least, greatly expanded) the idea of “church shopping.” Suddenly, believers were not limited to a small number of congregations within walking distance of their homes.<sup>66</sup> To provide a more obscure but equally important example of how technologies change our thought, I would mention the clock. Certainly we realize, upon reflecting, that the clock drastically changed our notion of what “work” might be. With this alteration of our notion of labor came alteration of our notion of “leisure.” Given that, we might ask: Was life different for our forebears who did not use an implement that told them the exact hour of the day? Christians should actually have greater avenues for considering these kinds of questions than do secular citizens. We might ask ourselves a narrower question than the one just mentioned. Would fellow believers from the second, eighth, or fourteenth century think it odd that we have come to believe that Sunday worship services should always start at a precise time and always be equal in duration? Recognizing that the Church is not just a worldwide body but also a body that transcends time,<sup>67</sup> we would be wise to ask questions like these.

Postman adds another layer of complexity in regard to the relationship between technologies and our thinking processes by suggesting that we consider our technologies to include more than just mechanical devices such as clocks. As did Ellul, he sees much of our technological drive to be a mere desire for efficiency. Such efficiency can be achieved through what Postman calls invisible “soft technologies” as much as it can by

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<sup>66</sup> For an elaboration of this idea, see Carl Trueman, “Which Henry Caused the Reformation?” *First Things*, October 31, 2017. <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2017/10/which-henry-caused-the-reformation>.

<sup>67</sup> Admittedly, there are small parts of the world that have not entered what Postman calls the era of Technopoly, and there are subcultures everywhere that do their best to subvert it. With that in mind I would mention that we could also find correctives at the present time. Certainly, though, all citizens who lived in what Postman sees as the tool-using era would provide us with valuable insights into our lives if we listened to them. G.K. Chesterton’s notion of the “democracy of the dead” seems appropriate here. Perhaps one of the ways of avoiding ideological entrapment by our tools is to occasionally ask ourselves what believers who lived before us might say if they observed our use of those tools. See G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: John Lane, 1908), 85.

any of our physical contraptions.<sup>68</sup> In *Technopoly*, his examples include standardized tests, bureaucracies, even scientific taxonomies. His discussion of opinion polls and how they have changed politics is instructive to all of us living in Western democracies.

Of course, communication technologies are especially prone to change how we think, and much of Postman's analysis is devoted to this. In *Amusing Ourselves to Death* he writes, "Moreover, we have seen enough by now to know that technological changes in our modes of communication are even more ideology-laden than changes in our modes of transportation."<sup>69</sup> The title of the book is an indication that he was most specifically concerned with television, as it was the medium that drastically took us from the "generally coherent, serious, and rational" world of the printing press to a world that is "shriveled and absurd."<sup>70</sup> Readers who first encountered the book in the 1980s probably had little difficulty agreeing with its claim that our education, politics, and even our religion had to be "recast in terms that are most suitable"<sup>71</sup> to the medium that became dominant in the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>72</sup>

Some might believe that the absurdity of television content is due to cultural and economic restrictions in the US, not to the medium itself. They might argue, for example, that American television has the features it does due to its being driven by advertising, and that *this* is the source of its illogic. Such a critique fails to note, however, that many aspects of television are inherent to the technology, regardless of what cultural and economic system it finds itself in. Redolent of Ellul's *Humiliation of the Word*, Postman notes that visual symbols have different demands than do written or spoken words.<sup>73</sup> In addition, the immediacy of television distinguishes it. As Innis, McLuhan, Ong, and Ellul have claimed, we need to devote as much attention to the technological form of our communication as we do to its content. The former imposes its will regardless of which culture it finds itself in. Following from that last sentence, I would argue that the internet is probably "Exhibit A" for how technological change can lead to ideological change. It is also, arguably, the best example of Postman's claims about the potential corrosive nature of technologies, mentioned earlier. Who among us can deny that, along with some wonderful benefits, the World Wide Web includes built-in features that predispose it to certain content-independent effects, effects that were once obscure but are now blatantly evident? One good example of that would be the medium's ability to allow each user to create his or her own individualized world. Who among us would deny that it appears to be dissolving features of our culture that may be long-standing, beneficial, and worthy of conservation? Certainly the family is one example of this. As more and more of us burrow into an online world that we

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<sup>68</sup> Postman, *Technopoly*, 89.

<sup>69</sup> Postman, *Amusing Ourselves*, 157.

<sup>70</sup> Postman, *Amusing Ourselves*, 16.

<sup>71</sup> Postman, *Amusing Ourselves*, 8.

<sup>72</sup> Postman's insights into the development of the "electronic church" are still worth thinking about today. See *Amusing Ourselves*, 116.

<sup>73</sup> Postman, *Amusing Ourselves*, 121.

have created to suit what we perceive to be our individualized needs, interpersonal relationships suffer, and fewer of us are willing to invest the hard work in maintaining such relationships.

I probably need to say little in regard to the negative consequences of the web, but one element from Postman might be helpful in providing evidence of his prescience. A typical argument in support of our newest technological medium is that it immediately provides a wealth of information at our fingertips. Though Postman did not live to see the full development of this phenomenon, more general insights that his books provide are quite apropos. The immediacy issue was addressed earlier. Has our culture (and the Church, embedded within it) carefully considered in what contexts instant access is important, and in what contexts more time is inconsequential? Indeed, has our culture considered contexts in which *slower* sharing of information might be healthy?

As I mentioned previously, we have not done so because we have reached the point where the “ends” of this lightning speed are no longer asked. The means themselves are the ends. Additionally, the very nature of “information” begins to change due to the medium. Technically, this change began with the development of the rotary press and the telegraph, devices that suddenly allowed citizens to be informed of activities and events from distant places. Postman explains that previous to some of our most recent technologies, information did not make sense unless the matter discussed had some relevant context. As he mentions in *Building a Bridge to the 18th Century*, whatever humans saw or heard was considered superfluous unless it gave “shape, texture, or authority to a political, social, or scientific concept.”<sup>74</sup> Moreover, that concept itself was required to adhere to the established worldview. The internet is thus the apotheosis of what Postman sees as a technologically driven world in which huge parts of what we think of as “information” are context-free.

In addition to being context-free, modern “information” is overwhelming to the point where any of the “shape, texture, or authority” mentioned earlier will quickly lose force. Here Postman moves to a claim that might seem outlandish to twenty-first-century readers: specifically, that information is not always beneficial to society. Upon giving this some consideration, Christians (particularly) may find it plausible. The crux of the argument is that all social-structural elements, including the Church, require systems for limiting information. The point is not that any particular drop of information is bad or threatening. The point is that a tidal wave of information will be overwhelming. Postman’s metaphor is actually different from the one I just shared. He pictures a healthy culture as being like a healthy immune system, one that destroys unwanted cells. Regardless of the imagery used, the take-away is that for a community to protect itself it needs to determine what information is of greatest value and worth devoting attention to.<sup>75</sup> Lacking that, individual citizens are so distracted and disheartened by

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<sup>74</sup> Postman, *Building a Bridge*, 86.

<sup>75</sup> Certainly the Christian church, by its very nature, can provide a good example of this through patterned devotion to the reading the Bible, both as individual members and as congregations. Given

a plethora of mixed messages that they begin to lose confidence in anything. Actually, they begin to have confidence in everything.

A specific manifestation of this principle is found in the technological destruction of the narratives that give us meaning. Here we get into some of Neil Postman's most in-depth discussions of religion, discussions that offer, at their base, appropriate analysis of some obvious problems that our broader culture is facing due to technology. At the same time, however, here is where Postman shares some fundamental assumptions that reveal a failure to understand a thoroughly Christian critique of technology.

## Technology, Narrative, and Philosophes to the Rescue

At a surface level, Postman's argument should resonate with believers, and it provides ample description of contemporary problems in our world. Every society, he claims, needs a "narrative," or "story," if you prefer. Postman clarifies his point in *Building a Bridge to the 18th Century*. He is not suggesting that *any* kind of story will do. He considers a narrative to be a *big* story (emphasis his) that "might offer explanations of the origins and future of a people" and give them a sense of purpose.<sup>76</sup> As noted above, a significant problem with our deluge of instantaneous information is its tendency to destroy all narratives. No story can answer every question easily. So a world that does not see some knowledge as more important than other knowledge cannot maintain any binding story. Postman suggests, for example, that science has dissolved "the great narrative of Genesis."<sup>77</sup> He also admits, however, that nothing truly durable has taken its place. The downside to a world where every idea has a channel for dissemination is that there is—if I may coin a term here—a "story-buster" for every story.

As the title of one of his books suggests, he believes that a solution to this problem can be found in the wisdom of the 1700s. I mentioned earlier that the "technocracy" of this presumably halcyon century provided enough tools to solve many human problems but not enough to completely overwhelm human social systems. More importantly, though, according to Postman, the great leaders of that time realized the need to embrace and protect a great narrative. He perceives that the wisest men of the era (for example, Diderot and Voltaire in Europe, Franklin and Jefferson in the United States) were practical thinkers. Rather than working in protracted solitude, attempting to answer every minor human question and create a comprehensive philosophy, they were content to live with ideological inconsistencies. What mattered was that proposed ideas allowed them to address pressing human problems. They were "philosophes," not

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that all citizens in a community have finite time for attending to information, the more time any of them devote to Scripture, the less time they devote to information that is antagonistic to it.

<sup>76</sup> Postman, *Building a Bridge*, 101.

<sup>77</sup> Postman, *Technopoly*, 50. His statements about this in *Technopoly* may be a little strongly worded. Or, at least, he fails to recognize that a sizable portion of the population still recognizes elements of the first book of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures as vital to their understanding of the world.



“philosophers,” according to Postman, not seeking information for its own sake but for how they could use information in practical ways to make their communities better. Moreover, they were equally pragmatic in regard to the “big story” they embraced. Postman even shares what he presumes to be a good paraphrase of their generally accepted narrative. Specifically, he writes the following:

The universe was created by a benign and singular God who gave to human beings the intellect and inspiration to understand His creation (within limits), and the right to be free, to question human authority, and to govern themselves within the framework established by God and Nature. Humanity’s purpose is to respect God’s creation, to be humble in its awesome presence, and, with honesty toward and compassion for others, to seek ways to find happiness and peace.<sup>78</sup>

This, to Postman, is a good summary of what the philosophes saw as their bedrock, the foundation of the rest of their thought and action. We should note, however, that Postman feels that these philosophes were under no illusion that their chosen narrative was immune to criticism by scientific and philosophical ideologues. In fact, he seems to indicate that the philosophes may not have actually believed any specific element of their common story. As he says in *Building a Bridge to the 18th Century*, the thinkers he most admires felt compelled “to live *as if* there is a transcendent authority.”<sup>79</sup> The emphasis is Postman’s, indicating he believed the italicized words were vitally important. Admittedly, this greatly alters our understanding of the importance of his proffered narrative. To paraphrase his earlier paraphrase with necessary addenda, I might write, “We will live *as if* the universe was created by a benign and singular God.”

Christian readers may have a myriad of problems with this revised worldview, but I wish to focus on two that relate directly to Postman’s most useful contributions to our thinking about technology. The first is that, ironically, the author is seeking a technological solution to a human problem. He is doing so by reducing narrative to the role of a “soft technology.” Admittedly, it is a soft technology that he believes produces good results, but it fits his description of a soft technology nonetheless. In *Technopoly*, he actually says as much, observing that “religious tradition serves as a mechanism for the regulation and valuation of information.”<sup>80</sup> Though every Christian should appreciate Postman’s keen analysis of our “crisis of narrative,” we should be cautious about using the biblical story as a tool for developing social cohesion. Indeed, we should completely reject a “wink-wink” agreement whereby many of those reciting and hearing the story see it as nothing more than a talisman. To us, the “great narrative of Genesis”<sup>81</sup> is revealed truth. We may have disagreements about the literal and figurative elements therein, but we are adamant that many of those elements point to Jesus

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<sup>78</sup> Postman, *Building a Bridge*, 107.

<sup>79</sup> Postman, *Building a Bridge*, 110.

<sup>80</sup> Postman, *Technopoly*, 80.

<sup>81</sup> Postman uses those exact words (or, “the great tale of Genesis”) multiple times in both *Building a Bridge to the 18th Century* and *Technopoly*. See for example *Building a Bridge*, 10; *Technopoly*, 50.

Christ, whom we see as the very center (and end) of the grand narrative that proclaims “In the beginning.” To riff on an idea from the Apostle Paul, “If we merely live *as if* Jesus were true, we are to be pitied more than any other human beings.”

This flows quite logically to my second point. By now we should recognize that Postman is quite adroit at consistently recognizing technology’s temptations to confuse means and ends. Even so, from a Christian perspective, his proposal to use the grand eighteenth-century narrative as a remedy for societal ills does just that. To be clear, Postman obviously believes that technology for technology’s sake is folly. Throughout his books, he intimates, or boldly claims, that technology should be a means to ends, and the ends are things like loving families, quality education, or engaged politics. This simply raises another question, however. Are *those* ends, or means? Postman is, thus, somewhat like the proverbial cosmologist who believes that the earth rests on the back of an elephant. The cosmologist must consider what the elephant rests on; Postman must consider what families, education, and politics are for. For those who truly believe the narrative of the Bible, these three aspects of humanity are certainly means, not ends. We might sometimes be tempted to think of any or all of them as the *summum bonum*, but in our lucid moments we realize this not to be the case.

## Technology, Revelation, and the (Truly) Loving Resistance Fighter

By alluding to these shortcomings in Postman’s thought, I am not suggesting that his work is of no value. As I hope the bulk of this essay indicates, I feel that Christians can greatly benefit from his ideas. His concise analysis of the role of technology should help them recognize some of the characteristics and negative repercussions of their lived environment. Moreover, on those occasions when he offers advice on how to live with technology, his proposals fall in line with descriptions provided above, and are wholly appropriate for Christians.

At a deeper level, where Christians might gather motivation and meaning for their response to technology, his work begins to diminish in value. Much of his prescriptive writing is at the end of *Technopoly*, where he offers advice for how readers might live with the implications of his analysis. He does this with a degree of hesitation, admitting that he is “armed less with solutions than with problems.”<sup>82</sup> Even so, he proceeds to suggest how to react to the dangers of a Technopolistic world. One element of his advice is to live as “loving resistance fighters.” He supplies nine defining qualities of such people. One, for example, is that resisters should “refuse to accept efficiency as the pre-eminent goal of human relations.” A second is that those who resist “do not confuse information with understanding.” As a final example, resistance fighters are people who “do not believe that science is the only system of thought capable of producing truth.”<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Postman, *Technopoly*, 182.

<sup>83</sup> Postman, *Technopoly*, 184.

In line with much I have shared here, I would note that these guidelines are completely suitable for Christians. To move Postman's abstract ideas to a more concrete level, I would say that the Church (and individual Christians) should be very skeptical of the idea that everything must be done faster and with fewer steps. This is especially the case in human relations. With a vision of eternity in mind, followers of Christ should know that the ticking of a clock is not always the best measure of reality. In line with another element of Postman's advice to resisters, the Church should recognize that information, by itself, is often little more than a distraction. Only when placed in the grander narrative of theological history does it afford its greatest use. Lastly, I might comment that Christians should be extremely bold when it comes to reminding fellow citizens of the limitations of science (especially social science).<sup>84</sup> They, more than most, should be prepared to highlight a source of truth that stands beyond empiricism and reason.

This insight actually brings my discussion full circle to where I began this essay, the subject of how Postman contrasts with Jacques Ellul. Obviously there is a significant distinction to which I did not allude at the beginning, the theologies the authors used in their writing. Postman was raised Jewish and had a very good understanding of Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>85</sup> Wariness toward religion, however, led him to take a secular, rationalist approach throughout his texts. He saw narratives provided by faith traditions as bases for encouraging a sense of human origin and purpose. He was suspicious of those who believe that any person can obtain "Truth" from revealed re-ligion.<sup>86</sup> Ellul's perspective was radically different. As most readers of this journal know, he had a profound conversion experience as a young man and remained committed to Christianity throughout his life. Upon becoming a professor and author, he published many purely sociological treatises, but for each of those books he wrote a Scripture-grounded counterpoint that relied heavily on Christian truths. Given this, while Ellul might have agreed with much of Postman's advice on how to live as a "resistance fighter," he undoubtedly would emphasize that the nature and purpose of Christian resistance is radically different from secular resistance. Ellul's perspective separates tremendously from Postman's here. Ultimately, then, Christians will find more benefit in reading the former.

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<sup>84</sup> Postman is recommending not a rejection of science and reason but a recognition of the limitations of both. The former is symptomatic of postmodernism, which he worries can cast a "devilish spell" on us. See *Building a Bridge*, 8.

<sup>85</sup> Lance Strait, a longtime student of Postman, provides some good thoughts on this topic. See Lance Strait, "The Judaic Roots of Neil Postman's Cultural Commentary." *Journal of Media and Religion* 5 (2006), 196.

<sup>86</sup> He gave numerous indications of this concern. As an example, in *Building a Bridge to the 18th Century* he argues that reading Scripture "as universal truth, not a human telling," degenerates into "Inquisition, Jihad, Holocaust." Rather than seeing any revelation as truth, he saw it as a tool. For example, he wrote, "It is permissible, I think, for those of us who disapprove of the arrogance of fundamentalism to borrow some of their memories."

Postman's secular vision in *Technopoly* was one of human power—through a combination of rationalism and narrative-based communal purpose—to manage and manipulate technology for good rather than for bad. As part of this, his advice to “loving resistance fighters” proposed a return to an earlier period in American history. He wrote, “You must always keep close to your heart the narratives and symbols that once made the United States the hope of the world and that may yet have enough vitality to do so again.”<sup>87</sup> More importantly, he suggested that proposing a new educational curriculum was the best way for American culture to address the problems of *Technopoly*.

Ellul, on the other hand, took a decidedly Christian approach to the issues I have described above, communicating that our “resistance” is paradoxically both necessary and futile, at least in this age. In *The Meaning of the City*, his theological response to *The Technological Society*, he devoted the last chapters of the book not to describing how Christians can reform the city (it being a symbol of human reliance on technology) but to describing how Jesus Christ will make all things new.<sup>88</sup> This message is perhaps even more clear and commanding in his expressive book *What I Believe*.<sup>89</sup> In that work he clearly stated that if we ignore revelation and abandon truth, the only thing we can resort to is power. Our love of technology, of course, manifests this. An essential step in our necessary and futile attempts to overcome technology is thus an act of truth, but also an act of love that supersedes anything Postman imagined from his resistance fighters. We may find Postman's advice useful as a means of pushing back against technology, but bigger issues are at stake. Ellul argued that if we expect our own use of power to save us from technology, we are doomed. Some detail in the form of a lengthy quotation is merited here:

But this permanent orientation of Jesus, this express choice not to use power, places us Christians in a very delicate situation. For we ought to make the same choice, but we are set in a society whose only orientation and objective criterion of truth is power. Science is no longer a search for truth but a search for power. Technology is wholly and utterly an instrument of power; there is nothing in technology other than power. Politics is not concerned about well-being or justice or humanity but simply aims at achieving or preserving power. Economics, being dedicated to a frenzied search for national wealth, is also very definitely consecrated to power. Our society is the very spirit of power.<sup>90</sup>

Completely accepting the revelation he experienced as a youth—a revelation Postman used only instrumentally—the French existentialist Christian saw truth and love fully presented in Jesus Christ. Though omnipotent God, Christ came among us and chose *not* to use power, though he had every ounce of it at his disposal.

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<sup>87</sup> Postman, *Technopoly*, 182.

<sup>88</sup> See Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970) and Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (New York: Knopf, 1965).

<sup>89</sup> See Jacques Ellul, *What I Believe* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989).

<sup>90</sup> Ellul, *What I Believe*, 150-51.

Only through a reliance on something higher can we find hope. This hope requires action, but also recognition of the fallen nature of humanity and the need for grace. It requires a commitment to our world and our neighbor that cannot be grounded in a socially constructed notion of our value and purpose. Most importantly, in addition to action it requires submission. A willingness to abstain from taking control, for the sake of something better, is thus an act of truth, love, and grace. For Ellul, then, this is our model as resistance fighters.<sup>91</sup> As he wrote, “Today only a nonuse of power has a chance of saving the world.”<sup>92</sup>

## A Christian Approach to Technology

Richard Stivers

Stivers, Richard. “A Christian Approach to Technology.” *Ellul Forum* 67 (Spring 2021): 47-56. © Richard Stivers, CC BY-NC-ND.

Global warming, mass extinction of animal species, plastic islands in the ocean, fresh-water and air pollution, pandemics, the nuclear arms race, cyber piracy and attacks, the race to control outer space, racial, ethnic, and sexual inequality, the proliferation of authoritarian political leaders and fundamentalist religious groups, the widespread use of artificial intelligence at the expense of human intelligence, the utter rapaciousness of financial capitalism, the chaos of the internet, the subordination of language to the visual image, the omnipresence of propaganda and advertising. Science fiction? Conspiracy theory? No, our hopeless reality.

Technological progress has caused or abetted these problems, while God appears absent from the world. We look to technology to solve the very problems it has created—we do not need God. In *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, Jacques Ellul argues that today the Church needs to rethink the question of technology in light of the abandonment of God and the human response of hope.<sup>93</sup> Ellul maintains that it is not unbelievers but Christians who are making God keep his distance. God may still be present in the life of a small group or an individual, but not in the Church, a Church of little faith. Yet he qualifies this by saying that Christians still do all kinds of good works. The problem is the technological, political, and psychological structures that have closed the world to God and turned Christians into idolaters.

Many Christians believe that the use of technology is exclusively a moral problem. Technology, it is argued, is our own creation and neutral in and of itself. The issue

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<sup>91</sup> Students of Ellul will certainly realize an ironic twist here. Ellul was an actual resistance fighter during World War II. Though Postman seemed to worry that claiming to find Truth in religion would lead to dreadful acts such as the Holocaust, Ellul’s conception of Truth in Jesus Christ convinced him to risk his life to help Jews escape occupied France.

<sup>92</sup> Ellul, *What I Believe*, 151.

<sup>93</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, trans. C. Edward Hopkin (New York: Seabury, 1973).

is our use of it. Each technology presents moral problems; therefore we must develop an ethical system to cover topics such as cloning, genetic engineering, nuclear war, pollution, and so forth. Unfortunately, Ellul points out, this view of technology is wrong, and hence our ethics will be abstract and misguided. The reality of technology is that it constitutes a system so that no technology can be separated from the others. Moreover, modern technology is exclusively about power and efficiency, which preclude any effective control of it.

In *Medical Power and Medical Ethics*, J.H. van den Berg argues that medical ethics has failed to take into account the power of medical technology.<sup>94</sup> In not recognizing the great power of medical technology, the norms of medical ethics are largely irrelevant. The power of medical technology is directed to keeping people alive no matter what pain and suffering that entails. The efficiency of the medical technology is appreciated in and of itself, without regard for its consequences. He realizes that as power increases, the effectiveness of values decreases. In a technological society, power itself is turned into a value, the supreme value.

Christians can participate in the ethical discussion about technology while simultaneously realizing that technology's real threat is spiritual. Technology is a spiritual power, not just a material power. It is difficult for Christians to recognize this, because for several centuries we have reduced religion to morality and reduced morality to a few symbolic issues, such as abortion, homosexuality, inequality, and pollution. In doing so we have downplayed other moral and spiritual conflicts.

The spiritual problems that technology poses for Christians can be summarized as follows: Technology is our idol, replacing the true God; it destroys meaning in discourse, hindering our ability to hear God's word; it establishes itself as truth, negating Jesus Christ; as creator it contains all possibilities, whereas Scripture maintains that with God everything is possible and every possibility is love; it imposes itself as fate over against Christian freedom.

## Technology as Idol

The concept that best helps us understand the spiritual dimensions of an idol is the sacred. In *The Sacred and the Profane*, Mircea Eliade argues that the sacred is a spontaneous human creation that has three properties: power, reality, and absolute value.<sup>95</sup> The sacred is perceived as all-powerful. We are ambivalent about sacred power, both fearing and desiring it. We wish to harness this power to our own advantage.

Today no power is greater than technology. Jacques Ellul has analyzed this at great length in *The New Demons*.<sup>96</sup> The power of technology is everywhere evident, from

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<sup>94</sup> J.H. van den Berg, *Medical Power and Medical Ethics* (New York: Norton, 1978).

<sup>95</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, trans. Willard Trask (New York: Harper and Row, 1961).

<sup>96</sup> Strictly speaking, what is sacred is the relationship between technology, on the one hand, and sex and violence in the media, on the other hand. The former is the sacred of respect, the latter

nuclear power, space flight, military weapons, artificial intelligence, the internet, and psychological manipulation, to name but a few examples.

The goal of modern technology is the power of efficiency. Efficiency contains two components that do not always work together. One is efficacy, the most successful outcome. Can we keep making cars more fuel-efficient? The second is achieving the most (even if not the most efficacious) with the least. Can we produce more cars with less expenditure of time, money, and human labor power?

The second dimension of the sacred is its reality. The sacred appears to be that which is most real. It appears that Eliade is talking about truth, for he maintains that people want to live as close to the sacred as possible. In traditional societies, sacred space lay within nature. The center of the village was thought to be the place where the world was created. Reality was secular but contained the truth of the sacred. In technological societies, our smartphone is the center of the technological universe, the place where we create our own reality.

Truth can be contrasted with two different opposites: falsehood and reality. In *The Sickness unto Death*, Soren Kierkegaard provides a discussion of the former,<sup>97</sup> whereas in *The Humiliation of the Word*, Ellul examines the latter.<sup>98</sup> In both cases—truth and falsehood, and truth and reality—there is a hierarchy, in which truth, the higher, defines both itself and its opposite, the lower. Only truth enables us to define falsehood, and only truth enables us to understand reality. Ellul contrasts truth with empirical reality. Language allows us to explore meaning and truth, whereas the visual image refers to empirical reality that is material and can be quantified. For Christians, truth is Jesus Christ, his life, his words and actions. In a technological civilization, truth is technology, for it represents the ability to manipulate and even create reality.

We have upset the hierarchy of truth and falsehood by making the two terms equal. When truth and falsehood are equal, the difference in value disappears. Truth becomes whatever we want it to be. Technology in the form of the media, but especially propaganda, the news, advertising, and public relations, provides us with the ability to create reality as truth and to turn falsehood into truth.

Technology plays havoc with reality. It fragments culture and thus destroys a shared symbolic reality. The main source of symbols is the media, especially advertising. These symbols, however, are transitory and segmented and do not convey meaning but only information. Without effective symbolism, reality becomes schizophrenic: part of it is

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the sacred of transgression. The positive pole, the sacred of respect, is dependent upon the negative pole, the sacred of transgression. The consumption of sexual and violent images in the media renews and reinforces the technological order in respect to the consumption of technological objects, services, and information. Sexual and violent images stimulate our desire for technology. For a more detailed explanation see Jacques Ellul, *The New Demons*, trans. C. Edward Hopkin (New York: Seabury, 1975) and Richard Stivers, *Technology as Magic* (New York: Continuum, 1999).

<sup>97</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980).

<sup>98</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, trans. Joyce Hanks (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985).

experienced in the dramatized information of the media, the other part in the statistical information of the computer. Our own reality escapes us.

In *The Sickness unto Death*, Kierkegaard explores the nature of actuality (for the individual) and reality (for society). Reality is a dialectic of necessity and possibility. For there to be freedom, both necessity and possibility must exist. Without possibility, the necessity of social norms and power becomes oppressive and enslaving; without necessity, the possibility of freedom remains only a fantasy. The ability to turn possibility into actuality is the will to act. Freedom always begins with the individual.

Today, reality is in the media, but reality has been reduced to mere possibility. The media presents us with entertainment, escape, endless possibilities. It is an imaginary world of celebrities, superheroes, demons, angels, monsters, conspiracy theories, and every conceivable plot. Our own lives, full of loneliness, anxiety, frustration, anger, and despair, can be traded in for lives of excitement and fulfillment. As Ellul observed in *The Technological Bluff*, when every possibility lies within technology, technological possibility becomes necessity.<sup>99</sup> The media is a necessary escape from technological totalitarianism. Technology has transformed freedom into escape.

Without transcendent truth, reality becomes mere possibility. First, science became the source of truth as fact. Then science itself was scrutinized, to the conclusion that there was no way to escape subjectivity—assumption, ideology, history. Science and facts were relativized. Subsequently, the fact became politicized, so that it becomes whatever serves one's group interests. Consequently, paranoid conspiracy theories abound. Conspiracies are always possible and thus real. Technology and politics work in tandem to create a world of possibility beyond our understanding and control. The necessity of the technological system and the political state remains in the shadows.

The Church is faced with the formidable task of helping people return to reality, and this can be done only by bringing truth—Jesus Christ—back into reality. If Christians cannot do this, we will refuse to confront the cultural and environmental crises for what they are: the work of autonomous humans living without God's love and without hope.

The third dimension of the sacred is the perception of absolute value. It is contained within the dominant etiological myth, a myth about sacred time when the world was perfect. In the environment of nature, time is circular, and the etiological myth is what Eliade terms the myth of the eternal return, a return to the golden age preceding the creation of the world. Hebrew Scripture frees us from the circular time of nature in announcing a new and different future—the coming of the Messiah. Eventually the Judeo-Christian understanding of the future is secularized as a social utopia, the perfection of society. By the late eighteenth century, time became progress toward the utopia.

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<sup>99</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), chap. 11.



In the technological environment, history becomes meaningless. The media helps create an eternal present. Technology supplants the collective experience of history. The utopia is now technological. We have to believe that we are already in a utopia, what Guy Debord in *The Society of the Spectacle* called the “promised land of total consumption.”<sup>100</sup> An advertisement proclaims, “We can’t wait for tomorrow.” The indirect meaning is clear: the utopia needs to be and can be now. The technological utopia already exists but can be improved by technology.

The myth of technological utopianism contains four principal symbols: happiness, health, success, and survival. The basic storyline is replete in advertising. Technology brings us total happiness in the abundance of consumer choices, goods, services, and information. Technology will perfect health as it provides a medical solution for every disease, even aging. Technology creates success in every conceivable way: economic, financial, political, military, and cultural. It will provide an algorithm for every environmental and social problem. The prophets of Silicon Valley have told us so. The four symbolic values of technological utopianism are aesthetical values, not ethical or religious. The utopia is an aesthetical paradise, a childish hope for the future.

Paradoxically, despite the mythological claims for technology, unhappiness, poor health, failure, and catastrophe are everywhere in evidence. The social media have brought loneliness and unhappiness, as we compare our lives to those of others. If we measure health by other than a standard of longevity, poor health, including mental health, is universal. The older we get, the more illness becomes our life. Obesity, heart disease, and depression are widespread. The plethora of medical information has made us all hypochondriacs. Success is not a reality for most in the face of growing inequality. Our suicidal relationship to our physical environment shows few signs of weakening. The myth of technological utopianism is a myth in both senses of the term—a falsehood, and a story about the meaning of life. Everywhere, technology contradicts its promises.

To sum up, technology is power, reality, and absolute value. Its omnipresence and perceived omnipotence make us spontaneously regard it as sacred. As Eliade maintains, we do not rationally construct something as sacred; rather, we emotionally acquiesce to it. To live in a technological civilization is to be an idolater of technology. Christian freedom should lead us to reject technological utopianism without rejecting technology itself.

## A Christian Response

How should we respond as Christians to modern technology? There is no single or best response. Freedom precludes it. I will sketch one from my own experiences, reading, and reflection. At best, it is a starting point.

It is essential that we desacralize technology and relativize it. This will be extremely difficult, for most people consider it above serious criticism because they are religiously

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<sup>100</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1983), para. 69.

attached to it. Each technology must be evaluated as to whether it deskills the user and dehumanizes the recipient and to how much harm it does to the environment. Because technology has become a system, evaluation of individual techniques can only be preliminary. The technological system as system must first be dismantled. This will not happen, however, without a cultural revolution that recognizes that technology exists to give God glory and to express love of fellow humans and all creation. It would necessarily be accompanied by a decentralization of power in the political state and the elimination of global financial markets.

Until then? We must be bearers of hope in the second coming of Christ. Our hope asks God to make his presence evident once again. Without God, all our remedial efforts will fail. Hope does not mean that we simply wait for God to rescue us. Concurrently, however, humility about our own contribution is required. No matter how heroic our efforts to solve the myriad of cultural, psychological, and environmental problems, we are up against fatalism about technology. The motto is: You can't stop technological progress. But we must regard creation as God's gift. It is ours on loan. In *Church Dogmatics*, Karl Barth argued that the inner meaning of creation is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>101</sup> To exploit creation rather than live in harmony with it is to reject Jesus Christ. Sinful has been our treatment of each other and other living beings. Our hope is an admission of guilt and an act of repentance.

To rethink technology in terms of hope is a monumental problem. We can analyze a set of techniques, or we can examine those techniques that make acceptance of the others possible. We would not accept the terrible consequences of an out-of-control technology were it not for the plethora of psychological techniques: propaganda, advertising, public relations, and all the techniques for the control of others, such as therapy, child-rearing techniques, marital techniques, and techniques for being a friend to yourself or others. These techniques that objectify user and recipient exist to bring us into conformity with technological progress.

Modern technology is exclusively about power; it is inherently violent. Psychological techniques manipulate others and thus do violence to others. They are the inverse of love. To expose them for what they are—techniques of hate—is to expose the entire technological system. We can do little in a technological society to oppose the myriad of techniques, for just by living in such a society we are complicit in its many crimes. We work and live within organizations that employ bureaucratic techniques to control us. We are coerced to make use of the computer and have to consume a multitude of technological goods, services, and information. But the one place we can do more than reject the techniques and substitute a Christian response is the employment of psychological techniques in interpersonal relations, the techniques that one person uses on another. Psychological techniques such as advertising, public relations, and propaganda are collective techniques that we can only reject.

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<sup>101</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), v. 3.

The opposite of psychological technique is love. Love is an individual, not a collective, practice. It is directed to another individual. To practice works of love in a technological society is the most radical act of all. It exposes the technological system at its weakest and most fragile point—it demands that we love technology, which is incapable of loving us, more than God and neighbor. But if God is love, and God has abandoned us, how can we live out love?

Ellul relates hope to faith in *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, and in *The Ethics of Freedom* he relates love to freedom (God's response to human hope).<sup>102</sup> Of course, we know that faith, hope, and love are interrelated, each implying the others. So if we can still hope in a time of abandonment, we can still have faith and practice love. What Ellul is getting at is that God's abandonment invariably leaves behind a remnant, who must live the incognito. Faith, as Kierkegaard observes in *Works of Love*, is inward, a secret, because one's relationship to God cannot be shared directly.<sup>103</sup> One can directly witness about Scripture to another, but with God absent, hope is the way to relate to others. A burning, relentless hope, lived out in a small group, may make the other ask you why you are joyful in the face of our hopeless situation. We can't leave love out of the story, however. Citing Paul, Kierkegaard has a lengthy discussion of "love hopes all things." Kierkegaard does not directly relate hope to the second coming of Christ, but it is implied. God loves everyone, and one should never give up the hope that the sinner (all of us) will return God's love, for God does not give up hope.

Now, to love another, Kierkegaard maintains, is to help her love God. God is the middle term between me and my neighbor. But like faith and hope, love is ambiguous. The three are recognized only with the work of the Holy Spirit. To have hope for another parallels the hope that God will return and make his presence known. If God is love, then the one indispensable criticism of the technological society and the one radical action he allows us, even in a time of abandonment and fatalism, is the hope of love. Love is an act of hope that God permits us in order to bring him back into our abandoned world, if only in a single encounter. We may not be able to end pollution and global warming, we may not be able to destroy corporations, we may not be able to eliminate the system of computers and artificial intelligence, but we can love.

To be able to love, we need face-to-face encounters with others. Consequently, the social media, which create loneliness, anger, depression, abject conformity, and lead to disinformation and scapegoating, must be boycotted. We have to uphold the primacy of the spoken word in particular, and discourse in general, in the onslaught of the autonomous visual image that destroys meaning and truth, which can be expressed only in and through discourse. We have to become human once again, God's creatures, who are free to listen to the Word of God.

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<sup>102</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom*, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976).

<sup>103</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), pt. 2, chap. 3.

In *The Meaning of the City*, Ellul claims that God will transform and remake our works, even those of pride and rebellion.<sup>104</sup> Hence God will recreate our technological civilization, turning violence into love in the New Jerusalem. We cannot do this; we have already tried to supplant God as creator. What God has left us to do, seemingly of little consequence, is to say no to technological fatalism with free and humble acts of love that hope for God's return to save all humanity and all his creation.

## Concerning a Christian Response to Technology

J.M. van der Laan

Who can deny that gasoline-, solar-, and battery-powered devices, not to mention cellphones, computers, and their extensions, structure our everyday existence? Who can deny that techniques orchestrate life today, whether in business, medicine, education, leisure activity, politics, or even the Church, whether Protestant or Roman Catholic? Technology is our catch-all term for this aspect of our life today. It is both the dominant feature and the force in our lives. It is a total environment; we can even say it is our *reality*. We live and breathe in and for technology. How should the Church address this situation? What should Christians say and do about this our undeniable current condition?

Often enough, we hear the Church explain, using the same arguments the world uses, that technology is not a problem as long as it is used right. However, as Jacques Ellul pointed out, new technology is typically and “necessarily used as soon as it is available, without distinction of good or evil.”<sup>105</sup> We do not really make conscious decisions about whether or not to use the available technologies, nor do we really have a choice about how to use a technology, since its use is predetermined by its fundamental design. Technologies function as they are devised—hammers hammer, saws saw, computers compute, knives cut, guns shoot bullets, automobiles transport people and hurtle down highways, televisions are made for watching, and so on—but also not as intended or expected. For example, knives and guns can be used to injure and kill other living beings. Automobiles are involved in major and minor accidents, causing injury and death. What is more, they contribute an enormous amount to environmental pollution. Television trivializes and turns everything it broadcasts, whether educational or political content, pleasant or unpleasant news, peace or war, humorous or serious programs, into mere entertainments.<sup>106</sup> Social media both connect and disconnect people, indeed may disconnect individuals even more than they connect them. Many studies

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<sup>104</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, trans. Dennis Pardee (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), chapter 6.

<sup>105</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Vintage, 1964), 99.

<sup>106</sup> See Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Showbusiness* (New York: Viking, 1985).

have demonstrated that our current devotion to and use of digital devices and media has not liberated us as much as increased our fear, paranoia, and isolation.<sup>107</sup> Amazon and Google provide truly astonishing assistance and possibility but also openly and surreptitiously collect information on (un)witting users, which those companies then use in whatever ways they choose. Technology succeeds and fails, not because it is used correctly or incorrectly but because its failures are co-extant with its successes. The two cannot be separated from each other. There is no such thing as a neutral technology whose good or evil depends on how it is used. Technology in fact erases the distinctions between good and evil, true and false, natural and artificial, real and simulated. As Marshall McLuhan observed, “Our conventional response to all media, namely that it is how they are used that counts, is the numb stance of the technological idiot.”<sup>108</sup>

van der Laan, J.M. “Concerning a Christian Response to Technology.” *Ellul Forum* 67 (Spring 2021): 57-66. © J.M. van der Laan, CC BY-NC-ND.

Nor can the Church argue that technology can, as it were, simply be “baptized” for our use and in that way be brought under control and made acceptable for use by Christians. As with the idea of proper and improper use, this reasoning is false. Technology today is unlike technology at any other time in human history: it resists any such “baptism,” transformation, or control. It is not a question merely of machines or digital devices, what we can call material technology (tools, artifacts, and mechanisms) but of non-material technology as well (methods, procedures, and strategies), in a word, *techniques* used to engineer and program individuals and society, from students in school and employees at work to commerce, the environment, and human health. Everything, every situation, and everyone becomes something to be controlled and optimized, made to operate like a machine, all in the service of efficiency and utility. While there may seem to be many separate, individual technologies in our world today, they actually constitute a vast ensemble of innumerable, interconnected technologies that combine to form one great, unified system. In Ellul’s judgment, technology “is not a collection of technical goods which may be freely used, but a total ideological and pragmatic system which imposes structures, institutions, and modes of behavior on all members of society.”<sup>109</sup> As an all-encompassing system, technology is now utterly beyond our control. Far from transforming technology as we would wish it to be, it transforms us, making us over in its own image, ultimately to the point of dehumanizing us who are made in the image of God.

Although technology includes techniques as well as devices, most people today primarily think of technology as those things connected to the digital universe. In consequence, I restrict my comments here to such examples. The *Washington Post* reported

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<sup>107</sup> See for instance Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

<sup>108</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 18.

<sup>109</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 310.

that in 2019, on average, “American 8-to-12-year-olds spent 4 hours and 44 minutes on screen media each day. And teens average 7 hours and 22 minutes—not including time spent using screens for school or homework.”<sup>110</sup> *PC Magazine* similarly reported that the average adult spent 5.9 hours per day with digital media in 2018.<sup>111</sup> How different are we Christians in our use of and devotion to technology? Most of us own and employ all the various technologies that everyone else has and uses. We and our children spend hours each day with our screens—at school, at work, at home. The vast majority of us and our children have and regularly use and have become dependent on, even enslaved to, automobiles, smartphones, PCs, TVs, video game consoles, and the like. Like so many others, we Christians devote hours to Facebook, email, Twitter, Instagram, digital games, YouTube, Google, Amazon, and texting, not to mention the myriad other technological interactions now on offer. Like everyone else, we Christians sit next to or across from each other but pay more attention to our smartphones than to the other person(s) there with us. And we do so with little or no thought to whether we should do so or not. We even make excuses for doing so.

The Church is certainly not to be anti-technology, but it must speak to the place and role of technology in our lives, in the lives of individual believers, and in the corporate life of the Church, especially in an age when technology has such dominance and power. Along with many others, I have argued that technological idealism (or utopianism) is the dominant ideology of the world today.<sup>112</sup> It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the world loves, even worships, technology. The world believes in continuous technological progress, ultimately resulting in a new idyllic existence. In this belief system, technology will solve all our problems, eliminate our woes, cure our ills, and heal our iniquities. The world sees technology perform miracles: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the mute speak, the hopeless at last have hope. Its blessings for humanity seem to be without number and new every day.

In the world’s view, technology enhances our existence and makes life ever better. It is the bearer of all good gifts: it gives us our crops, our health, our jobs, our shelter. It promises us ease, convenience, and comfort, but above all, technology increases our freedom and power. In this worldview, technology becomes the machine of unlimited possibility and inevitable progress, of the advance and improvement of all conditions: mechanical and organic, material and psychological, physical and spiritual. As the world sees technology, it offers otherwise unattainable knowledge; it represents the source of new, fabulous powers; it bestows gifts upon humanity and remedies the ills

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<sup>110</sup> Rachel Siegel, “Tweens, teens and screens: The average time kids spend watching online videos has doubled in 4 years.” *Washington Post*, October 29, 2019. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2019/10/29/survey-average-time-young-people-spend-watching-videos-mostly-youtube-has-doubled-since/>.

<sup>111</sup> Rob Marvin, “Tech Addiction by the Numbers: How Much Time We Spend Online.” *PC Magazine*, June 11, 2018. <https://www.pcmag.com/news/tech-addic-tion-by-the-numbers-how-much-time-we-spend-online>.

<sup>112</sup> See J.M. van der Laan, *Narratives of Technology* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

of society; it unites us with one another; indeed, it *perfects* the world *and* humanity. Whether in matters of health, environment, or prosperity, “salvation” is not expected from Jesus Christ but from technology. How different really are the beliefs of Christians about technology?

Like God, technology is glorious. Like God, it is incomprehensible and impossible to master. Like God, it appears to be omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent, especially as embodied in the internet/World Wide Web. Last, but certainly not least, we request services of all kinds from it, much as we once prayed to receive guidance and good gifts from the deity. We rely on its strength and its revelations (if not grace). Inspiration comes not from God but from the servants and custodians of technology, of the next techniques for business, education, and farming, of the computer and all its appendages, of the internet. But the Church knows that technology is not God. The Church has a duty to expose and reject such beliefs as false.

If we wish to determine what a particular person or society holds sacred and values above all else, we need to identify what he or she or they most think about, pay attention to, and devote their time and lives to. Today, there can be no doubt that technology with all its expressions, but especially the smartphone or personal computer and internet, have now become *sacred*. Just try and take away someone’s smartphone, or something now as ordinary as a television, and see what resistance and ire result. Citizens of the technological society cannot, must not, and dare not criticize, much less do without, technology, which by definition is its very foundation, necessarily its most important and revered possession, indeed, its *summum bonum* and most sacred reality. To do so would be, in effect, to blaspheme. But the sacralization of technology is the true blasphemy, as the Church must know. Its task is then to contest faith and devotion to the technological system.

Amazon, Google, Facebook, and Microsoft are massive monopolies of products, services, information, and more. While the pretext is that they provide us with countless benefits, the harm they do is largely ignored. At one time, “Don’t be evil” was Google’s unofficial motto and was included in its corporate code of conduct. Google’s parent company Alphabet has now repackaged that directive (or reminder) as “Do the right thing.” Both sound noble but really express something innocuous, and they actually mask whatever questionable practices Alphabet and its subsidiaries engage in. One of those subsidiaries, YouTube, is “notorious for pushing users toward [...] conspiracy theory videos, as a consequence of the most common user choices on the site and how the platform’s predictive algorithms are written.”<sup>113</sup> But conspiracy theories present fantasies and outright lies as truth. Seemingly benevolent, Google stands accused of helping countries such as China repress political dissent. Besides handling or using posted data in highly questionable ways, Facebook has permitted content that ranges from hate speech and fake news to incitement of violence and criminal activity. How and when has the Church addressed such issues as they relate to Christians?

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<sup>113</sup> Joanne McNeil, “Search and Destroy.” *Harper’s Magazine* (February 2020): 14.

The domination of technology in the world today leads or even compels the Church to adopt and adapt to, in ever greater measure, whatever technology has to offer. Certainly, the prevalence of technology in the Church varies from denomination to denomination and congregation to congregation. Some have likely maintained a healthy distance from technology, while others have welcomed it into the worship service itself. Many if not most church communities have asserted that they need to change with the times, to adopt new technologies as they emerge in order to keep pace with the changing attitudes and behaviors of their congregations. They want to be “relevant.” I cannot think of any Old Testament or New Testament efforts to be “relevant,” however. Church leaders maintain that they are responding to what they perceive the members of their churches need and want. And they argue that by employing popular technologies as they become available, they either retain members or draw in new believers and members. A Christian friend of mine and a leader in his church community informed me that his church has had a Facebook account for several years. Recently, his church launched a Twitter account. In each case, his church community never paused to consider or analyze these decisions. Rather, it adopted those technologies without a second thought, without thinking about the pros and cons of using Facebook and Twitter, without evaluating them and their effects. Such choices and actions are typical. No one brought attention to Facebook policies about content or (so-called) privacy. No one noted that Facebook uses the data from all its subscribers to fashion a platform that manipulates and controls users. No one paused to point out that Twitter spreads inanity and triviality as well as rumor, falsehood, and malice.

Let me offer one other concrete example where churches have employed a technology without understanding it, neither how it functions nor what deficiencies or effects it has. Computer projectors and big screens are now a part of a great many church services. Song lyrics, Bible verses, pictures, and sermon content appear as PowerPoint displays at the front of church sanctuaries and auditoriums. Little if any critical thought can have gone into such choices. In the world, PowerPoint has become ubiquitous and the preferred mode of presentation for anything and everything. The Church, too, has found a use for it. Critics such as Edward Tufte have pointed out serious problems with PowerPoint, however.<sup>114</sup> Even if used as intended, PowerPoint restricts and minimizes content. It focuses attention not on the words and Word spoken by the preacher but on a few phrases (ideally five bullet points of four words each) and images on the screen, which distract the audience and work against concentration. PowerPoint presentations diminish and trivialize the content of the message to the point of meaninglessness. Worst of all, PowerPoint devalues the word, in this case, God’s Word for our lives, since it transforms the message into bits and pieces like sound bites, and with the addition of pictures to make the presentation more “interesting” or appealing, the visual takes precedence over the spoken Word. Finally, PowerPoint transforms everything into entertainment, hardly something a church service should be. The Church preaches and

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<sup>114</sup> See Edward Tufte, *The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint* (Cheshire, CT: Graphics Press, 2003).



teaches that Christians are to be in, but not of, the world, but as the Church too readily conforms to the world and to technology, the people of the *Book* (the *biblia*) and the *Word* (the *logos*) too easily become a people of technology instead.

We Christians must ask and identify in what, or better, in whom, we put our faith. Of course, when confronted with such a question, we all answer: in God! We must likewise ask what or who it is we serve. Again, we answer: God! But how honest are those answers? At the end of *The Technological System*, Ellul concludes that “the human being who uses technology today is by that very fact the human being who serves it.”<sup>115</sup> That comment casts light on what may well be most troubling about the intersection of Christian life and technology. Who, if not the Christian, should know that no man can serve two masters?

The world loves technology with all its heart, soul, strength, and mind. It cannot wait for the next smartphone, television, laptop, tablet, program, game, or app. The world spends its hours and days on screens, texting, tweeting, emailing, and surfing the web. Does the Church, do Christians, behave any different? Don't we live almost entirely as the world lives in relation to technology? How have we limited our use of technology? Of automobiles, televisions, PCs, smartphones, or of techniques for management, education, and relationships? We stand convicted. In recent decades, the Church has had little or nothing to say about technology except to follow the rest of the world and embrace it with more-or-less open arms. However, the Church must lead, not follow, the world. The Church must remember that we are to have no other gods before our God, the only God. If the Church is to be the Word and the Light to a world in ignorance and darkness, if it is to expose the ideologies of the world as false, it must challenge the faith that the world (and the Church) has in technology.

If technology takes up so much of our time, if it occupies so many of our thoughts, if it commands such a place of importance in our lives, if it commands our attention (even obedience), it vies with our allegiance to God; indeed, it displaces God in our lives. It is a power and dominion at odds with the command to have one God and no other. It is a false god, an idol, and must be exposed and rejected as such. It must be stripped of its power over us. And when even Christians look to technology for answers and solutions, even for meaning, we become idolators, we fall away from Christ the only Savior. We are then like those people in the Bible who did not first seek to know the will of God, because we first seek to know the will of technology. Technology removes all boundaries. It promises human beings a life without limits, where everything is possible and permissible, a life without constraints. To expect or seek such a life is an act of rebellion against God. It is to commit the original sin again, the sin of wanting to know what God knows, indeed, to want to be God. With all its capabilities, technology holds out the promise of self-deification.

The twenty-first-century Christian Church forgets or ignores its ancient mandate and fundamental obligation to challenge and reject the values of the world, which now

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<sup>115</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Continuum,

leads a life governed and shaped by technology, a life that conforms to the values of technology. Ellul alerts us in *The Technological Society* to “the subjugation of [...] new religious life to technique.”<sup>116</sup> In its embrace of technology, arguing that it must do so to reach a twenty-first-century, technological society, to “meet people where they are,” the Church relinquishes its obligation to confront, unmask, and deny the world and its values. Instead of challenging technology, the Church harmonizes with it. As he points out, “it was formerly believed that technique and religion were in opposition and represented two totally different dispensations.”<sup>117</sup> Of course, that opposition has disappeared, and there is now only one dispensation, to appropriate that old theological term: it is that of technique or, to use the more common term, technology. The Church, Ellul asserts in *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, must be “the question that God puts to the world,”<sup>118</sup> but the Church cannot be such a question, when it participates in the great celebration and festival of technology.

In *Works of Love*, Soren Kierkegaard asked, “If it is true, then, that all of secular life, its pomp, its diversion, its charms, can in so many ways imprison and ensnare a man, what is the earnest thing to do?”<sup>119</sup> In precisely that way, technology—the preeminent facet of secular life today—has captivated us *and* taken us captive. It has caught us as in its web or net and holds us fast.

Kierkegaard posits two possible answers to his question: “either from sheer earnestness to be silent in the church about things, or earnestly to speak about them there in order, if possible, to fortify men against the dangers of the world.”<sup>120</sup> But there is really only one answer and course of action, he concludes: “to talk about things of the world in a solemn and truly earnest manner.”<sup>121</sup> So it is with technology. The Church is to speak out about those things of the world, specifically, technology that both enchants and entraps us, distracts us and leads us away from faith and hope in God.

As Hubert Dreyfus recognized, Kierkegaard understood true religious life, specifically, true Christianity based on the Incarnation, as “an unconditional commitment to something finite, and having the faith-given courage to take the risks required by such a commitment. Such committed life gives one a meaningful life in this world.”<sup>122</sup> For Kierkegaard, such a committed and meaningful existence could be realized only within the religious or spiritual sphere. Arguing from Kierkegaard’s position, Dreyfus concluded that today the internet is “the ultimate enemy of unconditional commitment, but only the unconditional commitment of what Kierkegaard calls the religious sphere

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1980), 325.

<sup>116</sup> Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 423.

<sup>117</sup> Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 423.

<sup>118</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, trans. Geoffrey W. Brommiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 142.

<sup>119</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 62.

<sup>120</sup> Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 62.

<sup>121</sup> Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 62.

<sup>122</sup> Hubert Dreyfus, *On the Internet* (London: Routledge, 2001), 122, n42.

of existence can save us from the nihilistic leveling [...] perfected in the World Wide Web.”<sup>123</sup> Sobering words of warning for a Church that relies more and more on the internet and all its attendant trappings. Ultimately, Dreyfus reminds us, the internet promotes the demise and elimination of meaning.<sup>124</sup> What could be worse for a Church, for the body of believers, which ostensibly exists to point to the source of all meaning?

The Church and individual Christians must then lay bare the true nature of and forsake the false values and meaning offered by technology. We must curtail our use of technology, even renounce the technologies we love most. We must acknowledge our apostasy and turn to God, not with part of but each with all of our heart, soul, strength, and mind. Let Christians live out lives of faith, hope, and love, not in technology, but in God.

## Book Reviews

Husserl, Edmund. *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* 1936, trans. David Carr. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970. *La crise des sciences europeennes et laphenomenologie transcendantale*, trans. Gerard Granel. Paris, Gallimard, 1999.

While a part of the canon for those who are phenomenologists, this book is also helpful for understanding broader issues concerning the philosophy of science, particularly for fields like human psychology. Husserl challenges us to reconsider accepted dogmas in Western science and offers methods for analyzing the world in which we live. Plus, it plays an important role in understanding the twentieth-century intellectual milieu of Ellul and others such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

*Cody Chambers*

*Gatesville, Texas*

Campbell, Will. *Brother to a Dragonfly* 1977. New York: Continuum, 2000.

I started reading Will Campbell the same year that I began reading Ellul. I found they shared similar convictions and perspectives on many things. The significant difference is that most of Campbell’s books, including this autobiography, are narratives. Ellul and Campbell knew of each other. Ellul contributed to a journal that Campbell co-edited, *Katallagete*. Campbell is a great storyteller. Enjoy the story, look for Ellulian themes, and perhaps it will be a life-changing read for you as it was for me.

*Mark Baker*

*Fresno, California*

Bauman, Zygmunt. *Postmodern Ethics*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993.

A book that *Forum* readers would be possibly interested in is one of the many books of the distinguished sociologist of modernity Zygmunt Bauman (1925-2017). I could

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<sup>123</sup> Dreyfus, *On the Internet*, 89.

<sup>124</sup> Dreyfus, *On the Internet*, 102.

perhaps mention *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989), or *Society under Siege* (2002). But I would like to draw the attention to *Postmodern Ethics* (1993). On the second page of chapter 7 (I read the Spanish edition, *Eticapomoderna*), Bauman mentions Jacques Ellul as the one whom he considers to be the most notable interpreter ever of modern Technique. I believe that it was what Bauman called the “intensity” of Ellul’s analysis that still explains the relevance of Ellul’s thinking. Through his understanding of the internal dynamics of the “technical phenomenon,” Ellul still is “the man who had foreseen almost everything” (Porquet), including particular things he had not witnessed yet during his lifetime.

*Roelf Haan*

*Utrecht, Netherlands*

Virilio, Paul. *Esthetique de la disparition* 1980. Paris, Galilee, 2004. *The Aesthetics of Disappearance*, trans. Philip Beitchman. Los Angeles: Semiotext, 2009.

Virilio outlined a theory of dromology (the science or logic of speed) across several books. In *The Aesthetics of Disappearance* he describes the experience of living in the (technologically driven) society of speed as akin to picnolepsy (petit mal seizures). The result is the opening of spaces that are, at once, in the world yet nowhere at all. One result of this situation is the frantic proliferation of tantalizing images in global mass media that serve to obscure what might otherwise be recognized as disturbing inconsistencies and elisions in market discourse. Readers of Ellul will recognize familiar themes, including the role of popular media in the perpetuation of technique.

*Rick Herder*

*Marshall, Minnesota*

Smith, Gordon T. *Wisdom from Babylon*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP [Book Reviews] Academic, 2020.

*Wisdom from Babylon* offers a timely reminder of the perils and possibilities of church leadership in our contemporary age. In an accessible yet well-researched work, Smith offers insights for understanding the times as well as recommendations for charting a path forward, including a fair assessment of Ellul’s contributions and rough edges. By couching his discussion within a clear-cut need for adaptive, virtuous church leadership, Smith resets the conversation on “cultural engagement” through a clear conversation about where we are, what’s really going on, what questions we should really be asking, and what possible future should we embrace.

*Peter Anderson*

*Phoenix, Arizona*

Ott, Kate. *Christian Ethics for a Digital Society*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2019.

I recently read this book as I was preparing a course on ethics in a digital age, drawing on Ellul as well as a range of scholars. In many respects Ott is not very Ellulian in her approach, but she does share with Ellul a perceptive way of engaging the Bible in apprehending social realities. The book has five fascinating chapters on different aspects of the digital world: “Programming for Difference” (on how algorithms create

personal worlds), “Networked Selves” (on identity and relationships), “Moral Functions Beyond the Delete Key” (on dataveillance and metanoia), “Creation Connectivity” (an excellent chapter on the neglected material impacts of the virtual world), and “Ethical Hacking and Hacking Ethics” (on disrupting and repurposing the current systems). At the end of each, she offers a brief biblical reflection, with the insights on Babel (chapter 1) and “Swords into Ploughshares” (chapter 5) being the most memorable. I would highly recommend the book and gained much from it, even if I found myself at odds with Ott at times.

*Matthew Prior*

*Egham, England*

Lewis, C.S. *The Abolition of Man* 1947. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2001. *L'Abolition de l'homme*, trans. Irene Fernandez. Paris, Ad solem, 2015.

This short book stems from three lectures that C.S. Lewis delivered at Newcastle in 1943 on the dangers of preferring moral subjectivism over natural law (summed up by the Tao). When objectivity in beauty or ethics or even knowledge is debunked, Lewis presents stern warnings that modern society, due to the “explaining away” of traditional values, will slide into states where man’s control over nature will heighten man’s control over other men. Ultimately, rationality itself goes out the window when the Conditioners of society justify their controlling agendas in arbitrary ways. As they succumb to subhuman standards, the social drift will tend toward the abolition of our very humanity. In the context of applied Scientism overstepping a healthy, ethics-guided science, Lewis fictionalized all of the themes above in his Space Trilogy, most notably in his concluding dystopia *That Hideous Strength* (1946). Both of his books do well to illuminate Jacques Ellul’s concern for the way technocratic values operate outside and above all other corrective values or reasoning. Lewis also anticipates Ellul by describing how the *is*, in the linear march of progress, takes precedence over the *ought*. Altogether, the third essay in *Abolition* presents a gripping vision that finds fuller treatment, one decade later, in *The Technological Society* (1954).

*Ted Lewis*

*Duluth, Minnesota*

Junger, Ernst. *The Glass Bees* 1957. New York: New York Review of Books, 2011. *Les abeilles de verre*, trans. Henri Plard. Paris, Bourgois, 1996.

This novel explores the profound contradiction between technical perfection, which is calculable, and human perfection, which is incalculable. Like any great work of literature, it provides the emotional context of a phenomenon, making it less abstract and more existential.

*Richard Stivers*

*Bloomington, Illinois*

Brun, Jean. *Le reve et la machine, technique et existence*. Paris, La Table **Book Reviews** Ronde, 1992. Jean Brun, *Le retour de Dionysos*. Paris, Desclee, 1969.

Pour Jean Brun (1919-94), philosophe protestant qui se reclame de Pascal et Kierkegaard, si la technique n’est pas neutre socialement c’est parce qu’elle n’est pas

neutre existentiellement. Ses livres de philosophie de la technique s'attachent à mettre à jour les fondements existentiels du rapport de fascination irresponsable que nous entretenons avec les techniques. Dans *Le reve et la machine* Brun montre que l'homme a d'abord rêvé ses techniques avant de les réaliser et de les mettre en pratique. Selon lui, l'histoire de la technique est commandée par un « onirisme métaphysique » qui investit la technique de la mission de nous faire accéder à une liberté désincarnée, libérée des contraintes spatio-temporelles de l'individuation. Le potentiel de déshumanisation que recèle la technique n'est pas le fruit d'une compréhension du réel trop pauvre, mais plutôt d'un désir actif de rompre les relations avec le réel qui caractérisent l'existence humaine et qui circonscrivent sa finitude. Dans *Le retour de Dionysos* Jean Brun montrait comment le désir de se désindividualiser et de briser la cage du moi alimente toutes sortes de conduites d'exaspération et une culture de la cruauté qui mobilise dans des sabbats techniques ou des orgies techniques le pouvoir de la technique de transmuter et de recomposer le donné naturel. Motorisation frénétique, conquête de l'espace, grisurie de la vitesse, création d'organes et d'un exo-organisme artificiels, rêve d'un cyborg: la technique « offre à Dionysos le dépassement exaltant des limites individuelles charnellement vécues ».

*Daniel Cerezuelle*

*Bordeaux, France*

Veliz, Carissa. *Privacy Is Power: Why and How You Should Take Back Control of Your Data*. New York: Bantam, 2021.

This book is all about the harm potential of data gathering. Ellul mentioned this in his last lecture to the Institut d'Etudes Politiques. He said the greatest threat to our freedom would be the technicians who know all about the data-gathering process and thus the validity of the data, and those who don't know the validity. I would say that the subprime mortgage fiasco in 2008 was an example of this. There are many more problems arising from data-gathering on the massive scale that exists today. What we see today with social media is that Google and others Hoover up all our preferences and sell it to those who have a commercial interest in knowing that information, potentially to exploit us. This book is a good case study of Ellul's philosophy, namely, the view that all technological development comes with a cost of some kind, often to our fundamental freedoms. I don't think that Veliz has read Ellul much, but the problems she raises are central to Ellul's concerns, and she articulates the problems very well. Controls are needed, but will the controls work and will they do more harm?

*Randal Marlin*

*Ottawa, Ontario*

Eilenberger, Wolfram. *The Time of the Magicians: Wittgenstein, Cassirer, Heidegger, and Benjamin and the Decade That Reinvented Philosophy*. New York: Penguin, 2020.

These philosophers are examined in relation to a search for meaning arising from the social-political upheavals expressed, for example, in two world wars. Wittgenstein showed that meaning was beyond the pronouncements of logic and science; Heidegger

located meaning in the anxious encounter with nothingness, the abyss, death, and dissolution; Cassirer found meaning in the cultural formation of symbols against an other; and Benjamin found it in wandering the one-way street of modernity and an erotic urge. The narrative is bracketed by the Cassirer/Heidegger 1929 debate at Davos, Switzerland, where the neo-Kantian-Hegelian philosopher of culture faced the soon-to-be Nazi rector of Freiburg. Culture was at a crossroads with the abrogation of meaning by an irrationality beyond science and logic and by a politicized technology. This study, then, stands well within the Ellulian corpus.

*David Lovekin*

*Hastings, Nebraska*

## About the Contributors

**Rick Clifton Moore** is professor of communication and media at Boise State University in Boise, Idaho. His research centers on media and ideology, with much of his recent work being on the topic of media coverage of religion.

**John Paul Russo** is professor and chair, department of classics, University of Miami. He is the author of *The Future Without a Past: The Humanities in a Technological Society* (winner of the 2007 Bonner Prize), *The Italian in Modernity*, co-written with Robert Casillo (2011), and *Souls of Lonely Places: Late Wanderings in Italy*, forthcoming in Italian from Campanotto, Udine.

**Richard Stivers** is emeritus professor of sociology, Illinois State University. Using Jacques Ellul's ideas as a springboard, he has written a number of books about technology, notably *Technology as Magic*.

**Paul V. Stock** is an associate professor at the University of Kansas in the department of sociology and the environmental studies program. He writes about Ellul and technology in relationship to morality, care, and the environment, with a particular emphasis on food and agriculture.

**J.M. van der Laan** is professor emeritus in the department of languages, literatures, and cultures at Illinois State University. His publications have dealt with literary treatments of technology, the Faust legend, and the intersection of science and the humanities.

## About the International Jacques Ellul Society

The International Jacques Ellul Society, founded in 2000 by former students of Ellul, links scholars, students, and others who share an interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), longtime professor at the University of Bordeaux. Along with promoting new publications related to Ellul and producing the *Ellul Forum*, the Society spon-

sors a biennial conference. IJES is the anglophone sister society of the francophone Association internationale Jacques Ellul.

The objectives of IJES are threefold:

Preserving a Heritage. The Society seeks to preserve and disseminate Ellul's literary and intellectual heritage through republication, translation, and secondary writings.

Extending a Critique. Ellul is best known for his penetrating critique of *la technique*, of the character and impact of technology on our world. The Society seeks to extend his social critique particularly concerning technology.

Researching a Hope. Ellul was not only a social critic but also a theologian and activist in church and community. The Society seeks to extend his theological, biblical, and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

IJES is a nonprofit organization, fully reliant on membership fees and donations from supporters worldwide. For more information or to become a member, please visit [ellul.org](http://ellul.org).



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# The **Ellul** Forum

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Scroll, Yuan dynasty (14th century). Image courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago.

### **About**

Jacques Ellul (1912-94) was a French thinker and writer in many fields: communication, ethics, law and political science, sociology, technology, and biblical and theological studies, among others. The aim of the *Ellul Forum* is to promote awareness and understanding of Ellul’s life and work and to encourage a community of dialogue on these subjects. The *Forum* publishes content by and about Jacques Ellul and about themes relevant to his work, from historical, contemporary, or creative perspectives. Content is published in English and French.

### **Subscriptions**

The *Forum* is published twice a year. Annual subscriptions are \$40 usd for individuals/ households and \$80 usd for institutions. Individual subscriptions include membership in the International Jacques Ellul Society, and individual subscribers receive regular communications from the Society, discounts on IJES conference fees, and other benefits. To subscribe, please visit [www.ellul.org](http://www.ellul.org).

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The *Forum* encourages submissions from scholars, students, and general readers. Submissions must demonstrate a degree of familiarity with Ellul’s thought and must engage with it in a critical way. Submissions may be sent to [toellulforum@gmail.com](mailto:toellulforum@gmail.com).

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## About the Contributors

# From Tech Critique to Ways of Living

Alan Jacobs

Jacobs, Alan. "From Tech Critique to Ways of Living." Ellul Forum 68 (Fall 2021): 3-23. © Alan Jacobs, CC BY-NC-ND. Reprinted with permission of The New Atlantis.

In the 1950s and 1960s, a series of thinkers, beginning with Jacques Ellul and Marshall McLuhan, began to describe the anatomy of our technological society. Then, starting in the 1970s, a generation emerged who articulated a detailed *critique* of that society. The critique produced by these figures I refer to in the singular because it shares core features, if not a common vocabulary. What Ivan Illich, Ursula Franklin, Albert Borgmann, and a few others have said about technology is powerful, incisive, and remarkably coherent. I am going to call the argument they share the Standard Critique of Technology, or SCT. The one problem with the SCT is that it has had no success in reversing, or even slowing, the momentum of our society's move toward what one of their number, Neil Postman, called *technopoly*.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Random House,

The basic argument of the SCT goes like this. We live in a *technopoly*, a society in which powerful technologies come to dominate the people they are supposed to serve, and reshape us in their image. These technologies, therefore, might be called *prescriptive* (to use Franklin's term<sup>126</sup>) or *manipulatory* (to use Illich's<sup>127</sup>). For example, social networks promise to forge connections—but they also encourage mob rule. Facial-recognition software helps to identify suspects—and to keep tabs on whole populations. Collectively, these technologies constitute the *device paradigm* (Borgmann<sup>128</sup>), which in turn produces a *culture of compliance* (Franklin).

The proper response to this situation is not to shun technology itself, for human beings are intrinsically and necessarily users of tools. Rather, it is to find and use technologies that, instead of manipulating us, serve sound human ends and the *focal practices* (Borgmann) that embody those ends. A table becomes a center for family life; a musical instrument skillfully played enlivens those around it. Those healthier technologies might be referred to as *holistic* (Franklin) or *convivial* (Illich), because they fit within the human lifeworld and enhance our relations with one another. Our task, then, is to discern these tendencies or *affordances* of our technologies and, on both social and personal levels, choose the holistic, convivial ones.

The Standard Critique of Technology as thus described is cogent and correct. I have referred to it many times and applied it to many different situations. For instance, I have used the logic of the SCT to make the case for rejecting the “walled gardens” of the massive social media companies, and for replacing them with a cultivation of the “digital commons” of the open web.<sup>129</sup>

But the number of people who are even *open* to following this logic is vanishingly small. For all its cogency, the SCT is utterly powerless to slow our technosocial momentum, much less to alter its direction. Since Postman and the rest made that critique, the social order has rushed ever faster toward a complete and uncritical embrace of the prescriptive, manipulatory technologies deceitfully presented to us as Liberation and Empowerment. So what next?

## The Rise of Technopoly

One must begin, I think, by grasping why the SCT has been so powerless. First, it has been articulated primarily in books. Not many people read books at all, and a tiny fraction of those who do read books ever read ones that develop complex and

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2011).

<sup>126</sup> Ursula M. Franklin, *The Real World of Technology*, rev. ed. (Toronto: Anansi, 2004).

<sup>127</sup> Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

<sup>128</sup> Albert Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life: A Philosophical Inquiry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>129</sup> Alan Jacobs, “Tending the Digital Commons: A Small Ethics toward the Future.” *Hedgehog Review* (Spring 2018). <https://hedgehogreview.com/issues/the-human-and-the-digital/articles/tending-the-digital-commons>.

countercultural ideas. Second, human beings are lazy herd animals. Or, to put it in less pejorative terms, the vast majority of people will always choose options for action that conserve mental energy without alienating them from their peers and aspirant peers. The SCT offers no answer to this tendency. Moreover, . . .

I'm sorry, am I depressing you? Perhaps so. A quick scan of my emotional faculties suggests that I am depressing myself. But my rational faculties tell me that useful thinking depends on an accurate assessment of the circumstances under which one thinks. And a rational assessment of the current moment must begin with the recognition that the forces against which Illich, Franklin, Postman, and Borgmann contended—and against which Borgmann still contends—have progressed with dramatic speed in the past forty years.

This progression is the inevitable result of three trends, all occurring within the context of global capitalism:

- Moore's Law: In 1965, an electrical engineer named Gordon Moore—then the co-founder of Fairchild Semiconductor Laboratory, later the co-founder of Intel—wrote a paper claiming that the number of components on a given integrated circuit had for some time been doubling every year, and would continue to do so for the foreseeable future.<sup>130</sup> Others pegged the period of doubling at eighteen months,<sup>131</sup> but whatever the specifics, the *effect* has been not just a great increase in readily available computing power but also the placement of that computing power within smaller and smaller containers.
- The mining of lithium: Lithium can be mined directly—mines may be found in the United States (primarily Nevada), Canada (primarily Quebec), and China, among other places—but direct mining is prohibitively expensive in comparison to extraction from salars (salt flats) or briny lakes. Most of the world's lithium comes from salars in Bolivia, Argentina, and Chile. Lithium is the essential component of the batteries that power our increasingly small devices.
- The spread of wireless telecommunications networks: Wireless telecommunications networks are based on an astonishingly diverse set of technologies, involving multiple means of safely transmitting multiple kinds of signals from one location to another.

These three developments are of course built upon an infrastructure subject to many other developments. And all are able to work in smoothly harmonious concert only because of the spread of a global economic order that allows the relatively free passage of raw materials and finished products alike around the world. The result is

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<sup>130</sup> Gordon E. Moore, "Cramming More Components onto Integrated Circuits." <https://newsroom.intel.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2018/05/moores-law-electronics.pdf>.

<sup>131</sup> Michael Kanellos, "Moore's Law to Roll on for Another Decade." CNET, February 11, 2003.

the global dominance of what Shoshana Zuboff calls “surveillance capitalism,”<sup>132</sup> a dominance that is limited only by the following factors:

- A potential slowing of miniaturization, which is to say, the possible falsification of Moore’s Law (though quantum computing may eventually provide a practical solution to such slowing);
- Limits to the world’s supply of lithium, potentially accelerated by the use of lithium batteries in automobiles (though a potentially significant new supply has just been discovered in Cornwall, England)<sup>133</sup>;
- Spottiness in fast wireless coverage in parts of the world (which will likely be addressed by various initiatives, such as the introduction of Internet satellites by Amazon, SpaceX, and other companies);
- The possible intensification of global political conflicts, especially between China and the West.

Any of these, or any combination thereof, could slow the spread of surveillance capitalism; but none of them promises imminent danger to it, and there are potential workarounds for them all.

We are therefore moving ever closer to an environment in which prescriptive, manipulatory technologies are ubiquitous and totalizing—not to say totalitarian, necessarily, although perhaps we do want to say that. A Uighur from western China, faced with an open, full-scale deployment of the most powerful surveillance technologies in the world, would probably want to say that. And it seems increasingly likely that the Chinese government’s treatment of the Uighurs—who, as Muslims who are ethnically Turkic rather than Han Chinese, make exceptionally convenient guinea pigs—is but a trial run for a system that will ultimately be deployed in the whole of China, and exported to other autocracies.<sup>134</sup> It also seems very likely that the Xinjiang re-education camps prefigure the future of China.

## “Life versus the Machine” in the West

Technopoly in the West, by contrast, has tended to deploy carrots rather than sticks, largely through advertising. It is of course possible to resist those carrots, to

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<https://www.cnet.com/news/moores-law-to-roll-on-for-another-decade/>.

<sup>132</sup> Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2019).

<sup>133</sup> Stephen Beard, “Lithium May Fuel a Mining Revival in England’s Cornwall.” *Marketplace*, October 19, 2020. <https://www.marketplace.org/2020/10/19/lithium-may-fuel-a-mining-revival-in-englands-cornwall/>.

<sup>134</sup> Ross Andersen, “The Panopticon Is Already Here.” *The Atlantic* (September 2020). <https://>

practice what Paul Kingsnorth calls “life versus the machine,” though only at significant cost. It has been Kingsnorth’s writerly mission in recent years to articulate what such resistance to the siren-song of technopoly might look like—and why this resistance is necessary:

Any action which hinders the advance of the human industrial economy is an ethical action, provided it does not harm life.

Any action which knowingly and needlessly advances the human industrial economy is an unethical action.<sup>135</sup>

The “human industrial economy” is Kingsnorth’s term for technopoly conceived in relation to the whole of the natural order. While the proponents of the SCT tend to focus their arguments on what technopoly is doing to *us*, to human beings, they are not unaware of the consequences of prescriptive, manipulatory technologies for the rest of the world. By adding Kingsnorth’s insights—and those of other thinkers of similar character, especially Wendell Berry—to those of the SCT, we can see more clearly that every depredation of the human is also a depredation of the natural order, and vice versa.

We might think of the shifting relationship of human beings to the natural world in the terms offered by German sociologist Gerd-Gunter Vofi, who has traced our movement through three different models of the “conduct of life.” The first, and for much of human history the only conduct of life, is what he calls the *traditional*. Your actions within the traditional conduct of life proceed from social and familial circumstances, from what is thus handed down to you. In such a world it is reasonable for family names to be associated with trades, trades that will be passed down from father to son: Smith, Carpenter, Miller. But the rise of the various forces that we call “modernity” led to the emergence of the *strategic* conduct of life: a life with a plan, with certain goals—to get into law school, to become a cosmetologist, to get a corner office.

Quite recently, thanks largely to totalizing technology’s formation of a world in which, to borrow a phrase from Marx and Engels, “all that is solid melts into air,”<sup>136</sup> the strategic model of conduct is replaced by the *situational*. Instead of being systematic planners, we become agile improvisers: If the job market is bad for your college major, you turn a side hustle into a business. But because you know that your business may get disrupted by the tech industry, you don’t bother thinking long-term; your current gig might disappear at any time, but another will surely present itself, which you will assess upon its arrival.

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[www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/09/china-ai-surveil-lance/614197/](http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/09/china-ai-surveil-lance/614197/).

<sup>135</sup> Paul Kingsnorth, “Life versus the Machine.” *Orion*. <https://orionmagazine.org/article/life-versus-the-machine/>.

<sup>136</sup> “Manifesto of the Communist Party.” <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm>.



The movement through these three forms of conduct, whatever benefits it might have, makes our relations with nature increasingly instrumental. We can see this shift more clearly when looking at our changing experience of time, and our understanding of the values inscribed in the passage of time. Within the traditional conduct of life, it is necessary to take stewardly care of the resources required for the exercise of a craft or a profession, as these get passed on from generation to generation. For an excellent example of how this works, see *The Wheelwright's Shop* by George Sturt, a 1923 book for which Albert Borgmann has expressed great regard.<sup>137</sup> The wheelwright must know a great deal about timber. Knowing that good timber for wheels is not easily found, he must also practice care for the forests in which such timber is found. The practice of wheelwrighting requires knowledge of and attention to an entire woodland ecosystem.

But in the progression from the traditional to the strategic to the situational conduct of life, *continuity of preservation* becomes less valuable than *immediacy of appropriation*: We need more lithium today, and merely hope to find greater reserves—or a suitable replacement—tomorrow. This revaluation has the effect of shifting the place of the natural order from something intrinsic to our practices to something extrinsic. The whole of nature becomes what economists tellingly call an *externality*.

It might seem useful to understand a little more clearly how the arguments of the SCT intertwine with the arguments of environmentalists, post-environmentalists (like the ecomodernists), and naturalists (as they were once called) or “nature-lovers,” if we can possibly reclaim that now frivolous term. But to pursue this understanding would only be to expand the population of a rudderless and leaky boat, soon to be swamped by the wake of the mighty ocean-liner of technopoly. We still don't have a way to shift the course of that Leviathan, much less to slow its progress. The question, as we think about moving beyond the Standard Critique, is whether there can be such a way. And at least one answer comes from a surprising source: Daoism. But we can't go there by a direct route.

## The Danger of “Human Resources”

The philosophical ancestor of the Standard Critique is Martin Heidegger. This is not to say that all the proponents of the SCT have read Heidegger, though some of them (such as Borgmann) have drunk deep from that peculiar well. I mean only that Heidegger, especially in his famous essay “The Question Concerning Technology,” provides a specifically philosophical account of the issues that the SCT attempts to address.

Much could be said about Heidegger's strangely compelling exposition—which asks what the essence of technology is—but a few points require our attention here. First, because “technology itself is a contrivance,” an “*instru-mentum*,” we are led to *think*

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<sup>137</sup> Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*.

instrumentally about it. It is a contrivance for mastery, and we therefore naturally think in terms of how *we* can master *it*. But when we look more carefully at how technology is a means that we try to master for specific ends, says Heidegger, we realize that we too, as much as the Great Externality called nature, become raw material in the process. Consider—to re-enter via Heidegger the lifeworld of George Sturt’s wheelwright—a modern forester:

The forester who, in the wood, measures the felled timber and to all appearances walks the same forest path in the same way as did his grandfather is today commanded by profit-making in the lumber industry, whether he knows it or not. He is made subordinate to the orderability of cellulose, which for its part is challenged forth by the need for paper, which is then delivered to newspapers and illustrated magazines.

There is a whole economic system here of which the forester has willy-nilly become a part. Trees make timber, which makes cellulose, which makes paper, which makes newspapers—and because the process is repeated and ongoing, all that material has to be held in “standing-reserve,” that is, regarded as a resource waiting to be used. And so too the forester. Now, as a human being he is not mere standing-reserve; but as a forester he is. Sturt’s account of the transformation of the craft of the wheelwright provides an equally vivid account of this situation.

As Mark Blitz has written—in one of the clearest expositions I know of Heidegger’s engagement with technology—within the governing logic of our current moment

all things increasingly present themselves to us as technological: we see them and treat them as what Heidegger calls a “standing reserve,” supplies in a storeroom, as it were, pieces of inventory to be ordered and conscripted, assembled and disassembled, set up and set aside. Everything approaches us merely as a source of energy or as something we must organize. We treat even human capabilities as though they were only means for technological procedures, as when a worker becomes nothing but an instrument for production. Leaders and planners, along with the rest of us, are mere human resources to be arranged, rearranged, and disposed of. Each and every thing that presents itself technologically thereby loses its distinctive independence and form. We push aside, obscure, or simply cannot see, other possibilities.<sup>138</sup>

This is what Heidegger means when he speaks of the technological “enframing” or “positionality”—the German word is *Gestell*—of human life. It gradually turns us all into “standing-reserve,” as when we speak with equal facility of “natural resources” and “human resources.”

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<sup>138</sup> Mark Blitz, “Understanding Heidegger on Technology.” *The New Atlantis* (Winter 2014). <https://>

This technological enframing of human life, says Heidegger, first “endan-ger[s] man in his relationship to himself and to everything that is” and then, beyond that, “ban-ishes” us from our home. And that is a great, great peril.

## The Way Beyond Heidegger

The philosopher Yuk Hui, a native of Hong Kong who now teaches in Germany, thinks that Heidegger is the most profound of recent Western thinkers on technology—but also that it is necessary to “go beyond Heidegger’s discourse on technology.”<sup>139</sup> In his exceptionally ambitious book *The Question Concerning Technology in China*<sup>140</sup> and in a series of related essays and interviews, Hui argues, as the title of his book suggests, that we go wrong when we assume that there is *one* question concerning technology, *the* question, that is universal in scope and uniform in shape. Perhaps the questions are different in Hong Kong than in the Black Forest. Similarly, the distinction Heidegger draws between ancient and modern technology—where with modern technology everything becomes a mere resource— may not universally hold.

Hui explores, for instance, Kant’s notion of the *cosmopolitan*, and the related role of print technology. A central concept in Enlightenment models of rationality, the cosmopolitan is the ideal citizen of the world engaged in public reasoning, and Kant believed that a “universal cosmopolitan condition” would one day be the natural outcome of history.<sup>141</sup> But Kant’s understanding of what that means is thoroughly entangled with the rise and expansion of print culture. It is directly *through* print culture that the “Republic of Letters,” the very epitome of cosmopolitanism as Kant knew it, is formed. But, then, what might a cosmopolitan be within a society whose print culture is either nonexistent or radically other than the one Enlightenment thinkers knew?

Hui’s novel approach to the question(s) concerning technology thus begins with a pair of seemingly contradictory ideas about whether technology should be seen as universal:

Thesis: Technology is an anthropological universal, understood as an exteriorization of memory and the liberation of organs, as some anthropologists and philosophers of technology have formulated it;

Antithesis: Technology is not anthropologically universal; it is enabled and constrained by particular cosmologies, which go beyond mere functionality or utility. Therefore, there is no one single technology, but rather multiple cosmotechnics.

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/www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/understanding-heidegger-on-technolog.

<sup>139</sup> Yuk Hui, “Cosmotechnics as Cosmopolitics.” *e-flux* 86 (November 2017). <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/86/161887/cosmotechnics-as-cosmopolitics/>.

<sup>140</sup> Yuk Hui, *The Question Concerning Technology in China: An Essay in Cosmotechnics* (Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic, 2016).

<sup>141</sup> Immanuel Kant, “Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View” [1784]. <https://www.m-hikari.com/philosophy/kant/>

As I read Yuk Hui's enormously complex argument, he claims that we are now in a position where we can see what is of value in the Thesis only after we fully dwell within the Antithesis. This leads us to the generative idea of "multiple cosmotechnics." First, what does Hui mean by the peculiar word "cosmotechnics"? "It is the unification of the cosmos and the moral through technical activities, whether craft-making or art-making." That is, a cosmo-technics is the point at which *a way of life is realized through making*.

The point may be illustrated with reference to an ancient tale Hui offers, about an excellent butcher who explains to a duke what he calls the Dao, or "way," of butchering.<sup>142</sup> The reason he is a good butcher, he says, is not his mastery of a skill, or his reliance on superior tools. He is a good butcher because he understands the Dao: Through experience he has come to rely on his intuition to thrust the knife precisely where it does not cut through tendons or bones, and so his knife always stays sharp. The duke replies: "Now I know how to *live*." Hui explains that "it is thus the question of 'living,' rather than that of technics, that is at the center of the story."

This unification—of making and living—might be said to be the whole point of Daoism. Though the same theme is woven through certain Confucian texts and the *I Ching*, it is particularly notable as the incessant refrain of the *Daodejing*, or, as it is more commonly called in the English-speaking world, the *Tao Te Ching*. The title means something like "The Classic of the Virtue of the Way" or "The Classic of the Way and of Virtue." In both cases "virtue" (*Te*) should be understood as something close to the Latin *virtus* or the Greek *arete*, meaning a kind of excellence, an excellence that has power.

Hui says, in an interview with *Noema* magazine about his book, that he has

attempted to understand Chinese cosmotechnics through the dynamic relationship between two major categories of traditional Chinese thought: "dao," or the ethereal life force that circulates all things (commonly referred to as the way), and "qi," which means tool or utensil. Together, dao and qi—the soul and the machine, so to speak—constitute an inseparable unity.<sup>143</sup>

Hui further comments that if the fundamental concern of Western philosophy is with *being* and *substance*, the fundamental concern of Classical Chinese thought is *relation*. So it makes sense, then, that his approach to cosmotechnics would center on the inquiry into a certain relation, that between *dao* (the way) and *qi* (tools).<sup>144</sup>

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/ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub document.cfm?document id=3590.

<sup>142</sup> Hui, "Cosmotechnics as Cosmopolitics."

<sup>143</sup> Yuk Hui, "Singularity vs. Daoist Robots." *Noema* (June 19, 2020). <https://www.noemamag.com/singularity-vs-daoist-robots/>.

<sup>144</sup> An earlier version of this essay, in a footnote on Yuk Hui's rendering of *qi*, implied incorrectly that the widely known *qi* meaning "energy" or "spirit" is the same word as Hui's *qi*, which he translates as "tool." They are distinct Chinese characters, and Hui in his book romanizes "energy" *qi* as *ch'i*. <https://>

## “They Will Sit Collecting Dust”

One could use many different passages in the *Tao Te Ching* to illustrate Yuk Hui’s views, but the obviously central passage is verse 80, which presents us with a vision of a wholly *local* life.<sup>145</sup>

Neighboring villages are within sight of each other  
Roosters and dogs can be heard in the distance  
Should a man grow old and die  
without ever leaving his village  
let him feel as though there was nothing he missed

But what is especially interesting about this village is the presence of technological sophistication:

Let every state be simple  
like a small village with few people  
There may be tools to speed things up  
ten or a hundred times  
yet no one will care to use them  
There may be boats and carriages  
yet they will remain without riders  
There may be armor and weaponry  
yet they will sit collecting dust

Powerful technologies are present—but unused. They are not destroyed, as the Ludites destroyed industrial machinery. They are simply ignored. Neither novelty nor power are attractive to the residents of this village—or rather, this *state* that bears the character of a village.

Let them return  
to the knotting of cord  
Let them enjoy their food  
and care for their clothing  
Let them be content in their homes  
and joyful in the way they live

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[/blog.ayjay.org/qi/](http://blog.ayjay.org/qi/).

<sup>145</sup> I quote from the translation by Jonathan Star (Tarcher, 2001). Knowing no Chinese, I have also found it prudent to consult other translations, especially the one by Edmund Ryden (Oxford, 2008) and the one by Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall (Ballantine, 2003). Star’s translation is an especially elegant one, and while his readings differ from some of the more scholarly ones, the scholarly ones also differ from one another. Ursula K. Le Guin’s version, *Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching: A Book about the Way and the Power of the Way* (Shambhala, 1997), is rather free but accompanied by thoughtful commentary,

This is a vision of a well-lived life, in relation to others, that may be *described* generally—what the people in one village do will resemble what the people do in neighboring villages—but *instantiated* only locally and specifically. For those who live this life, their relation to their tools will be determined by their commitment to the Way. Tools that do not contribute to the Way will neither be worshipped nor despised. They will simply be left to gather dust as the people choose the tools that will guide them in the path of contentment and joy: utensils to cook food, devices to make clothes.

Of course, the food of one village will differ from that of another, as will the clothing. Those who follow the Way will dwell among the “ten thousand things” of this world—what we call nature—in a certain manner that cannot be specified legally: Verse 18 of the *Tao* says that when virtue arises only from rules, that is a sure sign that the Way is not present and active. A cos-motechnics is a living thing, always local in the specifics of its emergence in ways that cannot be specified in advance. Nevertheless, those animated by the Way will bear certain common traits, as described in verse 15:

Deliberate, as if treading over the stones of a winter brook  
Watchful, as if meeting danger on all sides  
Reverent, as if receiving an honored guest  
Selfless, like a melting block of ice  
Pure, like an uncarved block of wood  
Accepting, like an open valley

It is *from* the ten thousand things that we learn how to live among the ten thousand things; and our choice of tools will be guided by what we have learned from that prior and foundational set of relations. This is cosmo-technics.

The variability of this way of life has already been hinted at. Multiplicity avoids the universalizing, totalizing character of technopoly. The adherents of technopoly, Hui writes, “wishfully believ[e] that the world process will stamp out differences and diversities” and thereby achieve a kind of techno-secular “theodicy,” a justification of the ways of technopoly to its human subjects.<sup>146</sup> But the idea of multiple cosmotechnics is also necessary, Hui believes, in order to avoid the simply delusional attempt to find “a way out of modernity” by focusing on the indigenous or biological “Other.” An aggressive hostility to modernity and a fetishizing of pre-modernity is not the Daoist way.

Hui doesn’t believe we can simply return to traditional ways—but this doesn’t mean we cannot resist technopoly. “I believe that to overcome modernity without falling back into war and fascism, it is necessary to reappropriate modern technology through the renewed framework of a cosmo-technics.” His project “doesn’t refuse modern technology, but rather looks into the possibility of different technological futures.”

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especially interesting for readers of her fiction—about which more later.

<sup>146</sup> Hui, “Cosmotechnics as Cosmopolitics.”

This project is necessary because “we are confronting the crisis of the Anthropocene”—the term widely used to designate the current geological age, in which human activity is largely responsible for the transformation of the Earth. Hui describes this shift as “the planetarization of standing reserves.”

That is, what makes this era the Anthropocene is our transformation of Earth’s ecosystem into resources waiting to be exploited. (An illustration: Paul Kingsnorth notes that “Ninety-six percent of Earth’s mammals, by biomass, are humans and livestock. The remaining 4 percent are wild creatures.”<sup>147</sup>) And when we make our world into standing reserve, we do the same to ourselves. We divide the cosmos into “natural resources” and “human resources.”

Therefore, writes Hui, “Heidegger’s critique of technology is more significant today than ever before”—though not adequate to resist “the competition of technological acceleration and the allures of war, technological singularity, and transhumanist (pipe) dreams.” All those forces are pushing in the same direction—the wrong direction. “To reopen the question of technology is to refuse this homogeneous technological future that is presented to us as the only option.”

Further, “Thinking rooted in the earthy virtue of place is the motor of cosmotechnics. However, for me, this discourse on locality doesn’t mean a refusal of change and of progress, or any kind of homecoming or return to traditionalism; rather, it aims at a re-appropriation of technology from the perspective of the local and a new understanding of history.” What is required, then, is not a cosmopolitanism that unifies and regulates but rather a *cosmopolitanism of difference*.

I would like to suggest how this cosmopolitanism of difference can be accomplished by invoking certain concepts that are essential to Daoism, in addition to *dao* and *qi*. The key concepts are *wuwei* (“inaction,” or “acting without action”) and *ziran* (“spontaneously so,” “self-deriving,” or “natural”). In verse 2 of the *Tao Te Ching* we are told,

The sage acts without action [wuwei]  
and teaches without talking  
All things flourish around him  
and he does not refuse any one of them

This choice not to refuse is a choice not to control, not to dictate; that is the form this inaction takes. (Not all inaction takes the same form: the character of inaction is determined relationally.) Note how this point is illustrated in the villagers, or citizens, of verse 80 who simply ignore massive, powerful technologies. Their response to the invitation to dramatically increase their power is simply inaction. Thus also verse 25:

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<sup>147</sup> Kingsnorth, “Life versus the Machine.”

Mankind depends on the laws of Earth  
Earth depends on the laws of Heaven  
Heaven depends on the laws of Tao  
But Tao depends on itself alone  
Supremely free, self-so, it rests in its own nature [ziran]

So to follow the Way sometimes means to let things be, to do nothing— not to destroy or even resist, but to be silent and still. Perhaps to knot a cord, attending all the while to the ten thousand things surrounding us that flourish by resting in their own nature. In so doing we may be able to discern our own nature and dwell spontaneously in it.

## Unhoarding

In *Always Coming Home* (1985)—a strange, unclassifiable book, part novel, part ethnography of an invented people of the future, the Kesh—Ursula K. Le Guin imagines a society governed by verse 80 of the *Tao Te Ching*. We first learn a great deal about the people of the valley of the Na—their songs and dances, their pottery, their social organization into Houses, their rites of maturation and of marriage. Then we discover that in one of the villages there is a computer terminal connected via Internet to a vast AI called the City of Mind, which also knows the very different life of a great metropolis not so far away. (Plural ways of life indeed.) People in the villages know that the terminal exists, but most of them aren't interested in it. Occasionally someone becomes interested, which is fine. The terminal is there when needed.

But social flourishing doesn't require the terminal. I say "social" flourishing because the Kesh do not live very long. Their lifespan has been diminished by a great plague that once ravaged the world. Such plagues we cannot do very much about, nor the resulting compromise of our collective health. But to live virtuously, in accordance with Dao, and to be content—these we can do. We can only hope that it will not take a truly deadly pandemic—something far worse than the one we've had—to remind us of the contentment that can be found in the acceptance of limits.

*Always Coming Home* illustrates cosmotechnics in a hundred ways. Consider, for instance, information storage and retrieval. At one point we meet the archivist of the Library of the Madrone Lodge in the village of Wakwa-ha-na. A visitor from our world is horrified to learn that while the library gives certain texts and recordings to the City of Mind, some of their documents they simply destroy. "But that's the point of information storage and retrieval systems! The material is kept for anyone who wants or needs it. Information is passed on—the central act of human culture." But that is not how the librarian thinks about it. "Tangible or intangible, either you keep a thing or you give it. We find it safer to give it"—to practice "unhoarding." She continues,

Giving involves a good deal of discrimination; as a business it requires a more disciplined intelligence than keeping, perhaps. Disciplined people



come here [...] historians, learned people, scribes and reciters and writers, they're always here, like those four, you see, going through the books, copying out what they want, annotating. Books no one reads go; books people read go after a while. But they all go. Books are mortal. They die. A book is an act; it takes place in time, not just in space. It is not information, but relation.

*It is not information, but relation.* This too is cosmotechnics.

## Mocking the Proud Spirit

How does a Dao-inspired view of our future with technology square with the totalizing tech-dystopian agenda of present-day China?

It is, I think, significant that Yuk Hui is not from the People's Republic of China but rather Hong Kong, and was educated partly in England before moving to Germany. This seems relevant to his interest in and reliance on Daoism as opposed to Confucianism, which he treats in his work but does not emphasize to the same degree. Though Daoism is one of the traditional Three Ways of Chinese culture, along with Confucianism and Buddhism, it is not easily made compatible with the interests of the Chinese Communist Party, or CCP. There is something intrinsically *dissenting* about Daoism, whereas Confucianism has for many centuries been associated with governance and statecraft. After all, the famous imperial examination system that for almost fifteen hundred years produced Chinese scholar-bureaucrats was based primarily on Confucian texts and principles.

The relationship between Confucianism and bureaucracy has led one Chinese scholar, Tongdong Bai, in his new book *Against Political Equality: The Confucian Case*, to make a provocative argument about the world's political future.<sup>148</sup> The growing discontent within liberal democracies might find an answer, he says, in Confucianism. Early Confucians "more or less embraced the ideas of equality, upward mobility, and accountability." But "they had reservations about the democratic idea of 'by the people,' or self-governance. Their political ideal was a hybrid between popular participation and intervention by the elites or, more properly, by the meritocrats." The rational, meritocratic, hierarchical social structures promoted by Confucianism, he argues, are well-suited to Chinese culture under the CCP, and are equally well-suited to resolving the political problems of the West.

A similar argument is made by Daniel A. Bell and Wang Pei in their new book *Just Hierarchy: Why Social Hierarchies Matter in China and the Rest of the World*.<sup>149</sup> Both books contend that Confucianism is uniquely positioned to consolidate and rationalize

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<sup>148</sup> Tongdong Bai, *Against Political Equality: The Confucian Case* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019).

<sup>149</sup> Daniel A. Bell and Wang Pei, *Just Hierarchy: Why Social Hierarchies Matter in China and the Rest of the World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020).

the order of modernity by drawing strength from traditional insights that modernity in the West has lost sight of, especially the rejection of a crude universal notion of equality and its replacement by a socially embodied just hierarchy. This would not mark the end of technopoly but its reshaping by the classic Confucian commitment to “benevolence.” Bell and Pei write that for Confucians, public officials should “grasp the moral Way [...], implement benevolent policies that benefit the people, and protect civilians from cruel policies.” The authors even claim that “Confucianism can help us to think of how to meet the challenge of artificial intelligence so that machines continue to serve human purposes.” How does Daoism fit in? Though Tongdong Bai explores it elsewhere, in *Against Political Equality* he does not treat it at all. Bell and Pei see a very limited, negative role for Daoism: For those “left out of the political hierarchies,” a “Daoist-style skepticism about the desirability of the whole meritocratic system can help to legitimize alternative avenues for socially valued ways of life.” Or, to put this the other way around, “Daoist ideas can help to legitimize the system among those left out.”

The skeptical character of Daoism is indeed the key here. As Yuk Hui writes, in response to a scholar who argues that both Confucianism and Daoism advocate a “return to the self in order to seek moral principles,” the likeness is false because “the nature proposed by Daoism is not a scientific and moral principle, but rather a *Dao* that cannot be named and explained.” (It is for good reason that Daoism features in every reputable history of anarchism, and that people who are interested in anarchism, like Ursula K. Le Guin, are also interested in Daoism.) The Daoist sage, like Michel de Montaigne—the Western thinker who most closely resembles that central figure in the *Tao Te Ching*—asks, “What do I know?” (*Que sfay-je?*) It is not a recipe for rule. The Daoist sage does not seek to govern, though the *Tao Te Ching* makes it clear that any community that happens to have a sage lying around should plead with him to lead them.

The particular tone of the sage’s skepticism is *ironic*, and the sage is in some essential sense an ironist, but his irony is always directed primarily toward himself. Indeed, this is precisely why people should seek him out to govern them: His primary qualification for office is the gently humorous attitude he takes toward himself, which then extends outward toward our technological “enframing” of the world. As I noted earlier, a community of Daoist sages, such as the one envisioned in verse 80 of the *Tao Te Ching*, wouldn’t smash machines as the Luddites did, but rather smile at them and if possible ignore them.

Heidegger is not known for his humor; there aren’t a lot of laughs in Hui’s work either. But I think this ironic humor I have been sketching out is essential to the character of the sage and, more important for my purposes here, essential to the sage’s role in leading us anarchically out of the technological “enframing” of the world. Sir

Thomas More said that Satan is a “proud spirit” who “cannot endure to be mocked”<sup>150</sup>; this is equally true of the slightly lesser Power we call technopoly.

I think Hui’s cosmotechnics, generously leavened with the ironic humor intrinsic to Daoism, provides a genuine Way—pun intended—beyond the limitations of the Standard Critique of Technology. I say this even though I am not a Daoist; I am, rather, a Christian. But it should be noted that Daoism is both *daojiao*, an organized religion, and *daojia*, a philosophical tradition. It is *daojia* that Hui advocates, which makes the wisdom of Dao-ism accessible and attractive to a Christian like me. Indeed, I believe that elements of *daojia* are profoundly consonant with Christianity, and yet underdeveloped in the Christian tradition, except in certain modes of Franciscan spirituality, for reasons too complex to get into here. (Franciscans are in a way the Daoists of Christianity, and Saint Francis himself, if you observe him from certain angles, a kind of Daoist sage.)

More generally, this cosmotechnics, this technological Daoism as an embodiment of *daojia*, is accessible to people of any religious tradition or none. It provides a *comprehensive and positive* account of the world and one’s place in it that makes a different approach to technology more plausible and compelling. The SCT tends only to gesture in the direction of a model of human flourishing, evokes it mainly by implication, whereas Yuk Hui’s Daoist model gives an explicit and quite beautiful account. And the fact that cosmotechnics, as I noted earlier, can be *generally described* but only *locally instantiated* makes room for a great deal of creative adaptation.

Moreover, cosmotechnics provides guidance for ordinary people and technologists alike. The application of Daoist principles is most obvious, as the above exposition suggests, for “users” who would like to graduate to the status of “non-users”: those who quietly turn their attention to more holistic and convivial technologies, or who simply sit or walk contemplatively. But in the interview I quoted from earlier, Hui says, “Some have quipped that what I am speaking about is Daoist robots or organic AI”—and this needs to be more than a quip. Peter Thiel’s longstanding attempt to make everyone a disciple of Rene Girard is a dead end. What we need is a Daoist culture of coders, and people devoted to “action without acting” making decisions about lithium mining.

One reason to hope that this is possible arises from the genealogy of what Richard Barbrook and Andy Cameron have called the “Californian ide-ology”<sup>151</sup>: that peculiar combination of capitalist drive and countercultural social preference that has done so much to make Silicon Valley what it is. The anarchic Sixties counterculture that provides half the impetus of this ideology is of course saturated with thought from the East; and now the whole of Silicon Valley is intricately entangled with China<sup>152</sup>—

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<sup>150</sup> Thomas More, *Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation*, ed. Monica Stevens (Auckland: Floating Press, 2013), 167.

<sup>151</sup> Richard Barbrook and Andy Cameron, “The Californian Ideology.” *Mute* (September 1, 1995). <https://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/californian-ideol-ogX>

<sup>152</sup> Elsa B. Kania, “Tech Entanglement—China, the United States, and Artificial Intelligence.” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (February 6, 2018). <https://thebulletin.org/2018/02/tech-entanglement->

where for some years now there has been a renewal of Daoism,<sup>153</sup> one not challenged, though also not endorsed, by the Chinese Communist Party. A synergy could emerge—if only we can find the sages necessary to make this cos-motechnics compelling. The question of how such sages might be formed, and formed more in a Daoist mode than a Confucian one, is a matter for further reflection.

## The Question Concerning China

Carl Mitcham

Illustrating what the Chinese call *^ ^ yuanfen* (fortuitous relationship), the year 1954 witnessed the publication of three works that have had profound influences on the thinking of technology. One was, of course, Jacques Ellul's *La Technique, ou L'enjeu du siecle*, a text that had been gestating for some ten years. Another was Martin Heidegger's *Die Frage nach der Technik*, distilled from talks the recently de-Nazified philosopher had been giving to German engineers. The third was a first volume of British biochemist and self-taught sinologue Joseph Needham's *Science and Civilization in China*. Those seeking to reflect critically on modern technology are only now beginning to appreciate the implications of Needham's work (since extended to more than twenty volumes) for themes raised by the other two writers. The one scholar who has most led this socio-ontological engagement is Yuk Hui, a young professor now at the City University of Hong Kong.

## The Needham Project

Needham's project can be traced back to the late 1930s (as can Ellul's and Heidegger's), with a serendipitous exposure, through his affair with a postdoc from Nanjing, to the richness of a civilization longer and more continuous than that of the Mediterranean West. As an ardent disciple of Western science—and with a belief in its essential universality—Needham set out to identify hidden continuities between Chinese and European discoveries and inventions. He ultimately argued that for roughly two thousand years, from 500 BCE to 1500 CE, China was the most advanced scientific and technical civilization in the world. During this period, the Chinese tradition knew more about nature and was more technically creative than any other in world history.<sup>154</sup> In its coverage of science, engineering, and technology in multiple forms across thousands of

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china-the-united-states-and-artificial-intelligence/.

<sup>153</sup> Matthew Carney, "China Reconnects with the Religion of Daoism, under the Watchful Eye of the Community Party." ABC News, December 27, 2017. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-12-28/we-have-restored-it-chinas-daoism-revival/9287484>.

<sup>154</sup> See Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, vol. 7, part II: *General Conclusions and Reflections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 21724, for his list of pre-modern Chinese discoveries and inventions.

years, biographer Simon Winchester's *The Man Who Loved China*<sup>155</sup> describes *Science and Civilization in China* as a *magnum opus* comparable with the *Corpus Aristotelicum*. The Needham Research Institute at Cambridge is today the leading center for continuing work on the history of science broadly construed (i.e., including technology and medicine) in Asia.

Mitcham, Carl. "The Question Concerning China." *Ellul Forum* 68 (Fall 2021): 25-42.

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The intellectual engine of Needham's research was what has come to be called the "Needham question." As he put it in a 1947 lecture, it is "the great problem of why modern science and technology developed in Europe and not in Asia. [... T]he more you know about Chinese civilization, the more odd it seems that modern science and technology did not develop there."<sup>156</sup> Or as he reiterated in 1953,

Before the fourteenth century A.D., Europe was almost wholly receiving from Asia rather than giving, especially in the field of technology. What can be said about the social milieu which produced that accomplishment and that failure?<sup>157</sup>

A decade later, in the same year that Ellul's *La Technique* appeared in English as *The Technological Society*, Needham complemented his original question with another: "[W]hy, between the first century B.C. and the fifteenth century A.D., [was] Chinese civilization [...] much *more* efficient than occidental in applying human natural knowledge to practical human needs?"<sup>158</sup> Both questions—why post-1500 China failed to give rise to a technoscientific society (as in Europe) and why for hundreds of years ante-1500 Chinese society was the most scientific and technologically advanced in the world—obviously complement Ellul's concern for the emergence of a Western social order dominated by scientific technology. At the very least, Needham's claim that China was host to highly developed science and technology prior to 1500, without for that matter becoming what Ellul calls a "technological society," offers both counterpoint and challenge to some of Ellul's ideas.

In China, traditional advances in discovery and invention took place without major disruptions in culture and civilization. The continuous subordination of technics to culture in Chinese civilization from the Qin to the Qing dynasties (221 BCE to 1912) offers a positive response to Ellul's question of whether there can be a civilization "inclusive of technique."<sup>159</sup> The break in Chinese culture came not from within but from without, as a result of Western aggressive imperialism and the arrival of a new kind of technology. Ellul's questioning of the compatibility of modern technology and civilization is, of course, one that Needham largely ignores, or addresses with what Ellul would

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<sup>155</sup> Simon Winchester, *The Man Who Loved China* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008).

<sup>156</sup> Joseph Needham, *The Grand Titration: Science and Society in East and West* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), 154.

<sup>157</sup> Needham, *The Grand Titration*, 177.

<sup>158</sup> Needham, *The Grand Titration*, 190.

<sup>159</sup> See Jacques Ellul, "The Technological Order." In Carl F. Stover, ed., *The Technological Order* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1963).

likely reject as shallow Christian optimism and naive Marxism. Admittedly, Needham practiced a wildly eccentric, anarchistic Christianity as well as a heterodox British Marxism (in the company of J.B.S. Haldane, J.D. Bernal, and others). But this should not be allowed to detract from the seriousness of his technoscientific, philosophical, and historical work, any more than Ellul's dogmatic Protestant Christianity should be a basis for summarily rejecting his critical, reflective sociology. Appreciation of the work of both must be critical but nuanced; sometimes both have been treated with too much homage. One lacuna in Needham's extensive reach—and despite a late-in-career engagement with the newly emerging interdisciplinary field of science, technology, and society (STS) studies—he never attended either to Heidegger's phenomenological questioning of the truth of the modern technologically infused scientific world picture or to Ellul's dialectical Christian-sociological analyses of techno-deformations in contemporary society. Needham was taken in by Maoist China in ways that Ellul would have criticized as intellectually disgraceful, to put it mildly. Still, Needham's positivist cataloging of discoveries in Chinese civilization and celebration of its achievements were simultaneously pursued from a perspective that challenged any mechanistic interpretation of natural science. What universal science ultimately disclosed, for Needham, was not mechanism but organicism. At some level, Needham's philosophy was vitalism. Although Needham was an ardent defender of science, he argued for a reinterpretation from within that would in effect extend its hegemony.

## Heidegger's Destabilization

It was the work of Heidegger perhaps more than any other twentieth-century philosopher who destabilized the historiographic and epistemological convictions that animated Needham's commitment to the universal truth claims of the modern sciences. In *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger presents truth as something other than the traditional correspondence between conceptual representation and reality. In an etymological analysis of the Greek word  $\alpha\lambda\epsilon\theta\epsilon\iota\alpha$ , commonly translated as "truth," he interprets *aletheia* as a compound of *a-* (negation) + *letheia* (from Lethe, one of the five rivers of the underworld, which caused those who drank it to forget their past lives). For Heidegger, truth is an uncovering or disclosure of what was forgotten, hidden. But any revelation or truth in turn hides other aspects of what is. The history of science in its modernist, Enlightenment expansion across the cognitive landscape brings into focus a new vision of the real but necessarily obscures others. There is no simple accumulation of ever more encompassing truth.

Over the course of history, different disclosures or revelations have differentially structured our access to reality, each constitutive of a world and bringing with it (to put things crudely, in terms of the present technological disclosure) distinctive benefits and costs. For Plato, Aristotle, and the other Greeks, the world-creating disclosure or truth was of Being as presence and a corresponding ontology of form. In the Christian period it was of Being as transcendent. In the modern period the new disclosure is of

world as *Bestand* or resource, the immanent enacting ground of which Heidegger names *Gestell*. Modern science takes up with the world through *Gestell*, picture knowing it as matter and laws over against human subjectivity. In contrast to the premodern craft-making of technics tied to local place and culture, modern scientific engineering exploits previously unknown resources such as coal and electricity in the aggressive design of universal transport and communication systems entwined with capitalist economics. In his failure to appreciate the historical (but not relativist) character of modern natural science and its technological corollaries, Needham's effort to valorize Chinese science becomes on occasion a patronizing translation of pre-modern Chinese ideas into modern concepts.

Chinese medical anthropologist Judith Farquhar in a recent set of Terry Lectures at Yale (2017) put it this way:

I cannot share Needham's deep commitment to the epistemological superiority of modern science and his vision of the evolution of world knowledge toward better and better accounts of only one world.<sup>160</sup>

Indeed, she also recalls a discussion in which Needham's collaborator Lu Gwei-Djen expressed her own doubts about how efforts to protect Chinese medical knowledge from looking like magic, religion, or superstition could betray the language and practices of classical medical practices and texts. The situation is ironic insofar as biochemist Needham, prior to his engagement with China, in his own Terry Lectures (of 1934, published 1936) had sought to destabilize modern scientific positivism from within by challenging mechanistic interpretations of biology as an "almost religious believer in 'organicism.'"<sup>161</sup>

Needham thus attempted to introduce his destabilization from within, but in a manner that retained the essential unity of science and even eventually expanded it so as to encompass Chinese science and civilization. Indeed, there is a sense in which Heidegger too sought to destabilize from within, but in a more radical (and dangerous) way, by secularizing Søren Kierkegaard's revolt against establishment Christianity and appealing to Friedrich Nietzsche's radical criticism of European civilization and culture (especially bourgeois culture). Like his precursors, in his foundational arguments Heidegger makes no use of Chinese history or civilization—although in the 1930s he did express some interest in Daoism<sup>162</sup> and later engaged Asian thinking through some students from Japan, Germany's Nazi ally.

In China, post-Reform and Opening (1978), Chinese interest in and translations of Heidegger have been extensive. This includes interest in Heidegger's philosophical criticisms of science and technology. *Being and Time* was translated into Chinese in 1987.

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<sup>160</sup> Judith Farquhar, *A Way of Life: Things, Thought, and Action in Chinese Medicine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 8.

<sup>161</sup> Joseph Needham, *Order and Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1936), 3.

<sup>162</sup> See Paul Shih-yi Hsiao, "Heidegger and Our Translation of the *Tao Te Ching*." In Graham Parkes, *Heidegger and Asian Thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), 93-105; Lin Ma,

## Misprisioned China

There is a similar failure to pay any substantial attention to China in Ellul. (As an aside, note that despite mutual resonances between Heidegger's *Gestell* and Ellul's *Technique*, neither makes any significant references to the other, either.) But Ellul's failure here is different than Heidegger's.

Ellul did write repeatedly about China, for example in his three books on revolution—*Autopsie de la revolution* (1969), *De la revolution aux revoltes* (1972), and *Changer de revolution: L'inéluctable proletariat* (1982)—and some studies of propaganda. But his concern there is only with twentieth-century Communist China; all references to deep China are quite superficial. Ellul was primarily concerned to expose a shameful French intellectual idolization of Maoist China, as present in the 1968 student-worker protests<sup>163</sup> and further exemplified by the 1974 visit of *Tel Quel* contributors to China.<sup>164</sup> The two great themes of Ellul's life and thought—Christianity and technology—are nevertheless not significantly informed by any engagement with Chinese civilization, culture, or philosophy. He simply uses his own thinking to criticize contemporary French intellectual infatuation with China and contemporary China itself.

In what ways might serious engagement with classical Chinese civilization inform or deepen Ellul's research into and criticisms of technological society? This is not an easy question to answer; only brief suggestions are possible here. Let me simply give two.

First, as already noted, premodern Chinese technical culture may offer some insight into what a civilization "inclusive of technique" might look like, beyond the theologically thick but sociologically thin indications present in Ellul. This is, of course, true to some extent for all premodern cultures. But the longest and most continuous literate civilization, which was so uniquely inventive, surely offers unique possibilities for exploration. One might, for instance, compare the dialectics of material and spiritual culture implicit in the French *Encyclopedie* (1751-72) and the ancient Chinese compilation of arts and crafts in the *Kaogong ji* (fifth century BCE), which was preserved as an element in the Confucian canon for more than two thousand years.<sup>165</sup> Post-Needham, the distinctive lifeworlds in Chinese material and intellectual culture, especially during the transition to modernity that began c. 1700, have been topics of an increasing number of scholarly studies in the West that could complement Ellul's somewhat narrow if not provincial focus on the European. For a useful overview of the transition, see at least

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"Deciphering Heidegger's Connection with the Daodejing." *Asian Philosophy* 16, no. 3 (2006): 149-71.

<sup>163</sup> See Michele Manceaux, *Les Maos en France* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972); Francois Hourmant, *Les Anne'es Mao en France: Avant, pendant et apres mai 68 (1966—1976)* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2018).

<sup>164</sup> See Ieme Van der Poel, "Tel Quel et la Chine: L'Orient comme mythe de l'intellectuel occidental." *History of European Ideas* 16, no. 4-6 (1993): 431-39.

<sup>165</sup> For an English text, see Wenren Jun, *Ancient Chinese Encyclopedia of Technology: Translation and Annotation of the Kaogong ji (the Artificers' Record)* (London: Routledge, 2013).



Benjamin Elman's *On Their Own Terms: Science in China, 1550-1900*, supplemented with Jing Tsu and Elman's edited volume, *Science and Technology in Modern China, 1880s-1940s*.<sup>166</sup> As samples of thicker cultural studies focusing on material life and practice, see at least Francesca Bray's *Technology and Gender: Fabrics of Power in Late Imperial China* and *Technology, Gender and History in Imperial China: Great Transformations Reconsidered*, along with Dagmar Schafer's *The Crafting of the 10,000 Things: Knowledge and Technology in Seventeenth-Century China*.<sup>167</sup>

For me, even more suggestive for cultural practices that relativize modern technology is the already mentioned work of Farquhar. Here I would add references to *Appetites: Food and Sex in Post-Socialist China*, *Ten Thousand Things: Nurturing Life in Contemporary Beijing*, and *Gathering Medicines: Nation and Knowledge in China's Mountain South*.<sup>168</sup> These provide especially calming counterpoint to Ellul's sometimes angry if not petulant diatribes against contemporary culture (Chinese and Western) under the influence of technology.

Second, a serious engagement with China offers the possibility for a deeper and more nuanced insight into the distinctiveness of the West, which Ellul is at pains at once to explicate, defend, and criticize. In *Betrayal of the West*, he wrote,

I, who have attacked the technical society and its scientific rationality, feel obliged to show that there is also a very different side to the West. The West represents values for which there is no substitute. The end of the West today would mean the end of any possible civilization. [...] To have given priority to rationality or the future or "having" is to have set out on a completely different road from that followed by other human groups.<sup>169</sup>

Yet as he also admits, "The French, the English, the Spaniards have committed countless atrocities through the world over the centuries" that are "a source of constant remorse for me, an unbearable burden" (7):

I accept responsibility for the evil that has been done, but I deny that only evil has been done. I know our civilization is built on bloodshed and robbery, but I also know that every civilization is build on bloodshed and robbery. (9)

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<sup>166</sup> Benjamin A. Elman, *On Their Own Terms: Science in China, 1550—1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); Jing Tsu and Benjamin A. Elman, eds., *Science and Technology in Modern China, 1880s—1940s* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

<sup>167</sup> Francesca Bray, *Technology and Gender: Fabrics of Power in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Francesca Bray, *Technology, Gender and History in Imperial China: Great Transformations Reconsidered* (London: Routledge, 2013); Dagmar Schafer, *The Crafting of the 10,000 Things: Knowledge and Technology in Seventeenth-Century China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

<sup>168</sup> Judith Farquhar, *Appetites: Food and Sex in Post-Socialist China* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); Judith and Qicheng Zhang, *Ten Thousand Things: Nurturing Life in Contemporary Beijing* (New York: Zone Books, 2012); Judith Farquhar and Lili Lai, *Gathering Medicines: Nation and Knowledge in China's Mountain South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021).

<sup>169</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Betrayal of the West*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Seabury, 1978), vii and ix.

Tell me, what is the greatest colonial power of our time? China, of course, which has occupied such non-Chinese territories as Manchuria, Mongolia, Sinkiang, and Tibet. [...] The Chinese and the Africans are not free of the sin we acknowledge in ourselves; they have been colonialist no less than we, and they (in the case of the Chinese) are imperialists no less than we. (11)

Surely this *cri de caur* is a simplification. On a scale of population, wasn't the British Imperial conquest and corruption of India greater than China's much smaller alleged colonies? Doesn't Ellul overlook how the invasions of Manchuria and Mongolia were preceded by Manchurian and Mongolian invasions of China as well as CIA involvement in Tibet? But more broadly, I'd hypothesize that a more nuanced engagement with China might contribute to deeper understandings of what makes Western "bloodshed and robbery" distinctive, including the justifications it has offered by appeals to revelation. Chinese imperialists never claimed justification by a supernatural God. Although as a theologian Ellul categorically rejects justification by revelation as theologically illegitimate, as a sociologist he is obliged to acknowledge its historically unique and powerful influence under the conditions of the Abrahamic religions.

## Greatness and Decline in the West

The theme of *Betrayal*, Ellul says, is "the greatness and decline of western civilization" in the tradition of Oswald Spengler, Werner Sombart, Jose Ortega y Gasset, and others at a "critical time when our civilization is being challenged, rejected without due consideration, and condemned with arguments that are not all bad, but with no one to plead in its defense except a few fascists" (vii).

Ellul recognizes that his ideas are sometimes appropriated by the Right but fundamentally rejects any sympathy with it. Chapter two is an overwrought jeremiad against the Left, for not being Left enough—for hypocritically siding with the poor only to abuse the truly poor. To this end, Ellul develops a somewhat strained distinction between three types of poverty: economic, political, and fame or reputation. Deprivation of any attention is the deepest poverty, as represented by, among others, post-World War II displaced peoples, Israelis, Kurds, and Tibetans. Leftist protests against the treatment of North Vietnam and black Africa are simply tactics for criticizing the West. "Do not let yourself be fooled by the outcries of the people who defend the Palestinians, the Chileans [against Pinochet?], the American blacks. [...] "They do not realize it, but they are liars" (123).

They lie insofar as their criticism of the unjust actions of the West valorize other civilizations at the expense of the West, thus undermining the basis of their own commitments. The West is unique and has introduced a uniquely valuable dynamic into world history. "I am not criticizing or rejecting other civilizations and societies," writes Ellul; "I have deep admiration for the institutions of the Bantu and other peoples (the Chinese among them)." But "ask yourself this question: If the Chinese have done away with binding of the feet of women, [...] whence did the impulse to these moves

come from? From the West, and nowhere else!” (16). “The whole of the modern world, for better or for worse, is following a western model; no one imposed it on others, they have adopted it themselves, and enthusiastically” (17).

At its core, Ellul’s historical vision is Hegelian.

The essential, central, undeniable fact is that the West was the first civilization in history to focus attention on the individual and on freedom. [...] We have committed crimes, but we have also caused the whole of mankind to take a gigantic step forward and to leave its childhood behind. [...] The West and the West alone, is responsible for the movement that has led to the desire for freedom and to the accusations now turned back upon the West. (17)

Ellul’s conceptualization of freedom is not exactly the same as Hegel’s, and Ellul makes only one indirect reference to him. But for Ellul just as for Hegel, freedom provides “a line of development common to all societies throughout history” (18).

[I]t was precisely the meaning of the whole process that the West discovered (not through sociological research, but in the form of a [Christian] proclamation). The West turned the whole human project into a conscious, deliberate business. It set the goal and called it freedom, or, at a later date, individual freedom. It gave direction to all the forces that were working in obscure ways, and brought to light the value that gave history its meaning. Thereby, man became man. (19)

The process began with the Jews, worked its way through the Greeks and Romans and into Christian Europe (first Catholic, then Protestant), leaving out of the grand narrative (as Hegel did) not just the Chinese but all non-Western civilizations—until, that is, they came under the influence of the West.

Today the whole world has become the heir of the West, and we Westerners now have a twofold heritage: we are heirs to the evil the West has done to the rest of the world, but at the same time we are heirs to our forefathers’ consciousness of freedom. [...] Other peoples, too, are heirs to the evil that has been inflicted on them, but now they have also inherited the consciousness of and desire for freedom. Everything they do today and everything they seek is an expression of what the western world has taught them. (21)

There is something breathtaking in the arrogance of the double “everything” in this last sentence: a hyperbole often repeated with assertions about “everyone” and “all” in multiple contexts that would seem to call for at least some minimal qualification.

Take the case of revolution: “Nowhere in the world—and I speak as one with a knowledge of history—has there ever been a revolution, not even in China, until the western message penetrated that part of the world” (24). Ellul evidently assumes here a distinction between revolt and revolution as developed in *Autopsie de la revolution* (1969) that nevertheless belittles the arguably revolutionary character of the civilizing creations of Chinese dynasties from the Qin and Han through the Tang, Song, Ming, and Qing.

”Please,” Ellul responds,

don't deafen us with talk about the greatness of Chinese or Japanese civilization. These civilizations existed indeed, but in a larval or embryonic state; they were approximations, essays. They always related to only one sector of the human or social totality and tended to be static and immobile. Because the West was motivated by the ideal of freedom and had discovered the individual, it alone launched society in its entirety on its present course. (29)

Ellul acknowledges however a dark side to the grand narrative:

The freedom being everywhere sought and being expressed at all levels has led the peoples along strange ways and produced unexpected consequences. Thus the systematic, effective application of rationality (*technique*) is evidently an effect of freedom. At the same time [...] it has proved to be the great force that negates and destroys freedom. (21)

Still, although "freedom may perhaps turn the world into a chaotic hell, but once the possibility of freedom is glimpsed, nothing else can satisfy man. [...] H]e is a maker of history, history understood as the expression of freedom and of man's mastery of events, nature, and his own social life" (32).

There is something chaotic as well in Ellul's whole book (a text that can also be read as marking a shift away from his earlier efforts to separate historical, sociological, and theological work, toward synthesis): not just in its rhetoric—which is by turns often dismissive of nuance, disconsolate, boastful, and petulant—but in the simplicity of its conceptual apparatus. While making use of diverse distinctions developed by others—e.g., Eros and Agape (Anders Nygren) and Dionysian vs. Apollonian mentalities—his key distinctions remain disappointingly vague, i.e., between reason (characterized as good), rationality (bad), rationalism (really bad), and rational method (technique?). Comparison with and reflection on reason as it appears in classical Chinese, as limned by Needham, could reasonably assist in clarifying such notions, as exemplified in French philosopher and sinologist François Jullien's method of "detour and access."<sup>170</sup> Indeed, if China were to be treated as something more than a kind of historico-whipping boy, the exercise might promote new insight into that distinctiveness of the West, which Ellul is at pains to both explicate and defend.

Additionally, the calmness infused throughout the Chinese tradition (which Jullien praises as "blandness" ☒ *dan*<sup>171</sup>) might temper Ellul's emotional turmoil. Repeatedly he castigates "technicians" but never clarifies membership in this class of bad guys. Much of the text is bloviated, repetitive, and lazy: at one point (chapter 2, note 7) he actually admits that an argument is dated but says he includes it anyway. Evidently composed in haste, out of spleen, and with little revision, the text is disrespectful of the reader, about whom Ellul nevertheless complains: "Writing this book has given

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<sup>170</sup> François Jullien, *Detour and Access: Strategies of Meaning in China and Greece*, trans. Sophie Hawkes (New York: Zone Books, 2004); see also François Jullien, *From Being to Living: A Euro-Chinese Lexicon of Thought*, trans. Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijalkowski (Los Angeles: Sage, 2020).

<sup>171</sup> François Jullien, *In Praise of Blandness: Proceeding from Chinese Thought and Aesthetics*, trans. Paula M. Varsano (New York: Zone Books, 2008).

me once again the feeling that I have done something absolutely useless, because no one will be able to accept it” (193). “All the behavior (and I mean literally all of it) of the technicians, the bureaucrats, the politicians, and, at bottom (despite appearances), the philosophers, the film-makers, and the scientists is suicidal” (194).

In the end, despite many genuine critical insights into the dialectical fragilities of the European heritage, Ellul’s self-indulgence tends to undermine therapeutic efforts and verges on incoherence. The prologue states unequivocally that “the end of the West today would mean the end of any possible civilization” (vii), while the last sentence of the epilogue reads, “The West is at its end—but that does not necessarily mean the end of the world” (200). As an aside, before turning to Yuk Hui, we can note that, unlike with Heidegger, little by Ellul has been translated into or discussed in Chinese. The only book translated is *La raison d’être: Meditation sur l’Ecclesiaste* (1987), published in Taiwan in traditional characters. His article “The Technological Order” is included in a simplified-characters translation in Wu Guos-heng’s *Classical Readings in the Philosophy of Technology*.<sup>172</sup> He is, however, often mentioned in publications on philosophy and technology. His name appears in the titles of twenty-five articles in the ^S^HIW CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure) database. Writers have reviewed his ideas (four articles), his concept of the autonomy of technology (seven articles), theories of propaganda and media (two articles), and ethics of freedom (three articles). There is no monograph devoted to his thought.<sup>173</sup>

## The Question Concerning Technology in China

Against this background, Chinese philosopher Yuk Hui’s *The Question Concerning Technology in China* is unique.<sup>174</sup> It is the first effort to bring the three thought-revolutionaries of 1954 into dialogue. Hui can be read as advancing a bold reassessment and extension of themes found first in Heidegger and Needham but reaching out also to include minor cords from Ellul. Indeed, four years earlier, Hui analyzed and elaborated on the special insight of Ellul’s concept of the technological system.<sup>175</sup>

The present book is an effort to rethink technology, resting in and developing the idea that nature is not some one thing, that it is co-constructed and therefore variable—and that this variability is reflected in diverse technologies. While scientists posit something that is the same behind their theoretical and experimental discoveries, the discoveries themselves present an ever-shifting view of natural reality. Even Needham

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<sup>172</sup> Ellul, “The Technological Order,” 10-37.

<sup>173</sup> Thanks to my research assistant Li Weibo at Renmin University of China for this information.

<sup>174</sup> Yuk Hui, *The Question Concerning Technology in China: An Essay in Cosmotechnics* (Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic Media, 2016).

<sup>175</sup> Yuk Hui, “Technological System and the Problem of Desymbolization.” In Helena Jeronimo, Jose Lms Garcia, and Carl Mitcham, eds., *Jacques Ellul and the Technological Society in the 21st Century* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013), 73-82.

admits that Chinese culture has involved different practice-embedded cosmologies than what is typically present in the modern West. Against this background, Hui concretely formulates his own question as: “If one admits that there are multiple natures, is it possible to think of multiple technics, which are different from each other not simply functionally and aesthetically, but also ontologically and cosmologically?”<sup>176</sup>

One way to begin engaging this question is to note the quite different mythological accounts of the origin of technics. In the West, there are such stories as those of Prometheus and the Tower of Babel. In both the Greek and the Hebrew traditions, technics is culturally conceived as a kind of opposition to the gods or God. Such a view is in the background of Heidegger’s effort to radically question what he sees as the metaphysical challenge of life in our technoscientific milieu. As Hui argues, however, the Chinese mythopoeic account of technics is markedly different. In the Chinese cultural tradition there is no Promethean theft from the gods, nor human rebellion against God. Instead, there were three mythological leaders of ancient tribes: the half-human, half-snake female Nuwa; her half-dragon, half-human brother-husband Fuxi; and the divine farmer and later kitchen god Shennong. All three collaborated to create humans and to provide them with such tools as fire. Humans are seen as situated between and natural combinations of heaven and earth. There is no rebellion of humans against heaven; there is only working with earth and heaven to cultivate and take aesthetic common pleasure in the world in which we live. Hui coins the term “cosmotechinics” to describe “the unification between the cosmic order and the moral order through technical activities”<sup>177</sup> that is entailed by such mythologies; importantly, this concept connects cosmologies (whether vernacular or mathematic-scientific) with practically sedimented beliefs about the good.

When asking his eponymous question, Needham fails to draw philosophical conclusions from the mythological differences. Instead, he attributes the difference of China to a set of historically contingent conditions: geographical, political, economic, and religious. Additionally, Heidegger never considers the implications of the simple difference in Western engineering, which emerged out of the military, in contrast to the way that Chinese *qi* (technics) and *X(®) gong cheng* (engineering), even to some extent *Mji* (machines), are more closely associated with farming and a stabilized, sedentary life.

Following an extended (fifty-four page) introduction to his thought project, Yuk Hui divides his reflection into two parts. Part one, “In Search of Technological Thought in China” (136 pages), explores the relationship between *qi* and *M dao* (cosmic order) in the long, three-thousand-year history of Chinese culture. This extended dialogue brings a deep appreciation of Chinese philosophy in its many permutations across thousands of years—in Daoism, in Confucianism, and in Buddhism—into conversation with the major philosophical traditions and thinkers of the West—from Plato and Aristotle to

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<sup>176</sup> Hui, *The Question Concerning Technology in China*, xiii.

<sup>177</sup> Hui, *The Question Concerning Technology in China*, 19.

Hegel and Heidegger. It is an achievement that any future effort to think technology in a global context will be called on to take into account. Part two, “Modernity and Technological Consciousness” (111 pages), draws on his presentation of traditional Chinese philosophy to reconsider both the philosophy of technology in the West and to offer alternatives to the contemporary tendency in China too quickly to want to follow the West. Hui’s challenge is not just to the West; it is also to China.

Repeatedly, Yuk Hui calls attention to mirror-image issues: In the West, the philosophical acidity of technoscience tends to reduce any public consensus about the good to the pursuit of modern science itself (particularly among the scientific elite) or individualist and faith-based freedoms (among the non-scientific many). In China, a rich traditional culture that became unable to defend itself against a European imperialism weaponized by technoscience has struggled since the Ming Dynasty to discover an alternative cosmotechnics. The Chinese effort deserves more consideration than it currently receives, Hui suggests, in either China or the West. Hui clearly wants to engage readers who are trying to think about these issues at the most general level, including philosophers of science and technology. As ambitious as it is, Yuk Hui’s *Question Concerning Technology in China* is but one contribution to an even larger project that can only be superficially limned here. It was initiated in *On the Existence of Digital Objects*, an effort to describe the distinctive reality possessed by things that “take shape on a screen or hide in the back end of a computer program, composed of data and metadata regulated by structures or schemas.”<sup>178</sup> Examples are emails, Facebook posts, even the digital text that I am composing right now on my laptop.

Post *Question, Recursivity and Contingency*<sup>179</sup> is a complementary engagement with technology as mechanical artifact versus organism in European philosophy, working out from the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, G.W.F. Hegel, and F.W.J. Schelling and drawing on the thought of Edmund Husserl, Henri Bergson, Martin Heidegger, Norbert Wiener, Georges Canguilhem, Gilbert Simondon, and Bernard Stiegler. Here is a crudely simplified summary of the argument as I understand it: Modern philosophy from Descartes to Kant operated under the dominance of mechanism. Kant achieved a kind of apotheosis of philosophy within the mechanistic framework, but in the third *Critique* opened the door to a new kind of thinking of teleology and the organism, what Hui along with others calls an organology. This thinking has struggled to develop in Schelling et al. and especially in cybernetics. Whereas *On the Existence of Digital Objects* can be described as analytic phenomenology and *The Question Concerning Technology in China* as historico-philosophical analysis, *Recursivity and Contingency* combines both approaches to map out the ontological contours of a new philosophical synthesis of technology and organism in world.

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<sup>178</sup> Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 1.

<sup>179</sup> Yuk Hui, *Recursivity and Contingency* (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2019).

Most recently, *Art and Cosmotechnics* is a continuation of *Recursivity* that re-introduces and enlarges its central concept and the “history of recursive thinking in Western philosophy”<sup>180</sup> by taking up the question of aesthetics as manifested in Daoism. As he concludes, this “*exercise* on art and cosmo-technics is fundamentally an invitation to reflection on the possibilities of technology and philosophy.”<sup>181</sup>

## Conclusion

In one of those fortuitous contingencies that occasionally denote a more than philosophical shift in socio-cultural discourse, in the early 1950s, in the aftermath of World War II and its violent globalizing force, Joseph Needham in England, Martin Heidegger in Germany, and Jacques Ellul in France each placed new questions about the Western commitment to technology on the European intellectual docket. *Quo vadis? Unde venisti? techno-homo occidentalis*. The divides among these three responses created fecund potentials that nevertheless remained largely untended: ignored by Needham, only superficially touched on by Heidegger, and explicitly rejected by Ellul. The special achievement of Yuk Hui, in what might well be described as a second order *yuanfen*, is that graced with unique linguistic facilities and philosophical itinerary emerging from an ontological engagement with techno-digital existence, under historical conditions that have also raised questions concerning technology to a new level of histori-co-global intensity, is to have begun to bring the divides face to face over a new question concerning China. The implications for Needham, Heidegger, and especially for Ellul’s diagnosis of the modern technological pathology remain to be more fully explored. But no one has put the questions more insightfully on the table.

## For a Technodiversity in the Anthropocene

Yuk Hui

What really is technics? We use an unusual word, *technics*, to render the French word *technique* and the German word *Technik*, in order to underline the difficulty of translating this word that could mean either technique (skill) or technology. We can understand the ambiguity and complexity of this word by looking into Martin Heidegger’s famous 1953 essay “Die Frage nach der Technik,” translated into English as “The Question Concerning Technology”<sup>182</sup> and into French as “La question de la technique.”<sup>183</sup> In this text, Heidegger uses the term *moderne Technik* to characterize those

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<sup>180</sup> Yuk Hui, *Art and Cosmotechnics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021), xix.

<sup>181</sup> Hui, *Art and Cosmotechnics*, 287. Italics in the original.

<sup>182</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Garland, 1977).

<sup>183</sup> Martin Heidegger, “La question de la technique [1953] .” In *Essais et conférences*, trans. Andre Preau (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), 9-48.



which emerged in the nineteenth century, called in everyday French *technologie*. We have three terms, *technics*, *technique*, *technology*, all from the Greek root *techne*, which comes from *tek*, namely, constructing with wood. These terms are interrelated, but in different European languages they have nuanced meanings that are either historically contextualized or conventionally adopted. I use *technics* as an all-inclusive term, while *techne* refers to the Greek technics and *technology* to the modern technics. What is meant by *technics*, however, remains hidden in the everyday use of the terms *technology* or *technique*.

## On the Concept of Technics

Jacques Ellul's work contributes to the elucidation of the concept of technics through his historical, sociological, and theological studies, especially the "unexpected" evolution of technology since the eighteenth century in Europe and its realization as a system capable of auto-augmentation and totalization, in both *The Technological Society* (original title: *La technique ou l'enjeu du siècle*, 1954) and *The Technological System* (original title: *Le système*

Hui, Yuk. "For a Technodiversity in the Anthropocene." *Ellul Forum* 68 (Fall 2021): 43-61. © Yuk Hui, CC BY-NC-ND.

*technicien*, 1977)—a question that I have closely engaged with in the past decade and that is central to my *On the Existence of Digital Objects* (2016) and *Recursivity and Contingency* (2019). Ellul's critique of the technological system was almost *contrecourant* during the peak of systems theory advocated by Niklas Luhmann in Germany and Edgar Morin in France.<sup>184</sup> We will touch upon the notion of technological system later; for now, I would like to focus on the concept of technics. Ellul begins *The Technological Society* with a critique of the conventional understanding of technics, which for him is far away from being able to understand the complexity and the dynamic of technics; namely, technics has been considered as equivalent to machines:

What is called the history of technique usually amounts to no more than a history of the machine; this very formulation is an example of the habit of intellectuals of regarding forms of the present as identical with those of the past.<sup>185</sup>

Ellul shows how this equivalence has been implicitly and explicitly maintained among his contemporaries, including the respected historian of technology Lewis Mumford.<sup>186</sup> The mis-identification of technics and machine led to a very narrow notion of technics. However, if technics is irreducible to machines, then what does it include, and how do we describe it? In Ellul's writing, we can sometimes perceive a spirituality of technology, such as we can find in the Idealists such as Hegel: a historical force that develops itself throughout time, since the emergence of the human species. I have two

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<sup>184</sup> See Ellul's critique of Morin in Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (London: Continuum, 1984), 201.

<sup>185</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Vintage, 1964), 42.

<sup>186</sup> Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 79.

concerns regarding Ellul's definition of technics in *The Technological Society*, however. This serves as the departure from which I would like to unfold my own agenda.

First, Ellul's approach is not entirely anthropological and paleontological as one finds in the work of Andre Leroi-Gourhan. Ellul's approach is more sociological, and therefore on occasion it seems to me that his sociological explanation is at odds with the definition of technics that he borrowed from others. If we follow the paleontologist, we might say that the process of hominization consists in the invention and use of technical tools—flints, for example. The technical inventions took millions of years to arrive, since these gestures demanded a gradual evolution of the central nervous system and sensory motor system. Andre Leroi-Gourhan therefore understands technics in the process of hominization as the externalization of memory and the liberation of bodily organs. Engels also pronounced this view in the *Dialectics of Nature*, especially in the chapter on the transformation of ape to man through labor. However, Ellul claims at some points that the primitive society “was free of technics.”<sup>187</sup> It is difficult if not impossible to think of a society free of technics, and here we may also confuse the relation between magic and technics, namely, that there is only magic but not technics in the primitive society:

In so-called primitive societies, the whole of life was indeed enclosed in a network of *magical techniques*. It is their multiplicity that lends them the qualities of rigidity and mechanization. Magic, as we have seen, may even be the origin of techniques; but the primary characteristic of these societies was not a technical but a religious preoccupation.<sup>188</sup>

Ellul's seemingly odd view resonated with Gilbert Simondon, who became a key figure in Ellul's *The Technological System* and in which Ellul takes Simondon further, from the latter's analysis of technical objects in terms of technical element, technical individual, and technical ensemble, to an autonomous technological system. This distinction between magic and technics may not come directly from Simondon, but they were writing in the same era (*The Technological Society* in 1954 and *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* in 1958). In *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*<sup>189</sup> Simondon proposes a speculative history of technology, which he calls the genesis of technicity. At the beginning is the magic phase, in which there is no distinction between subject and object, while ground and figure (terms taken from Gestalt psychology) are already separated. The convergence between ground and figure is maintained by key points, namely, the sacred geographical points and special dates such as festivals. For Simondon, the term *genesis* is what he calls individuation, which he elaborated in *L'indi-viduation a la lumiere des notions de forme et d'information*. According to this theory, individuation is triggered when a system is oversaturated,

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<sup>187</sup> “Society was free of technique. And even on the level of the individual, technique occupied a place much more circumscribed than we generally believe.” Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 65.

<sup>188</sup> Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 64. Italics are mine.

<sup>189</sup> Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, trans. Cecile Malaspina and John Rogove (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

when the tensions or incompatibility within the system have reached a threshold and consequently a restructuration takes place. When the magic phase is saturated, its restructuration is presented as a bifurcation into technics (practice) and religion (theory), and each part in the second stage further bifurcates into a theoretical part and a practical part. For example, religion bifurcates into ethics (theory) and dogma (practice). This does not mean that Ellul agreed completely with Simondon's theory of the genesis of technicity, as he contested the nature of the key points in *Theologie et Technique*.<sup>10</sup> His description of magic as pre-technics seems to have implicitly reserved the term *technics* for a post-magic rationality, or *techno-logos*.

The post-magical rationality, which is technics, according to Ellul, seems to have started in the East and traveled from the Near East to Greece and then continued in the Roman era. For Ellul, in Greece and Rome technics remained Oriental; it was not until the decline of the Christian West in the fourteenth century that the anti-technological tendency was reversed, and then modern science and technology emerged. After the eighteenth century, technology ceased to be the application of scientific discoveries; instead, technology gained an autonomy that was far beyond machines and beyond the sheer application of sciences. Ellul reminds his readers that Western scholars have mistaken the East as inclining toward mysticism and regression (one can find this, for example, in Pierre Teilhard de Chardin). Instead, Ellul shows that “technics is essentially Oriental”:

This predominance of technique in the East points up an error which is found throughout Western thought: that the Oriental mind is turned toward the mystical and has no interest in concrete action, whereas the Western mind is oriented toward “know-how” and action, and hence toward technique.<sup>190</sup>

Ellul's criticism against the stereotype of the Orient and his historical analysis of the evolution of technics in the West is plausible—not least in that he implicitly reproached the Prometheism that attributed to the Greeks the meaning of technics. Interestingly, this account of technics is similar to Hegel's theorization of the *Weltgeist*. That is to say, like the *Weltgeist*, technics travelled from the East to the West, and it is realized as an autonomous and self-conscious form in the State. However, since technics' departure to the West from the East, what happened in the East became insignificant. It will be significant again only after it is modernized and synchronized by the West. Retrospectively, perhaps the *Weltgeist* is like salmon,<sup>191</sup> which go back to the stream where they were born, to spawn and die there. So technics, like the *Weltgeist*, travelled back to the East and flourished there after colonization and modernization; and now in Western medias, China is no longer blamed only for being a world factory but is reproached also for its rapid development of artificial intelligence that is putting Western democracy and values in danger. It is true that Ellul touched upon non-

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<sup>190</sup> See Gilbert Simondon, *L'individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d'information* (Grenoble: Editions Jerome Millon, 2005).

<sup>191</sup> See Jacques Ellul, *Theologie et Technique* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2014), 183-85. Ellul claimed that these sacred points are posteriori, namely, its sacredness is given by the human.

Western cultures in his *The Betrayal of the West*,<sup>192</sup> but the question of technology in non-Western cultures was not sufficiently addressed. These two issues concerning the history of technology have yet to be clarified. For if Ellul's contribution is to elucidate the concept of technics, then this question concerning the beginning of technics and the non-European concept of tech-nics—if we agree with him that technics always exceeds machines—has yet to be clarified.

But what does it mean exactly that technics exceeds machines? We may refer to what Simondon says in the third part of *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, where he argues that the genesis of technicity should not be reduced to the evolution of technical objects. Instead, it should be understood as a genetic process in which technical thinking interacts dynamically with aesthetic, religious, and philosophical thinking. That is to say, technological thinking is not an independent thinking but rather one that is motivated and at the same time conditioned by other thinking. What Simondon does in *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* is very significant, even though one can reproach him by saying that he leaves the impression that the primitive society is pre-technics—something that might be inspired by Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*.<sup>193</sup> But this does not mean that the magic phase is devoid of technics—it means only that in the magic phase the ground and figure are not separated. That is to say, technics still has a dominant function in the mediation between the internality of the subject and the externality of the environment. Thus it was preoccupied with religious meaning, rather than with rationality. This might be how we can understand those seemingly odd passages in *The Technological Society* mentioned above. Simondon's thesis on the genesis of technicity is fundamental for us to understand the diversity of technology, since he states that a technological thought is dependent on its relation to other thoughts, namely, on its *locality*. The notion of locality is important but also delicate, since in our time locality, negatively defined in opposition to globality, can also mean conservatism, traditionalism, and even proto-fascism, such as found in the discourse of the National Rally in France and the AfD in Germany. Without approaching the question of locality, however, perhaps we will not be able to fully understand the question of technology. Locality does not mean a logical operator—that which is opposed to the non-lo-cal—but rather cosmology. I suggest that technics is cosmologically situated in locality, and precisely because of this we can account for the different trajectories of technological development.

This way of understanding technics appears unfamiliar, however, because we have been told that science and technology are universal. In the current technological and philosophical education, there is not even space to have such a doubt. According to the conventional understanding, one admits that other civilizations also developed their technologies; however, these technologies differ only in terms of functional aesthetics

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<sup>192</sup> Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 27-28.

<sup>193</sup> See Moritz Rudolph, *Der Weltgeist als Lachs* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2021), in which the author makes the witty claim that if Hegel was right that the *Weltgeist* travelled from the despotic Orient to Greece, then to Rome, and lastly to Germany, now it travels back to the East like a salmon.

(for example, the particular length and decoration of spoon handles) and levels of technicality, and despite these differences, they could be understood in principle as the same kind of technology. Non-European thoughts, therefore, have been considered solely as ethics or religions that regulate the use of these technologies. Therefore today we find everywhere discussions on Daoist ethics of technology, Confucian ethics of technology, Indigenous ethics of technology, etc. To what extent is technology universal? If we can find different technologies in different cultures, shouldn't this imply that there have been multiple technological thoughts? Here, when we follow up our previous discussion with Ellul, we want to ask, What happened to the East after technology travelled to the West?

## On the Antinomy of the Universality of Technology

It seems that one has more courage to challenge the universality of the concept of nature than the concept of technics. For example, in the so-called “ontological turn” in anthropology, associated with anthropologists like Philippe Descola and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, the anthropologists questioned that the concept of nature that we are using now is mainly a product of European modernity. There are different natures, as one can find in ethnographies. Nature as it is understood today in the globalized world refers to the non-manmade environment surrounding us. It is a modern construction based on the opposition between nature and culture, which Descola calls “naturalism.” Nature is here considered to be the opposite of culture and at the same time an object to be mastered by culture or the “spirit.” However, this naturalism is not a default but rather a fault. In *Beyond Nature and Culture*, Descola cites the diary of Henri Michaux, written when the writer returned to Paris in 1928 after visiting a friend in Ecuador.<sup>194</sup> The trip had required them to canoe alone for a month along the Amazon River. Upon their arrival at Belem do Para, Michaux describes an amazing scene that problematizes the modern concept of nature:

A young woman who was on our boat, coming from Manaus, went into town with us this morning. When she came upon the Grand Park (which is undeniably nicely planted) she emitted an easy sigh. “Ah, at last, nature,” she said, but she was coming from the jungle.<sup>195</sup>

The role that the non-humans—the jungle, leopards, plants—played for the Amazonians is not that of nature understood today. Indeed, in these Indigenous groups, one finds forms of knowledge irreducible to those based on the division between nature and culture.

If the anthropologists are able to argue for multiple natures, or multiple ontologies as response to the anthropocentrism of the Anthropocene, is it possible to argue for multiple technologies, namely, to relativize the concept of technics from the conven-

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<sup>194</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Betrayal of the West*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Seabury, 1974).

<sup>195</sup> See Yuk Hui, *Recursivity and Contingency* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2019), 233 fn71.

tional understanding as a universal *techno-logos*? *The Question Concerning Technology in China: An Essay in Cosmotechnics* (2016) consists in this effort. The answer is deemed to be a difficult one, but even raising such a question is not easy at all. Perhaps we can try to articulate the difficulties by looking into how a discourse on the universality of technology is already uncritically assumed in some schools of thought, for example, in the philosophy, anthropology, and history of technology.

Let us start with philosophy of technology. Readers of Heidegger know that in his 1949 Bremen lecture titled *Gestell*, later published as *Die Frage nach der Technik* in 1953, Heidegger makes a distinction between what the Greeks called *techne*, and *moderne Technik*. If *techne*, understood as *poiesis*, bringing forth [*Hervorbringen*], bears a mode of unconcealment of Being [*Sein*], then one finds in modern technology no longer *poiesis*. Rather, it has its essence as *Gestell*, namely an *enframing* of all beings as standing reserve [*Bestand*], resources to be exploited. Modern technology, for Heidegger, arrived after modern science, taking on its significance after the Industrial Revolution. Heidegger's analysis is well recognized in Continental philosophy, and the distinction he made between the Greek *techne* and modern technology also resonates with the Romantics, whose thought persisted among conservative thinkers in Germany. Heidegger's analysis travelled far beyond Germany; it is also well endorsed in the East. The experience based on the opposition between *techne* and modern technology is identified as the conflict between tradition and the modern, and resonates in cultures that are experiencing great transformation due to modernization. If we follow Heidegger's analysis, however, we might want to ask, how can we situate technics in the East? It is definitely not modern technology, but is it Greek *techne*? Or if, as Ellul said, the Greek technics is Oriental, is there no substantial difference between them?

On the other hand, Heidegger's interpretation of *techne* as the unconcealment of Being already points to an understanding of technics beyond its utilitarian and anthropological definition. That is to say, Heidegger's concept of technics, like Ellul's, far exceeds machines and tools. Did the Chinese and the Japanese, for example, also have such an understanding of their technics, namely, in relation to the unconcealment of Being? Kitaro Nishida, the founder of the Kyoto School, once made a rather straightforward but profound observation that for the West, Being occupies the central question in philosophy, while for the East, it is the question of Nothing. It is doubtful that this distinction could be applied to the East at large; at least we can say that in Chinese thought it is not Being but Dao that is the highest inquiry of philosophy. What then is *dao*? We are told at the beginning of the *Dao de jing* that *dao* cannot be explained by language,<sup>196</sup> while it is also not mysterious since it exists everywhere, in feces and in gold.<sup>197</sup> Dao, like Being, is beyond the objective description of language,

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<sup>196</sup> Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

<sup>197</sup> Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, 32.

and for this reason it is spiritual and irreducible to materiality but also conditions all pursuits of knowledge.<sup>198</sup>

If technology, as well as the concept of technology, must be understood historically, not only factually and chronologically but also spiritually—in the sense of what Hans Blumenberg calls a *Geistesgeschichte der Technik*—then it is immediately evident that there are many histories of technologies in different cultures and civilizations.<sup>199</sup> In India, China, and Japan, as well as in the Amazon, one finds different technologies, but do they have to do with the Greek Being? It would be total dis-orientation to conceive the Greek technics and the Promethean myth as the origin of all technics, though it is unfortunately the case today.

In the anthropology of technology, the invention and use of tools (often covered by the terms *labor* or *praxis*) has been understood as the determining process behind hominization, notably in the work of Leroi-Gourhan. We saw earlier that he interpreted technics as an extension of organs and an externalization of memory. In this interpretation, technology is anthropologically universal. This is not wrong insofar as such externalization and extension are considered as proceeding from what Leroi-Gourhan called a “technical tendency.” But we still have to explain what he called “technical facts,”<sup>200</sup> which are different from region to region and from culture to culture. While a technical tendency is necessary, technical facts are accidental: as Leroi-Gourhan writes, they result from the “encounter of the tendency and thousands of coincidences of the milieu.”<sup>201</sup> While the invention of the wheel is a technical tendency, whether wheels will have spokes is a matter of technical fact.

But is a technical fact merely accidental, caused by the material condition? We would like to ask, what is embedded in these technical facts apart from a casual reduction to cultural difference, or even sometimes to contingency? In the history of technology, the biochemist and sinologist Joseph Needham raised a haunting question, by asking why modern science and technology wasn’t developed in China and India. At the same time, in his multiple volumes of *Science and Civilization in China* Needham shows the large amount of rather advanced scientific and technological development in China *before* the sixteenth century. Echoing Needham’s inquiry, there have been significant inquiries on comparing technological development in different regions of the world in order to show that, for example, one particular region is more advanced in papermaking or metallurgy than another. However, this is a distortion of Needham’s question, which in fact suggests that one cannot compare Chinese science and technol-

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<sup>198</sup> Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, trans. D.C. Lau (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2001). The text starts with, “The dao that can be said is not the eternal dao.”

<sup>199</sup> Zhuangzi, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, trans. B. Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 182. For a closer discussion, see Yuk Hui, *The Question Concerning Technology in China: An Essay in Cosmotechnics* (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2016/2019), 67-68.

<sup>200</sup> I have tried to elaborate on the relation between Being and *dao* in my latest book; see Yuk Hui, *Art and Cosmotechnics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021).

<sup>201</sup> Hans Blumenberg, *Geistesgeschichte der Technik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2009).

ogy directly with that of the West since they are based on different forms of thinking.<sup>202</sup> In this sense, how can one re-articulate these differences? It is through discussions and negotiations with the philosophy of technology, anthropology of technology, and history of technology that I believe we can arrive at an even richer concept of technology, which I call *cosmotechnics*. The prefix *cosmo-* suggests that technology is motivated and conditioned by cosmology, and technology mediates between the cosmic and the moral of the human world. I took China as an example of such an investigation. Instead of simply rejecting technology as being universal, I suggest that we understand what is at stake with the following antinomy:

Thesis: Technology is an anthropological universal, understood as an exteriorization of memory and the liberation of organs, as some anthropologists and philosophers of technology have formulated it;

Antithesis: Technology is not anthropologically universal; it is enabled and constrained by particular cosmologies, which go beyond mere functionality or utility. Therefore, there is no one single technology, but rather multiple cosmotechnics.

We know that for an antinomy, when the thesis and antithesis are examined separately, each of them stands on its own; but when they are brought together, then one sees immediately a contradiction. Kant resolves his antinomies in the *Critique of Pure Reason* by separating the thing in itself and the phenomenon: namely, one thesis is correct within the realm of phenomenon, and the other is correct in the realm of noumenon (especially in the third and fourth antinomy). Technics is universal insofar as it is a material support, like what Leroi-Gourhan called externalization, Jacques Derrida called supplement, and Bernard Stiegler called tertiary retention; but beyond that there are tremendous differences in different technics that are not merely contingent.<sup>203</sup> I gave a preliminary definition of *cosmotechnics* as unification between the cosmic order and the moral order through technical activities. The meaning of the cosmos and the moral have to be understood according to its locality. This also means that technology should be *resituated* in a broader reality, which enables it and also constrains it, like what Simondon said regarding the genesis of technicity. In *The Question Concerning Technology in China: An Essay in Cosmotechnics*, against easy oppositions between the West and the East, for example, one being mechanical and polemical, the other organic and harmonious, I suggest formulating a technological thought in China according to the historical dynamics and relations between two major philosophical categories, *dao* and *qi* (literally, utensils, to be distinguished from the word of the same pronunciation that is familiar to western readers, meaning breath, vital energy). These two categories, I argue, are fundamental to the reconstruction of a technological thought in China. It is not only because, as stated earlier, it is not the question of Being but of Dao that occupies the central role in Chinese thought (Chinese thought

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<sup>202</sup> Andre Leroi-Gourhan, *Milieu et technique* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1973), 336-40; Andre Leroi-Gourhan, *L'homme et la matiere* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1973), 27-35.

<sup>203</sup> Leroi-Gourhan, *L'homme et la matiere*, 27.



is also called *dao xue*, the studies of *dao*), but also because there has been an ongoing discourse about the unification between *dao* and *qi* in the history of Chinese thought. The discourses about the relation between the two are dynamic throughout history, meaning that there have been countless reflections and theorizations on their relations, from Confucius and Lao Tzu to the early twentieth century. Finally, we see how the discourse is rendered ineffective during the process of modernization, that is to say, since China's defeat by Britain in the Opium Wars, which forced China to open to modernization and global capitalism.<sup>204</sup> The discourse on *dao* and *qi* was replaced by the dialectics of nature, an orthodox Marxist philosophy of science. Today, for many scientists but also for most Chinese, *dao* becomes laws of nature, and *qi* is replaced by Western technology. Calculation comes to the front, and the rest recedes to the background and becomes powerless. If we can take Simondon's figure-ground theory further, we might say that the figure, which is technology, is detached from such a reality, which is its ground; by detaching from the ground, it desires to universalize and to become the ground of everything.

Let us take a step back. If Heidegger, the thinker of Being, was able to see the great secret [*Geheimnis*] in modern technology, namely, the possibility of the unconcealment of Being in the form of challenging [*Heraus-forderung*], it is because Being still has its role in the modern world, as a possibility and task of philosophy. However, Being is not *dao*, and Heidegger's interpretation of technology grounded in the history of Western philosophy might not provide the right path for thinking beyond the evening land. This awareness may come to us only as *apres coup*, just as philosophy is always a latecomer. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Chinese were very eager to take the Western technology as Chinese *qi* and hoped to integrate it into the *qi-dao* discourse, but they failed, because the relation of *qi-dao* at that time became a dualism. The British historian Arnold Toynbee—someone Ellul often referred to, critically—once raised an interesting point in his 1952 Reith Lectures for the BBC: why did the Chinese and Japanese refuse the Europeans in the sixteenth century but allow them to enter the countries in the nineteenth century? His answer was that in the sixteenth century the Europeans wanted to export both religion and technology to Asia, while in the nineteenth century they understood that it is more effective to just export technology without Christianity. The Asian countries easily accepted that technology was something inessential and instrumental; they were the “users” who could decide how to use it. Toynbee continued by saying,

Technology operates on the surface of life, and therefore it seems practicable to adopt a foreign technology without putting oneself in danger of ceasing to be able to call one's soul one's own. This notion that, in adopting a foreign technology, one is incurring only a limited liability may, of course, be a miscalculation.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> See Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*. Vol. 2, *History of Scientific Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>205</sup> In relation to this, one may even find an affirmation in Derrida's *De la grammatologie* (1967), in which Derrida compared Western alphabetic writing and Chinese pictorial writing, claiming that the

We can interpret what Toynbee said in two ways. First, that the opposition of Asian thought and Western instrument, and the belief that the former can master the latter, are proved to be mistakes, since it is dualist in nature; second, that technology in itself is nothing neutral, but it carries particular forms of knowledge and practice that its users are obliged to comply with. Without taking into consideration this understanding of technology (which Max Weber might call rationalization), one takes a rather dualist approach, by undermining technology as something merely instrumental. This miscalculation, a fault, has become a necessity in the twentieth century.

## Technodiversity in the Anthropocene

What could be the value of introducing the concept of cosmotechnics in the time when we have entered into the so-called Anthropocene, in which technical activities dominate the earth? We live in an epoch of cybernetic systems, which become more and more organic, as Ellul rightly described in his *The Technological System*. In *Recursivity and Contingency*, I attempted to reconstruct a philosophical history of cybernetics by outlining the historical relation between mechanism and organism, from Kant to cybernetics, in order to show that we have entered a new condition of philosophizing after Kant.<sup>206</sup> The earth in the time of F.W.J. Schelling and later James Hutton was described as a superorganism, and since the late twentieth century it has been regarded as a gigantic cybernetic system capable of homeostasis, under the name of Gaia. If we take up Ellul's inquiry of the future of technology, we might ask how to think technology beyond cybernetics—which, according to Heidegger, indicates the end of Western philosophy and metaphysics. The concept of cosmotechnics also has the aim of addressing the future of technology. I proposed an agenda on technodiversity (or a multiplicity of cosmotechnics) in *Recursivity and Contingency* as a way to think beyond a cybernetic reductionism.

In the past century, modern technologies have covered the surface of the earth, constituting a converging noosphere in Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's sense. In fact, Teilhard's noosphere might provide us with a conceptual tool to understand the Anthropocene, especially when we think that it is based on the discussion with Vladimir Vernadsky's biosphere. Since the nineteenth century, the formation of the noosphere has been largely accelerated by technological competition, which in turn also defines geopolitics. Japan's defeat of Russia in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05) led to the lament of the German reactionary thinker Oswald Spengler that white people's biggest mistake at the turn of the century was to have exported technology to the East; Japan,

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former is based on the concept of substance and the latter on relation. For a detailed analysis, see Yuk Hui, "Writing and Cos-[For a Tec]h[no]motechnics." *Derrida Today* 13, no. 1 (2020): 17-32. **diversity** in the

<sup>206</sup> For a detailed analysis, see Hui, *The Question Concerning Technology in China*, part [Anthropocene] one.

once the student, now became the teacher.<sup>207</sup> This “technological consciousness” persisted throughout the twentieth century and was marked by the atomic bomb, space exploration, and now artificial intelligence. Recently, some commentators have declared that we have entered a *new axial age* opened up by a more balanced technological development,<sup>208</sup> namely, that the technological achievements of the East seem to have reversed the unilateral movement from the West to the East. This is also the source of the neo-reactionary sentiment that we see today in the West,<sup>209</sup> since it continues Spengler’s curse of the “Decline of the West,” now affirmed by ideological slogans such as “Decline of the West and Rise of the East.”

Taking a step further, we may want to reposition this discourse of the Anthropocene and the new axial age as a critical moment to reflect on the future of technology and geopolitics. This critical assessment demands the *reopening* of the question of technology. Reopening means, first, enlarging the concept of technology by pluralizing it, and second, by doing so we open new imaginations, new methodologies, and new possibilities for thinking the future. We can suspect that there has been misunderstanding and ignorance of technology in the past centuries, since technology has been regarded as merely instrumental and inessential, but more significantly, as homogenous and universal. This universality of technology prioritizes a particular history of technology, which is fundamentally modern. I attempt to show that the way that technology has been perceived in the philosophy, anthropology, and history of technology is debatable, and it is *imperative* now for us to gain a different understanding of technology and to reflect on its other futures.

Perhaps I can sum up my aim to develop the concept of cosmotechnics in two positions. First, it is an attempt to enlarge the concept of technology that we have inherited today—for example, the widely accepted distinction that Heidegger made between *techne* and modern technology. I suggest considering a multiple cosmotechnics instead of a technology that begins with Prometheus and continues to the current digital technology. If this concept of technology remains so narrow, then we will also limit our imagination of the possible futures of technology to one very definite future—apocalypse. Second, I want to propose a particular way of doing philosophy as response to this epoch: I hope to give non-European thought new roles, in this case Chinese thought, by considering it from the perspective of technology. Again, China serves as *an* example. A philosophy of technology in China has never been thematic in traditional thought. This is also the reason that I did not introduce an already elaborated Chinese thought of technology but rather the re-construction of such thought and interrogation

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<sup>207</sup> Arnold Toynbee, *The World and the West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953),

<sup>208</sup> I argued that Kant’s 1790 *Critique of Judgment* imposed an organic condition of philosophizing; see Yuk Hui, *Recursivity and Contingency* (London: Rowman and Littlefield International, 2019). For a more concise explanation of Kant’s relation to cybernetics, see Yuk Hui, “Philosophy after Automation?” *Philosophy Today* 65, no. 2 (2021): 217-33.

<sup>209</sup> Oswald Spengler, *Man and Technics: A Contribution to a Philosophy of Life* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1967), 100-01.

of such possibility. I do not pretend to provide a complete discourse; instead, what I offered in *The Question Concerning Technology in China* is only episodes that aim to open windows to such thought. I do not believe that we will be able to make non-Western philosophy relevant today without thinking it through technology, since otherwise such thought will remain only part of cultural tourism. And maybe not only non-Western philosophy but also Christian theology (!), just as Ellul claims that without engaging with technology it will only be rendered powerless.<sup>210</sup>

Those who work on intercultural or transcultural philosophy might tendentially reproach this project as being culturalist, since for them a transcultural exchange is more productive. To think that I want to regress to an essentialist discourse, be that returning to the archaic cosmology or abandoning modern technology, would be to misunderstand. What is at stake is ways of knowing and sensing, which are crucial to the production of diversities of knowledge. The problem that we have to confront is that in the modern era, these kinds of knowledge are considered useful only for historical studies and cultural tourism (just as today one pays thousands of euros to go to the Amazon for shaman tourism). The initiative of rediscovering a technodiversity and the attempt to reflect on the future of such a diversity is not a nationalist or culturalist project. Instead, it is an investigation into different modes of co-existence as well as epistemological and ontological diversities. In reply, one might want to ask, isn't colonization the most significant form of cultural exchange in human history? And how could the once-colonized look at their own history and their non-modern knowledge? The uneasiness of engaging with a culturalist discourse is understandable, but ignoring different forms of knowledge and life is simply anti-intellectual.

We could also say that this attempt to reopen the question of technology is fundamentally a project of decolonization; however, it is not a project left to non-Europeans. Indeed, it is a project that is essential and imperative for Europeans also. Modernization brought forward two temporal dimensions: on the one hand, a simultaneity, characterized by the synchronization and homogenization of knowledge through technological means; on the other hand, consequently, the development of knowledge according to an internal necessity, namely, progress. Modernization *qua* globalization is a process of synchronization that converges different historical times to a single global axis of time and prioritizes specific kinds of knowledge as a major productive force. It is also in this sense that we understand why Heidegger claims in "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking" (1964) that the end of philosophy proves to be the triumph of the manipulable arrangement of a scientific-technological world and of the social order proper to this world. The end of philosophy means: the beginning of the world-civilization based upon Western European thinking.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> See Nathan Gardels, "New Axial Age." *Noema Magazine* (17 June 2020), <https://www.noemamag.com/the-new-axial-age/>.

<sup>211</sup> Yuk Hui, "On the Unhappy Consciousness of Neoreactionaries." *E-flux*, no. 81 (2017), <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/81/125815/on-the-unhappy-conscious-ness-of-neoreactionaries/>.

The end of philosophy is marked by cybernetics. Moreover, it implies that the world civilization and geopolitics are dominated by Western European thinking. If there is a future for philosophy again, it will have to become a “post-European philosophy.”<sup>212</sup>

This re-opening cannot avoid confronting the concept of technology that we have today, such as what the anthropologists of the “ontological turn” want to do with the concept of nature. Cosmotronics implies not only the varieties of technologies in different geographical regions in human history, but also different forms of thinking and a different complex set of relations between the human and non-humans. Departing from these anthropological and philosophical investigations, we have to further interrogate what this technodiversity could mean for us today. Will they be able to inspire us to *reframe* the *enframing* of modern technology, apart from simply preserving them as obsolete pre-modern and non-modern knowledge? In order to do so, we must reopen the question of technology and challenge the ontological and epistemological assumptions in modern technologies, be it social networks or artificial intelligence.

Without a direct confrontation with the concept of technology itself, we can hardly maintain alterities and diversities (which I formulate as biodiversity, noodiversity, and technodiversity<sup>213</sup>). This is perhaps also the condition under which we can think about a post-European philosophy (and perhaps a political theology). If Heidegger can claim that the end of philosophy means “the beginning of the world-civilization based upon Western European thinking,” and such end is marked by cybernetics, then an ignorance of technology and a blind acceleration only worsen the symptoms while pretending to heal them. What we hear today, however, is the fantasy toward a technological singularity, constant human enhancement, and large-scale geoengineering. Interestingly and confusingly, acceleration is embraced by both Marxists and capitalists, for the former believe that when full automation is reached it will be possible to free all labor, while the latter see that with full automation they can make more profit. One has reason (and it might be an imperative to do so) to be sceptical of a tragist Promethean impulse claiming to end capitalism with full automation, because it is based on a false personification of capitalism as an aged person who will be rendered obsolete by technology. The fact is that capitalism deterritorializes and reterritorializes itself through technology. However, we are not simply rejecting the idea of acceleration, either. Rather, it makes more sense to ask, what kind of acceleration is faster than taking a radical turn, to deviate from the global axis of time and liberate our imagination of technological futures from the transhumanist fantasies? In order to respond, we need a technological thinking that is capable of first rendering the gigantic technological force contingent and making it necessary again for searching out a path beyond the Anthropocene.

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<sup>212</sup> See Ellul, *Theologie et Technique*, 107-13.

<sup>213</sup> Martin Heidegger, “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking.” In *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Harper & Row, 1972), 59.

# Avons-nous vraiment besoin d'une cosmotechnique?

Remarques sur La question de la technique en Chine

Daniel Cerezuelle

Je suis tres ambivalent au sujet de ce livre. D'une part j'y trouve des informations tres interessantes et des idees avec lesquelles je suis tout a fait d'accord ; mais d'autre part je ne suis pas vraiment convaincu par sa these principale concernant la notion de cosmotechnique.

Des informations utiles: Je connaissais les recherches historiques de Joseph Needham sur l'histoire des techniques en Chine, mais je n'avais jamais rien lu sur la philosophie de la technique en Asie, et plus particulierement en Chine. Ce livre est le premier a m'apporter des informations sur la maniere dont la technique etait apprehendee dans la philosophie chinoise tradi-tionnelle, puis par des philosophes chinois et japonais modernes. N'y con-naissant rigoureusement rien, ce fut pour moi une premiere initiation que j'ai trouvee tres interessante. Mais je ne suis pas en mesure de determiner si la presentation est fidele et perspicace et encore moins d'en discuter le contenu.

De nombreux points d'accord quant a certains problemes de notre civilisation tech-nicienne: Je ne citerai que quelques points de convergence avec Yuk Hui pour identifier certains effets desastreux de la technicisation con-temporaine du monde sur la culture.

Ainsi concernant la these (ellulienne) de l'universalisation technique:

Les systemes techniques qui sont en train de se former aujourd'hui, alimentes par les technologies numeriques (par exemple les smart cities, l'internet des objets, les reseaux sociaux et les systemes d'au-tomatisme a grande echelle), tendent a homogener la relation entre l'humanite et la technique (p. 66)<sup>214</sup>.

Cerezuelle, Daniel. "Avons-nous vraiment besoin d'une cosmotechnique? Remarques sur La question de la technique en Chine." *Ellul Forum* 68 (Fall 2021): 63-73. © Daniel Cerezuelle, CC BY-NC-ND. 63

Un peu plus loin: « La force de la technologie demantele, en Chine, l'unite meta-physique de la pratique et de la theorie » (p. 69). Ce qui d'ailleurs fut le cas dans toutes les civilisations dont la vision du monde specifique est detruite par la technique.

(Les) cultures qui, au cours du siecle dernier, ont du se soulever con-tre la coloni-sation europeenne, ont deja subi de puissants change-ments et de profondes transfor-mations, au point que la condition technologique mondiale est devenue leur propre destinee (p. 86).

Yuk Hui a juste titre evoque les remarques de l'anthropologue Leroi-Gour-han qui constatait en 1964 que « au point actuel, les individus sont impregnes, conditionnes, par une rythmicite qui a atteint le stade d'une machinisation (plus que d'une humanisation) pratiquement totale » (p. 293). Et il ajoute qu'il faut repenser « .les rythmes qui sont en train de se synchroniser et de devenir homogenes, suite au triomphe des systemes

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<sup>214</sup> See Hui, *Art and Cosmotechnics*.

technologiques mon-diaux qui envahissent tous les domaines de notre vie quotidienne et tra-versent tous les territoires: telecommunications, logistique, finance, etc. »

Pour conclure, je ne peux qu'être d'accord avec l'auteur lorsqu'il écrit « Ce devenir technologique du monde doit être remis en question si l'on veut interrompre le règne de la synchronisation et produire d'autres manières de coexister » (p. 311).

Je suis d'accord aussi avec plusieurs propositions de Yuk Hui pour résister à ce devenir technologique du monde et encourager un autre rapport au monde. Que ce soit dans ce livre ou dans un entretien publié par la revue *Ballast*<sup>215</sup>, pour résister à la tendance à l'universalisation uniformisante, inhérente au développement des technologies, il nous incite à promouvoir une diversification des techniques en revalorisant le local et le sensible. Il faut dit-il chercher « la localité » de la technique pour la réinsérer dans une réalité plus vaste qu'elle. Cela veut dire permettre à la technique de se différencier selon les lieux, les sociétés, leurs morales, leur conception de la nature, etc. Bref, pour paraphraser les recommandations de Polanyi au sujet de l'économie, il faut reencastler la technique dans la culture en l'adaptant aux spécificités des contextes sociaux autant que naturels. Ainsi, il nous dit que la question de la préservation de la biodiversité n'est pas séparable de celle de la « technodiversité ». Moi qui ai étudié la question des pêches artisanales dans l'estuaire de la Gironde près de Bordeaux, j'ai pu constater que l'abandon des techniques de pêche traditionnelles qui étaient adaptées aux spécificités du milieu estuarien, et le recours à des techniques de plus en plus puissantes et surdimensionnées, ont en effet fortement contribué à la disparition des espèces puis, finalement, à celle des pêcheurs professionnels et de leur mode de vie. Je suis donc tout à fait d'accord avec la thèse de Yuk Hui que la seule solution viable est de « développer des technologies locales permettant des programmes de coexistence ». Je suis aussi en accord avec lui quand il explique que cette orientation générale de réintroduire une forme de vie et réactiver le local requiert une réhabilitation de la sensorialité et du rapport sensible que nous entretenons avec le monde. Il plaide ainsi pour une « écologie sensible » et explique que « ...reinvestir la question des sens permet de se réapproprier cette écologie sensible qui est absolument laissée de côté par le développement technologique moderne. » (p. 61).

Je réserve pour la fin un point important de convergence, point qui caractériserait—si j'ai bien compris—la conception chinoise traditionnelle de l'action technique, à savoir qu'il faut toujours se préoccuper des effets des techniques sur ceux qui la mettent en œuvre, et pas seulement—comme nous faisons trop souvent—des effets qu'elles ont sur les objets auxquels elles s'appliquent. Ainsi Yuk Hui nous invite à ne pas séparer le moyen (l'homme) de la fin et des formes de vie qui résultent de sa mise en œuvre. Pour être bon, il faut que le moyen améliore l'acteur autant que son objet. Il me semble qu'il y a là un point d'ancrage fort, tant pour une critique des techniques que pour la recherche d'alternatives.

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<sup>215</sup> For the analysis of these three diversities, please see Yuk Hui, "For a Planetary Thinking," in *E-flux*, no. 114, ed. Bruno Latour and Martin Gurnard, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/114/366703/>

Je souscris sans reserve aux orientations precedentes proposees par Yuk Hui. Mais pour les appliquer, avons-nous reellement besoin de ce qu'il appelle une *cosmotech-nique*?

## Qu'est-ce que la cosmotech-nique

Dans la conclusion de son ouvrage, il explique « on ne peut resister a lessor de cette raison technologique qu'en faisant emerger d'autres manieres de raisonner en vue de constituer une nouvelle dynamique et un nouvel ordre » (p. 216). Cette nouvelle maniere de raisonner, qu'il appelle « cosmotech-nique » est precisee a plusieurs reprises dans son livre.

Car la tache la plus fondamentale aujourd'hui consiste a elaborer une nouvelle conception de l'histoire mondiale et une pensee cos-motechnique capables de renouveler notre maniere d'etre avec les objets et les systemes techniques (p. 77).

Pour cela Yuk Hui suggere un projet apparemment tres ambitieux et tota-lisant. « Au creur de la proposition de ce livre (...) il y a l'idee de reflechir de maniere systematique a l'unite entre la technique et l'ordre cosmique et moral, afin de penser a nouveaux frais la production et l'usage des technologies » (p. 319).

Deux etapes sont necessaires pour se reapproprier la technique moderne d'un point de vue cosmotech-nique: premierement, il faut reconfigurer un fondement a partir des categories metaphysiques fondamentales, comme on a tente de le faire ici avec le qi-dao ; deuxiemement il faut reconstruire sur ce fondement une *episteme* qui conditionnera a son tour l'innovation technique, le developpement, l'innovation. (p. 318).

Cette *episteme* devrait a son tour conditionner la vie (ou forme de vie) dans ses dimensions politique, esthetique, sociale et spirituelle, et servir de force de creation comme de contrainte pour la connais-sance (p. 318).

Si j'ai bien compris il s'agit pour Yuk Hui de promouvoir une nouvelle concep-tion du monde et de la place de l'homme dans le monde. Reprenant la terminologie structuraliste foucauldienne, il nous affirme qu'il faudrait construire ou « inventer » —une nouvelle *episteme* qui conditionnerait nos manieres de penser et d'agir dans un sens nouveau. Il s'agit donc bien de *conditionnement*, des esprits et des actions par un nouveau cadre mental qui nous obligerait a etre « sages » dans notre usage des techniques.

## Changeons d'isme !

Votre vehicule ne marche pas bien? C'est que vous n'avez pas un bon mo-teur. Changez donc de moteur ! Si le progres tourne mal, si nous sommes sur des rails qui risquent de nous conduire tot ou tard vers une catastrophe, il faut qu'il y ait eu un

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for-a-planetary-thinking/.



principe vicie a la source de ce mouvement. Pour des intellectuels il est tout naturel de penser que c'est la faute a une fa<sup>^</sup>on theorique de penser, a un cadre cognitif et conceptuel particulier. Reprenant le vocabulaire structuraliste de Foucault, Yuk Hui parle d'une « *episteme* ». Si je m'en tiens a mon experience personnelle, depuis les annees soixante, au fur et a mesure que les problemes d'environnement s'aggravent, on n'a pas manque d'intellectuels qui denoncent des *ismes* pour en proposer un autre. Selon les auteurs on nous explique que si nous nous retrouvons aujourd'hui dans une impasse, c'est la faute a la tradition judeo-chretienne, c'est la faute a la perversion du christianisme par l'Islam, c'est la faute aux traditions gnostiques, c'est la faute au dualisme cartesien, au positivisme, au reduc-tionnisme darwinien, a la pensee bourgeoise, a la science, aux philosophies du sujet, au logocentrisme occidental, aux metaphysiques de la representation, a l'ontotheologie, etc.

Apres la denonciation, la proposition: on voit donc les memes auteurs mettre chacun sur le marche son nouvel isme, un pret-a-penser de rechange, sense nous tirer d'affaire en reinserant l'activite technique dans un cadre global. Ce sera (au choix) le Structuralisme, la Theorie Generale des Sys-temes, le Macroscopie, l'Ecosophie, la Nouvelle Alliance, la pensee de la Complexite, La Methode (version E. Morin), etc. A chacun de completer l'inventaire. Toutes ces propositions ont en commun une meme conception de la maniere dont il conviendrait d'ameliorer notre condition en reformant les esprits. Cette conception c'est la substitution. « Empechons donc cette mauvaise maniere de penser de vicier les esprits, de les aveugler et de les entrainer dans une mauvaise direction. Denon<sup>^</sup>ons-la, extirpons-la, purifions, reformons les esprits, implantons-y une autre *episteme* ; ainsi, *conditionnees* par une autre maniere de pensee, les actions des hommes iront desormais dans le bon sens. »

La construction d'une cosmotechnique est-elle necessaire pour reguler l'usage de la raison technicienne?

Selon Yuk Hui, « Pour comprendre les defis poses par la technologie aux cultures non europeennes, il nous faudrait donc passer par Heidegger et son concept de la technique comme achevement de la metaphysique » (p. 246). Pour faire face a l'emballement technique contemporain et a ses diverses consequences sociales, environnementales, politiques et culturelles, est-il vraiment necessaire de construire une ontologie ou une nouvelle metaphysique? L'idee frequemment enoncee que nous aurions besoin d'une « pensee nouvelle » que l'on va substituer a l'ancienne suppose que jusqu'a maintenant les hommes n'etaient pas suffisamment equipes pour resister aux tendances productivistes, scientiste et techniciste de notre civilisation ; or, je suis persuade du contraire. Il ne faut tout de meme pas oubli-er que l'on peut critiquer—et que l'on a effectivement critique—de maniere clairvoyante la societe technoscientifique et productiviste en s'appuyant sur la raison commune. Il faut rappeler que toutes les orientations proposees par Yuk Hui et avec lesquelles j'ai signale mon accord peuvent etre argu-mentees au nom de la raison et du bon sens. Elles ont deja ete proposees par des penseurs technocritiques qui s'appuyaient sur de tels fondements.

N'en déplaise aux manes de Heidegger, c'est la raison commune, attentive à l'intégralité de l'expérience personnelle vécue et en particulier à ses dimensions charnelles qui a été suffisante pour permettre à Berdiaeff, Guardini, Anders, Ellul, Charbonneau, Illich, Postman, et tant d'autres, pour identifier les problèmes résultant de la technicisation du monde. Ce n'est pas l'adhésion à une métaphysique particulière qui les a poussés à s'insurger puis à analyser. Ils ont d'abord fait l'expérience douloureuse d'une contradiction entre, d'un côté, leurs valeurs et leur sensibilité et, de l'autre, certaines dimensions du monde dans lequel ils se trouvaient. Ils se sont sentis privés de nature, privés de beauté, privés de liberté dans leur vie quotidienne ou professionnelle, ils étouffaient dans un monde sur-organisé, ils ont senti que les relations qu'ils entretenaient avec autrui étaient dépersonnalisées et dépersonnalisantes, etc. Ils ont eu aussi le sentiment que c'est quelque chose qui ne va pas s'arranger, qui va être aggravé par l'évolution sociale en cours. Ils ont eu aussi la conviction que ce que leur sensibilité percevait, c'est une contradiction qui concerne tout le monde et que pour y apporter quelque remède il faut analyser cette contradiction afin de déterminer ce contre quoi il faut agir. Ce n'est pas en repudiant une ontologie ou une métaphysique particulière qu'ils ont pu penser la technique de manière éclairante pour nous. Ce ne sont pas des idées théoriques, c'est d'abord le sentiment d'une contradiction vécue qui suscite pour l'un un malaise, pour l'autre une révolte. Ils sont persuadés que cette *expérience sensible* d'un désaccord avec le monde qui se met en place est importante, et ils n'ont pas cherché à refouler le sentiment intime de cette contradiction comme quelque chose de secondaire. Au contraire, ils ont plutôt mobilisé leur *raison* pour en identifier les causes. Pourquoi cette même raison commune ne suffirait-elle pas pour chercher et mettre en œuvre des alternatives? Ainsi, dans *La trahison de l'occident*, contre un rationalisme aveugle, fasciné par la puissance et la passion de l'unité, Ellul plaide pour une raison conçue comme recherche de la mesure et comme art dialectique de patiemment tenir ensemble les contraires. De même, ce n'est pas l'adhésion à une nouvelle métaphysique qui a conduit Ellul, Charbonneau, Illich et bien d'autres à penser—comme certains des penseurs chinois anciens présentés par Yuk Hui—qu'une technique doit être évaluée non seulement d'après le degré d'efficacité de l'action sur son objet mais aussi d'après la manière dont son usage retentit sur celui qui la met en œuvre. (Qu'il ne faut pas séparer le moyen de la fin c'est une des thèses fondamentales de *Presence au monde moderne* de Jacques Ellul).

## **Les risques de la recherche de l'unité et d'un ordre global**

Alors que le confucianisme affirmait « l'unité du cosmos et de la morale » (p. 114) selon un principe de résonance entre l'humain et le Ciel, le règne de la technique a rompu en Chine « l'unité métaphysique de la pratique et de la théorie », Yuk Hui cherche une « nouvelle union » (p. 69). Et pour cela il veut « concilier technique et nature comme le propose Simondon » (p. 87).

« Des que nous acceptons le concept de cosmotechnique, nous cessons de maintenir l'opposition entre magie/mythe et science, ainsi que l'idée d'un progrès de l'une à l'autre » (p. 58). Il s'agit donc de réduire le privilège de la pensée rationnelle. Contre sa prétention à l'universalité, il faudrait promouvoir des modes de pensée privilégiant l'analogie, la résonance entre les divers ordres de réalité. Notons que l'on retrouve ainsi les grandes orientations de la pensée esotérique de la Renaissance (comme celle de Paracelse) qui passionnait Simondon. On peut y voir aussi une réactualisation du rêve romantique animé par un lancinant désir de fusion-réconciliation avec le monde, manifestation du « sentiment océanique », que Freud décrit comme sentiment « d'un lien indissoluble, d'une appartenance à la totalité du monde extérieur »? Mais ne risque-t-on pas dès lors une régression vers un nouveau paganisme, une nouvelle pensée mythique qui resacralise l'ordre cosmique tel que le groupe social se le représente?

Par ailleurs le projet de promouvoir la diversité des cosmotechniques et de conformer nos actions non plus à une raison commune mais, selon les groupes sociaux à tel ou tel modèle unifié de l'ordre du monde ne risque-t-il pas de favoriser des unifications autoritaires à l'intérieur de chaque groupe culturel, la sacralisation du tout justifiant le sacrifice des parties individuelles? Et comme les diverses communautés peuvent indéfiniment se fragmenter en sous-communautés qui se rejettent mutuellement, ne risque-t-on pas aussi de renforcer la vieille tendance des humains aux « guerres culturelles » et aux politiques identitaires?

Par ailleurs, je suis assez sceptique sur la possibilité de fonder durablement l'éthique sur la considération d'un ordre cosmique préétabli, indépendant de nous, car il n'est pas évident que le cosmos soit aussi ordonné que cela, ou plutôt que son ordre soit en harmonie complète avec nos valeurs éthiques. Certes l'homme appartient à la nature dont il dépend, mais il a aussi une dimension non-naturelle qui le pousse à s'opposer à l'ordre du cosmos qu'il vit souvent comme un désordre. Certes, le monde non-humain nous donne à certains égards l'impression d'un ordre régulier et hiérarchisé. Mais c'est aussi celui des tsunamis imprévisibles, des éruptions volcaniques, des météores qui peut-être un jour désintégreront la planète Terre, des virus qui peuvent la dépeupler ; c'est aussi celui dans lequel l'« ordre » consiste en ce que le plus fort vit en dévorant le plus faible. Comme le rappelle Charbonneau, l'homme est nature et fait partie de ce cosmos qui lui donne la vie, mais il est aussi liberté. Lorsqu'il ne sacralise pas les forces cosmiques et naturelles qui peuvent à tout instant le détruire, c'est *contre ce* potentiel destructeur du soi-disant ordre du monde dont la science nous dit qu'il n'est régi que par le hasard et la nécessité, que l'homme rêve de pouvoir créer un autre monde de justice, d'amour, de fraternité et de paix, un monde conforme aux exigences de l'esprit: l'exact oppose de ce qu'il peut observer tous les jours. Mais l'expérience montre qu'en prétendant mettre de l'ordre dans ce désordre on risque d'aggraver ce dernier. Ce que montre l'histoire de l'Occident c'est que la désacralisation du monde et la liberté vont de pair. Or avec le Christianisme la désacralisation du monde est complète et l'exigence de liberté est devenue irrépressible. Plus qu'au triomphe de l'ontothéologie, c'est à cette désacralisation chrétienne du monde qu'on peut attribuer la montée en puissance

technicienne de l'occident. Apparemment cette liberté chrétienne, accompagnée de la technique, contamine aujourd'hui la plupart des sociétés de la planète. D'où les risques de désordres tels que la liberté pourrait être la victime du processus qu'elle a mis en mouvement. Il y a là une contradiction difficile à résoudre : comment maîtriser les forces mises en mouvement par la liberté sans sacrifier cette liberté ?

Or en fondant une éthique technicienne et une politique sur la considération d'un ordre cosmique, on risque de laisser de côté la question de la liberté au profit de l'unité. Ellul s'était montré très critique à l'égard de la tentative d'Edgar Morin de construire une science de l'homme unifiée ; il nous avertit que « la traduction dans cette société de cette science, c'est l'élaboration d'une organisation socio-politique totalitaire ». Un peu plus loin, il précise qu'il en est ainsi lorsque la créature propose une théorie non seulement totale, mais aussi fermée, c'est-à-dire prétendant rendre compte de tout ce qui est intellectuellement saisi, expliqué, mais aussi saisissable et explicable—lorsque cette théorie est non seulement le reflet du réel mais la solution de ce réel<sup>216</sup>.

Je remarque d'ailleurs que la question de la liberté est absente du livre de Yuk Hui. Le mot n'y apparaît que très rarement. Sa préoccupation est plutôt celle de l'unité ; or il ne peut y avoir de liberté que là où il y a contradiction et tension.

## **Changer d'orientation: une question de métaphysique ou de caractère ?**

Faut-il inventer une vision *du monde* pour remplacer celle qui est défectueuse ? Oui, répond toute une tradition philosophique. Mais n'est-ce pas une naïveté de philosophe que de vouloir sauver les hommes en opposant une doctrine à une doctrine, un paradigme à un autre paradigme, une *épistémè* à une autre, remplacer un programme par un autre (Yuk Hui a étudié l'informatique) ? Certes, les hommes agissent selon ce qu'ils pensent, mais leur pensée est plus souvent orientée par leurs désirs et des mythes irrationnels que par des idées métaphysiques. Est-il réaliste d'imaginer que c'est l'adoption d'une « nouvelle pensée », en fin de compte un nouvel *isme*, qui va nous sortir d'affaire ? J'en doute. Je me demande si ce sont vraiment de mauvais *ismes* qui nous rendent aveugles aux impasses ou nous sommes engagés. Ne serait-ce pas plutôt parce que nous n'avons pas la force d'ouvrir les yeux et de voir par nous-mêmes que nous nous précipitons dans des *is-mes* toujours renouvelés, errements dont il me paraît important de souligner deux causes (il y en a peut-être d'autres). La première cause serait que la technique n'est pas existentiellement neutre, ce qui lui confère un pouvoir mythogène. Quels que soient les cadres ontologiques et la métaphysique qui structurent les cultures humaines, la technique fascine ; elle nous fait rêver d'une transmutation de l'existence, enfin délivrée de ses cadres spatio-temporels et de ses liens

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<sup>216</sup> Yuk Hui, *La question de la technique en Chine*, trad. Alex Taillard, Paris, Éditions divergences, 2021.

charnels a la terre. Ce faisant la technique nourrit une mystique du progres qui nous fait desirer toute augmentation de la puissance et nous rend aveugles aux couts et au risques sociaux et environnementaux de la montee trop rapide du pouvoir des hommes. La deuxieme cause serait notre difficulte a enregistrer les contradictions dans lesquelles nous vivons et a les penser personnellement. C'est pourquoi la substitution aux anciens *ismes* d'un nouvel *isme* impersonnel risque de continuer a nous exonerer du devoir de penser personnellement, ce qui ne ferait qu'aggraver notre condition.

Je ne suis donc pas sur que pour resoudre les problemes poses par l'accelera-tion demente de la technicisation du monde il serait necessaire d'inventer une « nouvelle rationalite ». A mon avis il faut surtout devenir « raison-nables » et faire un effort pour sortir de la fascination techniciste. Plutot qu'une cosmotechnique, je crois que ce qu'il nous faut surtout, ce sont des *penseurs libres*, de solides gaillard(e)s, capables de supporter la contradiction, de resister a la pression sociale et aux entrainements collectifs, quel que soit l'*isme* dominant du moment. Ce qui suppose l'attention de chacun a son experience personnelle et la confiance en son jugement personnel et en la raison commune. Ce n'est pas une affaire de metaphysique ou d'*episteme*, mais de caractere. Bien entendu la mefiance a l'egard du role social de tout *isme* globalisant, quel qu'il soit, n'empeche pas de faire un travail theorique, a la fois critique pour demystifier et demythologiser la technique et con-structif pour chercher des alternatives et cela dans de nombreux domaines. Tous les *ismes* ne se valent pas ; j'en suis persuade, sinon je ne serais pas un intellectuel. Mais rien ne prouve qu'il soit necessaire, pour reorienter nos pratiques techniciennes, de disposer d'une « nouvelle pensee » et de « nouveaux savoirs » susceptibles de fonder une « nouvelle alliance » entre l'homme, la technique et le monde. Je crois plutot qu'entre les necessites du monde et la liberte de l'homme il y a inevitablement une tension dont les termes devront etre constamment renegoties grace a une veille de la conscience et de la raison qui ne connaitra jamais de terme.

## Compte rendu de Ce Dieu injuste...? Theologie chretienne pour le peuple d'Israel

Patrick Chastenet et Sylvain Dujancourt

Ellul, Jacques. *Ce Dieu injuste...? Theologie chretienne pour le peuple d'Israel*, Paris, Arlea, 1991, 201 p.

« Car Dieu a renferme tous les hommes dans l'infidelite afin de faire miseri-corde a tous. » (Rom. XI, 32). Si Dieu decide de tout, pourquoi punirait-Il ceux qu'Il a fait d'avance pour temoigner de sa colere? Si Dieu—absolu-ment libre dans sa souverainete— « sauve » les uns et « rejette » les autres, comment accepter que de tels irresponsables soient damnes? Si Dieu est bon, Il ne peut pas faire le mal. S'Il laisse faire le mal, c'est qu'Il n'est pas bon. Dans l'un de ses tous derniers livres, publie

en 1991 soit trois ans avant sa mort, Jacques Ellul tente de sortir de cette serie de contradictions logiques par une pensee dialectique deja solidement eprouvee.<sup>217</sup>

L'homme est-il en mesure de juger de la bonte ou de la justice de Dieu? En verite, l'arbitraire de Dieu c'est que nous ne comprenons pas, c'est ce que nous n'acceptons pas, en tant qu'hommes. Dieu est « arbitraire » exacte-ment comme l'amour est arbitraire. Pretendre que Dieu est « injuste » si-gnifierait qu'il existe des valeurs au-dessus de celui que Kierkegaard nomme precisement « l'Inconditionne »<sup>218</sup>. Cela reviendrait a dire que Dieu n'est pas Dieu ! Pour l'auteur de la *Maladie a la mort* comme pour celui de *La Raison d'etre*, Dieu est absolument libre, c'est-a-dire que ni son etre ni ses

Chastenet, Patrick, et Sylvain Dujancourt. Compte rendu de *Ce Dieu injuste ...?* Theologie chretienne pour le peuple d'Israel. *Ellul Forum* 68 (Fall 2021): 75-78. © Patrick Chastenet et Sylvain Dujancourt, CC BY-NC-ND.

**Ellul Forum** decisions ne dependent de qui ou de quoi que ce soit. En verite, la Bible nous dit que le Bien c'est uniquement ce que Dieu fait et que seul Dieu decide de ce qui est juste ou non.

L'auteur de *Ce Dieu injuste?* est bien conscient de s'attaquer la a l'un des passages les plus difficiles de la Bible. Car les trois chapitres (IX, X, XI) de l'Epitre de l'apotre Paul aux Romains comptent generalement parmi les plus ignores ou les plus mal compris. Dans son commentaire, le theologien protestant n'oublie pas qu'il est aussi historien et sociologue. Son exegese a donc fort peu a voir avec un simple panorama recapitulatif des diverses interpretations de ces trois chapitres. Car en definitive, il s'agit ni plus ni moins que d'etablir une theologie chretienne du peuple juif et de combattre les racines theologiques de l'antisemitisme et de l'antisionisme de l'Eglise. Son projet tombait d'ailleurs a pic a l'heure ou certains secteurs (tres mi-noritaires) de l'Eglise catholique renouaient avec leurs vieux demons anti-juifs. En effet, peu de temps apres la parution de son ouvrage, le quotidien *La Croix* revela que des moines benedictins avaient remis en vigueur de vieilles prieres antisemites abolies par le pape Jean XXIII en 1959. L'annee precedente, des catholiques traditionnalistes avaient meme profite du pele-rinage de la Pentecote pour defiler dans les rues de Chartres et inviter « les juifs perfides » a se convertir.

La question posee par Ellul dans ce livre peut se resumer ainsi: que de-vient le peuple juif depuis l'avenement du Messie? Est-il rejete? Pour Ellul, loin d'etre le « peuple deicide », Israel est le peuple porteur de Dieu en Jesus-Christ. Le peuple elu reste le peuple « elu ». Ce qui ne veut pas dire « sauve » mais « mis a part pour temoigner ». La mission du peuple juif est d'attester que le Dieu biblique est unique, que ce Dieu est maitre de l'His-toire et que son Amour constitue la seule verite. Ainsi, la vocation d'Israel est de vivre, selon la Loi, une aventure historique caracterisee par le desir de changer le monde, mais toujours dans l'attente du Messie. Cette reponse claire d'Ellul ne surprend pas de la part d'un auteur qui a pris le parti d'Israel « en

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<sup>217</sup> Yuk Hui: "produire des technologies alternatives". Revue *Ballast*, juillet 2020.

<sup>218</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Le Systeme technicien*, Paris, Calmann-Levy, 1977, p. 222-23.

tant que chretien<sup>219</sup> » et qui ne pretend pas a l'objectivite scientifique. Pourtant, selon Ellul, trois erreurs ont ete commises: 1) les juifs ont con-fondu la Torah avec la justice et la volonte de Dieu, or Dieu ne se laisse pas enfermer dans un texte. Sa Justice n'est pas l'exacte retribution des « reuvres » et Sa Volonte est impossible a connaitre dans son entier ; 2) charges de la **Book Reviews** proclamation du Dieu liberateur pour tous, les juifs ont oublie l'universalite de leur message ; 3) les juifs se sont appropries la Revelation, l'Alliance et l'Electio. D'où le rejet « temporaire et partiel » d'Israel qui a de^u le projet divin de transmettre Sa volonte liberatrice a tous, et son remplacement par Jesus-Christ, en sus de l'ultime reste d'Israel. Alors que la Torah est reservee au seul peuple juif, rappelle Ellul, Jesus-Christ est un don offert a tous les hommes, autrement dit la Torah accomplie. Malgre cela, les juifs refusent toujours de considerer le Seigneur comme « l'Eternel ». Choisi par Dieu pour ses faiblesses et non pour ses vertus, Israel n'est pas coupable selon Ellul.

Ce en quoi son point de vue differe de celui defendu par le jesuite Jean-Noel Aletti qui propose—dans un livre publie le meme mois—une lecture radicalement differente de l'epitre aux Romains<sup>220</sup>. Sur l'interpretation de ce texte, divisant les chretiens depuis Luther car renvoyant a la question de savoir si nous sommes sauves par la foi ou par les reuvres, ces divergences n'ont rien de tres surprenant. L'objet du livre de l'exegete catholique est de preciser la notion de justice divine chez l'apotre Paul alors que nous avons vu que pour Ellul il s'agissait d'etablir une theologie chretienne du peuple juif et de combattre l'antisemitisme de l'Eglise. Alors qu'Aletti pratique une exegese dite « scientifique » de type synchronique, Ellul se livre a une etude exegetique, theologique et ethique. Partant du meme texte mais avec des intentions et des methodes differentes, les conclusions divergent. Selon Aletti, Israel aurait commis une faute en rejetant Jesus-Christ, les juifs devraient renoncer a la Torah comme voie de justice et de salut, la promesse faite a Israel n'aurait plus de raison d'etre—resume de la doctrine de l'Eglise catholique—alors que selon Ellul, les juifs ne sont pas coupables, la Torah revele le Christ et que la promesse demeure.

Ellul souligne que le refus des juifs de reconnaitre la messianite de Jesus a en effet permis le « salut » des pai'ens. « La ou le peche a abonde, la grace a surabonde. » Isaac et Ismael, Moise et Pharaon, le « oui » et le « non », vont de pair. Israel est toujours et en meme temps le peuple élu et rejete. On peut alors parler de « positivite de la negativite » dans la mesure ou cette desobeissance meme sert le dessein ultime. Si la majorite des juifs n'a pas

**Ellul Forum** reconnu le Messie en Christ, c'est pour permettre a tous les hommes de connaitre la grace et lelection. Il revient donc a l'Eglise, aujourd'hui, de sus-citer la jalousie d'Israel par une ethique d'homme libere. Or, comme l'avait montre Jacques

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<sup>219</sup> Cf. Jacques Ellul, *La Raison d'etre. Meditation sur l'Ecclesiaste*, Paris, Seuil, 1987.

<sup>220</sup> Frederic Rognon, *Jacques Ellul, une pensee en dialogue*, Geneve, Labor et Fides, 2007 ; Vernard Eller, « Ellul and Kierkegaard: closer than brothers » in C. Christians et J. Van Hook (dir.), *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays*, Urbana-Chicago-London, University of Illinois Press, 1981 ; Nelly Viallaneix, *Ecoute Kierkegaard. Essai sur la communication de la Parole*, Paris, Le Cerf, 1979.

Ellul dans l'un de ses livres majeurs<sup>221</sup>, tant que les chrétiens prêcheront une morale, une dogmatique, une contrainte, une austerité en lieu et place du salut, de la joie, de la liberté et de l'amour, les juifs pourront légitimement refuser de reconnaître le Fils de Dieu en Jésus.

La Shoah doit nous conduire à penser autrement toute la théologie chrétienne, théologie à jamais bancalée sans Israël. Et l'auteur de conclure en établissant un lien entre le judaïsme et la fin de l'Histoire: qu'il le veuille ou non, le peuple juif « est le coin enfoncé dans le creux de pierre du monde et il y restera jusqu'à ce que le creux de pierre soit changé en creux de chair ».

## Review of *An Unjust God? A Christian Theology of Israel in Light of Romans 9-11*

Patrick Chastenet and Sylvain Dujancourt

Ellul, Jacques. *An Unjust God? A Christian Theology of Israel in Light of Romans 9-11*, trans. Anne Marie Andreasson-Hogg (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012).

"For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all" (Rom 11:32). If God determines everything, why would he punish those he made in advance to testify to his wrath? If God—absolutely free in his sovereignty—"saves" some and "rejects" others, how are we to accept that those not responsible are damned? If God is good, he cannot do evil. If he lets evil be done, he cannot be good. In one of his very last books, published in 1991 three years before his death, Jacques Ellul attempted to break out of this series of logical contradictions by an already well-tested dialectical thinking.<sup>222</sup>

Is man able to judge the goodness or justice of God? In truth, what is arbitrary in God is that which we as human beings do not understand, do not accept. God is "arbitrary" just like love is arbitrary. To claim that God is "unjust" would mean that there are values that exist above the one whom Kierkegaard specifically called "the Unconditioned."<sup>223</sup> This would be like saying that God is not God! For the author of *Sickness unto Death* as for the author of *Reason for Being*, God is absolutely free, that is, neither his being nor his decisions depend on anyone or anything. In truth, the Bible tells us that the Good is only that which God does and that God alone decides what is and is not just.

Chastenet, Patrick, and Sylvain Dujancourt. Review of *An Unjust God? A Christian Theology of Israel in Light of Romans 9-11*. *Ellul Forum* 68 (Fall 2021): 79-82. © Patrick Chastenet and Sylvain Dujancourt, CC BY-NC-ND.

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<sup>221</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Un chrétien pour Israël*, Monaco, Editions du Rocher, 1986, 243 p.

<sup>222</sup> Jean-Noël Aletti, *Comment Dieu est-il juste? Clefs pour interpréter l'épître aux Romains*, Paris, Seuil, 1991, 288 p.

<sup>223</sup> Jacques Ellul, *La subversion du christianisme*, Paris, Seuil, 1984.



The author of *An Unjust God?* is well aware that he is taking on here one of the most difficult passages in the Bible. The three chapters 9, 10, and 11 of Paul's Epistle to the Romans generally count among the most unheeded or most misunderstood. In his commentary, the Protestant theologian does not forget that he is also a historian and sociologist. His exegesis therefore has very little in common with a simple overview summarizing the various interpretations of these three chapters. Ultimately, his exegesis is concerned squarely with establishing a Christian theology of the Jewish people and striking at the theological roots of antisemitism and anti-Zionism in the Church. His project was also timely, when certain (very small) parts of the Catholic Church were taking up again with their old anti-Jewish demons. Indeed, shortly after his book's appearing, the daily *La Croix* revealed that Benedictine monks had restored old antisemitic prayers that had been abolished by Pope John XXIII in 1959. The previous year, some traditionalist Catholics had even taken advantage of the pilgrimage of Pentecost to parade in the streets of Chartres and invite "the perfidious Jews" to be converted.

The question that Ellul poses in this book can be summarized as follows: What does the Jewish people become after the coming of the Messiah? Are they rejected? For Ellul, far from being "the Christ killers," Israel is the people who bear God in Jesus Christ. The chosen people remain the "chosen" people. Which is not to say "saved," but "set apart as witnesses." The mission of the Jewish people is to testify that the biblical God is one, that this God is the master of History, and his Love constitutes the only truth. Thus, the calling of Israel is to live, according to the Law, a historical adventure characterized by the desire to change the world, but always in the expectation of the Messiah. Ellul's clear answer does not come as a surprise, from an author who took Israel's side "as a Christian"<sup>224</sup> and did not claim scientific objectivity.

Yet, according to Ellul, three errors have been committed: 1) The Jews confused the Torah with the righteousness and will of God, although God does not constrain himself within a text. His righteousness is not the exact retribution for "works," and his will is impossible to know entirely; 2) Charged [Book Reviews] with proclaiming the liberating God for all, the Jews forgot the universality of their message; 3) The Jews took to themselves Revelation, Covenant, and Election. Whence the "temporary and partial" rejection of Israel that disappointed the divine plan to transmit his liberating will to all, and its replacement by Jesus Christ, in addition to the ultimate remnant of Israel.

Whereas the Torah is reserved to the Jewish people alone, Ellul recalls, Jesus Christ is a gift offered to all men, in other words, the Torah fulfilled. Despite this, the Jews refuse still to consider the Lord as "the Lord." Chosen by God for their weaknesses and not their virtues, Israel is not guilty according to Ellul.

This is how his point of view differs from that championed by the Jesuit Jean-Noel Aletti, who proposed—in a book published in the same month—a radically different

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<sup>224</sup> Cf. Jacques Ellul, *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks

reading of the Epistle to the Romans.<sup>225</sup> On the interpretation of this text, which has divided Christians since Luther because it concerns the question of whether we are saved by faith or by works, these differences of opinion are not surprising. The purpose of the Catholic exegete's book is to clarify the notion of divine justice in Paul's thought, whereas we have seen that for Ellul it is about providing a Christian theology of the Jewish people and combatting the Church's antisemitism. Whereas Aletti practiced a so-called "scientific" and synchronic exegesis, Ellul undertakes an exegetical, theological, and ethical study. Starting from the same text but with different intentions and methods, the conclusions diverge. For Aletti, Israel did wrong in rejecting Jesus Christ, the Jews should renounce the Torah as the way of righteousness and salvation, the promise made to Israel no longer has reason to exist—a summary of the Catholic Church's teaching—whereas for Ellul, the Jews are not guilty, the Torah reveals Christ, and the promise endures.

Ellul emphasizes that the Jews' refusal to recognize that Jesus is the Messiah actually permitted the pagans' "salvation." "There where sin abounded, grace abounded more." Isaac and Ishmael, Moses and Pharaoh, the "yes" and the "no" go hand in hand. Israel is always and at the same time the chosen and the rejected people. We can therefore speak of the "positivity of negativity" to the extent that this very disobedience serves the ultimate purpose. If the majority of Jews have not recognized the Messiah in Christ, it is so that all men may know grace and election. It is thus up to the Church, today, to arouse Israel's jealousy by an ethics of man set free. For as Ellul had shown in one of his major books,<sup>226</sup> as long as Christians preach morality, dogmatics, constraint, and austerity instead of salvation, joy, freedom, and love, the Jews will have legitimate reason to refuse to recognize the Son of God in Jesus.

The Shoah must lead us to think the whole of Christian theology in another way, a theology that is forever unsound without Israel. And the author concludes by establishing a link between Judaism and the end of History: whether they like it or not, the Jewish people "are the wedge that is sunk into the world's heart of stone and will remain there until the heart of stone is changed into a heart of flesh."

*Translated by Lisa Richmond.*

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(Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990).

<sup>225</sup> Frederic Rognon, *Jacques Ellul, une pensée en dialogue* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2007); Vernard Eller, "Ellul and Kierkegaard: Closer than Brothers." In C. Christians and J. Van Hook, eds, *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1981); Nelly Viallaneix, *Ecoute Kierkegaard. Essai sur la communication de la Parole* (Paris: Le Cerf, 1979).

<sup>226</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Un chrétien pour Israël* (Monaco: Editions du Rocher, 1986).

# Review of Wisdom from Babylon: Leadership for the Church in a Secular Age

Peter Anderson

Smith, Gordon T. *Wisdom from Babylon: Leadership for the Church in a Secular Age*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020, 189 pp.

The particular challenges of Church leadership in this cultural moment set the scene for Gordon Smith's contributions in *Wisdom from Babylon: Leadership for the Church in a Secular Age*. More specifically, Smith attempts to evaluate and address the pressing need for qualified, capable, and mature leadership for the Church in the midst of complex social and cultural circumstances<sup>227</sup>. As president and professor of systematic and spiritual theology at Ambrose University and Seminary in Calgary, Alberta, Smith speaks from a career invested in leadership development and ministerial training. He is also ordained within the Christian and Missionary Alliance and serves as a teaching fellow at Regent College, Vancouver. Having already published works on spiritual theology, vocation, leadership, and ecclesial identity, *Wisdom from Babylon* offers a synthesis of many of these themes in an effort to stimulate vocational maturity among Church leadership.

Smith divides *Wisdom* into two sections, the first focusing on reading and understanding the times and the second articulating the alternative community, competencies, and dispositions necessary for faithful Church leadership in a secular age. In setting the scene, he uses the term *secular* to identify the consciousness of the present age that emphasizes a lost sense of transcendence. He follows a line of thought as developed by the work of philosophers Louis Dupre, Charles Taylor, and James K.A. Smith (15-21). As Smith rightly identifies, the rise of secularity is less an indication of the decline of religion, spiritual, or faith in the Western social setting and more an indication that religion, specifically Christianity, has lost a privileged position within the larger culture (15). Significantly, Smith points to the rise of secularity not only in culture at large but in the Church in particular. Channeling the spirit of H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*, Smith suggests four distinct responses to secularity ("Go Along to Get Along," Monastic, Culture Wars, and Faithful Presence) as an evolution of Niebuhr's original categories. The "Go Along to Get Along" response involves individuals living a divided life, separating existence along the private/public or spiritual/secular binary. The Monastic response disengages from society, creating a protective barrier and isolated society not on a binary as in the "Go Along to Get Along" but as an entirely distinct existence hermetically sealed from the corrupted broader culture. The Culture Wars response proposes a restorationist vision for Western society, misremembering and exaggerating a once-Christian culture in need of reclamation via legislation, education, and various other public advocacy. The final position, the Faithful Presence

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<sup>227</sup> Jean-Noel Aletti, *Comment Dieu est-il juste? Clefs pour interpreter l'epitre aux Romains* (Paris: Seuil, 1991).

response, embraces the Church's cultural marginalization as an opportunity for humble, charitable social renewal through authentically Christian practices and witness within the fabric of social order.

Anderson, Peter. Review of *Wisdom from Babylon: Leadership for the Church in a Secular Age*. *Ellul Forum* 68 (Fall 2021): 83-87. © Peter Anderson, CC BY-NC-ND

After introducing the four categories, Smith spends several chapters pulling in various voices across Church history in an attempt to evaluate the four responses and offer the positive and negative possibilities of each. In the traumatic, minority presence of the post-exilic prophets in the Old Testament, the Church is reminded of the significance of God's glory, distinctive ecclesial identity, and biblical hope even in the face of troubling, fearful times. From the wisdom of the early Church, Augustine and Ambrose call out the power of seeking the common good, the essentiality of the catechumenate to a rightly formed social identity, and the significance of Trinitarian spirituality to the life of the Church. The historic minority churches clarify the distinction between secularity and the secular, the importance of a contextualized faith, and the place of justice and advocacy in the midst of genuine suffering. Finally, Christian voices from secular Europe (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Jacques Ellul, and Lesslie Newbigin) recast a vision for reclaiming the Church's prophetic, subversive, redemptive identity.

The concluding portion of section one revisits the four responses proposed by Smith, analyzing the benefits and drawbacks of each. The "Go Along to Get Along" response accepts the secular world but creates a troublesome (and false) sacred/secular divide. The Monastic response crafts an alternative Christian vision for life but fails to follow the preservational and redemptive calling of the Church, surrendering to cynicism. The Culture Wars response speaks counterculturally but with an adversarial, power-hungry, fear-mongering voice. The Faithful Presence response fulfills the biblical vision for Christian witness from the margins.

A point of diversion is noteworthy at this point. Smith's engagement with Ellul in his review of Christian voices in secular Europe does a great job of drawing popular-level attention to some of Ellul's most prescient analysis. Specifically, Smith calls out Ellul's attentiveness to the duality of the Christian life lived in constant tension within the world, emphasizing the discontinuity of the world and the kingdom of God through leveraging insights on urbanization (from Ellul's *Meaning of the City*) and *technique* (e.g., efficiency, means as ends, and technology's dehumanizing tendencies). Additionally, Ellul's use of "salt and light" imagery as well as the call for a more hopeful Christian experience round out a solid recognition of Ellul's contribution to cultural exegesis and analysis. Smith represents Ellul fairly and offers introductory, framing concepts that would benefit a reader drawn to the works referenced in this section for further Ellul resources.

The second half of *Wisdom* turns a corner from offering broader analysis and historical review in order to describe the competencies and dispositions essential for leading the Church to be a faithful witness in the cultural situation analyzed in part one. To this end, Smith identifies three concepts critical to future leaders: liturgical leadership,

catechetical leadership, and missional leadership. Each of these concepts frames not only the quality of leader necessary for Church leadership but also the kind of community aimed at Faithful Presence. By liturgical, Smith draws attention to the formative, devotional qualities essential to Church life. By catechetical, Smith calls for the Church to reclaim the teaching-learning identity in which Christians are initiated into the faith in order to pursue a shared life seeking wisdom and spiritual maturity. By missional, Smith calls the leader and community to actively bear witness to the reign of Christ in word and deed, drawing on the priestly, pedagogical, and empowering role of good leaders.

Smith's sections on liturgical and catechetical community present a condensed adaptation of his larger work on the subject, *Called to Be Saints*. Nevertheless, restating topics such as the need for theological integrity, formative and informative practices, encounters with the ascended Christ, and hope in the midst of lament all offer important reminders of God's primary call for his people to grow in wisdom and maturity. In fact, Smith's identification of political wisdom, peacemaking, and ecumenism all reinforce the need for a new kind of creative, imaginative leadership rooted in the traditions, biblical foundations, and formative rhythms of the Church. After a final revisiting of interiority in the life of the leader, Smith concludes with a word on hospitality, generosity, and justice in the witness of the Church.

Overall, Smith's work represents a timely contribution to Church leadership conversations dominated by a seemingly endless list of moral failures, spiritual abuses, and mismanaged scandals. Smith's hopeful, worshipful alternative renews the spirit of those longing for Church leaders and communities identified by virtue rather than vice. In addition, *Wisdom* presents helpful insights for leaders and Christian communities hopefully working toward a better future. The strengths of *Wisdom* rest on Smith's ability to offer a beautiful portrait of the body of Christ as it ought to be. His emphasis on liturgical, catechetical, and missional leadership offers a clear, compelling case for a healthier, wiser, mature leader.

Yet, there are moments where the initial recognition of secularity as a "loss of transcendence" becomes muddled and Smith's initial statements feel disconnected from both his analysis and recommendations. Smith's alternative model for leadership would benefit greatly from being positioned as the restored balance of transcendence and immanence over and against secular-ity's overemphasis on the immanent. At times, Smith's work sounds like yet another cultural analysis from a Christian leader proposing the best model for cultural engagement. For example, Smith avoids including any mention of potential struggles or challenges for Church leaders and Christian communities seeking to embrace the Faithful Presence response. Every other response offers a list of strengths and weaknesses. Smith's model may be ideal, but the application of the model surely is not. It's not difficult to look around and acknowledge that too many churches fail to see the secularity Smith identifies as present within the Church. As a result, Smith's alternative model may never gain traction within many congregations without clear guidance for even sensing the need for changing approaches or tactics. To

that end, acknowledging the hard work of changing responses would enhance Smith's already helpful contribution.

Minor criticisms aside, Smith has done the Church a great service by employing his wisdom and experience to offer guidance for charting the kind of leadership and community designed to flourish within the contemporary social moment. His insistence on wisdom and maturity offers critical counter-narratives to the modern tendency toward foolishness and vacuity. To that end, I hope many take the time to read Smith's careful contributions for the sake of God's glory and the good of the world.

## Review of *Radical Technologies: The Design of Everyday Life*

Pierre Lindsay Chineegadoo

Greenfield, Adam. *Radical Technologies: The Design of Everyday Life*. New York: Verso, 2017, 368 pp.

In this book, Greenfield aims to provide the global digital citizen with a manual to navigate the thick forest of networked digital information technology:

If we want to understand the radical technologies all around us and see just how they interact to produce the condition we recognize as everyday life, we'll need a manual. That is the project of this book. (7-8)

The author makes us aware of how the networking of digital devices in our everyday lives constantly mediates and modifies our daily living:

Networked digital information has become the dominant mode through which we experience the everyday. In some important sense, this class of technology now mediates just about everything we do. (6)

He further adds:

A series of complex technological systems shape our experiences of everyday life in a way that simply wasn't true in any previous era, and we barely understand anything about them: neither how they work, nor where they come from, nor why they take the forms they do. (6)

In *The Technological Bluff*, Ellul qualifies such incognizance as embarrassing:

If Technique has such negative effects and raises such dangers and threats, why do we have so little awareness of it? Why do most people not sense it or see it? Why is there this headlong rush into technical progress? Why do only a few specialists know it?<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011).

Chineegadoo, Pierre Lindsay. Review of *Radical Technologies: The Design of Everyday Life*. *Ellul Forum* 68 (Fall 2021): 89-94. © Pierre Lindsay Chineegadoo, CC BY-NC-ND.<sup>229</sup>

The book introduces a gripping, technological-fiction movie-like script titled “Paris Year Zero.” It describes the City of Light, fully functioning and operated through innovative, networked information-technology devices ranging from the smartphone to machine learning, automation, and artificial intelligence. The book plunges us into a world of near-technological fantasy and unveils the face of what Greenfield dubs the “posthuman economy” made possible through the perfectibility of blockchain technique. Terms such as *posthuman*, *cyborg*, and *transhuman* fill each chapter of the book, signaling Greenfield’s concern that networked digital devices may, if left unsupervised, push human beings out of the new social order shaped and driven by the digital economy. Herein lies the radicality of radical technologies.

Each of the following ten chapters addresses emerging technologies’ other face: rationality, procedure, and efficiency. Like the two-faced Greek god Janus, the networked digital devices conditioning our society and restructuring the social order are double-faced.

Chapter 1 deals with the invasive smartphone versus the networking of the self. Readers will discover how smartphones are omnipresent in the global village. However, the efficient use of the smartphone jeopardizes the autonomous self as a free independent subject. The author peels sequentially the phone’s fabrication layers to reveal how it is transforming our self-understanding and has become the new lens through which we are learning to mediate reality and manage our everyday life. The autonomous self is smeared out across a global mesh of nodes and links; all aspects of our personality we think of as constituting who we are—our tastes, preferences, capabilities, desires—we owe to the fact of our connection with that mesh and the selves and distant resources to which it binds us. (15-16)

Chapter 2 reflects on the Internet of Things as a “planetary mesh of perception and response.” The smartphone is part and parcel of a more extensive mesh topology that forms a computer and digital electronic wi-fi device network. These, like the Fitbit, Apple Watch, digital pedometers, and smart home devices, are entangled together, sending and receiving electronic messages on a constant basis. This “mesh topology” is qualified as the Internet of Things, but Greenfield prefers these “for what it is: ‘the colonization of everyday life by information processing’” (32). For example, wearable technologies such as Fitbit and Apple Watch serve the double purpose of measuring the performance and efficiency of the human body. Greenfield critically comments that “a brutal regime of efficiency operates in the background” (35) of the wearable biometric community.

Chapter 3 describes augmented reality as “an interactive overlay on the world.” Greenfield reflects on virtual and augmented reality from various angles. These immer-

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<sup>229</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerd-

sive technologies “are interface techniques—modes of mediation, rather than anything more fundamental” (65). I find it quite poignant when he shares his hope that augmented reality could reduce his mild face-blindness, or prosopagnosia, enabling him to recognize others and sparing them from “the real insult implied by my failure to recognize them” (68). He highlights the relentless striving for the technological society to reach beyond the flaws of human beings and comments that “the discourse augmented reality shares with other contemporary trans-and posthuman narratives is a frustration with the limits of the flesh and a frank interest in transcending them through technical means” (80).

As described by Greenfield, radical technologies validate Ellul’s statement that “We are conditioned by something new: technological civilization.”<sup>230</sup> The ideology of Technique (as defined by Ellul<sup>231</sup>) can lead to a fatalist attitude or a strict determinism philosophy. Ellul would argue however that we “must seek ways of resisting and transcending technological determinants.”<sup>232</sup> In Ellul’s thinking, humans as free agents should transcend technology, and not vice versa.

Chapter 4, on “Digital Fabrication: Toward a Political Economy of Matter,” should be of paramount interest to those who advocate for a fairer economic distribution of goods and services. Greenfield posits that the coming into existence of digital-fabrication machines marks “the final defeat of material scarcity” (89). Digital fabrication enables “end consumers to fulfill emergent demand more or less directly.” Digital fabrication serves Technique and becomes a tool toward a rational form of an effective process of production that tends to be more decentralized and accessible to all. However, he acknowledges that the challenge is not necessarily the deployment of fabrication technologies but the resistance to any “logics of accumulation and exploitation” (112).

In Chapter 5, “Cryptocurrency: The Computational Guarantee of Value,” the significant novelty of cryptocurrency for our everyday life is defined, highlighted, and criticized. The digital currency system remains vulnerable because of issues of privacy and security. Its fragility arises because of “the power over the network now resting in the hands of a very small number of actors” (137).

Chapter 6, “Blockchain Beyond Bitcoin: A Trellis for Posthuman Institutions,” indicates a passage to blockchain technology that engineered and validated Bitcoin. It attracted more interest than Bitcoin itself because it opens the possibility for a “universal, distributed data-storage infrastructure based on the blockchain” (146). Blockchain technology promises an alternative financial system that is efficient, verifiable, and incorruptible. But the recent cryptocurrency heist in August 2021 of Poly’s blockchain

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mans,1990), 73.

<sup>230</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Vintage,1954), xxix.

<sup>231</sup> “The term technique, as I use it, does not mean machines, technology, or this or that procedure for attaining an end. In our technological society, technique is the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency [...] in every field of human activity.” Ellul, *The Technological Society*, xxv.

<sup>232</sup> Ellul, *The Technological Society*, xxxii.



site proves the inherent flaw in any blockchain system. Ellul guards us against thinking that Technical thinking can think about Technique.<sup>233</sup> Proponents of blockchain technology are interested only in the progress of such Technique and cannot foresee the unpredictable move of intelligent hackers.

Ultimately, Greenfield describes how this form of automated economy leads to a posthuman ordering of the world, “not because their designers imagine autonomous technologies working alongside human beings, [...] but because they conceive of humanity as something to be transcended” (181).

Chapter 7, “Automation,” looks inside and outside “the annihilation of work.” Here Greenfield reinforces his thesis of the posthuman turn:

Large-scale data analysis, algorithmic management, machine-learning techniques, automation, and robotics, constitute a coherent set of techniques for the production of an experience I call the posthuman everyday. (185)

For Ellul, it would represent technological instruments that advance the cause of Technique as a planned, rational system aiming at efficiency.

In Chapter 8, “Machine Learning: The Algorithmic Production of Knowl-[Book Reviews] edge,” the author exposes the limitations of training machines’ algorithms to acquire fully autonomous knowledge, mainly when it requires the faculties of perception and discrimination. For instance, the Google Images algorithm showed bias in confusing some images of Black people with that of gorillas, “apparently because the only training images labeled ‘people’ it had ever been provided had light skin” (218). Frances Haugen recently testified before the US Senate about the dangers inherent to the Facebook algorithm.

Chapter 9, “Artificial Intelligence,” describes “the eclipse of human discretion.” Greenfield forecasts that the training and retraining of automated algorithm to be as cognitively efficient as human beings will eventually lead to the “edge of the human” (259). Artificial intelligence makes human beings finally expendable.

Chapter 10, “Radical Technologies,” reconnects us to the technologies as instruments of the design of everyday life. The automated systems driven by artificial intelligence are becoming “more prominent in shaping the circumstances of everyday life. [...] They subtly alter the ways we see and engage in the world” (225).

Undoubtedly, this book can serve as an addition to Ellul’s studies on technology and Technique. Greenfield has vividly described how a panoply of technological tools and devices supports, assists, and transforms our daily living. This book presents a significant amount of analytical discourse of the digital information network that is worth examining in the light of Ellul’s core concepts of technology and Technique that he developed and discussed in *The Technological Bluff*, “The Technological Order,” and *The Technological Society*. Perhaps Greenfield could have been more explicit in

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<sup>233</sup> Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*, 93.

his definition of “radical technologies” and included a reflection on the role of drones and robots in the context of digital information and universal networking.

It is the human choice not to “surrender control of a situation to the judgment of algorithms” (226), despite their ambitious claim to sell themselves as an efficient means to a more super-productive society. In such a context, Ellul’s interrogation resounds like a clarion call:

What then is the real problem posed to men by the development of the technological society? It comprises two parts: 1. Is man able to remain master in a world of means? 2. Can a new civilization appear inclusive of Technique?<sup>234</sup>

Indeed, like Greenfield himself puts it, “This book is to be played at maximum volume” (226).

## About the Contributors

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**Sylvain Dujancourt** is vice president of the Association internationale Jacques Ellul and the former director of the Protestant periodical *Foi & Vie*. He completed a master’s degree in theology on law in the works of Jacques Ellul and a doctorate on law, technique, and theology.

**Yuk Hui** wrote his doctoral thesis under the French philosopher Bernard Stiegler (1952-2020) at Goldsmiths College in London and obtained his Habilitation in philosophy from Leuphana University in Germany. Hui is author of several monographs, including *On the Existence of Digital Objects* (2016), *The Question Concerning Tech-*

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<sup>234</sup> Jacques Ellul, “The Technological Order.” In Carl F. Stover, ed., *The Technological Order* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1963), 14.

*nology in China: An Essay in Cosmotronics* (2016), *Recursivity and Contingency* (2019), and *Art and Cosmotronics* (2021). Hui is co-editor of *30 Years after Les Im-materiaux: Art, Science and Theory* (2015) and editor of *Philosophy after Automation* (*Philosophy Today*, vol. 65, no. 2, 2021), among others. Hui has been the convenor of the Research Network for Philosophy and Technology since 2014 and a juror of the Berggruen Prize for Philosophy and Culture since 2020. He currently teaches at the City University of Hong Kong.

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## About the International Jacques Ellul Society

The International Jacques Ellul Society, founded in 2000 by former students of Ellul, links scholars, students, and others who share an interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), longtime professor at the University of Bordeaux. Along with promoting new publications related to Ellul and producing the *Ellul Forum*, the Society sponsors a biennial conference. IJES is the anglophone sister society of the francophone Association internationale Jacques Ellul.

The objectives of IJES are threefold:

**Preserving a Heritage.** The Society seeks to preserve and disseminate Ellul's literary and intellectual heritage through republication, translation, and secondary writings.

**Extending a Critique.** Ellul is best known for his penetrating critique of *la technique*, of the character and impact of technology on our world. The Society seeks to extend his social critique particularly concerning technology.

**Researching a Hope.** Ellul was not only a social critic but also a theologian and activist in church and community. The Society seeks to extend his theological, biblical, and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

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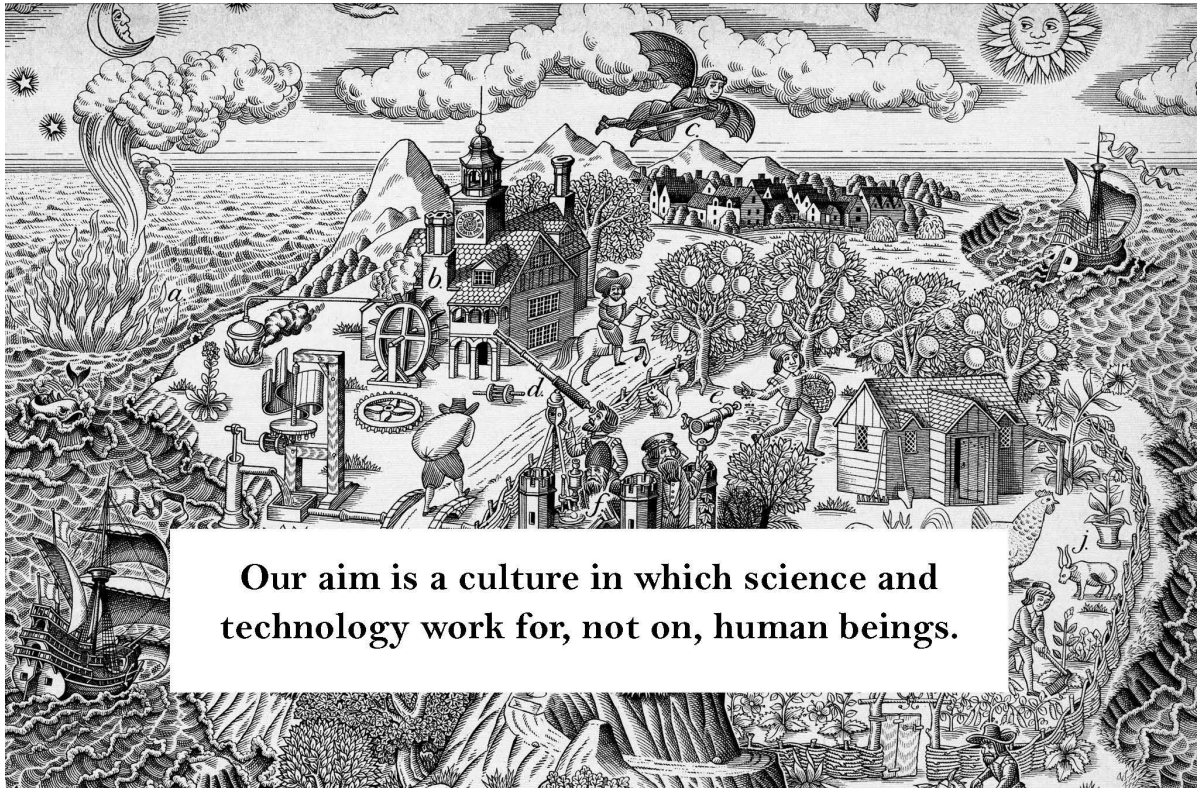
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